



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### **Sovereignty in an Unequal World: Anthropological Perspectives**

*Kuldova, Tereza (University of Oslo, Oslo, NOR)*

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The notion of sovereignty understood as the authority of the state to govern over its territory has been resuscitated both on the Left and the Right, from Podemos to Trump, thus taking once again the center stage in political debates. We could ask if we can imagine a progressive vision of political sovereignty, such as the one sketched by William Mitchell and Thomas Fazi in their recent book, *Reclaiming the State*. But as anthropologists, we may first want to inquire into the general human desire and need for sovereignty, into its appeal and promise in all its different manifestations - be they individual, collective, political or religious, on in between. Rethinking sovereignty and its meaning for people across the globe becomes even more topical in a world where sovereignty has become a scarce resource and where different forms of slavery thrive - from actual slavery and human trafficking to debt and different types of dependence. In a disenchanted, extremely unequal world, sovereign moments, and collective rituals capable of bringing such moments about, become rare. This panel invites papers from across anthropology, ethnology and other social sciences to think theoretically through the notion of sovereignty, while grounded in ethnographic fieldwork. And to think sovereignty through unconventional or extreme examples - think of Bataille, de Sade, Nietzsche 'in practice' and anywhere they may possibly manifest. In particular, anthropological considerations of the following themes will be welcome: (1) sovereignty and the state, (2) sovereignty and crime, murder, torture or tyranny, (3) sovereignty and religion, (4) sovereignty and economy, (5) sovereignty and excess, luxury, wasting, exploitation, (6) sovereignty and the sacred and ritual.

There will be a special issue of the *Journal of Extreme Anthropology* devoted to the question of sovereignty, thus offering a possible venue for publication of the conference papers.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 3 | Room 3**

Ilja Steffelbauer: *Turncoats: Reclaiming Sovereignty by Turning One's Back on Civilization*

Tereza Kuldova: *Loss of Sovereignty and Social Abjection: On the Melancholic Objects of Political Desire*

Kate Tudor: *Self-Made Men - Economic and Consumer Sovereignty in the Accounts of Serious Fraudsters*

Tessa Diphoorn: *Corporate Sovereignty: Permissive Authority Claiming and Making in Southern Africa*

**Thursday, September 20, 2018 | Slot 4 | Room 3**

Roman Urbanowicz: *Competing Sovereignities, Political Imagination and Desire for the State in South-Eastern Lithuania*

Ekaterina Zheltova: *Narrating 'property issues': longing for sovereignty in the Albanian-Greek Borderlands*

Emmanuel Awoh: *Contesting forms of Authorities and local governance in Cameroon*

# SESSION PAPERS

## **Turncoats: Reclaiming Sovereignty by Turning One's Back on Civilization**

*Steffelbauer, Ilja (Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie, Wien, AUT)*

In his theory on state-formation Carneiro (CARNEIRO 1970) identified "circumscription", both "environmental" (i.e. pertaining to natural features of the landscape) and "social" (i.e. the presence of other societies on adjacent territory) as the main factor in combination with population increase that caused the emergence of stratified societies and the early state. In this theory the majority of future peons, serfs, slaves or fellahin "chose" the continuation of their accustomed agrarian lifestyle over retaining their political sovereignty and the risk of an insecure future in the barbarian wastes.

This choice was not universal and individuals and groups took the divergent path, preserving their sovereignty and a more egalitarian and less exploitative social order in exchange for a less affluent and less secure life that often brought them into direct, violent confrontation with state-power. Scott (SCOTT 2009) has argued along these lines for upland Southeast Asia and examples from medieval (POHL 1988, 121ff. on the Slav settlement of the Balkans) and ancient (SNODGRASS 2000 on the formation of Greek Dark Age society) history spring to mind. Under the stress of imperial expansion and decline as well as in frontier zones the trade-off between sovereignty and security was obviously more tempting or inescapable than during periods of stability well within the borders of civilization.

This presentation endeavors to identify a common strategy and shared motives by examining various examples from history and ethnography where individuals, groups and whole populations chose to "turn coat" and either join existing "barbarian" societies or found their own, often on marginal lands or in embattled frontier zones. It also tries to pose the question, whether contemporary renunciations of the rules, forms and institutions of civilization (Western Jihadists, Freeman-on-the-land, Reichsbürgerbewegung) are similar if comparatively pathetic attempts to continue this strategy in a globalized world that has no more barbarian fringes to escape to.

