

## Psychoanalysis, Poverty and Society

### Reflections on Manasi Kumar, *The Poverty in Psychoanalysis: 'Poverty' of Psychoanalysis?*

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#### I. General ideas

##### Introduction

Dr. Kumar<sup>1</sup> discovered a specific and well hidden, difficult topic. Is the gap she addresses between the discipline itself and a not only inner topic possibly an indicator for a deeper insight into the fact that something, which cannot be represented in the unconscious is repeating somewhere else? In a Lacanian term we could say that by this reason it appears as what is called the 'real' – as a broader symbolization is missing.<sup>2</sup> Not in reality but more or less in the discourse on and of psychoanalysis. The phenomenon is related to the fact that the unconscious does not know any denial. It shows clearly how the personal unconscious is rooted in conflicts and proliferates in the outside world.

Poverty is a social fact in all countries if it represents the characteristics of people of lowest or even no income in contrast to the ones who live high above that level. Nevertheless, there are forms of extreme poverty – often called misery – which are more widely common e.g. in Kenya and other Third World countries than in the Western World. At least the statistics of e.g. the United Nations differentiate like this.

Manasi Kumar's analysis reaches far beyond a Kenyan or an Indian perspective. The question she raises is of general importance for all those who want to understand how reality, its mental representation and the unconscious are interconnected. Not as an end in itself but as a step towards an answer. To achieve this we add a few perspectives from different angles.

##### Economic and mental poverty

Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* portrayed people with crude kinds of civil war induced excesses of mental illnesses which were out of reach for traditional psychoanalysis while he simultaneously referred to the political perspective of national liberation from colonialism (1962). Colonialist violence had been a means of actively produced deprivation for hundreds of years for too many people concerned.

Beyond such not at all theoretical or historic perspectives, most of us know people who might be poor in economic terms but the optimism of many of them make them rich in terms of mental health. The disaster only begins when access to the deeper roots of the self is forcluded – by mental reasons or by situations in the outside world. E.g. by confinement, torture or deprivation of essential goods like food and accommodation. Wilhelm Reich's *Character Analysis* focused the psychotic perspective of schizophrenic disintegration. His position was the attempt to reintegrate the forcluded parts. There is a big difference if the disintegrated items are just psychic phenomena or related to the outside world.

In Kenya there is little help for most of the persons mentally concerned. Fanon rejected psychoanalysis and started a discourse which led directly into the political arena. It was reflected by Guattari and Deleuze in their critical positions towards traditional understanding of psychoanalysis and desire – in their famous concept of *Anti-Oedipus* and the *machines désirantes*.

Recently Achille Mbembe from Cameroun responded to Fanon's concepts by identifying the terms 'black' and 'negro' in his post-colonial reflections: metaphors created to hide the positions of the aggressors (not only in the Western World) enmeshed in biases, projections and scientific myths. And, much more, the driving forces of establishing ways to generate surplus value from selling and exploiting human beings as slaves – a considerable force in the development of early capitalism.

The opposite pole is according to Mbembe the little secret that the colonized fell into the trap of sacrificing their desire to the wish to possess the 'magic' things the colonialist owns. At least the local leaders who supported and organized slavery seduced themselves this way.

Nathan Nunn from Harvard researched the pure economic damage caused by extractions from the sourcing cultures until today in his outstanding research work on *The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades* (The Quarterly Journal of Economics, February 2008).

Nevertheless, the effects of capitalist basic patterns are represented in the practice of ownership rights in the whole world – and ownership is the opposite of poverty and deprivation. The German psychoanalyst, Alexander Mitscherlich, stated in 1965 that an ideology which is basically rooted in society – i.e. the inviolability of property – might be part of a (collectively-)neurotic defense.

##### An unconscious sacrifice

We touch the ground where psychoanalysis is flourishing into culture and responding to it since Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). It must be mentioned because of the close connection to poverty and its representation in the unconscious on that level. While Freud headed for the concept of death-drives he significantly left out the social and political sphere of the concrete world – even if he reflected the discontents of culture in another groundbreaking work in 1930. Twenty-five years later Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* tried to link libido and death-drives to social developments again, motivating students around the world to reconsider repression, repressive desublimation and their own political positions and contexts – with a wave of protests and political consequences which arose after the *One-Dimensional*

<sup>1</sup> Manasi Kumar, *The Poverty in Psychoanalysis: 'Poverty' of Psychoanalysis?* Psychology and Developing Societies 24(1) 1–34. © 2012 Department of Psychology, University of Allahabad. SAGE Publications Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan (1973), *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. London, 1994.

*Man*. Whereby the book was just a minor element in the set of reasons.

Why is poverty or deprivation in reality – i.e. also the history of social reality – even not adopted by the personal unconscious? Because desire directs itself rather towards the master than to the slave – in the Hegelian terms of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In a 1972 seminar, Jacques Lacan who adopted and twisted several Hegelian concepts into psychoanalytic discourse deals with the terms ‘capitalist discourse’ and ‘surplus jouissance’. The ideas of *discours capitaliste* and *plus-de-jouir* were early attempts to bring these areas of commercial and libidinous economy together. Even if they finally were not followed up greatly.

The English translator, Russel Grigg from Australia, kept the French word ‘jouissance’ instead of translating it as enjoyment. An interesting part of Lacan’s seminar he expressed like this:

‘And why does one let oneself be bought by the wealthy? Because what they give you stems from their essence of wealth. Buy from the wealthy, from a developed nation, you believe – and this is what the meaning of the wealth of nations is – that you are simply going to share in the level of a rich nation. However, in the process, what you lose is your knowledge, which gave you your status. The wealthy acquire this knowledge on top of everything else. It’s simply that, precisely, they don’t pay for it.’ (p. 83)

I still don’t know exactly what this ‘knowledge’ (*le savoir*) is which the slave sacrifices when he follows the master by submission and work – according to the Hegelian model of 1807. And what the capitalist master does not pay for. But it must be located in the area where those who keep their optimism ‘even if they sometimes don’t have sugar for their tea’ (her motto) at home.

### **Living in the social world**

I guess this basic knowledge is more or less the close relation to friends and family members, a sound personal and social environment, social ties and the refusal to give up – a deeply rooted self-confidence. I have an example from an adorable mother of ten meanwhile grown-up children in Kenya who lost the family farm and property due to the post-election riots in 2007/8, soon after the strong father of the family had passed away. She never gave up and kept her family together by her optimism – even if there would be ‘no sugar for the tea’ and several of her children were divided across the continents meanwhile.

