



Abstracts zu Workshop 41

Dispossession – Accumulation – Social Distress. Globalisation and Economic Anthropology

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The Second Marginalisation of the Dispossessed: Change and Distress in Rural South-East Estonia

Soviet and post-Soviet collapse led the East European region to various forms of transformations. Estonia took the lead in a rapid neoliberalisation of the society. Early accumulation by dispossession included restitutive land reforms (as opposed to “giving land to the ploughman”) and privatisation (“erastamine”) of the means of production of the Soviet farms, ironically termed “ärastamine”, that is, a specific form of (public) stealing.

Parallel to this, the system of subsistence production in the countryside broke down and capitalist patterns of consumption brought along loss of social status for many and the reorganisation of rural life in general and radical changes in both, consumption and production patterns have led to severely limited opportunities to locally challenge the “millennial capitalism” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

Based on 18 months of multisited fieldwork in Estonian centralised villages, I will discuss the results of Estonia's entrance into global capitalism that has marched considerable proportion of the rural people into destitution, brought along a loss of status unparalleled in the country's history, and has notably altered a once moral economy of relative equality. In this context I will reconsider the anthropological emphasis on renewed social connections and reciprocities in post-Soviet settings (e.g. Bridger and Pine 1998) and show that the anthropological search for resistance and local resolve may mean losing sight of the actualities of social deprivation. Because in Estonia, the rural poor were also dispossessed of their social capacities for survival they suffer from a dual “poverty of resources” (de la Rocha 2001).

All this has clear consequences for the outcomes of today's crisis. I suggest that following the 1990s collapse, a second process of normalisation of the crisis by marginalising the already destitute is taking place. In the present crisis, the desire to increase social distance from the stigma of poverty becomes particularly clear in public situations. Public gaze is revealed to control and to judge, to expose divisions and inequalities, leading to further dislocations of the

social and further distress through the divisions into deserving and undeserving poor, and by that, to further dispossessions, this time of access to state welfare.

Barbara Audycka, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, Poland

Commodities, Social Boundaries and New Ways of Dispossession in a Polish Village

This paper focuses on the everyday life experience generated by dealing with commodified objects and the values attributed to these. The circulation of objects is analysed as a means of establishing new social boundaries in a post-transformation Polish village.

Following the breakdown of communism, numerous attempts have been made to implement a so-called capitalist mentality into the Polish peasantry's minds. Polish scientists tried to draw a line between a so-called 'peasant ethos' and the 'spirit of capitalism' emphasizing the importance of rationality, private property and postponing the material reward. But all these efforts were in vain as plenty of new commodities became available and new patterns of consumption emerged. While these patterns were initially accidental and undifferentiated in the early days, soon new social distinctions of consumer emerged.

In my research I have analysed this phenomenon focusing on so-called 'everyday use objects', such as bowls, cutlery or tableware, usually depreciated on the reason of their 'everydayness' and their circulation in the 'women's zone'. But my observations of the circulation of such 'everyday use objects' in the village of Malerzow (Lower Silesia) shows that these are important commodities in a 'fight for objects' that has become equivalent to a competition over social status. Another central element linking this fight to the wider economy and the production of wealth is a process of dispossession enacted in speech, economic transactions and on the symbolical level. I therefore argue, in line with Michael Thompson's consideration in "Rubbish Theory", that the revaluation of objects depends on the status of the possessor and the symbolic construction of these objects.

Katy Fox, Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, UK

The Common Agricultural Policy and Neoliberalism: An Odd Alliance.

Drawing on doctoral fieldwork I did on EU integration between 2006 and 2008, this paper wishes to engage the theoretical concept of 'neoliberalism' with ethnographic data from Romania on the way in which the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) impacted on vulnerable rural populations. I further wish to outline the need for anthropology to engage more closely with the workings and developmental agendas of transnational institutions such as the EU through sustained fieldwork by preferring a methodology of the relationships at the interface of political institutions and people affected by their policies to one that casts these relationships as 'levels'.

Contrary to some voices in anthropology that assert that 'neoliberalism' does not have any analytical value, I argue that it can be (carefully) used rather fruitfully to describe the ongoing reorganisation of inequalities along new spatial fractures and social group divides. I show that in this new spatiotemporal context, the CAP, originally a welfare policy in a post-World War II Western Europe has undergone a metamorphosis into a far more exclusive policy that benefits only entrepreneurs on the ground. I particularly draw on rural development projects (Pillar II of the CAP) to show who benefitted from these projects and what constituted their fundamental premises and assumptions. I argue that the structural changes in the worldwide organisation of production in European agriculture include only particular types of farming, which makes 'peasant' production inadequate and requires the subjects of this kind of production to change. I argue that in the process of creating consumers, people's agricultural products are devalued and their livelihoods become threatened. This is not a new story, but it remains particularly salient as the proportion of people relying on so-called 'subsistence agriculture' for their livelihoods is particularly high in Romania. In many cases, the only alternative for people is temporary labour migration to Western Europe which keeps them in a precarious work cycle.