- CARNEIRO, R., A Theory of the Origin of the State, Science Vol. 169, 1970, p. 733–738.
- POHL, W., Die Awaren: ein Steppenvolk im Mitteleuropa, 567-822 n. Chr.. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1988.
- SCOTT J., The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- SNODGRASS, A., The dark age of Greece : an archaeological survey of the eleventh to the eighth centuries BC. New York: Routledge, 2000.

## **Loss of Sovereignty and Social Abjection: On the Melancholic Objects of Political Desire**

*Kuldova, Tereza (University of Oslo, Oslo, NOR)*

We are currently experiencing a profound crisis of political imagination. Neoliberalism has been generating ever increasing amounts of population that feel disillusioned, angry, impoverished, devalued, lonely, insecure, hopeless, forsaken, and at general loss. The tyranny of the markets has resulted both in the reactionary rise of right-wing populism and in the weakening and emptying of the nation-state. It could be argued that in their melancholia for the traditional world of security, community and solidarity, the rightwing supporters misrecognize their enemy and effectively replace the forces of global capitalism with the more tangible bodies of the immigrant Others. In the process, they become, to the cultural elites who know better and pride themselves on their moral high-ground, socially abject (racist, homophobic and so on) subjects, and yet, they bear their social abjection as a badge of honour and righteousness, as a sign that they are onto something. But we must ask: are we really dealing here with a case of a simple misrecognition, of a replacement of the real problem we are unwilling to acknowledge or deal with (capitalism) with a vicarious one (immigration)? Is it really the lost security, community and solidarity that is being mourned and resuscitated in the first place? And ultimately, is it really the obscenities of the right-wing populism that provoke us or is it something else? Grounded in ethnographic work with outlaw motorcycle clubs and their often right-leaning supporters, I will argue that what these 'revolting subjects' in fact sense as lost and what they are pathologically attached to in their melancholia, is political sovereignty. Effectively, what they wish to revive, albeit often inarticulately, is the political fiction of the autonomy of the political vis-à-vis the economic, i.e. the ability of the state to subsume and control the powers of capital. This revival of desire for sovereignty often manifests itself in muscular forms. But we must ask, is not this desire onto something and can a progressive case for sovereignty and muscularity vis-à-vis the forces of global capital be made?

## **Self-Made Men - Economic and Consumer Sovereignty in the Accounts of Serious Fraudsters**

*Tudor, Kate (university of sunderland, Sunderland, GBR)*

Within the context of neoliberal economics and consumer capitalism, late-modern individuals are placed under extreme pressure and their economic and symbolic survival are constantly under threat. Within this context, people are forced to compete in increasingly brutal circumstances in order to avoid annihilation within the fields of economic and consumptive performance. Engagement within these fields, however, is not solely based on coercion but is simultaneously underpinned by seductive ideals such as sovereignty. Conversations with those convicted for their involvement in serious fraud indicate the centrality of the notion of

sovereignty to their subjective experience and, in turn, their motivation for fraud. The notion of economic sovereignty was key to their understandings of economic enterprise whereby they carved out spaces of extreme personal freedom in which they were free to engage in acts of serious and sustained economic predation. Similarly, understandings of consumer sovereignty were characterised by a degree of excess whereby the individual who self-governs consumptive choices was replaced by the individual who is characterised by the absolute right to pursue pleasure in an unrestrained way. As a consequence, many of their personal barriers against criminality were eroded. Thus, whilst acts of economic predation are necessitated by the deep-seated cultures of anxiety and insecurity produced within contemporary capitalism, they are also facilitated by the cultural profusion of notions of sovereignty within this context.

### **Corporate Sovereignty: Permissive Authority Claiming and Making in Southern Africa**

*Diphoom, Tessa (Utrecht University, Utrecht); Wiegink, Nikkie (Utrecht University, Utrecht)*

The growing work on sovereignty in anthropology has represented a move away from a focus on *legal sovereignty* towards the analysis of *de facto sovereignty* (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 296). Generally speaking, this shift has provided a way of analysing how non-state actors assert and claim (public) authority. In this line of thinking, sovereignty has been defined as a “socially constructed source of power that is reproduced through daily practices and repetitious public performances” (Diphoom 2016: 13). Amidst this anthropological focus on sovereignty, numerous concepts have emerged, such as graduated sovereignty (Ong 2000), selective sovereignties (Moore 2005), fragmented sovereignty (Davis 2010), and social sovereignty (Latham 2000; Rodgers 2006), to name but a few. Although productive and insightful, this multitude has also made it difficult to distinguish between them and raises the question of how claims to authority differ across localities and actors.