I know others who are more or less addicted to sacrifice their genuine strength to spoiled rewards from consumption – status symbols to attain acknowledgement from others or drug-like possessions which allow them to disappear behind the mirror of public phantasmata again and again. Their addiction leads them to semi-criminal or even criminal activities like betraying, stealing or blackmailing but their mind (ego) is not willing to understand what they do to comply with the demands of their mislead super-ego. In my personal environment, some of them caused true disasters on this unsound foundation.

They are not uncommon neither in Kenya nor elsewhere. By writing a novel about it from a very personal view I got into contact also with others who opened their hearts and reported about what makes them mentally suffer.

An intercultural couple – German woman, Kenyan man, he considerably younger than her – reported about schizophrenia attacks, which the husband suddenly suffered. The voice he hears seems to be the representation of his twin brother who cannot share into the relation to his wife. Also the mother of the identical twins exercises pressure on her daughter in law. She wants to be provided with what she needs to live for free by misusing the only sometimes superior position of whites. Very common I think. Luckily, the daughter in law stays strong. They live in coast area close to Mtwapa but there is no psychiatrist or psychoanalyst available since a small clinic closed in 2012. As that wife is a trained nurse she knows in general how to cure the husband.

### **Personal motivation – wild psychoanalysis**

Why do I report this? I feel that many psychic defects are deeply rooted in society and will simply proliferate if no further knowledge about such implications is provided to the public. And establish discourses that can close the gap by reestablishing symbolic orders as a basis to express and address political demands. Each disease has a genesis and people should know about that. Even if poverty and deprivation are not illness but a social fact and nevertheless have the potential to create mental foreclosure.

The medical system in Germany, where I work as a marketing consultant covers in general the costs of therapy of somatic and psychic diseases – but it takes around 15 percent of the national income (according to official statistics it were 11.2 percent of gnp in 2014). At present we see a huge increase of the number of people caught by depression (major depressive disorder). It is heavily related to the phenomenon of isolation which people experience as social facts. But finally it is most often their own behavior which creates such situations. The effect is that consumption of goods works as a compensation. It requires a good income to follow such heavy calls from the super-ego. The resulting behavior is almost a social norm. Doubts without an alternative form of reason – which only lose its pathological character when collectively shared according to Freud – lead towards diseases whether psycho-somatic or just psychic. The growing virtuality of life causes as well a hole in the world of personal relations and communication and creates new phantasmata instead.

Luckily, I discovered a useful and even simple way to put body and soul together again easily on personal level. Please do not laugh, it is the kind of body massage which is provided e.g. at Bamburi Beach close to Mombasa. I refer to an aspect of psychosomatics which is a valuable asset of what I call Swahili spirit – described in a little book, *Friends at Bamburi Beach*. Maybe it sounds strange but in fact the one who initiated late Freud’s important concept of the ‘Id’ (in 1923), Georg Groddeck, applied massage in his sanatorium in Wiesbaden as a means of therapy in his concept of ‘wild psychoanalysis’ which I widely share. Groddeck used unconventional means and we should consider whether parts of it can be used to change deprivation into the awareness of intrinsic power of

resistance. Swahili spirit offers a trace to develop mental wealth in an area which is publicly rather regarded as poor.

Sorry, that my thoughts are jumping like this. I would like to say that the idea of poverty in a broader understanding of psychoanalysis should connect the places to which they mainly refer to as signifiers, Europe (psychoanalysis) and Africa (poverty – even and especially if it is a stereotype) and the thinkers, therapists and psychoanalysts much more closely than they actually do.

Not only on the level of expert discussion but even broader. The wider areas might include journalism, literature or other arts and finally politics. A more open perspective might help people with social as well as mental problems to understand how they immerse into social life and empower themselves to demand and act towards necessary changes. That includes traumata, which are based on expulsion or flight – from war, civil war, repression or poverty.

### **Inappropriate institutions**

For more than one year, I was the initiator and co-founder of an association of psychoanalysts, philosophers, social scientists in the German-speaking area who work on the theoretical foundations of how especially mental illness is linked to the productive forces and vice versa. This group more or less broke due to the differences in understanding what I call ‘economy of desire’, which extends psychoanalytic concepts into the socio-economic sphere. The political aspects were a too much critical dimension for my co-founder, a professor. The understanding of terrorism was one of the breaking points – me I see how Al-Shabaab is operating close to my wife’s place in Mombasa’s old town and how its connections lead to Nairobi, Paris and elsewhere.

A friend of mine is a journalist and a peace and conflict researcher in Nairobi. Her name is Hawa Noor M. When a German journalist reported on the traumatization of children and young adults from activities within the civil war in Somalia we were looking for a way, how to do more than just have German radio listeners get informed about such disasters – on levels of acting and understanding as well.

But we did not succeed at all. Too many levels would have to be coordinated from Dadaab refugee camp to social institutions in Germany or Sweden. Furthermore, reflections on narration are an outstanding dimension to complete full understanding – which practically seems to be impossible. What is raw reality and how is it immersed in representation? Our point of reference from the perspective of literature and narration is Nadifa Mohamed’s novel about the beginning of Somali civil war, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. We cannot clearly divide understanding of ‘truth’ from fiction.

### **No final conclusion**

Maybe these ideas are of at least any use for the work of Dr. Kumar. It must be very difficult to keep up a critical position towards institutions in a politically highly sensitive environment.

My wife and son live in a major East African city. She is quite younger than me and was socialized in her local area, According to her experience and opinion my country is only good for earning money not for living. I accept that. But many relations between these countries and cultures exist. Also from my friends’ side, whether journalists or teachers.

This initial statement just intends to give an idea of what the discovery of the topic ‘Poverty in Psychoanalysis’ versus ‘Poverty of Psychoanalysis’ caused.

The novel I wrote plays in Kenya and Germany entitled *In the Heart of the Wild Triangle. Resonances from the German-Kenyan Other* published in 2014. The story pursues a few psychoanalytic traces and is also a kind of a case study of what in many intercultural situations may encounter. A well reputed Swiss Lacanian psychoanalyst wrote a personal comment in German.

Sorry for the length without drawing up a conclusion – maybe that is the unconscious’ unavoidable destiny.

