

## **SESSION 13 (Pre-organized panel)**

### **Identities of Diaspora and Translocality: Music and Minorities in Malaysia**

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Malaysia is a multicultural nation located at the nexus of “mainland” and “island” Southeast Asia. Through maritime links, communities from the region, Asia, and Europe participated in mercantile activities and eventually settled in British Malaya. Despite the cultural diversity, the British developed racial classifications that were institutionalized after independence in 1957. Thus, Malaysia was increasingly divided into racial categories of Malay, Chinese, and Indian and agglomerated numerous cultural groups under the category of “other”. Revisiting governmental regulations and national cultural policies, this panel examines diaspora, ethnic vis-à-vis national identities, and translocality in relation to music and minorities in Malaysia. In the first presentation, Santaella examines a Javanese performance heritage in Johor, Malaysia as an early diaspora and contemporary translocality. In the second presentation, Nithyanandan looks at the cultural intersections of Malaysian composers of diverse backgrounds and the ways in which they navigate personal identities within national categorizations. In the third presentation, Samuel Tan investigates the Malaysian Chinese art song as a genre that is product of multiple diasporas and reflects alternative forms of translocality. Finally, Azeem Shah discusses the dabus heritage as a genre that emerged from an earlier diaspora and was adopted by the Malay national majority to celebrate state cultures. The panel addresses all Malaysian racial categorizations and discusses the production of (trans)locality through the performing arts in the 21st century.

**Mayco A. Santaella**

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### **Javanese Wayang Kulit in Malaysia: Early Diasporas and Current (trans)Locality(ies)**

The transmigration program was initiated by the Dutch in the 1910’s and continued to develop with the Indonesian government after independence in 1945, making it one of the largest resettlements schemes of the 20th century. The program aimed to resettle communities from Java, Madura, Bali, and Lombok to other less populated islands of the archipelago. During this time, Javanese communities moved to Malaya establishing Javanese settlements in Johor, Selangor, and Perak, present-day states of Malaysia. This

presentation discusses a Javanese transmigrant community in Malaysia and the negotiation of a Javanese identity within a different national context in Johor, Malaysia. Despite being an ethnic majority in Java, the Javanese become minorities in the new locale, (re)defining ethnic signifiers through the performing arts while adjusting to the new provincial and national context respectively. An analysis of Wayang Kulit allows an investigation of the production of (trans)locality, considering encounters with the ‘other’, and geographical translocality vis-à-vis community, ethnic, and cultural translocalities beyond geographical conceptualizations (see Appadurai 1996). The tensions between “cultural homogenization” and “cultural heterogenization” are negotiated by the culture bearers which in turn manoeuvre both the production of locality at the micro level and translocality at the macro level outside Java. Re-evaluating anglophone dyadic conceptualizations of homogenization/diversification, this presentations considers the “in-betweens” of the fluid conceptualization of “communitas” as alternative modernities (Gaonkar, 2001) particularly for minority communities in maritime Southeast Asia.

**Jotsna Nithyanandan**

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**Composing the Malaysian: Reflecting on Shared Spaces  
in Malaysian Contemporary Compositions and Composers**

Malaysia is a country that is diverse and hybrid in its ethnic make-up and culture but steeped in an ethno-national ideological rubric through which everything is sieved or evaluated, resulting in binary constructs of the centre-periphery and state defined notions of what (or who) belongs and what (or who) doesn’t belong. This presentation explores the process of music creation and production by selected Malaysian contemporary music composers, Bernard Goh, Jillian Ooi and Samuel J Das as well as myself, as a platform for identity presentation and representation. It posits that Malaysian-ness transcends constructed ethnic boundaries, is not defined by this categorization alone, and discusses how the permeability of boundaries, intersections and overlaps of cultures translates into music. On a deeper and more personal level, it delves into the composer’s Malaysian identity related anxieties and how he/she articulates these issues via music and performance. Thus, through the processes of music creation and production, the composers negotiate their multi-layered and multicultural experiences that stem from their day-to-day social interactions and activities. Therefore, this presentation aims to present these composers as social actors who through the medium of music and performance, articulate their “everyday-defined” social reality and thus hope to provide an alternative method to the authority driven reality, in order to negotiate the status quo and opposing viewpoints in Malaysia’s contemporary social environment in relation to the country’s national identity that is currently framed to favour the centre (majority) and under-representing the periphery (minority). It also takes into