Proper-property or anti-fascist anthropology?

The Trojan Horse of possession-based economies and the mode of production of the horse's Achilles-heel

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This commentary discusses Julien-François Gerber and Rolf Steppacher's proposal for an anthropological engagement with the basic principles of possession-based economies. The empirical and analytical validity of the theory of ownership is dismissed. That theory mistranslates classics of economic anthropology into economics. The modes of production approach reveals that the theory of ownership's core claim is false - capitalism is not based on legal property, but on inequality instead. Further, the theory of ownership's analysis of an absence of legal property in socialist economies and its recent alignment with far-right anti-migrant and Islamophobic ideologies are rejected. Accordingly, Gerber and Steppacher's theoretical and empirical assumption that possession-based economies are capitalism's opposite is false as is their conception of basic principles and logics, which empties economic anthropology of an analysis of power and inequality. Alternatively, a historical anthropology of modes of production is proposed that is alert to and rejects co-optation by far-right ideology.

I. Translating translations

"For relaxing times... make it Suntory time." (Bill Murray, Lost in Translation, 2003, directed by Sofia Coppola)

Suntory is a long-standing brand among the Japanese whisky-producing corporations. It was also a prominent "actor" in the 2003 blockbuster *Lost in Translation*, whose lead character, a US-American movie star impersonated by Bill Murray, is the figurehead for Suntory's advertising campaigns in Japan and finds himself in Tokyo, dazed and confused from drinking, loneliness, love, and from the foreign, alien metropolis bustling with people around him. Problems and pitfalls of linguistic and cultural translation climax in a TV-studio during the shoot for a new Suntory commercial. The studio translator is unwilling to facilitate communication between the foreign film star and the Japanese director. This leads to a stream of misunderstandings with the result that the message, "for relaxing times… make it Suntory time", is repeated on a seemingly infinite loop as the commercial has to be shot again and again.

Surprisingly, that infinite loop has been interpreted as a culture industry entertainment masterpiece that turns globalization's cultural and linguistic misunderstandings into sophisticated art-house cinema slapstick worthy of an Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences Award ("Oscar") and worthy of recognition in the social sciences and humanities (Mitchell, 2003; Skrabec, 2010). However, on the surface of that loop is a straightforward message, Suntory-time is relaxing time. Put simply, the entire movie works as product placement for the Suntory brand. The director of *Lost in Translation*, Sophia Coppola, mentioned herself that 1980s Suntory-whisky commercials starring her father Francis Ford-Coppola and Akira Kurosawa were a major source of inspiration for the movie. Thus, rather than postmodernist equations of globalized culture with the intricacies of translation, the better analytical angles that *Lost in Translation* has to offer for the social sciences and humanities are how global capitalism incorporates families across generations, shapes their worldviews and, far beyond the transnational household scale, naturalizes branding and marketing so that a global public is inclined to ignore an audacious 101-minutes product placement and mistake it for art-house entertainment.

Now, why am I writing about this when I have been invited to comment on Julien-François Gerber and Rolf Steppacher's article on "Basic principles of possession-based economies"? Their certainly well intended academic project translates the theory of ownership into anthropology and feeds on postmodernist dazzles and confusions that are similar to those found in *Lost in Translation* did . To put it bluntly, their proposal of basic principles for possession-based economies is a disguised product-placement for a pseudo-academic theory that reifies capitalism's ideological foundations and aligns the latter with far-right and neo-fascist ideas about current issues such as immigration, terrorism, and underdevelopment.

Section two of my commentary establishes the basic principles of a theory of ownership, which is the work of the sociologist Gunnar Heinsohn and the economist Otto Steiger. This is crucial for an advanced understanding of the translation that Gerber and Steppacher propose and fills a void that exists because their only evidence as to why anthropologists should consider the theory of ownership is that it "has one important advantage over other theories, it can easily be discussed by different specialists" (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA). That "theory" is, in fact, a set of axioms that are said to apply to all human economies, for these are either possession-based or they are property-based. Such rigidity gives that set of axioms consistency. One variable, the articulation of ownership, defines whether a human economy is possession-based or property-based. Possession-based economies have "de facto" ownership because they lack institutions that guarantee rights and security. Property-based economies, instead, offer members a firm legal-political regulation secured and sanctioned by institutions, which makes ownership "de jure" property.