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## **II. Reconsiderations**

### **Society and the unconscious**

We cannot ignore the social dimension when it comes to understanding the unconscious correctly. Even before we see the light of day or learn how to speak culture directs us. Its reproduction is more or less based on a goods and profit driven economy. The vast majority of people depends in its basic personal economy on income from this system. Individual desire is widely encoded by reified wishes, whether nutrition, house, car or phone. The economy of such goods goes beyond the set of meaning in psychoanalytic interpretation like the father’s phallus or the mother’s body – as important they are.<sup>3</sup> Reproduction of desire-captivating goods follows a wider understanding of economy to which the human beings are mostly just attached. As contributing workers of blue or white collar as well as consumers.

Equal attention not just in the psychoanalytic setting but in the broader picture allows us to recognize how each single human being is dealing with these social and environmental entities which go far beyond man’s capabilities. Even when we are immersed in our dreams’ productive economy the world around us turns and our fellows change the situation quickly and sometimes unpredictable.

Some very basic social situations have been spoiled without those who are mostly affected by it had any chance to contradict. As wealth and property are in the hands of a relatively few it is important to discover the large areas of mental and economic impoverishment which already arose. In each desert there is, however, life. A very special and adjusted form of survival and even more culture with joy and fun.

A reviewed perspective of poverty and the poor can lead to a new understanding of how social life in general can benefit from the creative developments we find there. Also from the great will to survive and to share with others. The world has to take away the depressing chains which prevent too many of us from personal and collective development.

<sup>3</sup> Freud’s investigations of Beyond the pleasure principle (1920) and later the concept of Civilization and Its Discontents (1930) introduced the idea of

death-drives as a fundamental supplement of the ego-driven perspective of psychoanalysis towards understanding culture as a whole

A big obstacle must be surmounted to achieve this. The repressed and deprived must raise their voice to be heard and must come to power even if they are weak. A tremendous contradiction. All the worse as most of the owners will not voluntarily give away any power or possession. So political and social institutions will have to change their perspective towards supporting even the non-privileged instead of sustaining unconscious fights within the societies.

All this goes beyond traditional psychoanalytic self-image.<sup>4</sup> New ways must be tried which allow all of us to understand how the real world economy and its rationality is linked to the desire of human beings. Considering poverty more closely is a step into this direction.

### Meta-discourses on poverty, reification and imaginary surplus

A recent check of around 3,000 scientific papers in magazines on marketing, management, economics and applied psychology of the past three years (2013–2015) was done in order to update a list of relevant new topics for in-house use of the author's business activities.<sup>5</sup> Half a dozen of essays were found which centrally dealt with different aspects of poverty but their perspective naturally contrasts to the – more or less dissatisfying – perspective which Dr. Kumar analyzed in the context of psychoanalysis.

One of these essays dealing with poverty explores specifically the economics of slums, i.e. the real living environment of many about whom Kumar discovered that they are deemed to have an 'essentially impoverished psychic life with no desires, thoughts, intellect or capacities' (Kumar, 14). The authors recognized well the intrinsic potential and dynamics of the dwellers to improve the situation themselves – but limitations from outside and the interest of those who benefit most from repression of others stand against it.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that poverty has not at all the 'impenetrable concrete thing-like quality' (Kumar, 14), which Kumar also rejects. The essay considers *inter alia* the situation in Kibera and Dharavi.

Another survey deals with the bottom-of-the-pyramid economics. The authors already focus on how to make these economics work in practice – not by traditional business methods but by a sophisticated approach, which involves organizations

from the civil society sector.<sup>7</sup> A kind of recipe to extend the market paradigm by overcoming giant challenges and 'reach' the poor but not asking whether a generalized market economy is an adequate approach for all. Similar publications appear since years focusing e.g. on low-income markets and low-income strategies to introduce consumer products to formerly neglected areas.

Muhammad Yunus and some comrades from France described their idea of social business.<sup>8</sup> Yunus developed the idea of micro credits and founded Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. He was Nobel Peace Laureate 2006. The difficulty of micro credits is that the concept with its important factor of group motivation was spoiled in many countries by ethically corrupt bankers so that those who before had nothing now at least have something – debts. Suicide rate among them is considerable.

We see that the discourse on poverty and its implications is not free from exploiting it. While the survey on economics of slums and several others highlights the responsibility of politics, others seem to deliver the 'wretched of the earth' (Frantz Fanon) to an even more sophisticated form of capitalism – with a more or less instrumentalized social component or without.<sup>9</sup>

We could add recent magazine or TV-stories on poverty and increasingly on refugees to proof that there is a real danger of meta-discourses, which generate their mental profits by 'displacing' the genuine topic in tricky ways. This approach tends towards replacing real poverty and the poor people by imaginary items. A general sympathy as well as specific kinds of hate might be common results as the discourse has only anonymous objects. Even several activities in the fund raising sector participate in skimming off the surplus codes. They erect their imaginary castles on the expenses of deprived fellow men who remain nothing less but empty signifiers.

Such economy of generating imaginary surplus is also at work in what I call the 'aesthetics of the pictures of misery'. Even e.g. the poorest children in Dadaab are good for generating real profit when photographers take emotionally moving photos of them and sell them to the leading picture agencies like AP, Reuters, Getty, AFP or DPA.<sup>10</sup> The latter collect royalties from their clients in the media who publish such photos

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Werner Kempfer (1950), *Die Honorarfrage in der Psychotherapie*, *Psyche, Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen*, 1950 (04): 202–221. [Fees in psychotherapy] Analysts need to be rewarded by their clients. The analyst's lifestyle is a determining factor of the discipline, including expensive education and training. So for poor clients there is virtually no access on their own cost, even if participating by giving away something valuable for the obtained result is part of the deal.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Hermanns, *MARK-MAN Navigator 2016*. [http://mark-man.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Mark-Man-Navigator-2016\\_E.pdf](http://mark-man.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Mark-Man-Navigator-2016_E.pdf) (website accessed on 8 Aug 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Marx, B., Stoker, Th, Suri, T. (2013). *The Economics of Slums in the Developing World*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 27, Number 4, Fall 2013, 187–210. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/jep.27.4.187>

<sup>7</sup> Schuster, T., Holtbrügge, D. (2013). *Benefits of Cross-sector Partnerships in Markets at the Base of the Pyramid, Business Strategy and the Environment*, Volume 23, Issue 3 March 2014, 188–203. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bse.1780/abstract>

<sup>8</sup> Yunus, M., Dalsace, F., Menascé D., Faivre-Tavignot, B. (2015). *Reaching the Rich World's Poorest Consumers*, *Harvard Business Review*, 2015 March. <https://hbr.org/2015/03/reaching-the-rich-worlds-poorest-consumers>

<sup>9</sup> A positive example from Uganda should be marked too. Blattman, C., Fiala, N., Martinez, S. (2014). *Generating Skilled Self-Employment in Developing*

*Countries: Experimental Evidence from Uganda*. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2014), 697–752.

