

Precarious states

advice, governance and care in settings of austerity

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**Two-day workshop**

based on ESRC project [An Ethnography of Advice](http://www.lse.ac.uk/anthropology/research/An-Ethnography-of-Advice/An-Ethnography-of-Advice.aspx)

Time/Date: 31st May/1st June 2018.

Venue: Parish Hall Basement (PAR.LG03),

LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE.

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When the UK’s Beveridge Report was first published in 1942, it sought to tackle ‘five giants’ of social need: Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. As the foundation of the post-war social contract, the report exemplified a new set of moral expectations for governance, in which the social health of nation-states would be attained by guaranteeing the social welfare of their citizens. In the present moment, such expectations have arguably taken on a disjunctive quality: citizens are still expected to behave in certain ways, but the extent to which states can meet their end of the bargain – and the terms in which they do so – has been dramatically transformed by several decades of neoliberalism and its entrenchment in post-crisis austerity measures. Increasingly, life for large segments of populations across Europe and the Global North is defined by precarity: both as an everyday experience of insecure incomes, homes or legal statuses, and as an index of a social contract that is no longer secure (Bear and Mathur 2015).

Bringing anthropological perspectives on politics, law, economics and value into dialogue with calls for a ‘Beveridge 2.0’, this workshop will explore how interconnected problems – debt, housing, law and order, immigration and health – are affected by the withdrawal of state funding, and will examine the diverse array of responses that emerge on the ground. Using advice and care as diagnostic tools that help to illuminate ‘the state of the welfare state’ today, our aim is to look out how philanthropic counsel, emergency assistance, charitable intervention, social activism and do-good-ish interference emerge in the cracks between market, society and declining welfare states, producing new compromises and new political projects (both progressive and regressive) in the process (Narotzky 2015).

Instead of seeing the domains of the state, the market and civic society as discrete (Cannell and McKinnon 2013), we will explore how they are entangled, juxtaposed and mediated, as difficulties in reconciling official requirements with social reality intensify, leaving rights and care to be granted according to a non-standardized evaluation of individual situations (Dubois 2009). The activists, brokers, or idiosyncratic officers who operate in these interstices make calculations that are simultaneously ethical and economic, requiring complex forms of calculus in order to convert material resources into care-oriented values of the public good, or vice versa. Meanwhile, their client/dependents find themselves increasingly at the mercy of local authorities, immigration regimes, landlords, banks and debt collection agencies. In settings where social movement activists provide ‘self-help’, struggles and dilemmas occur over how best to instantiate social justice, provide assistance and balance individuals’ moral judgments against the collective good, or convert between these diverse forms of value (Bear et al 2015).

**Advice.** Advisers act to correct mistakes made by state agents, force disparate branches of the state to speak to one another, mimic the state and give it a new guise, offer sites where state power may be challenged, or – increasingly – circumvent the state and other formal institutions altogether. This workshop tracks the mediations that advice enables, exploring how political, economic and legal imperatives and domains dovetail and diverge. Where in the post-war years welfare (and advice) were furnished and funded by the state, its role is shrinking as the nature of state-citizen relations is reconfigured. Those in need now include new waves of people facing precarious living conditions. These are prompted by a shift from state-planned to neoliberal economies, growing deindustrialisation, the rise of a service economy, and the effects of financialisation. The drastic shrinking of funds for aid and assistance, previously an essential underpinning of the welfare state, has been accompanied by an increase in those who will be needing such aid, and the entry of entirely new sets of players to fill the gap. Economic reforms have reconfigured the caring role of the state, and the responsibility to provide assistance and essential counsel has expanded beyond the agencies that formerly provided (and subsidized) them. New caring agents - informal networks, self-help groups and activists – are emerging

‘**Ethics of care’**. We propose to extend the call for a new ‘political ontology of the self’ (Skeggs & Loveday 2012) to questions of citizenship and governance (Koch 2017). Care directs the distribution and allocation (but often misallocation) of resources and hence becomes a way to implement governance across different social groups. Private agencies may mediate between the state and migrants, enabling an exclusionary immigration policy, yet also act as sites for challenging state power. Getting access to the food bank, to debt relief, or to the ranks of those intent on occupying one of the repossessed properties allocated by activists, depends upon relationships of solidarity, but new forms of inequity may also be enshrined. In debt advice, where the state, the market and charity are locked in an uneasy embrace, payments take on different moral meanings. They may be viewed as owed to the state so as to balance the fiscus and contribute to the common good, or owed to financial creditors where they accrue as immoral profit. Financial corporations, recognizing their culpability, now subsidise advice and are newly endowed with moral agency, while the (re-) emergence of paternalistic forms of charity, through faith-based, unpaid advice work, indicate a neo-Victorian re-moralisation of poverty. These changes in resource-allocation have unfolded alongside a tightening of national borders and a renewed emphasis on national security – in the UK, for example, the deliberate creation of a ‘hostile environment’ for migrants. They have also been accompanied by a resurgence in nationalist attitudes and in the desire for punitive states at a popular level. The conference will link these new forms of nationalism and authoritarianism to changes in state-citizen relations and resource-distribution. It will explore their relevance for questions on the ground about who, as citizens, can access scarce resources.