Heinsohn and Steiger's claim to fame is that the theory of ownership rejects the so-called myth of barter in classical economics, which they replace with a master-narrative that has de jure property beget money, credit, interest and markets, as individual market agents require securitized assets as collaterals that facilitate measurement and value (for a recent English language summary of their work see Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013). It is further important to know that Heinsohn and Steiger have been developing the theory of ownership since the 1970s and have done so with political ambitions that range from support for 1980s neoliberal Cold War propaganda to Heinsohn's recent offers of academic shimming for the German, Danish and other far-right political movements and parties' anti-immigration and Islamophobic campaigns.[1]

Section three argues that Gerber and Steppacher's effort reifies the theory of ownership, even though they acknowledge shades of coexistence in the possession-property binary. Yet, their basic principles and subtypes of possession-based economies - be these horticultural, post-socialist, informal or other – require by necessity an acceptance of the empirical validity of the axiomatic system possession-based economies versus property-based economies. This leads them to misinterpretations of anthropology's many earlier efforts to classify and categorize human economies, especially so in regard to their reading of the modes of production debate.

Section four further clarifies the difference between the flexible modes of production categories, which capture historical specificity but avoid a postmodernist rejection of any classification, and the misinterpretation of those categories by Gerber and Steppacher. This brings to light that, much like Heinsohn and Steiger, Hernando de Soto, and others, Gerber and Steppacher fail to consider that property relations first and foremost have to do with power and inequality and that they are established in acts of dispossession. The degrowth agenda and the praise of possession-based economies that Gerber and Steppacher propose is thus a naïve denial of the fact that under capitalism and other modes of production, many humans have no ownership of any assets and that others who own assets could easily have these dispossessed as soon as they were of value to capital. Capitalism, ultimately, is the opposite of an economy with de jure property as it feeds on arbitrary rights and accumulation is secured instead in violent contests.

To conclude, I highlight that Gerber and Steppacher's claim that anthropology was the discipline that deals with possession-based economies and that we should use our expertise to contribute to the de jure versus de facto ownership binary amounts to a disguised proposal to take our discipline back to an outdated fixation on non-Western and/or non-capitalist societies that we have overcome in advanced analyses of the intricacies and vicissitudes of global capitalism in recent decades (as recently laid out in this journal and elsewhere Reyna, 2016; Palomera and Vetta, 2016; Eckert, 2016; Benda-Beckmann, 2003; Kapferer, 2005; Neveling, 2016). The carrot of trans-disciplinary dialogue as a way to support anthropology that Gerber and Steppacher offer is, thus, a veritable Trojan Horse that sells back to us a normative inversion of a fundamentally flawed and politically and scientifically unacceptable theory of ownership.

II. Grand ambitions - proper property from the Cold War to the new far-right

For more than four decades, Heinsohn and Steiger have clouded their writings in an aura of revolution against classical, neoclassical, and Keynesian economics. If the latter models insist that barter was practiced in all human societies and, hence, evidence for a universal, transhistorical *homo economicus,* the Heinsohn and Steiger revolution puts ownership in the driver's seat of an evolutionary model. Once human economies emerge that turn de facto ownership into legal ("de jure") property they create the precondition for the emergence of money, interest, credit, and markets. Such institutions, not humans, make history and this is why economists in their deducting of economic laws from the actions of humans "confuse the agent with a mere user of goods" (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 3).

Since its inception in the 1970s, Heinsohn and Steiger have advertised the theory of ownership as a worldview and analysis that could improve capitalism. If economic policies would focus on securing "de jure" property, humanity could revive the Leviathan-like institutions and legal orders that "enable the power to *sell*, the power to *burden*, the power to *hypothecate* and the power to make property available to satisfy claims in debt *enforcement* actions" and end the persistence and chaotic state of possession-based economies, burdened with de facto ownership (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 2, their Italics). In this spirit, Heinsohn and Steiger wrote in affirmation of the early Reagan era's ideological supremacist dismissal of socialism, portraying the latter as a misguided economic system lacking a proper understanding of property rights (Heinsohn and Steiger, 1981).