Due to the Youth Opportunities Program, a government program in northern Uganda starting 2007 applicant groups with 'successful proposals received one-time unsupervised grants worth \$7,500 on average – about \$382 per group member, roughly their average annual income. (...) The program led to substantial and persistent increases in investment, work, and income. (...) After four years, groups assigned to grants were more than twice as likely to practice a skilled trade – typically a self-employed artisan in carpentry, metalworking, tailoring, or hairstyling. After four years the treatment group had 57% greater capital stocks, 38% higher earnings, and 17% more hours of work than did the control group. Treatment group members also became more 'firm-like' in that they were 40–50% more likely to keep records, register their business, and pay taxes. They also used significantly more unpaid family labor in agriculture and, for every four people treated, a part-time employee was hired and paid' (698).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Rebecca Blackwell for AP in 2011 when she portrayed new arrivals in Dadaab refugee camp. Amongst them an at that time two years old boy from Somalia named Aden Salaad, photographed while sitting half-starved in a broken washbowl. This photo was published amongst others from Blackwell's series in online-magazines worldwide beneath advertising banners of telecommunications companies or department stores.

with the main intention to attract readers' attention – directing it finally to their customers' advertising offers who in return finance the online offers. Such 'aesthetics' support a profit driven monetary economy by stealing the shape from the poor and even the dead. Nothing but common media practice.

### Missing language

What is the 'true' basis of such meta-discourses in the clouds of people's imagination? The truth is that there is no truth! Because such truth is the result of a discourse from which the deprived are excluded. And, as far as the unconscious does not know 'real' denial poverty is not existing there. Even more: it is excluded from such areas. Whatever we can verbalize deals with a signifier not its absence. When Freud reported to his fiancée about missing money in his father's house he was sure not to be affected directly himself any longer. When Melanie Klein was in deep need for help by her few friends she recognized that their help was a chance and took it to proceed. Only later deprivation turned into an important factor within her concept of what in a child's soul is recognized as being deprived by the mother or the wishes to steal from her body in defense – nobody ever before had discovered such an intensive and obviously cruel but true mental economy of the child's Oedipus.

In the 70's we discussed in Germany the idea of Alfred Lorenzer's *Sprachzerstörung und Rekonstruktion* which probably was not translated. It portrays the destruction of language in psychopathology and suggested that this defect could be solved by using a reconstructing concept of symbols. But whatever refers to the situation in the outside world – reality – is marked by a different economy. I believe that not only in psychosis a kind of foreclosure is taking control – we all are mostly unable to recognize how much life separates us from ourselves in each second. We also are unwilling to accept how much we are the result of the desire of others and 'the Other' – the ones who procreated us. Who once started cell division by making ovum and sperm fuse. Morula, blastula, fetus ...

That means sexuality in such a biological sense will never be represented in the ideas an analysant<sup>11</sup> might realize even if it is part of what is enrolled in his, her or our genetic code of the unconscious. It would take a detour through Sartre's idea of psychoanalysis of things, also named 'existential psychoanalysis'.<sup>12</sup> The consequences of this concept (Sartre himself was no psychoanalyst and rejected the idea of the unconscious in favor of consciousness, and, in French: *situation, projet, facticité*) say that we cannot abstract from the things we deal with when we analyze our inner psychic life and its relation to reality and especially to freedom. Things are most often similarly unconscious as their counterpart (in) the soul but can be analyzed with regard to being – it requires a philosophical perspective.

For such reasons I guess poverty in its true meaning can hardly be 'understood' by the unconscious. It occurs as may be the lost objects in mourning and melancholia (outside world vs. inner objects). Our psychic economy is mostly unable to represent the outside economy as a mixture of desire and complex forces which make us follow the road of reified wishes in the outside world of physical existence. The capitalist discourse (see below) is the unit and also the process which rewards the individual with the financial equivalents (by selling their manpower)<sup>13</sup> to get satisfied by material items which allow them to survive, e.g. buying food and renting a secure place, and fulfill reified wishes. Even several of the poor people own a mobile phone and have access to TV in many places of the world. What they mostly desire is what they know from TV.<sup>14</sup> In such cases we talk about imaginary items. And hard economic research discovers how e.g. cable TV has changed women's status in Indian villages.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Kumar's own experience in all these scientifically represented areas will surely shed more detailed light on it.

The question of poverty in or of psychoanalysis is also the question of representability of the outside world as something different than a positive entity – except deprivation, which connotes something which has been there before but later was taken away. It is more or less the result of a materialistic understanding of the world and a positivistic approach. But it is common sense.

The realm of emotions, feelings, trust or altruistic attitudes might be counterparts to materialistic concepts of desire. It can also only be expressed in thing-like terms, possessions – whether owned, desired or deprived.

Which language can we use to describe what Dr. Kumar targets at? I hope that I understood what she means as her article shows a clear intention. Not to hide the real world behind concepts which exclude the majority of our fellow men and women.

It requires a language of social interests and political demands. As analysts usually want to get paid for their work a public health care system has to be established which allows even poor people to reward their therapists (even if the psychoanalytic approach demands at least small contributions by the analysant). Although utopian it would be an institution. My Kenyan friends at the coast instead face an empty clinic where formerly at least one psychiatrist was offering help – for 4,000 Kenyan shillings (around \$ 40) per session. The doctors and the nurses went away in 2011 when their salary was repeatedly not paid. The schizophrenic attack of an otherwise strong Kenyan man remains unanalyzed even if it is highly interesting as it refers to intercultural resonances.

When I talk to the poor dealers at Bamburi beach<sup>16</sup> who suffer heavily from the government's policy towards terrorism sweeping away the tourists who before were sufficient sources of income for them they prove to know the reasons

<sup>11</sup> On spelling see: footnote 19.

<sup>12</sup> Being and Nothingness (1943), last part.

<sup>13</sup> Submitting themselves to the 'rules' at the same time – those who fail will be considered inappropriate, in deficit and often pathological.

<sup>14</sup> I know it from e.g. a closely related person who was fascinated by Bollywood movies and telenovelas for a long time and whose imaginary was soaked with their logic.

