

## PROCESSES AND EFFECTS OF POST-SOCIALIST NEOLIBERALIZATION\*

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### Editorial

Our thematic block was initially announced by the journal *Studia Europaea* as a special issue regarding “the social effects of austerity”. This title could suggest that the guest editors would have liked addressing “austerity policies” as a technical matter with some sorts of consequences in what regards people's social conditions and/or their capacity to act as competitive actors within the “democratic capitalist regime”. In order to avoid such an interpretation from the very beginning, there is a need to at least briefly highlight that our perspective and aims are shaped by a political approach towards policies. Therefore, instead of a discussion about “the social effects of austerity”, in this journal issue we are actually expressing our will to have a contribution to the critical analysis of how is neoliberal politics envisioning, elaborating, implementing and evaluating the (austerity) policies that are (re)enforcing the power structures of capitalism. The papers of this thematic block are viewing the functioning of this large issue in different domains, such as: economic policies of liberalization and the pauperization of working class (Pantea); development policies in the context of the politics of dismantling the social state (Vincze); policies of forced evictions and housing politics (Vrăbiescu); social services and the role of NGOs in neoliberal state restructuring (Zamfir); human rights advocacy and the politics of obscuring structural issues of social and economic inequality (Safta-Zecheria); precarization of labour and neoliberal academic politics (Ivancheva); the politics of universal basic income and the possibility of the ideological consensus of liberalism and socialism (Butaru).

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\* Thematic bloc (guest editors: Lucian Butaru, Șerban Văetiși and Enikő Vincze)

According to our understanding, policies are not neutral means of expert actions to solve “a problem”, but are instruments of power: they do not only define how resources are distributed across the society (and how is, for example, legislation used to support employers and disempower workers, or to back up the real estate businesses and exclude the already marginalized from access to adequate and accessible housing), but are also creating the subjects (both the ones that are privileged, and those who are disadvantaged by them) and are justifying the produced social hierarchies. While creating ‘redundant’ or ‘surplus’ social categories as a result of its political economy, capitalist neoliberalism makes appeal to systems of cultural classifications. As a result, those individuals who are pushed into positions from where they are structurally unable to be ‘competitive’ on the ‘free market’ are rendered not only illegal or rightless, but also immoral and ‘undeserving’ citizens, and even more, as non-humans or non-persons ineligible for the fundamental human rights, including socio-economic, civic and cultural rights.

The papers of this thematic block do not go beyond neoliberalism by looking for post-neoliberal alternatives (in Romania, in the European Union, or globally), and in this sense they might not bring something new into the international debate on these issues. But, together, they are adding a strong argument for the need for enlarging in Romania, too, the critical discussions about neoliberalism and capitalism as global phenomena – regardless if they refer to the neoliberal shift of the post-Mao era in China (Pantea) or to the trans-national debates about the universal basic income (Butaru) or to how neoliberal reforms of higher education are leading to the precarization of the academic profession both in the ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ countries (Ivancheva); or if they tackle the larger issue of neoliberalization in the context of one country, Romania by analysing the ways in which national or international non-governmental organizations act as players of the neoliberal regime (Zamfir; Safta-Zecheria); or by discussing the politics and practices of citizenship dispossession through cases of forced evictions (Vrăbiescu); or by addressing the processes of state reform and the politics of entrepreneurial development as means by which the national and local actors are localizing patterns of global neoliberalism (Vincze). By placing these discussions into the discursive frame of ‘post-socialism’ we subscribe to the understanding that the collapse of real socialism was incorporated

into a global political context and had a role to play in the changes of the latter, while the globalization of neoliberal politics and economic policies did not only created the frames of this collapse but it also radically changed state capitalism and promoted the idea of the impossibility to imagine alternative regimes.

Besides their analytical potential, the value of these papers is about encouraging such debates within an academic space that is still marked by fears or hesitations about what a 'post-socialist context' might tolerate in what regards the critical analysis of capitalism and of its current form, neoliberalism. For in such a context 'post-socialism' means anti-socialism used as a discursive device not only in order to justify neoliberal policies while pretending to empower the individual in the front of an oppressive state, but also to sustain that globalization of capitalism as it happens today is not a political option, but a natural extension of the market as embodiment of freedom and guarantee of economic well-being. As scholars who happen to live on the Eastern edges of the European Union, we might demonstrate that the role of 'post-socialism' as ideology is to support the unconditioned celebration of capital across borders and the perverse understanding of private property as a supreme right of capitalist class privileged by the market-maker state, and as well as to exploit labour and/or to transform it into a 'redundant' subject in the name of individual 'competitiveness' and 'entrepreneurial spirit'.

Among the authors of this thematic block the reader might encounter some of the members of the Workshop for Social Criticism (*Atelierul de Critică Socială*, <http://pages.ubbcluj.ro/acris/sample-page/>) run at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca since December 2013; and as well as some of the participants on the conference "Modes of Appropriation and Social Resistance" (in particular on its panels about "Post-socialist Neoliberalism and the Dispossession of Personhood", and about "Roma Resistance in the Context of Development and Policy Interventions") organized in November 2014 at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Babeş-Bolyai University by the Romanian Society for Social and Cultural Anthropology.