Attention to empirical material is not their forte, however, and throughout the decades of their work has always taken the backseat while ideology was at the steering wheel. As the structure of global hegemony shifted at the end of the Cold War, Heinsohn and Steiger portrayed the West German government's efforts to establish legal institutions and reinstate property rights in the newly acquired East German territories as evidence for their theory. In fact, they drew on Federal Court rulings of the post-1990 Germany to reiterate the empirical validity of their claim that the socialist economy of the now-gone German Democratic Republic (GDR) knew no de jure property but only de facto possessions (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 9). Such empirical evidence is more than dubious. It certainly ignores the multi-facetted and highly differentiated system of private and collective property rights in the GDR, where many small and medium enterprises oscillated between private and public ownership. For example, the *KATHI Nährmittelfabrik Rainer Thiele*, based until today in Halle/Saale and with various production sites in the wider region, was established as a private business in 1951, it purchased various competitors during the 1950s and 1960s, was regulated and yet forced to expand when it became the monopoly producer of baking mixtures for anything from cakes to bread in 1969, and collectivized in 1972 as *Volkseigener Betrieb (VEB) Backmehlwerk Halle*. KATHI products had an international market with sales revenues among the German diaspora in the US, for example. Like many other family-owned enterprises, the owners retained a high degree of control of the company even after 1972 as they were managing directors during the VEB period (authors own research in Halle 2003-2008, Damm et al., 2011). The theory of ownership knows nothing of such dynamic histories of property relations under socialism (Thelen, 2011), nor would it ever consider the possibility that the rigid distinction between de jure property and de facto possession is flawed with normativity, as it does not account for the fact, let alone the possibility, that some humans may want their societies to have de jure institutions that secure collective ownership.

The theory of ownership's dogmatic, somewhat ordoliberalist worldview – which to them means that markets should be secured via institutions and laws while property has to be an individual and never a collective matter[2] - is crucial for understanding how Heinsohn and Steiger explain the plight of developing nations in the Third World.   They claimed that the cause of the difficulties faced by developing nations was their lack of institutions and laws backing or creating private property. Those plights show nothing but a lack of institutions and laws backing (or creating) private ownership in developing nations. And where there is no de jure property there is no market, no growth, and no creditworthiness (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2008: 198-205).

Turning to population dynamics, demographics, and inheritance law, Heinsohn recently added the concept of a fatal "youth bulge" to the portfolio of global phenomena that the theory of ownership can explain. His voluminous German language book *Sons and Global Power. Terror in the Rise and Decline of Nations* (Heinsohn, 2008: , my translation of the German title) argues that a surplus of male offspring across the non-Western world means that there are too many "third sons" and "fourth sons" with excess status. They are excluded from inheritance and therefore have no access to property, which is why they started rioting in the Arab Spring, then began to emigrate to Europe and/or engage in terror attacks on the wider public, for example when they sexually assaulted German women on New Year's Eve in Cologne and other larger cities in 2015. Heinsohn has recently been busy spreading these theses in interviews in German mainstream media and has happily accepted the praise that far-right and neo-fascist blogs have shown for his work.[3]

The theory of ownership is, evidently, nonsensical, poorly researched, pseudo-scientific, and politically dangerous. Academic engagement with it should make it the object of research and not of debate. Analyses of the very fact that Heinsohn and Steiger could have university careers may provide important insights into the workings of German academia during the Cold War and after (anthropology, and especially so postmodernist anthropology, certainly was shaped as a discipline by many such Cold War careers Reyna and Glick Schiller, 1998; Price, 2016). Another interesting research angle would be to consider the theory of ownership in light of the widespread Eurocentric, anti-communist, racist, and other preposterous world-views that are, again, on the rise across the Western world (Loperfido, forthcoming 2017).