<sup>15</sup> Jensen, R., Oster, E. The Power of TV: Cable Television and Women's Status in India, Quarterly Journal of Economics, August 2009, 1057-1094. <http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/124/3/1057.short>

<sup>16</sup> A small book about them has been produced with a colleague from Nairobi (Mrs. Hawa Noor Mohammed) in 2015: [http://mark-man.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/friends\\_at\\_bamburi\\_beach.pdf](http://mark-man.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/friends_at_bamburi_beach.pdf)

A website is available too: <http://www.life-at.com/>

for their misery well. They tried two or three times to achieve something when they approached the local authorities. All in vain. They lost heart as they are poor and most of them shy.

When we ask ourselves where such deprivation comes from which makes so many suffer (including the somehow privileged in form of fear of social relegation) – we can locate the reasons in what happens in the real world.

The economist Nathan Nunn from Harvard examined the economic underdevelopment in many African countries thoroughly. He came to the conclusion that the effect can explained widely by former slave trades.<sup>17</sup> That is hardly represented in any human soul. The effects of foreclosure in reality are recognized as a present defect not as a result of former activities by others.

It might take a thick skin to keep up until knowledge complements psychic demand. Where is the place knowledge and truth coincide? According to the four Lacanian discourses it is psychoanalytic discourse where they meet.<sup>18</sup> The analysant is the one who does the work to achieve something.<sup>19</sup>

It's a question of language and understanding and especially the language of the discourse of desire which makes it so difficult to address poverty as an entity.

### **'Achetez à un riche' / Buy from the rich**

Remember the final part of *Interpretation of Dreams* (chapter VII C), where dream work is introduced as the cooperation between a manager and a capitalist. A recent memory wants to act (as a general manager) in a dream but cannot achieve anything without a connection to the deeper level of desire/wish (German: *Wunsch*) located in the unconscious in the form of a metaphor: the capitalist. As such, capital is even more than a metaphor it is the basic element of psychoanalysis itself as a socio-economic practice of exchange and conversion of desire.

It is somehow like in real life: what people prefer to see is shiny wealth and richness and many even adore it. From the above mentioned fact that most of us have to get involved in reification of the self by signing employment contracts to obtain the required equivalents in form of salaries in return, the truly rich ones are excluded.<sup>20</sup> And this group is getting richer and richer i.e. absorbs capital and production means as property as so many recent research shows while the poverty trap does not allow most of the poor to escape. This is just what appears under positivistic perspective in reality and is not represented in the (personal) unconscious. If we accept the idea of an unconscious beyond such an individual item which is based mostly on repression of desire we will find a set of items the economy of desire mixes: goods, capital, desire, submission or dominance. The result is also called 'globalization' – a little too much to be unfolded here.

Nevertheless even the capitalist's desire is not free from ambivalence. Lacan's son-in-law and editor of his seminars,

Jacques-Alain Miller, reported a few years ago after the international banking crisis:

"Question – ‚How do you interpret the fear of losing money, our own money? To hoard money, is it the same for a small saver than for a billionaire? Jacques-Alain Miller – ‚I happen to treat during a few weeks a patient who was billionaire, a maniac, who regularly announced me laughing that he had just gained or lost a million dollars that very morning speculating with currencies. The price of the session was for him a kind of tip, a something that did not exist. He ended bankrupted. There are other types of billionaires, more conservative, even miser, and more informed. But if you are really rich, you are rather ‚unanalysable', because you cannot pay, you cannot yield anything significant: the analysis slips over you like water on the feathers of a duck. The ‚small saver'? To save, accumulate; it means to sacrifice desire, or at least to defer it. The Harpagon's box, it is the jouissance-box, made of cold jouissance. Money is a signifier without signification, which kills all significations. When one is devoted to money, truth loses meaning, one only sees a booby-trap there.“<sup>21</sup>

A little more important is Lacan's own description of some economic basics in his Seminar XVII.<sup>22</sup> The true meaning of the wealth of nations is the fact that the poor believe that they can access the status of the rich by simply buying goods from them. A magic practice of participation. But while they buy they immediately give away the means they possessed before (capital) and the capitalist – i.e. the seller – absorbs it. Furthermore the capitalist obtains the desire! A few sentences again from that seminar (already cited above):

‘And why does one let oneself be bought by the wealthy? Because what they give you stems from their essence of wealth. Buy from the wealthy, from a developed nation, you believe – and this is what the meaning of the wealth of nations is – that you are simply going to share in the level of a rich nation. However, in the process, what you lose is your knowledge, which gave you your status. The wealthy acquire this knowledge on top of everything else. It's simply that, precisely, they don't pay for it.’ (p. 83)

The concept is not easy. Lacan operates in a tricky way with language itself especially when he introduced the concept of capitalist discourse to his peers in Milano in 1972, very clever rhetoric – metaphors from psychoanalytic history when Freud travelled to the US in 1909, philosophy of Plato and his idea of Eros, reference to Karl Marx and capitalism.<sup>23</sup> Even if the concept was forgotten or given up after a few years.

Language is the question at all. How to express what it is all about on the level of desire? We run into the trap of positivism when we believe it could be answered beyond psychoanalytic discourse – or by at least something similar to it. Where

<sup>17</sup> Nunn, N. The long-term effects of Africa's slave trades, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, September 2007, 139-176. (Must read!) [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/the\\_long\\_term\\_effects.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/the_long_term_effects.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Versus Discourse of the Master, Hysteric Discourse and Discourse of the University – the scientific perspective is a mode of discourse of the university. The place of truth there is occupied by the signifier.

<sup>19</sup> Lacan for that reason spells the term with 't' at the end and I adopted this perspective.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Thomas Piketty's research or Oxfam: 62 billionaires own the same wealth as half of the world's population. Whether it is exactly true or shows just the direction. The unconscious does not count.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?page\\_id=299](http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?page_id=299)

<sup>22</sup> The Other Side of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, Translated by Russell Grigg, New York/London: Norton 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Hermanns, *Discours capitaliste und Plus-de-jouir. Zur ökonomischen Terminologie von Jacques Lacan 1969-1972*. Düsseldorf: Peras 2011.

the analysant can do his or her work by finding access to personal desire and to the way it is controlled by and/or connected to reality. While the latter is not just psychoanalysis but introduction to the economy of desire.

