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Το παρόν τεύχος εκδόθηκε με την οικονομική στήριξη του Ειδικού Λογαριασμού του Πανεπιστημίου Κρήτης και του Ιδρύματος Bourdieu. Η έρευνα, τμήμα των αποτελεσμάτων της οποίας παρουσιάζεται στο παρόν τεύχος, χρηματοδοτήθηκε από το Κοινωνικό Ίδρυμα Ιωάννη Σ. Λάτση. Ευχαριστούμε τη Sandrine Garcia και τη Φανή Λιάπη για τη συνδρομή τους στην υλοποίηση του τεύχους αυτού.

Socioanalysis beyond borders: fieldwork in European sociology

If sociology is understood essentially as a «crisis science», this is not due to the fact that one gladly falls back on it, in times of crisis, as a repair workshop in order to cushion the social impact of dysfunctions of the economic system or of mistaken political decisions and their consequences.

It is rather the case that central sociological concepts, such as «habitus», i.e. «the ensemble of social structures internalized or incorporated by the individual», are never as empirically clear and comprehensible as in times of crisis. Discontinuities and contradictions arise between the durable dispositions of «habitualized practices», which reflect social normality and have proved their worth before the occurrence of the crisis, and the, often, abrupt emergence of new relationships and their requirements.

The consequent discrepancy between routinized mental, moral and behavioural dispositions and the unfamiliar new conditions is accompanied by a loss of orientation in time and space and also in regard to personal identity and role, and is frequently a source of manifold suffering.

Such a crisis, penetrating the entire social context, or, as one used to say, «the social body», can accordingly be truly called a «collective disorientation», to borrow a term from the anamnesis of psychic pathologies. It can also be traced back to the distinctly sociological concept of «anomie» which, since Durkheim's pathbreaking study of suicide, is understood as the loss of reliable normative coordinates for orientation in the social world.

Since Durkheim, we know that rapid social change, for example in the form of a radical economic upheaval in both a downward and an upward direction, regardless of whether prosperity and welfare suddenly decline or increase, is accompanied by such disorienting consequences for the individuals concerned, and the related pathological symptoms of suffering from loss of orientation take on in extreme cases the form of «anomic suicide». But, according to Durkheim, they can also occur in the shape of a radical decline in the birth rate, as could be observed in exemplary fashion among the inhabitants of the former GDR after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In view of a profound and multiform crisis of society on a global scale, sociology is at present more and more called upon to fulfil its role as a crisis science and to make the central hot spots of the crisis, whether they are located at home or abroad, the terrain of sociological research and diagnosis. After all, the handwork of sociology, in the sense of a «public sociology», consists not in waiting in the ivory tower until the burning issues of the time come to it or land on its desk for solution, but in undertaking a socioanalysis of social upheavals and their after-effects in confrontation with objective empirical circumstances, and also, specifically, with their subjective representations and interpretations by the individuals involved and acting within them.

While the processes of the so-called globalization, for example in the field of financial capital, are progressing at a furious speed and are reflected not least in the symptoms of crisis thematized above, social scientific research on these crises continues to be largely restricted to the national contexts and their sociologies in each case, even though the illusion is indulged in at big international conferences or in scientific collections of essays that a simple stringing together of contributions to a social issue from various national contexts opens up the path for cross-border scientific perspectives and «transnational» diagnoses.

In order to arrive at the long overdue international opening up of social scientific research and socio-critical analysis, the sociologist himself must first approach the relevant scenes of the events no matter how difficult the empirical work may turn out to be in view of his «foreignness» and not least of the often not inconsiderable problems of communication. This might, at first, appear to be an unnecessary handicap and tempt one to follow the good advice to «stick to one's trade» and be concerned with the home-made social issues of one's own country instead of wishing to play the uninvited prophet in foreign lands. But a weighty heuristic opportunity lies concealed behind the factor of «foreignness»: it is accompanied by «distance» to the apparently self-evident givens of the everyday

life-world of another society. As a result of the lack of personal involvement in the social relationships to be dealt with, being foreign provides the opportunity for a participant but, nonetheless, critically distanced objective approach. It offers a chance for a consciously displayed «naïve curiosity» in the face of an unknown and even seemingly «alienating» reality.

One might be tempted to consider this kind of socio-analytical ethnography or ethnographic socioanalysis, and the epistemic stance necessary for it, in the attempt to reenact interpretatively «foreign» subjective experiences and interpretations as a special methodological path clearly distinct from traditional sociological procedures. But this would be a fallacy and would underestimate the manifold analogies involved in the problem of understanding what is foreign beyond class borders, distances between generations, gender differences or sub-cultural particularities in the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

The interpretative method of sociology always brings with it the danger of ethnocentric perspectivity and the accompanying misunderstandings and misinterpretations, but we are then dealing precisely with specific variants such as class or gender ethnocentrism.

