



Goodbye Realeurasia

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17. DEZEMBER 2020

The dissertations of Sudeshna Chaki and Ceren Deniz, dealing with multiple facets of the small business economy in India and Turkey respectively, were submitted in early summer and defended in late autumn with the help of video technology. We are grateful to our Faculty at the Martin Luther University for granting permission to organize the defences in a hybrid form. External examiners (Chris Gregory from Canberra for the defence of Chaki and Don Kalb from Antwerp for that of Deniz) together with a limited public participated online. The candidates, the core of their committees, and a small local audience were physically present in the main seminar room of the Max Planck Institute. The result in both cases was a very satisfactory *Magna Cum Laude*.

Chaki and Deniz have both undertaken field research in their home countries (albeit in locations with which they had no previous familiarity). Politics in India and Turkey have been dominated in recent decades by parties that combine religion and nationalism with neoliberal economic policies that represent a significant departure from earlier statist regimes. Both REALEURASIA students focused on the dynamics of family-owned businesses, including some with a multi-generational history. In the background, as with all the doctoral projects of this team, was the religious sociology of Max Weber. Chaki and Deniz reported that sincere commitments to the doctrines and practices of Hinduism and Islam respectively are no impediments to business success. On the contrary, the paternalist sponsoring of religious rituals of commensality in factories fosters cohesion and may hinder workers from recognizing and acting upon common class interests. Asked at her defence to comment on tensions between the traditional world view and the laws of neoliberal markets, Chaki responded that the rise of the Hindu nationalist party BJP was accompanied by general processes of differentiation. No longer the all-encompassing cosmology of the past, religion was increasingly one “sphere of life” among others. Sylvia Terpe, a senior postdoctoral member of REALEURASIA from the beginning, has shown that this differentiation of spheres was elegantly theorized by Max Weber himself (Terpe 2020).

Weber’s celebrated thesis that a unique Protestant ethic was a key factor in the emergence of

modern capitalism in the wake of the Reformation has been taken up by a number of commentators on the dynamic performance in recent decades of “Anatolian tigers” in Turkey’s provincial towns. Ceren Deniz is highly critical of these accounts. The discourse about “Islamic Calvinists” assumed that entrepreneurs in Anatolian towns have become successful without state support on the basis of an Islamic work ethic. Deniz argues that this is a misrepresentation. Islamic values are indeed important, but so is the dependence of a new business class on indirect state support and various other socio-economic factors that facilitate private capital accumulation. Under the rule of AKP governments from the early 2000s onwards, religiosity has been instrumentalised. As in India, the doctrines and organization of the dominant faith are of little significance for economic action in capitalist markets. The Weberian hypothesis has no traction today: more attention should be paid to political networks, class and cronyism than to the piety of individual entrepreneurs.

The projects of REALEURASIA have been spread out across the landmass of the supercontinent. Our intention all along has been to connect ethnography-based economic anthropology with both long-term histories (in the spirit of Jack Goody) and contemporary geopolitical configurations. Among the more significant political developments since we started in 2014 are the “migrants’ crisis” that shook Central and Western Europe in 2015, Brexit one year later, the presidency of Donald Trump, and the pandemic of 2020. The fallout from all of these phenomena can be interpreted with the help of Karl Polanyi’s theorization of the double movement: excessive reliance on the principle of the market, exemplified by the neoliberal mobility of goods, money and people, threatens the integument of society. Reactionary countermovements include many varieties of nationalism and fascism. In the era of the Anthropocene (perhaps better termed the Capitalocene), the need for a progressive countermovement on a planetary scale is urgent. Unfortunately, the combination of intensified authoritarian rule in China and the rejuvenation of Cold War Atlanticist alliances in the West leaves little chance for civilizational commonalities across Eurasia to be recognized as a basis for the radical changes urgently needed by humanity.

A fuller account of the activities and results of REALEURASIA, including details concerning publications, can be found in the latest departmental report:

[Report Department 'Resilience and Transformation in Eurasia' & Max Planck Fellow Group 'Connectivity in Motion'](#)

This blog will be archived at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in due course.

The raw quantitative data collected in the field using the survey instrument devised by the group has been deposited at GESIS (DOI: 10.4232/1.13559), where it is available to all bona fide researchers. Fieldwork was a very important component of almost all individual projects (senior

researchers as well as doctoral students). The data will be cited in team members' publications for many years to come. The first five dissertations are being published promptly in 2020-2021 in the departmental series *Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia*. These are (in alphabetical order):

Anne-Erita Berta: *Entrepreneurs against the market: morality, hard work, and capitalism in Aarhusian independent businesses*. 2019.

Sudeshna Chaki: *Dynamics of emergence, functioning and (dis)continuity: small-scale enterprises in provincial India*. 2020.

Ceren Deniz: *Formation of provincial capital, value regimes and everyday politics in Anatolia*. 2020.

Laura Hornig: *On money and Metta: economy and morality in urban Buddhist Myanmar*. 2019.

Daria Tereshina: *Managing firms and families: small businesses in provincial Russia in times of flexible accumulation*. 2019.

References

Terpe, Sylvia 2020 "Working with Max Weber's 'Spheres of Life': An Actor-Centred Approach" *Journal of Classical Sociology* 20 (1): 22-42.