

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY





NEW

SZÉCHENYI PLAN

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Week 1

Forms and rituals of exchange:
material and symbolic values

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On exchange

- All economies embrace a particular circulation of goods.
- No society can rely on complete autarchy:
 - hazdis (Tanzania): Larger games are shared following the hunt according to established regulations (Woodburn 1982)
 - Cuzco (Peru): The subsistence farming and commodity production are inextricably intertwined in family farms (Mayer 2002)
- Allocation mechanisms (Polányi)
 - reciprocity: sharing of resource based on mutual exchange
 - redistribution: centralisation and reallocation of good by states or big men
 - exchange: market based commodity exchange driven by price mechanisms

Forms of exchange

- Aspects:
 - nature of calculation (self-interest \Leftrightarrow altruism)
 - direction (one-directional \Leftrightarrow relational)
 - participants (individual \Leftrightarrow community); and their relations (equal \Leftrightarrow hierarchical)
 - role of money
 - modality (ritual \Leftrightarrow everyday)
- Types:
 - commodity exchange
 - barter
 - gift
 - ceremonial exchange
 - one-directional transfers

Barter

- Exchange of goods among equal partners with no use of money („simple commodity exchange”)
 - dual transactions: one particular object moves in one directions whereas the other moves in the opposite
- Significance:
 - the original form of commodity exchange – Adam Smith: the natural propensity to barter and exchange (often criticised)
 - in smaller communities: use of money is often associated with taboo
 - in times of crisis: due to lack of cash
 - widespread in modern economies as well
- Diversity of barter forms:
 - simultaneous \Leftrightarrow delayed return (credit)
 - silent circulation \Leftrightarrow ritual exchange
 - one-time \Leftrightarrow regular

Explaining barter

- Rational choice theory
 - two communities: seaside (fish) and inland (apple)
 - exchange of fish and apple
 - more complicated versions: variety of goods, multiple communities, sequences access to goods
 - transactions costs: travel, storage, information, \Rightarrow actors can reduce these costs by money
 - the transaction costs of the use of money (currency exchange, tax) \Rightarrow barter can save these costs
- Anthropological approaches
 - forms of sociability: requires high degree of trust, and relied and induces enduring relationships (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones 1992)

Commodity exchange

- Exchange of different goods among equal partners through the use of money
 - dual transaction: money moves in one direction, the good (or service) moves in the opposite
 - goods are exchanged for their values or usefulness
- Impersonal nature of exchange: it is mediated by price mechanisms
- Genuinely associated with the notion of commodity and market
- Two distinctive paradigms:
 - classical commodities appear only in capitalism: goods are produced for the value they can realise in the exchange (Marx)
 - goods are present in different societies: they are produced for circulation (Simmel, Appadurai)

Gifts

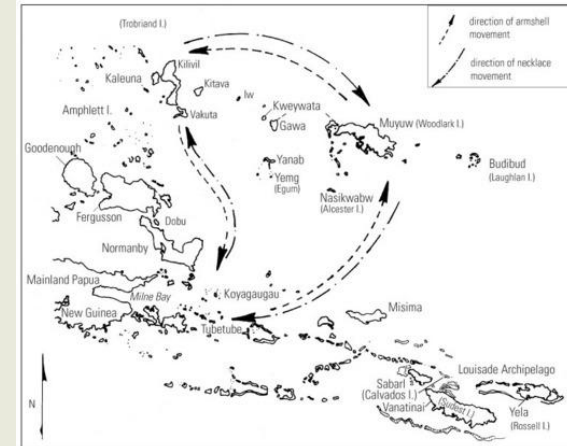
- Goods are exchanged for reinforcing social ties.
- The spirit of reciprocity is dominant:
 - mutual obligations
 - sequenced transactions
- Triadic logic:
 - obligation to give
 - obligation to accept
 - obligation to return
- Personalised component:
 - relations between people
 - objects tied to people

Ceremonial exchange

- Presentation and mutual exchange of valuable objects in ceremonial forms
- Constitutive element of the political order:
 - establishing political alliances
 - enacting peace and post-war compensation
- Ceremonial: formalised and ritual (dance, music, feast)
- Sequenced transaction
- Between individuals ↔ among groups

The Kula ring

- The refined system of the exchange of goods in Papua New Guinea
- Described by Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founding father of cultural anthropology describes it (firstly)
- Several thousands men from 18 communities takes part in it; stretches over 1300 km, using canoe
- Objects:
 - arm shells: travel counter-clockwise
 - necklaces: travel clockwise