Gerber and Steppacher, however, propose that we should accept that theory and invert its normativity from advancing capitalism to championing degrowth in order to realize the principles and, hence, the potential of possession-based economies for anthropological research and for a de-growth development agenda. In order to advance the critique and rejection of this project I now turn to the anthropology component in the theory of ownership.

III. The theory of ownership's anthropology component as world-historical fiction

The above shows how Heinsohn and Steiger position "property" within an analytical binary of ownership rights, opposed by "possession". It further shows that this is untenable nonsense and that anthropology should sense no urge to engage this particular theory of ownership except for the possibility of moving it from essence to existence by making the very existence of this theory and of its authors the subjects of our enquiry (Vigh and Sausdal, 2014).

In light of these insights, Gerber and Steppacher, whose work is largely in the field of development studies, have a surprisingly pragmatist approach to the conduct and feasibility of academic debates. As I said above, their credo is; several disciplines could engage in a conversation about the theory of ownership so this makes this an acceptable theory. Considering the fact that Heinsohn and Steiger make explicit use of the classics of economic anthropology in building their theory, one can certainly see the well-intentioned motivation for suggesting such a cross-disciplinary dialogue. However, the political and academic flaws of the theory of ownership are reflected in its mistranslation of anthropology into economics.

Much like Karl Polanyi's "Great Transformation" that argued that there had been a historical disembedding of economy and society, the coming of property essentially marks a watershed to Heinsohn and Steiger. Polanyi's watershed, however, emerges when long-term political-economic processes culminate and bring to the fore a new calculus, which tips the scales towards a primacy of the market over other social institutions (Polanyi, 2001). Heinsohn and Steiger, instead, have no concern for the complexity of social, political and economic processes that usher in world historical changes such as the great transformation or the global spread of capitalism. What matters is that neither "tribal systems" nor "command systems" have money proper. Moreover, they dismiss statements by Malinowski or Sahlins that concepts of possession were as absent as the concept of property in such systems as an imprecision "in their choice of terminology" (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 6).

Other of the many (mainly German-language) publications co-authored and single-authored by Heinsohn and Steiger dismiss major positions in economic anthropology in similar ways. In an article on the origins of the market Heinsohn nullifies anthropology's formalist-substantivist debate. Both positions "exhibit the same ignorance about the fundamental difference between property and possession" and fail to see that "money is not the child but the mother of the market". That market is constituted in history by the coming together of "indebted proprietors" and, hence, dependent on a set of formalized, enforceable legal regulations that guarantee private property. However, Heinsohn offers no empirical enquiry into the historical circumstances that created indebted proprietors or the circumstances that had those proprietors create and later amend institutions securing de jure property. Instead, we learn that only such de jure ownership "comprises the intangible (non-physical) capacities of (i) burdening property in issuing money against interest; (ii) encumbering it as collateral for obtaining money, (iii) alienating it in sale contracts, and (iv) enforcing against it after default" (Heinsohn, 2006: no pagination available in online version).

Now, there is a very similar list specifying the emergence of “property rights as *de jure* claims” in Steppacher and Gerber (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA, their Italics). Unfortunately, they do not clarify the implications of these alleged entitlements for our analysis of ownership-economies. Instead, their discussion of basic principles of possession-based economies affirms Heinsohn and Steiger by showing that property’s opposite, possession, can be broken down into subcategories, which can then be charged with basic principles to show a way forward as humanity leaves behind the property-based economies stage in its evolution.

For the moment, it is important to stick with Heinsohn and Steiger before engaging Steppacher and Gerber. With the existence of two modes of ownership thusly ascertained, Heinsohn and Steiger move forward. As ownership status is backed by institutions and turns from de facto to de jure, “the somewhat arbitrary rule- and power-based deployment of goods and resources is transformed into the economic deployment of goods and resources” (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 1). Such legal security shape-shifts the latter into commodities and assets. It also begets money, interest, and credit because institutions securing and securitizing ownership provide the de jure status required for burdening and hypothecating assets with interest payments reflecting the assets’ monetary value. Heinsohn, a sociologist, and Steiger, an economist, use these findings to accuse classical, neoclassical, and Keynesian economists of inverting the trajectory of humanity’s economic history (or should we say evolution), “they resemble a fish that can only understand water after it has been thrown on to the land” (Heinsohn and Steiger, 2013: 17). To reiterate, exchange and markets are secondary phenomena (“the land” in the above quote), whereas the primary phenomenon is the emergence of property rights and their different arrangement of ownership.