This workshop explores ‘precarious states’ at a time when austerity politics, an entrenched crisis of welfare provision, and the reconfiguration of state-market relations challenges the post-war welfare consensus. It investigates how redistributive intentions are rendered increasingly difficult by funding cuts, and acknowledges the deleterious effects of austerity regimes as they chip away at the heart of welfarism, rendering people ‘expropriable’ (Davey 2016). But it also seeks to counter overly pessimistic assessments that uniformly foreground the punitiveness of such new regimes in terms of the rise of a ‘neo-liberal Leviathan’ (Wacquant 2009) or that exclusively emphasise Foucault-style ‘self-discipline’. Advisers working at the coalface, and activists striving to broaden their struggles, seek ‘ethical fixes’ (Pia 2016) to respond to pressures by delivering fair outcomes in the interests of all. In drawing attention to the work of advisers, activists and ordinary citizens who engage in advice-seeking processes, we foreground an analytical and ethnographic engagement with an ethics of care that continues to exist at a time when many have seen the decline of collective and redistributive responsibilities in the UK and beyond.

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|  | **THURSDAY** |  |  |  |  |
| **10.00** | **COFFEE/INTRO** |  |  |  |  |
| **10.30 – 12.30** | **Panel 1:** | **Housing, financialisation and urban development** |  |  | **Temporal Vertigo in Austerity Greece** |
|  | Paper 1 | Matt Wilde (LSE/Leicester) ‘Communitas and the commons: regeneration and resistance on a London council estate’ |  |  | Austerity and Terror in the middle East: On the Welfare State and the Police State |
|  | Paper 2 | Ana Gutierrez (LSE) ‘”El hogar no es lo mismo de antes”: Making and Un-making precarious homes among  women activists in Spain’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 3 | Luna Glucksberg (LSE) ‘The opposite of precarity: housing, stability and wealth in elite London’ |  |  | TINA to Austerity: A few ethnographic notes from an ethnography in Athens of crisis |
|  | Paper 4 | Jaime Palomera (GRECO, Universitat de Barcelona) ‘The home as an asset: scrutinizing the nexus among  home-ownership, rentier capitalism and social reproduction’ |  |  | Arguing with austerity: ‘fiscal anthropology’ & the politics of liquidity |
|  | Discussion Catherine | Catherine Alexander (Durham) |  |  |  |
| **12.30 – 13.30** | **LUNCH** |  |  |  |  |
| **13.30 – 16.00** | **Panel 2** | **Urban welfarism and austerity** |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 1 | Cristina Grasseni/Robin Smith (Leiden) ‘Advice and care in urban/rural food reconfigurations in Italy and Croatia’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 2 | Martijn Koster, Lieke vd Veer, Janne Heederik (Radboud University) ‘Participatory urban governance and  residents’ responses: remaking difference and deservingness in Rotterdam and Manchester’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 3 | Antonio Pusceddu (GRECO, Universitat de Barcelona) ‘Austerity, the state and precarious urban welfarism in Italy.  A view from the South’ |  |  | Faring Well in Austere Times: Capitalizing on Financial Inclusion and Welfare in India |
|  | Paper 4 | Deborah James (LSE) ‘Unravelling and reconfiguring dependency in austerity Britain’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 5 | Franciso Arqueros (Maynooth) ‘“You don’t have a right to anything”: deservingness revisited’ |  |  |  |
|  | Discussion | Deborah James (LSE) |  |  |  |
|  | **DRINKS/DINNER** |  |  |  |  |
|  | **FRIDAY** |  |  |  |  |
| **10.30 – 12.30** | **Panel 3** | **Quality advice and funding cuts** |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 1 | Tobias Eule (Universität Bern/LSE) ‘Rumours of Quality: Asylum Advice in Switzerland’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 2  Paper 3 | James Organ ‘Law Schools and advice sector collaboration: the view from Liverpool in the age of LASPO’  Jennifer Sigafoos ‘”Firefighting’” austerity advice services’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 4 | Lisa Hahn ‘Strategically Mobilizing (against) Migration Law’ |  |  |  |
|  | Discussion | Tobias Eule, James Organ, Jennifer Sigafoos, Lisa Hahn |  |  |  |
| **12.30 – 13.30** | **LUNCH** |  |  |  |  |
| **13.30 – 15.30** | **Panel 4:** | **Popular authoritarianism** |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 1 | Insa Koch/Ryan Davey (LSE) ‘Popular authoritarian revisited: class and coercion in British state liberalism’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 2 | Anna Tuckett (LSE) ‘Gatekeeping Britishness: Muscular nationalism and the UK citizenship test’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper 3 | Giacomo Loperfido (GRECO, Universitat de Barcelona) ‘Locality, trust, and “the people”: crisis and the decline  of Venetian populism’ |  |  |  |
|  | Paper4 | Gillian Evans (Manchester) ‘Surplus to Requirements: precarious populism and the state of post-industrial  society in the UK’ |  |  |  |
|  | Discussion | Katharine Tyler (Exeter) |  |  |  |
| **15.30 – 17.00** | **PLENARY** |  |  |  |  |