The Kula ring

- Ceremonial exchange:
 - strictly regulated (who, when, where?)
 - rituals: building canoe (expel bad spirits living in the timber), cleaning
 - objects with no use value
 - the value of objects: the more it has been exchanged, the more valuable
 - enduring and mutual relationships between individuals as well as communities
 - prestige and political power



Critique on Malinowski

- Harris (1968)
 - the Kula ring is associated with the exchange of goods necessary for the reproduction of life (gimwali)
 - Kula thus creates the condition for the exchange of everyday goods among hostile communities
- Annette Weiner (1992)
 - Malinowski collected data on the domains of life dominated by men
 - behind the Kula women are engaged in the exchange of banana leaves and banana skirts
 - women have more significant economic roles, and as a consequence, more power than men-centered social practices allow them to reveal

Spheres of exchange of the Tivs

- Bohannan (1955, 1959)
- Nigerian farmers along the commercial routes
- Separate and hierarchical spheres of exchange
 - wives: exchange of sisters (women for women)
 - prestige objects: clothes, cows, slaves (distance trade – cooper rods as money)
 - subsistence goods: food (barter on the local market)
- Conversation between spheres is limited:
 - morally regulated
 - upward conversion: device for increasing prestige



Primitive exchange

- Sahlins (1972)
 - in tribal societies, the logic of economy is specific:
 - „material transactions are instantaneous episodes in the realm of societal ties”
 - societal ties organise the material transactions, and material transactions shape social ties, all this is cemented by reciprocity; BUT
 - reciprocity is not homogenous:
 - general reciprocity: altruism, pure gift
 - balanced reciprocity: gift exchange, trade
 - negative reciprocity: profit motives, barter, gambling, theft
 - relations of social distance and reciprocity:
 - the stronger kinship (kin, clan, tribal) the reciprocity is the more general
 - negative reciprocity: allowed only outside the community

The problem of value

- Why people are engaged in exchange?
 - because goods represent value for them
- What is the source of value?
- Adam Smith (1776): *The Wealth of the Nations*
 - use value: the practical potentials of an object
 - exchange value: the potentials of an object to be exchanged
 - paradox: the two values could diverge
 - water: high use value yet low exchange value
 - diamond: low use value yet high exchange value
 - resolution: labour theory of value
 - water can be found everywhere, whereas mining diamond needs major labour investment
 - predecessors: St. August, St. Thomas Aquinas (just prices)

Marx's response

- Marx (1867, 1885, 1894): *The Capital*
 - use value is inherent in the object
 - exchange value is conditioned by social relations
 - commodity fetishism:
 - in commodity exchange value appears as relations between objects (as if value were inherent to object)
 - in reality: value is constructed by social relations (labour)
 - alienation
 - labour theory of value:
 - abstract \Leftrightarrow concrete labour
 - ratio of labour used to produce and the socially necessary labour to produce the object
 - labour only acknowledged in the exchange

Critique on Marx

- Simmel (1900): *The Philosophy of Money*
 - value is not the property of the object but the valuations of the subject concerning the object
 - the value of an object can be determined in relations to other objects (only this object is wanted than the other)
 - exchanges of sacrifice (Appadurai 1986)
- Baudrillard (1972): *For a critique of the political economy of the sign*
 - the use value is also socially constructed: it is dependent on the systems of needs which is socially shaped
 - symbolic value: signifying taste and status
 - sign value: meanings of objects vis-a-vis each other

The cultural turn

- Sahlins (1976)
 - Marx and the neo-classical economics neglects the key question: what is the origin of value?
 - the value of commodities are defined by cultural codes: commodity exchange is a cultural product
 - the example of the edibility of meats :
 - dog, horse: no; pig, cattle: yes; cattle is the most
 - rather steak than haslets
 - this system is built on the prohibition of cannibalism: to create maximum distance from humans
 - dogs, horse: often personalised, live with human beings
 - haslet: reminds of humans (naming) ⇔ steak creates distance
 - clothing:
 - based on dress, cloth, colour, and the patterns
 - feminine-masculine, domestic-public, lower class-upper class

Conundrums of value theories

- Graeber (2001)
 - confusion around the theories of value understood in different domains:
 - in sociological and philosophical sense – “freedom is a fundamental value of the American society”
 - in economic sense – “this house is worth a lot”
 - in linguistic sense as distinctions in meanings – “the definition of red as not yellow, blue, brown.”
 - values coming to the fore time by time in anthropology: the coordination of systemic and individual actions (motivation)
 - Kluckhohn: value orientations (responses to fundamental questions)
 - Dumont: binary oppositions laden with values