



UNIVERSITETET I OSLO
Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet

HAROLD WILHITE

disputerer for Dr. polit.-graden over avhandlingen

Why is consumption changing in Kerala? An ethnographic approach

Prøveforelesning for Dr. polit.-graden:

"Everyday technologies and the transformation of life worlds"

Tid: fredag 2. juni, kl. 10.15-11.00

Sted: aud. 2, Georg Sverdrups hus (UB)

Doktoranden vil offentlig forsvare sin avhandling i disputas:

"Why is consumption changing in Kerala? An ethnographic approach"

Tid: fredag 2. juni, kl. 13.15

Sted: aud. 2, Georg Sverdrups hus (UB)

Ordinære opponenter:

Dr. Filippo Osella, University of Sussex (1. opponent)

Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Universitetet i Oslo (2. opponent)

Professor Odd Are Berkaak, Sosialantropologisk institutt, har vært koordinator for kommisjonen.

Disputasen ledes av dekan Asbjørn Rødseth.

Abstract of Dissertation: Why is consumption changing in Kerala? An ethnographic approach

DOKTORAND: Harold Wilhite
GRAD: Dr. polit.
FAKULTET: Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet
INSTITUTT: Sosialantropologisk Institutt
VEILEDER: Marianne Lien
DISPUTASDATO : 02.06.06

Why consumption is changing in the emerging middle classes of South India is the question addressed by Harold Wilhite's in his doctoral dissertation to be defended on 2 June.

In his doctoral dissertation, Harold Wilhite addresses the question of why household consumption is changing rapidly in the Indian State of Kerala. The insights from the study contribute to an understanding of social and material change not only in Kerala, but more broadly in the emerging middle classes of Asia and other parts of the world. Kerala is interesting because consumption is exploding despite low economic growth, growing religiosity, and a history of redistributive politics. Wilhite uses an ethnographic approach to interrogate relationships between consumption and India's opening to global capitalism in the 1990s, Kerala's extensive work diaspora and the social order in middle-class Kerala, including social relationships in the extended family. Family and gender relations are shown to be important mediators of consumption. Wilhite shows how new technological infrastructures and devices are also important change agents. Devices like refrigerators and washing machines bear with them potentials for changing household practices in unforeseen ways once they are taken into use.

Important new theoretical insights emerge from the study on the interplay between global (non-local) discourses, goods and technologies on the one hand, and local ideas and practices on the other. Wilhite's dissertation demonstrates the importance of a perspective which accounts for social, material, and discursive contributions to socio-cultural and consumption change, illustrating that in places like India, the Western post-modern turn towards conceptualising consumption as inner-directed and individualised has significant weaknesses in theorising change.