But what are the epistemological interests of social science in dealing with subjective witnesses to the experience and handling of crises in a foreign country? How far does such an analysis remain rooted in the genre of the ethnography of a singular case? How far can it claim to make an exemplary contribution to the sociology of social crises and the diagnosis of social suffering? Here one can call to mind classical predecessors and models such as Friedrich Engels. «In the meantime, however, the established fact of wretched conditions in *England* will impel us to establish also the fact of wretched conditions in *Germany*», Engels wrote in the year 1845 in his preface to *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, a work in which he «wanted more than a mere abstract knowledge of my subject; I wanted to see you in your homes, to observe you in your every-day life, to chat with you on your condition and grievances».

Emphasizing that in his depiction of the everyday life of the English workers he observed and wished to observe them not as «members of a single isolated nation» but as men, as «human beings in the most emphatical meaning of the word», Engels presented a relentlessly candid analy-

sis and critique of society in early industrial England¹. Although it had the status of a well-informed and well-documented «country study», it aimed essentially at an empirical analysis and theoretical penetration of the «social question» of the industrial age and the corresponding forms of human suffering in the social world which went beyond the constraints of the national framework and the ethnographic character of the subject under study. In view of the general intention and relevance of Engels' study, which consciously took a concrete exemplary case as its starting point and then passed beyond it, scarcely any reader in this country would make the mistake of considering it primarily with the curious but distanced and uninvolved gaze of the «tourist» as an English «special case». No matter how much the meticulously collected detailed knowledge of English institutions (from factory laws to the school system) and the everyday world (from family life to the popular culture of the public houses) may often «disconcert» the German reader, the sensitively depicted conditions of human life and human fates, the social contradictions and constraints disclosed in the work are, nonetheless, empathetically comprehensible to him «just as they are», and, beyond all superficial exoticism, they have the character of intercultural variations on a familiar shared basic theme.

In regard to the social question in Europe today, it can be said that the state of crisis experienced in Greece and mediated through this experience is not expressed in a fundamentally different way in many neighbouring countries and that, instead of being treated as a special case, it ought to be taken as a kind of model case. From such a sociological point of view, Greece presents a huge sociological laboratory in which all conceivable contradictions and states of tension, all the dislocations and breaks in our contemporary late capitalist society are concentrated through a burning glass, and a sociological analysis of the conditions there can provide the foundation for a more comprehensive transnational diagnosis of society and our times. This sociological laboratory includes, above and first of all, the members of society affected by the crisis and their subjective mental states, their changing relationships to themselves and their life projects in the time of crisis, their coping strategies and their resistance. It also includes the emerging symptoms of social and subjective disorientation and the accompanying forms of hurt and suffering. These can certainly be understood empathetically by contemporaries in the materially privileged north of Europe

1. K. Marx & Fr. Engels, *Werke*, Bd. 2, Berlin, 1976, pp. 225-507, here, p. 231. See the English translation: Fr. Engels, *The condition of the working class in England: from personal observation and authentic sources* (introd.: E. Hobsbawm), St. Albans: Panther Books, 1969, pp. 19, 323-324.

and can thus contribute to the prevention of shallow moralization and sweeping assignments of guilt.

The research-ethical demand formulated by Bourdieu et al., following Spinoza, in the pathbreaking study *The Weight of the World*²: «Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate, understand»³, acquires even greater validity when using interpretive interviews in a foreign social context, as in the encounter between two cultural contexts or national affiliations structures of symbolic rule or hierarchical international relationships consciously or unconsciously assert themselves.

This is particularly true of the case we are interested in here, which involves sociological fieldwork dealing with the subjective experiences and interpretations of a profound social crisis. Researchers from Germany and Switzerland, leading economic powers in present-day Europe, here, encounter discussion partners from Greece, the country of the European Union most massively affected by economic crisis, state debt and political unrest. This is a highly problematic constellation, as the reciprocal perception and thematization of the two societies in the mass media is evidently characterized by pronounced ambivalences and tension, which can range from mockingly ironic to aggressively stigmatizing or condescendingly pitying attitudes, on the one side, to insinuations of Machiavellian power strategies and imperialist plans, on the other. This renders the realization of Spinoza's maxim, quoted above, difficult, as we are, after all, dealing, whether willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, with a relationship of symbolic rule, and the well-meaning gaze of the socially critical social scientist who travels to Greece with the intention of getting rid of stereotypes and contributing to a better understanding of the experience of crisis, cannot escape this dilemma and remains trapped in this structurally skewed situation.

A relative protection against the reciprocal insinuations and stereotyped imputations, which are to be expected, was provided by the fact that the three participating researchers were members of a Swiss university –neutrality oblige!–, that the interview was carried out in any case in English (i.e. in a code which was foreign for both sides) and that the Greek intermediary who enabled the discussion to take place already enjoyed a degree of trust on the part of the interviewees.