Such a mono-variable analysis comes at a huge analytical cost, however. The constant insistence on the significance of de jure ownership means that all other economies are defined by an absence of such ownership alone. Similar to modernity’s credo that anything other is “traditional” (Neveling and Klien, 2010), property’s credo is that anything other is possession. This, the absence of property, according to Heinsohn and Steiger is the defining feature that makes a myriad of social formations one and the same.

Once we consider this, Gerber and Steppacher's claim that the theory of ownership "can easily be discussed by different specialists" certainly appears in a different light. This is no longer about the practicalities of trans-disciplinary conversations. Gerber and Steppacher's insistence that possession-based economies and their basic principles warrant closer consideration because they come with multiple "logics" and because these are insufficiently considered in the theory of ownership is certainly valid, but comes at the expense of accepting the flawed binary of the theory of ownership and thus consolidates the project that Heinsohn and Steiger have developed.

This also affects their claim that anthropology would lack an overall classification of such economies despite the many case studies that the discipline has produced. First, as I have shown above, the binary of possession-based versus property-based economies has no analytical or empirical validity in the theory of ownership. Anthropology has done well to avoid establishing any subtypes and basic principles for such economies. Second, Gerber and Steppacher claim such validity on the basis that authors involved in the 1970s modes of production debate used categories of ownership - such as patrimony and access – but that these lacked precision and focused "on power relationships rather than on 'logics'" (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA). This statement has striking resemblance with Heinsohn and Steiger's claim that anthropologists since Malinowski, formalists as much as substantivists, were imprecise in their choice of terminology.

That striking resemblance aside, one wonders how an anthropologist could arrive at insights about logics in economic systems without considering power relationships. Yet, indeed, Steppacher and Gerber manage well to outline "the different systems of possession" and still ignore questions of power and inequality. Instead, they reduce the short blurbs elaborating their six "main categories of possession-based systems" (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA, summarized in their Table 1) to the very logic that Heinsohn and Steiger have set out. Their focus on possession is bereft of any concern with the political or demographic aspects of control over resources or technologies.

This is aggravated by the many nonchalant references to academic works that are supposed to back the analytical and empirical validity of the subtypes of possession-based economies introduced in their article. One of their headings proposes the subtype "Agrarian economies – 'simple'". In the text below that subheading, this changes to a "subsistence-oriented agricultural (or horticultural) community". We learn that this subtype was valid because "[m]any leading authors have been interested" in it and we receive as evidence a list of seminal authors that includes Friedrich Engels Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, Eric Wolf, and several others (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA). Assuming for a moment that there was a possession-based economy of the "subsistence-oriented agricultural (or horticultural) community"-kind, one would expect that this list would be followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences between the empirical and analytical thrusts of the seminal works referenced. Instead, Friedrich Engels' *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and its concern with the development of capitalism stands side-by-side with Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's *The Institutional Aspects of Peasant Communities: An Analytical View* and its arguably fundamentally different concern with how the second law of thermodynamics extends to material resources.

Another pressing question that this list raises is why Eric Wolf's book *Peasants* is referenced as evidence for anthropology's interest in a "subsistence-oriented agricultural (or horticultural) community" when Wolf's peasant category described "rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn" (Wolf, 1966: 3-4). Gerber and Steppacher are not only misinformed in their choice of references, they further fail to realize that such peasants' volatile lives and times and the fact that "peasants" is a transregional and transhistorical category makes them prototype members of several categories of possession based economies, from “Agrarian economies – ‘complex’” to “informal economies” to “Soviet-type economies” (in fact what has been described as the “second economy” of socialist nations would also match all these categories, see Sampson, 1987).