To my mind such contexts are nothing for ill or suffering people. It is for those who are able to generate a broader view which is not less based on true experience. It is nothing for hasty generalizations. Too many fractals appear which prevent to do so. Nevertheless the more generalized view and perspective exists – economy of desire. This political plug-in makes even advanced psychoanalysts act angrily irrational.<sup>24</sup>

A different kind of practice seems to be required if we want to address how we all are interconnected to media driven biases, ideas or values, mislead forms of desire which support the masters even more than giving freedom to the slaves as the latter have no idea of alternatives to the patterns they have learned from observing the masters jealously. And finally also the question of property is to be raised: which role does property play in generating neurosis (and even worse) which captures many of our human fellows' souls? Alexander Mitscherlich wrote in 1965: 'Even an ideology which belongs to the basics of our society like the inviolacy of property can be part of a (collectively)-neurotic defense of phobia' (my own translation).<sup>25</sup> I would like to complete: basic property items are representations of death-drive and they are even more than just resonance-generators of psychopathology. It does not imply to cancel the concept but when questions on justice and a fair life arise they have to be answered – and when power is a problem we must find adequate solutions.

### More French perspectives

Dr. Kumar mentions that French psychoanalytic tradition contributed virtually nothing to the discussion of poverty (Kumar, 18). It did, but under a different name. And there it touched the borders of the traditional understanding of psychoanalysis. It directs to a more adequate way of how the psyche is rooted in the social life and how social life itself is based on expelling contradictions of human existence.

The position of Lacan is clear – he focuses on reified manifestations of desire and how they are enrolled in the register of the imaginary. Just the opposite of poverty but it has at least a connection.

Going beyond Lacanian perspectives psychoanalyst and former critical student of Lacan Félix Guattari opened the door to a wild scenario. He co-wrote with the philosopher Gilles Deleuze *Anti-Oedipus. Volume one: Capitalism and Schizo-*

*phrenia*. Published in France in 1972. The book caused worldwide discussions due to its concept of desire. The authors introduced desire mainly as 'desiring machines' which are inseparably connected to the social sphere. Impoverishment is attributed already in the concept of Oedipus itself: the traditional focus on family structures is just a castration of desire itself – the authors claim that desire is more or less everything. The only counterparts are resistances. The authors started the book with an emanation of what is in English translated as the *id*, in German: *das Es* and in French: *le Ça*. Everything is the 'id' – especially the social production. They did not ask for permission to think in that way but straightly went to action (anti-psychiatry) and executed their concept. Traditional psychoanalysis ignored them.

Chapter III deals with ethnology and how Oedipus is introduced as a kind of super-signifier e.g. by Róheim even where the myths to which he refers to point in the opposite direction. It is really funny how in many places of native culture allegedly Oedipus is found but not the real deprivation which could easily be discovered as reminiscences of colonialism – i.e. the colonialist's language. Also the Swiss section of ethno-psychoanalysis (Paul and Goldy Parin and Fritz Morgenthaler) who explored among other ethnicities the Dogon in Mali were widely blind to decode how French colonialism had changed the social and mental order of their indigenous interviewees – first of all the French language they used.<sup>26</sup>

That leads to another important topic: Frantz Fanon. He described explicitly how colonialism had entered the souls of the Caribbeans and what followed from it e.g. with regard to the meaning of the color of skin as a releasing factor of heavy loads of hardly controllable libido respectively desire.<sup>27</sup> In Algeria where he later, after fighting for France in World War II, worked as a war psychiatrist (he refused to be psychoanalyzed) he discovered the many deep scars French colonialism and the fight against it had left in the minds of fighters and civilians as well. This can be widely recognized until today – motivated analysts know this much better from their daily work. Such traumata lead us back to the refugee camps of Dadaab and to a young boy named Abdibashir who does penance for the cruelty of the world around him by surrendering himself to catatonia.<sup>28</sup>

A recent author should finally be mentioned: Achille Mbembe from Cameroun who also stands in a French tradition, partly in that of Fanon and also of Michel Foucault.<sup>29</sup> He argues that colonialism was a kind of extrapolation of destruction from the territory of the Western World and that all what happened in this respect especially in Africa, the Caribbean,

<sup>24</sup> A personal example: In 2014 I had co-created an association which was committed at least partly to that perspective. But my co-founder, mastermind of a psychoanalytic-critical discipline named 'Pathognostik' (gnosis of the pathological symptom), attacked me coram publico after eight sessions in a sneaky and disgraceful way – and the basic idea of a free association without a legal form was broken. Many agreed with me but I am not the born leader. It took a lot of self-conquest to found a new group named 'Orphys' in 2016. Obvious breaking points were: The understanding of things (just a mental representation of oedipal concepts – or elements of an 'economy of desire?'), terrorism (a phantasm of wild fools who kill and assassinate like in Westgate Mall or in Paris – or a real chain of economically and politically soaked mislead desire, beyond a group phantasm?) and the role of writing (is a text the ultimate way to somehow represent truth – or is the person itself the object of his and the analyst's desire?). cf: [http://www.orphy.org/alle\\_veranstaltungen.php](http://www.orphy.org/alle_veranstaltungen.php)

<sup>25</sup> Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden (1965) – The inhospitality of our cities. A deliberate provocation. Seems that it has not been translated into English.

<sup>26</sup> Parin, Morgenthaler, Die Weißen denken zuviel. Psychoanalytische Untersuchungen bei den Dogon in Westafrika (1963). French: Les Blancs pensent trop (1966). Seems that it has not been translated into English.

<sup>27</sup> Freud's metaphor of women's sexuality as the 'dark continent' of 1926 allows unfolding the libidinous relations between an individual unconscious and the social arena. Cf: Ranjana Khanna, Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism (2003).

<sup>28</sup> Bettina Rühl, Anatomie einer Lagergesellschaft in Kenia. Radiofeature on Deutschlandfunk (Germany) 7 October 2014. The author reports inter alia on that boy.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault is quite important but currently I cannot see the relation from e.g. bio-power to poverty or deprivation. In this concept of 1978 he focuses on how the discourses on the economic paradigm changed their perspectives.

South America and in the South States of the later US were constitutive and accelerating factors of early capitalism where slaves delivered real monetary value as a final surplus factor (and everything has left its traces until today – see Nathan Nunn). He describes how slave economy affected and still affects how deprived, black skinned people are perceived.<sup>30</sup>

He writes an astonishing style – slightly schizophrenic when he refers to his evidential basis in literature in a convincing way. He rather seems to be a teacher than a political motivator. When he argues that the world turns black it means that the process of creating subjects to be objects of repression and exploitation is no longer limited by the former practices in the colonies at the time but unfolds its logic globally, the world turns black even in the centers of its former projections.

And what helps to establish such an imperium? An emotional economy described by the little secret of the former colonies: the subjugation of the indigenous is based on his own desire. Similar to Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* but nevertheless a provoking and even slightly arrogant thesis.