Daniel Münster, Department of Social Anthropology, Martin-Luther-University, Halle/Saale, Germany

Does the W.T.O. Kill Farmers? Farmers' Suicides and Globalization in India

When Lee Kyung Hae, a South Korean farmers leader stabbed himself to death with a Swiss pocket-knife at the opening day of the fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) in Cancun (2001) he was wearing a sandwich board that read "The W.T.O. kills Farmers". With this act of protest suicide Lee Kyung Hae arguably established the thesis linking neoliberal globalisation, advocated by WTO and World Bank since the late 1980s, and a global agrarian crisis, leading to social and economic distress among farmers around the world, on an international stage. In fact, his slogan "the W.T.O. kills farmers" has become a leitmotiv for social activists and journalist alike reporting on the issue.

In my presentation I want to highlight some features of the present agrarian crisis in India, with a special focus on the epidemic suicides by thousands of farmers in distress. Drawing on fieldwork in one "suicide prone district" (Wayanad) and on reports from other such districts in India, I will focus my attention on the question of globalization and agriculture. How do the neoliberal economic reforms after 1991 and the subsequent structural adjustment measures affect the livelihood of Indian farmers? Through the comparison of different distress regions in India, I will argue that unilinear macrosociological explanations like the one outlined above are of limited value for ethnography. Instead, regional scenarios of agrarian crisis should be accounted for by embedding them both in accounts of neoliberal transformations and in regional histories of agrarian practice, social inequality and state-farmer interactions.

Patrick Neveling, Daniel Münster, Christian Strümpell

Introduction to the workshop

In this introduction, we briefly introduce the key concepts guiding the workshop: dispossession, accumulation, and the social distress. The second part elaborates our argument that there are significant differences in theory building related to the arenas of production and consumption and that there is a strong need for studies that challenge recent notions of "Neoliberalism" by arguing from a more global perspective.

Patrick Neveling, Institute for Social Anthropology/Historical Institute, University of Berne, Switzerland

The Flexibility of Accumulation before ‚Flexible Accumulation‘: Export Processing Zones 1947-2007

This paper introduces one of the central institutions of global economic restructuring after World War II; the Export Processing Zones (EPZs). After the establishment of the first such zone in Puerto Rico in 1947, more than ten years passed until the second zone was opened in Shannon, Ireland. But since the 1960s EPZs have been established extensively and in 2006 the International Labour Organisation counted 3500 EPZs in more than 130 countries with more than 60 million workers employed. In recent anthropological and other theories in postdevelopmental spaces, EPZs have been analysed as markers of graduated sovereignty (Ong 2000) because nation states give away sovereign rights such as taxation, customs duties and labour laws in order to attract foreign direct investment (FDI).

Based on a historical account of the emergence of the EPZ complex and a brief comparison to the plantation complex of the 19th century, this paper argues that it is short sighted to understand EPZs as markers of graduated sovereignty. Instead, these zones are analysed as an emerging process of outsourcing one of the main contradictions arising in the global economy at the end of the era of formal imperialism: According to the prevailing notion of sovereignty, postcolonial nations had ‚inalienable right‘ to political and economic decision making. By creating special zones for FDI, these rights were upheld as fictions as national economies became segmented and the flexibility of accumulation was assured long before Harvey's (2005) periodisation of changes in global accumulation regimes, which locate the emergence of ‚flexible accumulation‘ in the early 1970s.

Irene Sabaté Muriel, Universitat de Barcelona, Spanien

Dwellers and Housing Provision in East Berlin: Resistance and Compliance with Global Economic Trends

With the emergence of capitalism, dwellings became embedded in real estate markets. The landlord's and developers' goal was to make them generate surplus. But the commodity nature of dwellings contradicts to a certain extent the inhabitants' point of view, who use them to meet a variety of needs and

aspirations. In their conception and experience, the spaces they inhabit represent a crucial location for social reproduction, regardless of their capacity to generate surplus. Thus, housing provisioning entails conflicting values and meanings for the different actors implied in its production, allocation and consumption –landlords and investors on the one hand, inhabitants on the other.

Globalisation has no doubt had an effect on housing provisioning in the last years. Nowadays, international investors and real estate companies scan housing markets worldwide in search of opportunities for accumulation. As in many other places, the urban renewal programs taking place in the Eastern districts of Berlin attract such transnational companies, which are replacing traditional landlords and buying up former public housing. This change in ownership structures on the supply side is also facilitated by the implementation of neoliberal policies aiming at the deregulation of markets. On the consumers' side, the growing international mobility of populations -be they economic migrants or cosmopolitan professional elites, with their respective purchasing powers and expectations- shapes the demand for housing.

This paper considers global trends, such as the mobility of populations and capital accumulation, as the framework for people's housing conditions. But everyday strategies practised by inhabitants in particular locations need to be taken into account as well. Ethnographic data collected in the Eastern inner-city of Berlin provide an insight into how people -either tenants, owner-occupiers, squatters or any other category of inhabitants- struggle to determine the way in which they access and inhabit their dwellings. This shows that a well-demarcated consumption sphere can not be identified. People are rather 'producing' their housing conditions on a daily basis, despite structural constraints. In doing so, they may either conform to or disobey the external impositions of globalisation as an irreversible commodification of housing.