In other words, the “logics” proposed for the possession-based economies trope are as flawed as the theory of ownership itself. The following consolidates this insight by example as it shows that the many subtypes developed and intensely debated by anthropologists, before and after Wolf’s 1966 publication, are much better suited to capture the multifarious spatial and temporal articulations of the power relations that make and break human economies.

IV. Arbitrary property, inequalities and their historical continuity

Staying with how Gerber and Steppacher incorporate Eric Wolf’s work into their basic principles of possession-based economies, we encounter further and more decisive misunderstandings of the means of production approach. The following also highlights the impossibility of replacing the analysis of power relations with a focus on “logics” when the very logic of political-economic relations and means of production concerns inequality and how it is maintained or altered.

According to Gerber and Steppacher, Wolf “coined the term ‘tributary mode of production’, to put an end to increasingly sterile debates about whether the concept of ‘feudalism’ could be applied to regions such as Asia, Latin America or Africa” (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA). In point of fact, Wolf acknowledged that he got the term from one of Samir Amin’s publication on neocolonialism in West Africa (Wolf, 1982: 81). Amin designed this as an umbrella term to incorporate as subtypes what some saw as feudal, Asiatic, or slave-owning modes of production and Wolf specified that the ambition was to have one category that would capture the “variable outcomes of the competition between classes of non-producers for power at the top” (Wolf, 1982: 81).

This certainly does not match Steppacher and Gerber’s disinterest in historical and contemporary inequalities or their searching for “logics”. In fact, they fail to realize that the issue for Amin and Wolf was not the narrow concept of feudalism. Instead, they established the tributary mode of production as an anti-Eurocentric stance *per se* that incorporated feudalism as one of several borderline cases across Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe:

> "The feudal mode of production appears as "a 'borderline' case of the tributary modes of production, in which the community is especially degraded, since it loses the *dominium eminens* of the land. This borderline character entitles us to describe the feudal formations as 'peripheral' in relation to the 'central' tributary formations. The slaveowning mode of production is similarly situated on the borders of the tributary formations, appearing only by way of exception, in a sequence that is not central but peripheral, as is also the case with the simple petty-commodity mode of production." (Amin, 1976: 16).

Wolf escalated Amin's move to incorporate specificity in larger analytical categories when he clarified that the tributary mode of production category replaced two ahistorical concepts (feudal and Asiatic) whose differentiation was based on an "ideological reading of Asian history" seeking to "counterpose Western freedom and Eastern despotism" (Wolf, 1982: 81). Steppacher and Gerber take no account of such historical specificity and, instead, replicate the long history of Eurocentrism when they mistakenly claim that, according to Wolf, the way "feudalism" articulated in "the European context" was emblematic of the tributary mode of production's possession-based character and that this character was evidenced in many clients-patron relationships in past and present economies across the globe (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA).

While the tributary mode of production category was sufficiently broad "to specify the politically relevant variables that distinguish one tributary situation from another" (Wolf, 1982: 81), Amin's reference to the European *dominium eminens* (eminent domain) points to the fact that tributary modes of production are ushered in by acts of dispossession. The loss of a given European community's of the land in the above quote refers to the moment when it was incorporated into a feudal state. Thus, rather than Gerber and Steppacher's possession-based economy, the tributary mode of production analyses a multilayered situation of rights, some of which are codified (as regards the eminent domain) and some of which are not (as regards the patron-client relations). Amin accordingly stated that our analysis of such borderline situations makes “it impossible to reduce production relations to legal property relations, and compels us to see production relations in their full, original significance as social relations arising from the organization of production” (Amin, 1976: 16).

Seen from this angle, the many client-patron relationships that Steppacher and Gerber list as historical and contemporary instances of tributary modes of production (which they equate with their subtype *“Agrarian economies – ‘complex’*”) are non-codified relations, which always have a state or an imperial formation lurking in the background that could invoke the right of eminent domain in the last instance. Thus, once attention turns to the historical specificity of anthropological analyses, a complex web of entangled, multifarious, and contradictory relations of rights comes to the fore. Property’s legal status is always an arbitrary one and enforcing that status foremost depends on choices. The social relations arising from the organization of production that Amin emphasized in the quote above do not merely involve a status in which there is either property or possession. Instead, dispossession is a necessary condition for the emergence of property. Accordingly, legal security is not the product of institutions but a world-historical fiction sustained by political formations during their tenure in power.

