

Social Anthropology of Organizations, Bureaucracy, and Corruption

Modul 1, Winter Term 2015/16

Mi. 14.00-16.00, 2.10 Institut für Ethnologie

28th October 2015-10th February 2016

Description of Class

What are the difficulties, ethical challenges and particularities in doing ethnography in organizations? How do social anthropologists understand bureaucratic organisations? And how do we explain and interpret practices of corruption in social anthropology? Finally, what do social anthropologists contribute to the public discussion about these issues?

During the course of class we read several ethnographies of organizations. We discuss different theoretical and methodological approaches to comprehend and explain practices of bureaucracy and corruption.

During the first part of our class we compile the theoretical framework of the class: social constructivism and the ethnography of organizations. In particular we discuss some key concepts and parts of Dave Elder-Vass' book *The Reality of Social Construction* (2012). Subsequently we examine difficulties, ethical challenges and particularities in doing ethnography in organizations. We conclude the first part of the class by comparing three accounts of organizational ethnography which analyse social practices in different mental health institutions (United States, United Kingdom and India).

The second part of the class deals with the social anthropology of bureaucracy – during which we look on bureaucratic practices and the significance papers have in the same. In the first session we discuss the approach of Don Handelman and an ethnographic example from Israel. Furthermore we think about how social anthropologist could contribute to develop 'better' bureaucracies and how they engage in bureaucratic practices themselves. During the following two sessions we will engage in reading two classic pieces of work. The first one is the influential book *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) by the political scientist Michael Lipsky. He analyses the logics, patterns of practice and constraints which shape the work of persons in public services, who carry out and enforce the actions required by laws and public policies. The second one is *The Social Production of Indifference* (1993) by political anthropologist and Harvard University Professor Michael Herzfeld. He argues that 'modern' bureaucratically regulated societies are no more 'rational' or less 'symbolic' than the societies traditionally studied by anthropologists. We conclude the second part of the class with a focus on documents, files and 'papereality' drawing on different (ethnographic) examples (Pakistan, United States).

The third part of the class covers the issue of corruption and possible anthropological perspectives on this phenomenon. We focus in particular on the Indian state. First we discuss corruption within Indian development programmes by drawing on the ethnography *Red Tape* (2012) by Akhil Gupta. Gupta conceptualizes the relation between the state in India and the poor as one of structural violence. Conclusively we discuss Veena Das' paper *Corruption and the Possibility of Life*, in which she lines out her understanding of corruption as anchored in ordinary everyday practices.

Credit Points: 6 ECTS (*Workload:* on campus: 30hrs/private study: 150hrs), optional course of module 1.

Requirements: Regular attendance (not more than two missed sessions), presentation (+ handout), regular preparation (average 12.5 hrs per week) of readings is expected (in particular: think/note something down about the topic/question for the respective sessions given in the schedule below). Every student has to hand in at least 3 assignments (length 1-2 pages). One should be on a theme of Part I *Theoretical Framework* (so inevitable all of you have to hand in assignment 1 ;-)), one on a theme of Part II *Bureaucracy* (assignment 2+3) and one on a theme of Part III *Corruption* (assignment 4-6). Upload your assignments to the BSCW-Server before the respective sessions (latest Tuesday evening).

E-Learning: All the reading and additional materials for our class are to be found on the BSCW-Server (e-mail address given on the 'list of participants' will be used).

Readings:

Part I: Theoretical Framework – Social Constructivism and the Ethnography of Organizations

Elder-Vass, Dave (2012): *The Reality of Social Construction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hirsch, Eric and David N. Gellner (2001): 'Ethnography of Organizations and Organizations of Ethnography'. In: Eric Hirsch and David N. Gellner (eds.), *Inside Organizations. Anthropologists at Work*. Oxford, New York: Berg, pp.1-18.

Britan, Gerald M. and Ronald Cohen (1980): 'Toward an Anthropology of Formal Organizations'. In: Gerald M. Britan, and Ronald Cohen (eds.), *Hierarchy and Society – Anthropological Perspectives on Bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 9-30.

