

### **Taking materiality of money's multiplicity seriously**

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On the 30th November 2013 the workshop „Taking Materiality of Money's Multiplicity seriously“ took place at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. Under auspices of the Research Training Group „Value and Equivalence“, the workshop was organized by Mario Schmidt, post-doc fellow at the Global Cooperation Centre, Duisburg and Martin Fotta, post-doc fellow at the DFG Research Training Group „Value and Equivalence“, Frankfurt am Main. The aim of the workshop was to bring together international scholars from the field of monetary studies to discuss a recent shift in the anthropology of money which focuses on money's quantitative character as its main quality. The workshop took Martin Holbraad's 2005 article „Expending Multiplicity: Money in Cuban Ifá Cults“ as an interpretative vantage point.<sup>1</sup> The most important insights are presented in this summary.

SANDY ROSS (Moscow) critically discussed how foreigners living in Moscow, Russia, attempt to make sense of rubles and adapt to local notions of value and practices of money use. She pointed out that this is not a linear but a gradual change in thinking about rubles along three dimensions: quantity, materiality and calculation (or number). She argued that the ruble begins as an abstracted (and sometimes confusing) collection of quantities that conversion only renders sensible in isolated, individual transactions. As material objects or artefacts, rubles begin to take on some feeling of having value, or being commensurable in certain quantities to commodities and services. After many conversions, and much experience using (and failing to use) ruble bills and coins, the ruble starts to develop into a unit of account as well as

a means of payment. Amounts of rubles become calculable numbers with comprehensible values.

After that GIAN PAOLA LAZZER (Verona) focused on the fact that for any money to be a cohesive totality or a whole, to use Holbraad's expression, there has to be trust. People have to trust that all coins, bills and so on are „real“ and stand what they claim to stand for. Inspired by Simmel, Lazzer asked if multiplicity could ever be a premise for a bad circulation of money and, more interestingly, where the materiality of particles could damage this aggregate. The presentation focused on counterfeiting processes arguing that it sheds light on how money's materiality produces two different kinds of multiplicity, a true and a fake one. Inversely, he argued that it is money's embeddedness that makes money counterfeiting possible.

EMANUEL SEITZ (Frankfurt am Main) began his talk by rhetorically imputing a crude materialism to Martin Holbraad's paper. He used this to embark upon a critical reflection on how anthropologists tend to reproduce specific notions about numbers, mathematics and money without taking into account the specific „Weltbild“ of the culture. Referring to Heidegger's notion of „Weltbild“ and „Gestell“ and in a dialogue with Oswald Spengler's theory of a difference between an apollinian and a faustian form of money, he concluded that money has to be understood to be pluralistic as each form of money develops in interaction with the culture it is embedded in.

In the last paper before Holbraad's reflections MARIO SCHMIDT (Duisburg) argued that money's capacity for abstraction is perceived of as pre-semiotic innate among Kenyan Luo. He tried to show that money's calculation and inherent drive to self-maximizing could not be tamed, but as a natural fact always had been tamed by Luo culture, that is even before it was there and theirs they were against money. He concluded his paper by arguing that the anthropology of money has to recognize money's double nature as both quantitatively abstract

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Holbraad, Expending multiplicity: money in Cuban Ifá cults. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11 (2), 2005, pp. 231-254.

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and quantitatively concrete, thereby taking seriously Lévi-Strauss' demand that anthropologists have to become „qualitative mathematicians“.

MARTIN HOLBRAAD (London) then summarized the first four talks by pointing to similarities and how the papers could fruitfully be improved by taking into account conceptual pairs such as transcendence / immanence and intensity / extensity which he found to be lurking behind the arguments of some papers and which he felt might be critically questioned by using the presented ethnographic data.

After lunch PETER OAKLEY (London) discussed two interlinked features of gold jewellery as an element of material culture in Western societies, that is (1) how, in some circumstances, gold jewellery exhibits multiplicity and (2) how this appears to be an inherent feature in gold jewellery's social role as a form of para-money. He used the term on the grounds that if there are exchanges which cannot be undertaken using official money, the system of economic exchange as a whole needs to acknowledge all the types of economic instruments being employed, even the peripheral ones. He continued by arguing that gold jewellery becomes more recognisable as a type of para-money when it is not seen in terms of individual objects undertaking distinct social trajectories, but as relational parts of wholes (jewellery collections).

OLIVER TAPPE (Halle an der Saale) explored the various ways in which the nation states of Laos and Vietnam are drawing on the iconography of money in order to forge and communicate 'national' identities, aspects of cultural heritage and utopian aspirations. He furthermore pointed towards differences in Lao and Vietnamese uses of ghost money which is sacrificially burned for the ancestors. During Lao sacrifices a specific sum of money, for example 100 \$, has to be parted into a multiplicity of as many small banknotes as possible, for example 100 1 \$ bills. The division of the sum to numerous banknotes of low denomination would first and foremost allow for an increased ritual efficacy.

MARTIN FOTTA (Frankfurt am Main) based his presentation on a long-term fieldwork among Calon, a population of Gypsies

living in Bahia, North-East Brazil. He argued that the Calon live in an environment that is essentially unstable. It is characterized by high levels of violence, mobility and uncertain modes of making a living. In this world, a man's „money on the street“, an aggregate of loans to non-Gypsies and other Calon, becomes a source of stability. Although it is never totally accessible and visible, as it is essentially money in circulation with varied due dates, it creates a feeling of living in the abundant and eventful present, while the knowledge of these amounts becomes a ground against which behavior is evaluated. It was Fotta's contention that such analysis of view of money from the point of view of marginal stranger-like figures, can shed light on the dynamics of monetary transgressions (and hence abstraction) attributed to money in general.

LUDEK BROZ (Prague) led the final discussion in which the potential of conciliating quantitative and qualitative approaches to money were discussed. Mette High (St. Andrews), participating as a guest, pointed out that she had the feeling most of the papers were interested in money as a system of organizing the economy or even the society as such and not first and foremost in the materiality of different currencies. All agreed on the following diagnosis that money was too often understood to be an object diverse regarding its material realizations (its cultural materialization as coins, bank notes, stones, shells etc.) while perceived as similar regarding its conceptual character (its natural essentialization as abstracting and quantitative).

#### **Conference Overview:**

Sandy Ross (Moscow), 5000, Five Thousand and five thousands: Quantity, Magnitude and Materiality with Rubles

Gian Paolo Lazzer (Verona), True and False Particles

Emanuel Seitz (Frankfurt am Main), Bewitched money. The ontology of ghosts and spirits in monetary theory

Mario Schmidt (Duisburg), Money as multiple Multiplicity or how to go against money with money.

Martin Holbraad (London), Comments and Reflections

Peter Oakley (London), Gold Jewelry as Money: the covert social identity of a class of object

Oliver Tappe (Halle an der Saale), The Iconography of Money: Nation states, social relations, and governmentality

Martin Fotta (Frankfurt am Main), „Money on the street“: fabricating Gypsy life-worlds

Ludek Broz (Prague), Final Comments and Discussion

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