Another positive effect was that our perceptible inter-

est in the experiences and opinions of the interviewees seems to have been spontaneously registered in a very positive fashion, so that the interviewees were very communicative, although many points they discussed with us as visitors would scarcely have been related in this way to «locals» or people «familiar» with the situation. The discussions were carried out in the style of an ethnological interview with «ethnographic informants», and we deliberately began by introducing ourselves as «visitors who had come to Greece in order to gain an on the spot picture of daily life there» in order to examine (self-)critically the picture presented by the media at home. All of those interviewed seemed to be spontaneously satisfied with this approach.

The discussions were carried out in a thoroughly enjoyable relaxed atmosphere, although they were sometimes highly emotional and full of political commitment, and one could assume that we, as researchers from the north, were perceived as disinterested short-term visitors who were not «involved» in the conditions and problems under discussion, so that we did not need to be met with reservation or mistrust. This also could be a strategic research advantage for an outsider perspective on the social situation under observation. It permitted us to put often very simple, in part consciously naïve questions, and to be always able to reckon with empathetic and friendly explanations.

It would be conceivable, and even desirable and feasible, in terms of research strategy or of the future realization of a socio-political treatment of Europe «from below», if, as a second step, colleagues from Greece came to Germany to carry out research in the field. They could conduct interviews here with workers or families on their everyday living conditions and experiences and possibly acquire interesting insights into social conditions, which, when viewed up close, are by far not as attractive as when seen from a distance. Discussions with mini-jobbers, recipients of Hartz IV, families in the lower income classes or old-age pensioners facing the risk of poverty could give our sociological observers from Greece an insight into social realities which could awaken memories of conditions at home and bring up the question of transversal and deeper-lying global macroeconomic dynamics and processes of transformation. Perhaps our Greek contemporaries would then see that the glitter of the German economic miracle is systematically related to specific forms of social misery, to a dark side in the shape of the ever-growing gap in incomes and

2. [P. Bourdieu (dir.), *La misère du monde*, Paris: Seuil, 1993.]

3. P. Bourdieu et al., *The weight of the world: social suffering in contemporary society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 19/P. Bourdieu (dir.), *Das*

elend der welt: zeugnisse und diagnosen alltäglichen leidens an der gesellschaft, Konstanz: UVK, 1997, p. 13.

wealth, the increasing precarization of broad sectors of the population and growing poverty in old age. Impulses for reflection on the true economic and political causes of the present crisis could possibly arise from such reciprocal insights. Much would be gained if the victims of this crisis

stopped putting the blame for their sufferings on one another, countering the populist strategies advocated by right-wingers on both sides with no small degree of success: «Do not deplore, do not laugh, do not hate, understand!».

Εδώ και τέσσερα χρόνια η οικονομική και πολιτική κρίση επηρεάζει παγκοσμίως τις καταστάσεις κοινωνίες. Μία σε αυτές είναι και η Ελλάδα.

Παρατηρώντας, στην περιοχή μου βλέπω ότι πολλοί άνθρωποι ψάχνουν στα σκουπίδια για να βρουν φαγητό. Άλλοι έχουν βδομάδες να φάνε και άλλοι πληθαίνουν στην εκκλησία για να πάρουν συσσίτιο και κοιμούνται στα παγκάκια. Κάποιοι οδηγούνται στη ζητιανιά γιατί πεινάνε. Πολλά καταστήματα στο κέντρο έκλεισαν επειδή δεν είχαν δουλειά επειδή πολύς κόσμος αρρωστάρει στην τράπεζα για φόρους, δεν έχουν χαράτσι, δάνεια με αποτέλεσμα να τους παίρνουν να πληρώ το σπίτι. Οι καθημερινοί μισθοί των εργαζομένων μειώνονται όλο και περισσότερο και δεν φτάνουν για τράπεζα τις οικογενειακές τους ανάγκες. Πολλοί άνθρωποι ακουτίζουν*

Λυπή η κρίση όμως δεν έχει επηρεάσει μόνο τους μεγάλους αλλά και τα παιδιά. Επίσης πολλά παιδιά ζητιανεύουν ^{δίοση} δεν έχουν να φάνε. Σίτο ~~δίοση~~ οι γονείς δεν βάζουν φαγητό στα παιδιά τους γιατί δεν έχουν. Ακόμη δεν έχουν την δυνατότητα να αγοράσουν στα παιδιά τους καινούργια τετραδία, τσάντες, μολύβια, γόμες και όλα τα απαραίτητα σχολικά. Σε κάποια παιδιά το χατζηλίκι μειώθηκε ή δεν υπάρχει.

Όσοσο παιδιά και μεγάλοι προσπαθούν με οποιοδήποτε τρόπο να επιβιώσουν απ' αυτή την οικονομική και πολιτική κρίση.