Pulman-Jones, Simon (2001): 'Observing other Observers: Anthropological Fieldwork in a Unit for Children with Chronic Emotional Behavioural Problems'. In: Eric Hirsch and David N. Gellner (eds.), *Inside Organizations. Anthropologists at Work*. Oxford, New York: Berg, pp. 117-136.

Schwartzman, Helen B. (1980): 'The Bureaucratic Context of a Community Mental Health Center: The View from >Up<'. In: Gerald M. Britan, and Ronald Cohen (eds.), *Hierarchy and Society – Anthropological Perspectives on Bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 9-30.

Part II: Bureaucracy – Bureaucratic Practices and the Significance of Papers

Handelman, Don (1981) 'Introduction: The Idea of Bureaucratic Organizations'. *Social Analysis* (9), pp. 5-23.

Shamgar-Handelman, Lea and Don Handelman (1991): 'Celebrations of Bureaucracy: Birthday Parties in Israeli Kindergartens'. *Ethnology* 30 (4), pp. 293-312.

Hoag, Colin (2011): 'Assembling Partial Perspectives: Thoughts on the Anthropology of Bureaucracy'. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 34 (1), pp. 81-94.

Denich, Bette (1980): 'Bureaucratic Scholarship: The New Anthropology'. In: Gerald M. Britan, and Ronald Cohen (eds.), *Hierarchy and Society – Anthropological Perspectives on Bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, pp. 165-75.

Handelman, Don (2007): 'The Cartesian Divide of the Nation-State – Emotion and Bureaucratic Log-

- ic'. In: Wulff, Helena (ed.), *The Emotions. A Cultural Reader*. Oxford, New York: Berg, pp. 119-142.
- Handelman, Don (1978). 'Introduction: A Recognition of Bureaucracy'. Handelman, Don and Elliot Leyton (eds.), *Bureaucracy and World View – Studies in the Logic of Official Interpretation*. St. John's, Nfld.: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, pp. 1-14.
- Lipsky, Michael (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy – Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Herzfeld, Michael (1993): *The Social Production of Indifference – Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Chicago [u.a.]: University of Chicago Press.
- Hull, Matthew S. (2012): 'Documents and Bureaucracy'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (1), pp. 251-267.
- Dery, David (1998): '>Papereality< and Learning in Bureaucratic Organizations'. *Administration & Society* 29 (6), pp. 677-689.
- Brenneis, Donald (1994). "Discourse and Discipline at the National Research Council: A Bureaucratic Bildungsroman". *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1), pp. 23-36.

Part III: Corruption – The State, Poverty, and Structural Violence in India

- Sissener, Tone Kristin (2001): 'Anthropological Perspectives on Corruption'. Working Paper: Chr. Michelsen Institute, Development Studies and Human Rights.
- Shore, Chris and Dieter Haller (2005). 'Introduction – Sharp Practice: Anthropology and the Study of Corruption'. In: Haller, Dieter and Chris Shore (eds.), *Corruption – Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto, pp. 1-26.
- Zinn, Dorothy Louise (2005): 'Afterword – Anthropology and Corruption: The State of the Art'. In: Haller, Dieter and Chris Shore (eds.), *Corruption – Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto, pp. 229-241.
- Gupta, Akhil (2005). 'Narrating the State of Corruption'. In: Haller, Dieter and Chris Shore (eds.), *Corruption – Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto, pp. 173-193.
- Gupta, Akhil (2012): *Red Tape – Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*. Durham, NC [u.a.]: Duke Univ. Press.
- Gupta, Akhil (1995): 'Blurred Boundaries – The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State'. *American Ethnologist* 22 (2), pp. 375-402.
- Gupta, Akhil; Nugent, David and Shreyas Sreenath (2015): 'State, Corruption, Postcoloniality – A Conversation with Akhil Gupta on the 20th Anniversary of >Blurred Boundaries<'. *American Ethnologist* (DOI: 10.1111/amet.12157).
- Das, Veena. "Corruption and the Possibility of Life". under review (http://www.academia.edu/9773471/Corruption_and_the_Possibility_of_Life).