The shortcomings of Steppacher and Gerber’s conceptual work are particularly striking as they reference anthropological publications that have pointed to the pitfalls of an overemphasis on legal property in our analyses. As Franz von Benda-Beckmann has pointed out in challenging Hernando de Soto’s *Mysteries of Capital* (another point of positive reference for Steppacher and Gerber), the concept of property as securitized assets ignores the plurality of appearances of such assets whereas an insistence that the securitization of assets could be a cure for global poverty ignores the fact that much of the world’s population has no assets to securitize in the first place (Benda-Beckmann, 2003).

Interestingly, Steppacher and Gerber's concluding effort to promote "new forms of possession" (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA) as an alternative pathway to property-driven capitalism is framed as a subtle critique of de Soto and Benda-Beckmann. It would have possibly been more rewarding had they started out with that critique rather than lending their work to the overdetermined Heinsohn-Steiger paradigm.

V. Concluding remarks

Among other things, the above has shown that the Heinsohn-Steiger binary reifies an understanding of anthropology as the discipline concerned with non-capitalist, not-that-complex societies. If this stood at the cradle of the discipline's positioning in the division of labour among the social sciences and humanities established during the bourgeois revolutions and carried forward during the heydays of Western imperialist expansion, anthropologists were able to break such chains after the Second World War (Wolf, 1982; Worsley, 1964; Mintz, 1996; Mintz, 1966; Roseberry, 1996; Kapferer, 2007; Rey, 1971). Seen in this light, Gerber and Steppacher's suggestion that anthropologists should act in affirmation of the theory of ownership, accept that the world is divided into economies with what we may call proper property (de jure) and economies with de facto possession, and research and subdivide the latter proposes that we return to those bourgeois ideologies of the 1800s. Obviously, humanity's historical and contemporary economies are a lot more complex than bourgeois ideology and its teleology could ever imagine. Fortunately, anthropology's categories and classifications of economies are hardly ever adamantly pro-capitalist and many are attentive to historical specificities. We should aim to keep it that way.

This is especially pertinent when anthropologists turn to finding ways how to overcome the vicissitudes of capitalism. This is a mode of production that feeds on ideologies of meritocracy and rights and of claims that these were secured and enshrined in legal institutions. Yet, at the same time, capitalism knows no "de jure" property and certainly did not come about through the emergence of institutions that secured such property. Instead, capitalism came about by way of dispossession in numerous waves of internal and external expansion, from the English enclosures to the application of John Locke's deliberations that non-European population had no concept of property and that their land could thus be righteously claimed by European colonizers and imperialists. At best, capitalism oscillates between de facto and de jure modalities of property, depending on which is the most easily enforceable way to incorporate territories, producers, practices, and what not into its global systemic operations.

Steppacher and Gerber certainly mean well when they propose that we (re-)consider the basic principles of possession-based economies and "deep roots of ancient possession-based logics" (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA) to develop a political and academic project for a better future. Unfortunately, however, there are a lot of political movements out there that invoke very similar roots and do so based on chauvinist, racist, nationalist, capitalist and neo-fascist terms. Heinsohn and Steiger's theory evidently lends itself to such movements. This is no wonder, as it seeks to substitute the world-historical process of original and expanded accumulation (Marx, 1962) with an awkwardly mercantilist ordoliberalism that posits a Leviathan-like legality of de jure ownership as the first instance of credit, money, and interest. It is certainly not advisable to take such an analysis as our starting point for dismantling capitalism or for beginning our enquiry into its alternatives.