It coincides with a statement of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*: ‘Why do people fight for their repression as if it were their salvation?’ (own translation).<sup>31</sup> Maybe a devilish position of people who go a step too far in their generalizations by losing contact to true and involved individuals. Even if denial and deprivation as a social fact are not directly represented in the ‘psychic device’ – how James Strachey used to translate ‘*Seele*’ mechanistically in the Standard Edition – one perhaps should not blame people for their missing knowledge or competencies.

When we see how devaluation and impoverishment are organized in great numbers before our eyes in reality a call for justice might be inevitable, whatever tradition of literature and the personal attitudes of analysts say. But that people seem to accept their submission in general due to the rewards they expect is widely obvious. It looks like we can only accept our own lives when a superior force ‘signifies’ them.<sup>32</sup> But it is impossible that all will find an analyst to discover the roots and rocks of basic security in themselves.

I guess that within psychoanalysis as a discipline the voice can hardly be raised. The place for this is somewhere else. But it is great when suffering poor and traumatized victims are treated by committed doctors like Dr. Kumar who contribute courageously to a better understanding of the world we live in, *asante sana* – thank you.

March 2106

### III. Epilogue – The border

When I still held my mother’s hand and touched her forehead one Friday in April 2016 in a hospital after she passed away an hour ago I asked myself how psychoanalysts could become aware of such a circle of starting and ending of life. It is impossible for them to know the in-between as nobody pays them for such extreme experiences at the edge of existence. Maybe some encounter similar things as just human beings without a direct link to theory. But the reverse position is impossible.

It came into my mind that getting paid for listening only works in very special social and economic situations. When Freud developed his ‘talking cure’ a financially strong community supported the procedure economically and contributed the completing set of psychopathological patterns. Psychoanalytic theory was derived from such basics. When somebody loses his money like the Wolf Man he is of less interest than before when he was a billionaire.

What if the person to be analyzed is incapable to pay? What if they are many? Many more than to be listened to in a sponsored experiment? The idea of psychoanalysis as a way to understand the role of the unconscious how it is determined by social relations between the self and its ‘psychic device’ (German: *Seele*) fails.

Only as long as money is the subconscious equivalent of words and ideas the process works.

In situations where the human entity of body and soul has so much more to say beyond any monetary equivalent there is no access to existential knowledge. And the experience of real poverty is something like this.

To my understanding contemporary continuation of psychoanalysis has to adopt a completely different perspective than that of ego psychology. The analyst is involved in a much deeper understanding than transference and counter-transference.

The challenge is to maintain contact to the unconscious and to understand the language it speaks in this symbiosis. Even if everything very basically is beyond spoken language whether death or money. Freud’s death drive is an intrinsic part of culture. Economic reproduction of the analyst also. So compensation seems to be the main obstacle to adopt poverty as a concept of psychoanalysis. It is its own border.

April 2016

### Attachment

Two Cases of Personal Experience

#### 1. Magic wooden cooking spoons

In 2007 I started a comprehensive set of conversations with some sellers at Bamburi beach. During my holidays I used to walk around there once or twice per day. So many of them approached, asking me to have a look at their offer and buy from them.

After two or three stays I knew most of the shops and sellers. Not only me but also my friends at home and in Kenya were equipped with what I had bought from them. Things I believed to be useful like carvings, boxes, nameplates, kangas, sandals, bangles and bracelets, drums and maracas – the collection had grown to a small shop at home as it was always difficult to say ‘no’.

One year later I began to collect also a few paintings. Before I refused to look closer at them as none unveiled specific artificial ideas to me. After a conversation with a seller, Dixon Karyuki, who also paints a little, he showed me a funny version of his interpretation of nomads, a traditional motive. The

<sup>30</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013).

<sup>31</sup> ‘Pourquoi les hommes combattent-ils pour leur servitude comme s’il s’agissait de leur salut?’

<sup>32</sup> The place of religion in former times and in many cultures even today – where will it turn?

creative style convinced me. Soon after I discovered the personal style of a very interesting painter from Lamu named Shee. Simon Kwenza, a beach gallerist – I used this term to upgrade the offer officially – sold them.

Soon my small depot at home was overcrowded. As I could not buy much more for myself and my family I started lessons with some of sellers in marketing for one or two hours occasionally. The sellers' offers were mostly similar. The high artificial value of some of the carvings or paintings went lost in the mass of many uniform things. Furthermore the wooden and canvas based items sometimes lost their original shape as they were placed and replaced each day and removed at night. The traces of wind and sun reduced the value at least slightly.

More or less only white tourist bought from the sellers. My idea was to make them think in their potential customers' patterns of mind. These customers usually look for things which fit to their homes and make them more comfortable. They are also used to some typical approaches of selling and presentation. Even a small souvenir must meet their expectations. No big problem for a small wooden giraffe or a lion but these items bring only very little profit to the seller.

We discussed different forms of presentation of the goods to make them appear more valuable and desirable. Also potential branding ideas. The most effective seemed to be the endorser brand 'Life at Bamburi Beach'. It would allow selling the idea of this special location in addition to the more replaceable goods and add surplus value to them – a locatable memory.

The recession following the 2007/8 post-election riots had been extremely painful for the sellers and their families. Slowly after business started to improve a little I established a website for them to promote their genuine offer and to get surfers more familiar with the slightly different economy at the beach. I used the idea of 'shops without walls, doors and ceilings' where the offer has to be renewed each day. Small scratches should be valued as unique value marks. A chapter on Swahili spirit was created. With the intention that alternative offers on lessons in culture or food preparation could be connected.

On the grass-root level of everyday business it had no impact. Nobody changed anything. The few surfers who visited the website were not the ones to come to Bamburi beach.

The sellers had listened and agreed but at the end everyone simply tried to sell something from his offer to me in the traditional, affect driven way – even if all my friends at home were provided well and my depot had no additional capacity. Furthermore I had also bought other things from local production, which were not offered at the beach at the airport or in local shops, like belts or banana leaf boxes or T-shirts with artificial decoration.

When I prepared food for my family during a stay in a rented house close to the beach in 2009 I discovered that nicely decorated wooden cooking spoons would also be useful things for places at home in Europe. I asked a friend to organize me a few spoons – also as a test whether she can manage such a small project herself. 'Maryam, tell your friends what I want and motivate them to employ their creativity. I'll pay what they ask as long as it is reasonable.' She brought four

wooden spoons of different size after some days, without decoration. 'It's too difficult.' – 'Go back and try.' The result was poor. A few crosses were more scratched than carved or simply burnt at the spoons' handle. 'The wood is too hard to be carved' was her answer.

