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*


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


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


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