A final paragraph about a possibly grim future should be added here. I opened this critique with references to the intricacies of translation and then retraced how Heinsohn and Steiger (mis-) translate anthropological research into the discipline of economics and how Gerber and Steppacher then retranslate that flawed anthropology into anthropology proper. Although by now it is evident that caution is advised, it is possibly understandable that some academics may find Heinsohn and Steiger's theory alluring if they do not give it much scrutiny. In a time of escalating inequality that many blame in part on a dysfunctional discipline of economics, it may seem encouraging that here we have scholars who pose as experts in the field of economics and yet are going after the economists and their flawed myth of barter. David Graeber's voluminous work on debt's impact on humanity's recent historical trajectory references Heinsohn and Steiger when he states that, “even some economists have been forced to admit that Smith’s Land of Barter doesn’t really exist” (Graeber, 2011: 43, also 396 footnotes 391 and 394; I owe this insight to Sauer, 2015). However, Graeber is wise enough to use Heinsohn and Steiger as “native” witnesses and then moves on to develop his own rejection of the myth of barter.

Steppacher and Gerber could have likewise avoided engagement with the abysmal theoretical ventures of Heinsohn and Steiger if they had consulted academic analyses of Heinsohn’s writings and their political ambitions (e.g. Therborn, 2009) and if they had consulted Heinsohn’s repeated appearances on well-known neo-fascist blogs during the past decade. Given the fact that anthropology is not *per se* immune to being coopted by neo-fascist ideologues, attention to the pitfalls of translation is crucial for the dangerous times we live in and for the possibly more dangerous times yet to come. Anyone can reference Malinowski, Polanyi, and other classics of our discipline. Rather than feeling flattered that our niche-discipline receives attention, we should consider very carefully the motivations behind such references. In this regard, reflexes such Gerber and Steppacher’s claim that objections to their basic principles of possession-based economies emerge from a postmodernist ‘anything goes’ stance are certainly not useful (Gerber and Steppacher, 2017: TBA). Instead, it is of utmost importance that we close ranks to bolster and fortify the discipline against neo-fascist co-optations of our findings.

Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist who certainly made many, mainly political, mistakes throughout his career (Neveling, 2016; Reyna and Glick Schiller, 1998), offers a critical social science perspective on the issue of translations (Geertz, 1983). In translation, things are lost and found. Translations between academic disciplines should declare their ambitions. If they fail to do so, we can certainly rely on our ability to identify an art-house movie as a 101-minutes product placement, capitalism as a mode of production that does not depend on de jure property, Heinsohn as a neo-fascist, and, last but not least, the fact that improving capitalism on the basis of a degrowth agenda is futile and socializing the means of production is the way forward, instead. In that historical instance, Suntory-time may still be relaxing time, but it will first and foremost be everyone’s time.

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[1] This is detailed in the following sections Heinsohn G and Steiger O. (1981) Geld, Produktivität und Unsicherheit in Kapitalismus und Sozialismus: Oder: Von den Lollarden Wat Tylors zur Solidarität Lech Walesas. *Leviathan* 9: 164-194.. An example of Heinsohn's engagement with a well-known neo-fascist blog is: http://www.trykkefrihed.dk/interview-a-continent-of-losers.htm (last visited 6 Dec, 2016).

[2] Ordoliberalism is often regarded as an economic policy variant of neoliberalism that gained currency in the early years after World War II, when anti-democratic ideas were hugely popular among the growing number of members of the Mont Pelèrin Society that Friedrich von Hayek had founded in 1947 to promote neoliberal ideas. Certainly, ordoliberalism's emphasis on a strong, not necessarily democratic state as the gatekeeper of neoliberalism was the leading policy program in Cold War West Germany, where it aligned itself with far-right thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and was applied in economic policies from the 1950s onward Mirowski P and Plehwe D. (2009) *The road from Mont Pèlerin : the making of the neoliberal thought collective,* Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press..

[3] A remarkable impression of Heinsohn's approach to immigration and the Cologne attacks in German language is available here: https://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article151043934/Es-gibt-in-der-islamischen-Welt-keine-girl-friends.html (last visited 6 Dec, 2016). For an interview with a neo-fascist blog see http://www.trykkefrihed.dk/interview-a-continent-of-losers.htm (last visited 6 Dec, 2016).