In this paper, we propose to further operationalize one of these concepts, namely *corporate sovereignty*. Corporate sovereignty - a concept primarily brought forth by Bruce Kapferer in 2005 – refers to the power of (transnational) corporates (i.e. profit-making entities) across localities and populations, and is often used to describe processes of privatization, hybridization and enclavization of security arrangements around large scale investments. In this paper, we want to develop this concept further by showing how corporate sovereignty is a permissible type of sovereignty; a type of processual power-claiming and making that is primarily conducted through and by permission of the state sovereign which acts as the arbiter, at least in name. This contrasts with other non-state actors, such as gangs, rebels, and vigilante groups, who lack this permission and therefore operate in a different way and find themselves in a more antagonistic relations with the state. In order to elucidate our claim, we will draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted on private security companies in South Africa and coal mining companies in Mozambique. We will show how both types of corporates, although different in nature, objective, context, and scope, obtain legitimacy through various performances of sovereignty through and under the permissive eye of the state. In addition, we explore how a desire for corporate sovereignty may manifest itself and uncover certain conditions under which the state is willing to permit corporate actors to take up a sovereign role.

### **Competing Sovereignties, Political Imagination and Desire for the State in South-Eastern Lithuania**

*Urbanowicz, Roman (Central European University, Budapest, HUN)*

The presentation considers two competing and ethnically framed projects of sovereignty – ‘Polish’ and ‘Lithuanian’ – in Šalčininkai municipality (South-Eastern Lithuania), Polish-populated and ruled by the party representing Polish minority in the country. The presentation is based on fieldwork materials – both interviews and participant observation – gathered in June-September 2016 in Šalčininkai.

Following the example of Haiti, given in the Chelsea Kivland’s article (Kivland 2012), I try to trace how abundance (if not excessiveness) of various sources of symbolic power affects popular political imagination and produces both perception of statelessness and certain images of preferable political leadership.

Unlike Haiti, expressly labelled as a failed state, Lithuania’s status of the EU member imposes certain obligations with regard to the way the rules of the game of local politics are organised. Since the right for both legitimate violence and symbolic manifestation of this right are seen as a prerogative of the central [‘Lithuanian’] authorities, a fierce competition takes place between the two ideological apparatuses, primarily represented by schools. Schools with Polish language of education are controlled by local authorities, whereas those with Lithuanian are under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The main site of this rivalry between local and central authorities is the choice of the first-graders’ parents. The competition involves both rhetorical mobilisation of the morality of reproduction (in this case, of a somewhat besieged ‘Polishness’) and manipulation of material resources, such as the majority of jobs and redistribution of material supplies from Poland.

On a larger scale, these two mechanisms – with ethnic mobilisation also comprising idioms of local subjectivity – allows the local branch of Polish Party to perpetuate its sole power over the municipality. As a result, ‘the Party’ becomes the most important structure of power in the municipality, and centres of decision-making shift from formal democratic procedures to the informal networks of private connections, relations of friendship and loyalty.

However, in terms of its symbolic representation, this ‘Polish system of power’ must comply to structural conditions, fully acknowledging the superiority of Lithuanian sovereignty over the territory. Using S. Jansen’s terms (Jansen 2015), it may be said that local authorities are fully loyal to the Lithuanian ‘statehood’ with regard to official representations, yet reproduce their own

'Polish' variety of 'statecraft' through daily practices of governance and their symbolic content. This condition, however, is not unmentioned by many Lithuanian political actors, who often treat the locality as 'disloyal' and requiring proper Lithuanisation (in terms assuming idioms of Lithuanian ethnic nationalism); a colonial attitude of sorts. This attitude, in return, renders AWPL's claim on exclusive representation of local subjectivity reasonable.

Such a condition of multiple sources of power, as I suggest, affects local political imagination significantly. First of all, the competition between two projects of sovereignty produces certain ruptures in the imaginational landscapes of power, thus hindering the localisation of the single source of authority; this leads to a certain perception of statelessness (lack proper patronage). As a response to such condition, images of strong political leaders, such as V. Putin and A. Lukashenka, are of significant popularity in the area, structuring local political imagination and projective modalities of relations between the state and its subjects.

#### References:

Jansen, Stef. 2015. *Yearnings in the Meantime: "Normal Lives" and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*. New York: Berghahn.

Kivland, Chelsey L. 2012. 'Unmaking the State in "Occupied" Haiti'. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35 (2): 248–70.