Ute Schüren, Historical Institute, University of Berne, Switzerland

The impact of changing development agendas on rural livelihood production: A view from Mexico

The multiplicity of rural livelihood strategies in supposedly traditional and conservative indigenous communities has been frequently interpreted as a recent phenomenon linked to neoliberal policies in the agrarian sector combined with new forms of competition in a global economy. Economic differentiation and land concentration have become more pronounced due to the liberalization of corn prices and raising production costs in Mexico, especially since the early 1990s. Thus, many poor peasants have started to sell or rent out part of their plots. The programme for the individualization and privatization of commons and the reduction of government support to rural producers have facilitated this process. Many households have to combine several economic activities because agriculture alone is not sufficient to guarantee their reproduction. However dramatic the current processes may be, changes of economic strategies by rural households are by no means new. In my paper, I will briefly describe the historical development of economic activities of rural households and show that they are a flexible response to regional and national policies as well as to international forces.

Christian Strümpell, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg

The Commodification of Land and Labour and the 'Double Movement' in India

With regard to 19th century Britain Polanyi argued that 'laissez-faire was planned, planning was not'. The imposition of markets in land and labour orchestrated by the state under influence of England's class of capitalists met with a simultaneous struggle of the landed gentry, peasants and workers to restrict destructive market forces. Walter Neale (1994) applies Polanyi's insights to the situation in colonial and postcolonial India and this reveals a very different relationship between state, market and society, although all major characteristics of a 'double movement' were at work in India. The difference was that both movements - one imposing a market and an oppositional one seeking to limit the first one's adverse impacts - originated in the same institution, the (post)colonial state. British colonial rule established a market in land revenues, but at the same time the authorities tried hard (but in vain) to protect tenants from rent-maximizing landlords. Similarly, postcolonial tenancy acts created a rural labour market while simultaneously trying to protect rural labour from market excesses by granting the right to vote and providing employment guarantee schemes. Following Parry (2009), my paper is concerned with the comparative 'double movement' in the context of industrial labour. Based on field research on labour movements around a public sector steel plant in Rourkela, Orissa (India), I will highlight the specificities of double movements occurring among the relatively protected and well-off workers in public sector industries and contrast these with labour movements of unprotected, poorly-paid labourers in the informal sector. The latter has expanded enormously since India adopted a policy of liberalization. This adversely affects already marginalised farmers whose land is today dispossessed to establish private sector industries or heavily polluted by smoke stacks employing workers who have lost prospects of public sector employment and are now forced to eke out a living under physically and legally insecure working conditions. Arguing from this ethnographic background, I will elaborate on the relationship between market, state and society in contemporary India.

Oliver Tappe, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany

Development politics and land reform in Laos

The Lao government has identified the alleviation of poverty as its main political goal. Development and progress are key concepts within official discourse. In this respect, some elements of orthodox socialism still play a role in the emerging Lao market capitalism despite the considerable changes and reforms concerning private economy, investment and questions of land rights. Since the communist revolution of 1975, the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party has applied various strategies to strengthen the economical power of this agrarian, sparsely populated country. At present, this aim is supported by international actors such as the Asian Development Bank with strong neo-liberal implications and entailing unforeseen impacts on local livelihoods. Illustrated by examples from Lao development politics - e.g. land reforms, resettlement programs, large

infrastructure projects - the intentions and results of national and international visions of "development" shall be highlighted and discussed in particular with regard to the consequences for the Lao rural population.

Tatjana Thelen, Institute for Social Anthropology, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Post-socialist reforms as neo-liberal dispossession?

Large parts of post-socialist developments could be described as show-cases of neo-liberal dispossession. In relation to post-socialist agrarian restructuring the sociologists Harcsa, Kovách und Szelényi, for example, speak of a process of „dispossession by legislation“ in which a great portion of the Hungarian population lost its land: „a scenario that recalls the 'enclosure movement' and its dire results“ (1998: 232). Besides land reforms, privatisation of other economic enterprises caused the loss of many social entitlements such as the rights to employment, to child-care and so forth.

Although post-socialist reforms thus fit within the framework of Harvey and other authors who talk about world wide „accumulation by dispossession“, the anthropological analysis has to follow such developments in more detail. Even it is true that many people in post-socialist contexts lost access to land, not all of them are in the same position or totally without land. The dispossessions are rather unevenly distributed and lead for example to decisive shifts in power within families along lines of gender and generation. In addition, „the“ state did not simply retreat from social provisions, but different state actors created also new, sometimes hybrid forms of responsibilities. On the basis of my data from Hungary, Romania and eastern Germany I intend to show in my paper, that not only do neo-liberal global ideas form everyday experiences, but that local experiences also form the image and practice of globalisation.