I promoted the idea among some carvers. 'Dear friends, in Europe and in the US many people have a close relation to cooking. We have a growing number of TV-shows on cooking and some watch them several times per week. Kitchen architecture and equipment are status symbols in some communities. Imagine that some people pay several millions of shillings for their kitchens. But they do not know to cook well only by spending heavily for the furniture. In each drawer in a European kitchen there is sufficient space for two or three magic wooden cooking spoons from Bamburi beach in Kenya. All tourists have enough space in their bags to carry some of such souvenirs for themselves and their friends. The only things you need is the product in a convincing style, little promotion and some good arguments to communicate the special magic.'

The magic can easily be derived from the feelings and good vibrations from Swahili cooking and culture, including its understanding of the body. Can easily be connected to the special kind of massage the ladies at the beach give. One could think about the many fresh and delicious vegetables and fruit there – and the spoons would simply transfer the magic to the food the customers will prepare at home by the spoon's special decoration – some for vegetables, others for meat, maybe also a spoon for the housewife and the other for the husband if he also cooks. And one for the child if it wants to share in the magic.

One can easily imagine such magic wooden cooking spoons presented with a small ribbon or something similar, so that it stands out from the standard offer on the sandy ground.

Even after one or two years nobody adopted the idea while at least me was a client willing to buy and ready to pay.

Meanwhile I had made friend with a carver. He usually applied the names of my new friends of the recent months on his hand made nameplates when I returned to Kenya. Lions, tigers, elephants, giraffes and at the rear sides the friends' names. I reminded him of the idea with the magic spoons as each of these friends could also receive a spoon as a present from me. 'Yeah, great idea, I will develop a special decoration for them and carve different sizes of such spoons'. After a few days nothing was finished. 'Eddy, I must leave after three days' I told him, 'hurry up'.

Two days later he proudly showed me a pair of spoons from light wood. They were painted white, black and pink. 'You misunderstood me. Color is not acceptable in a pot with hot water or oil or vegetables. I want good dark wood and small carvings at the handle.' Eddy had just gone to Nakumatt supermarket and bought a decorative set of spoons for *ugali* to sell them to me. I had seen such there myself before. But he still until today claims that it was his own work.

I have not seen any example of such magic wooden cooking spoons from Bamburi beach beside the four initial ones from my friend Maryam – even after seven or eight years. Still today everybody wants to sell to me from his replaceable offer. When I finally accept to buy a piece from any of them, around

three to eight colleagues come and want to be served with a purchase too. They listen to what I tell them about innovative ideas and offers and about my depot which burst at all seams – ‘I’ve sold nothing this week, at least a small thing ...’

When I met Eddy last autumn, he ran with the deposit for twelve nameplates. He should have given two of them to each of his three colleagues from the small cooperative and remain himself with six to be carved. It took one week to get the nameplates from the colleagues as he did not surrender any of the deposit to them. On following Christmas I asked only for one from each of them. Eddy who was back – he used to be the leader – received no order.

At some days virtually no tourists from Europe can be found at Bamburi beach. Terror based travel advisories from many governments including UK and USA do their work. Many European tour operators have deleted Kenya from their list of East African destinations. They offer Zanzibar and Kilimanjaro in Tanzania instead. And the whole area is under pressure from new destinations like Dubai too. The policy of the Kenyatta and his predecessor Kibaki administrations are the obvious reasons. Al Shabaab has reached parts of their goals as impoverishment and insecurity is growing in several social sectors. While others are surely improving.

Moreover the sellers who remain face higher fees for permissions as the authorities need to finance their administration. Fruit sellers now have to pass fee-based official courses. Those who do not have money for their licenses are now selling mango and bananas illegally from their bags – always ready to run when they see a uniform.

## 2. The vicious circle

When I walked along Bamburi beach at low tide one year ago somebody approached me diagonally from behind. I was relaxing my mind and did not expect to meet or to talk to anybody at that moment. The beach was wide because of the low tide and I drifted a bit more to the faraway waterline to escape a meeting when I became aware of the stranger. But a few seconds later the person reached me and looked at me from the side.

A young woman in a shabby dark red dress. Short hair and slightly yellow eyeballs. Drug-addicted, I thought. The usual story. She had no food, no place to sleep and it was obviously true. I considered what to do. A small bill would not have much effect. In this moment a very soft voice raised from behind her back. The slim woman’s body was hiding a tiny baby on her back. It was resting there in a blue scarf. When it heard voices it decided to join.

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I never before saw such a retarded baby. It was almost inconspicuous. ‘It’s my little son Boniface’ the young woman said. I was shocked. Could not remain centrally at the beach doing nothing. ‘You need help but I am not the right person to do so’ I replied. ‘Let me bring you to some friends.’

I directed her to the nearby place where the massage ladies used to sit and wait. ‘Sorry dear Joyce, here is someone who urgently needs help’ I quickly informed my friend. ‘They have no food or place to go to.’ The young woman quickly introduced her story. The uncle had refused any help some time ago and she was living without money with others somewhere at the beach. Someone had given her a poisoned drug, something to smoke. She turned addicted soon. And by whatever reason she became pregnant without knowing. Then the little son was born.

The women sitting there became angry. ‘We know such people. They beg for money from the tourists and as soon as they have it they go to their dealers and deliver it to them. It’s their business.’ Little Boniface cried. She breastfed him. But the breast was hardly to be recognized. A small blue cap covered Boniface’s head. ‘Why don’t you go to rehab in town?’ they asked. I did not understand their Swahili conversation. But it was clear that therapy places are difficult to obtain.

I apologized for confronting the massage ladies with this unsolvable problem. But the young woman was real. Maybe her name was Grace. She needed food and her son too. I gave to the senior massage lady what was in my pocket and asked her to make good use of it for Grace. They developed some plan and I continued my walk highly worried.

The next day I asked why they had not taken the young woman to police who should organize any official aid. ‘What do you think’ was the answer. ‘The police and the drug dealers cooperate. They would have arrested Grace until a dealer would have paid 2,000 shillings. And later the story would continue.’

I was heavily shocked. Nobody would be able to release Grace from the ones who misuse her. At least she generates some profit to them as long as she can walk around. And if not ...

‘Not only insiders know what is transported on important traffic routes when they are temporarily closed by authorities’ someone told me.

The economics of war, terror and crime meet there and mix before they enter into the traditional economy – human beings as clients, goods and profit sources included.

Will that vicious circle ever be broken?