### **Narrating 'property issues': longing for sovereignty in the Albanian-Greek Borderlands**

*Zheltova, Ekaterina (Charles University (Faculty of Social Sciences), Prague, CZE)*

In this paper I attempt to understand what role the experience of property redistributions as narrated in personal life-stories plays in how people imagine the state(s) in a borderland region. The paper is a part of my on-going PhD research project and is based on anthropological fieldwork in several locations of the Albanian-Greek borderlands.

The region of Epirus that I deal with in my research, was split between Greece and Albania in the result of the on-going dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and was left with ambiguous legacies of land ownership and use. In many cases transactions with land had no documentary record and were only confirmed with oral agreements. On the other hand, the preexisting cultural, religious, and linguistic differences together with social and economic stratification were further intensified by the nationalist state ideologies. All over the region in the twentieth century people have experienced property redistribution often accompanied by involuntary displacement and, sometimes, by acts of violence. A vivid example of the latter is the situation that led to the brutal massacres and the expulsion of Cham Albanians from Greece in 1944-1945. On the Albanian side of the border the property issue was associated with the process of collectivization enacted by the communist government. After 1945 the large-scale properties that had remained from the Ottoman Chiflik system were redistributed to small owners and landless people (Zhllima et al. 2010) and then were gradually collectivized so that by 1976 nearly all land belonged to cooperatives or state farms (Zhllima et al. 2010: 53).

After the end of the communist regime in 1989 and restoration of private property, most part of the land was redistributed *per capita* between the residents (Zhllima et al; De Waal 2004; Stahl and Sikor 2009). However, it was also possible to claim rights for a property on the basis of "restitution" of the former owners if one could provide the necessary documents proving that the property had belonged to him/her or the family before 1945. In many cases, it was impossible and caused various speculations and, sometimes, conflicts between neighbors and relatives. For that reason, a lot of people in the villages consider the situation to be direct violation of their rights (Triantis 2018). In the Greek minority of Albania the situation is often perceived through a discourse of victimization presenting the Greeks as the only victims of the unjust redistribution that have been deliberately deprived of their property rights on the basis of their identity.

Simultaneously, after the fall of the communist regime in Albania and opening of the border, the "Cham issue" has been re-actualized in the new social and political context. The descendants of the Chams, that were expelled from Greece and deprived of their properties there, have claimed rights for the properties or a financial compensation (Kretsi 2002). The property issues have been incorporated in the agenda of the "ethnic" parties promoting minority rights and nationalist ideologies, the "Greek minority" *Unity for Human Rights Party* and the "Cham" *Party for Justice, Integration and Unity*. They both use the "property issue" and the related discourse of accusation and victimization in order to make nationalist claims and promote their political agenda.

The "property issues", both as a lived experience and as a discourse, are present in almost every life-story that I hear in the borderland region. In many cases, these accounts are accompanied by expression of common feelings about the "state" (be it Albanian, Greek or, quite commonly, the "state" as a non-specified idea of reified power): "the state is not existent here", "the state does not care" et c. In this paper I will try to offer an interpretation of what exactly different people mean when talking about the "state", and how the ideas of the "state" and the "Homeland" are connected (or juxtaposed) in their imaginaries.

### **Contesting forms of Authorities and local governance in Cameroon**

*Awoh, Emmanuel (University of Melbourne, Melbourne, AUS)*

Attempts to co-opt formal and informal state actors in Cameroon have led to the creation of hybrid political systems where the state is confronted by multiple political orders including traditional authorities. This creates the potential for uneasy coexistence with the different normative systems. These political orders produce tensions and conflicts within local communities with regards to issues such as land governance where the fields of jurisdiction between these sovereign institutions overlap. The legitimacy of the state becomes critical when analysing the formal state authority on certain policy field, while informal state actors like traditional authorities appear to be relevant within local communities only if they remain legitimate. Informed by over eight months of ethnographic research conducted in Cameroon in 2015, I explored the everyday encounters between traditional authorities, local communities and state bureaucrats to explain the nature of how legitimacy is built and recognised by different audiences. In the process to establish control and ownership of land, traditional authorities, the state and the local population become engaged in processes where specific aspects of the different sources of legitimacy are borrowed, reproduced, altered and or co-opted. It is through these local interactions that I have argued is easier to understand legitimacy because one gets to learn what traditional authorities do as custodians of land and what their actions mean to their communities. The findings of this paper show that different sources of legitimacy will matter depending on the policy field in question. However, once a traditional leader loses his moral legitimacy with the grassroots, he does not only undermine his power, he also creates a situation of conflict.