

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY





NEW

SZÉCHENYI PLAN

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Week 4

Forms and meanings of money

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The concept and functions of money

- Object or record generally accepted as payment for goods and services
- Function of money in economics:
 - medium of exchange
 - unit of account
 - standard of deferred payment
 - store of value
- ...and in anthropology:
 - social relations that enable the everyday use of money
 - how the use of money transforms everyday social relations

Two sidedness of money

- "Head and tail" at the same time (Keith Hart)
- Earlier:
 - token of authority: created by the state
 - commodity with a price: value in itself (commodity money, coin)
- Head:
 - top down (state power)
- Tail:
 - bottom up (social contract)
- Market and politics (state) inextricably linked
- Relation between impersonal objects and relation between persons

Forms of money

- Evolution:
 - commodity money
 - coin
 - fiat money
 - currency
 - electronic money
- Importance of trust:
 - use of money less and less dependent on internal value of money object, and more dependent on generalised social trust, trust in the state in particular
 - disintegration of trust:
 - decrease in economic activity, and exchange in particular
 - alternative forms of exchange (barter)

The impersonality of money

- Simmel (1900): *The Philosophy of Money*
- Use of money and modernity are closely linked
- Money as symbol for rationality, calculability and impersonality
 - making value measurable: needed for emergence of rational calculation
 - transformation of relationships between people participating in exchange is: impersonality
- Exchange is separated from other spheres: personal freedom, independence from “natural” groups, new forms of association
- Money infiltrates social sphere: disintegrative impact (family, small communities)

Money and capitalism

- Marx: *Capital* (1867); *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844)
- Money central to understanding capitalism
- Form of exchange:
 - pre-capitalist: $C \Rightarrow M \Rightarrow C$
 - capitalist: $M \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow M$
- Money: expression of exchange value
- Commodity fetishism: social life revolves around money
- Alienation: money turns everything into its opposite

The “subversive” impact of money

- Bohannan (1955, 1959)
- Tiv spheres of exchange (reminder)
 - wives
 - prestige goods
 - subsistence goods
- Limited conversion between the spheres
- Appearance of money: possibility of unlimited conversion
- Scrambles separate spheres of exchange
- Cultural subversion
- “Destruction”



Money and alienability

- Godelier (1999)
- Pre-modern society:
 - money both alienable and inalienable
 - precious metals (gold, silver)
 - basis for money
 - basis for objects of adornment
 - monopoly over trade in precious metals
 - Egypt: gold is the body of gods
- Modern society:
 - money as synonymous with alienability
 - anything can be commodified, except:
 - individuals
 - rights–Constitution

Money and language

- Shell (1982)
- Anxiety of interactions between economic and intellectual exchange, or money and language
- Invasion of merchants' language into thought:
 - taboo in several world religions:
 - Jewish
 - Christian
 - Muslim
- Sign and substance of value \approx reality and appearance
- Nothing will come out of nothing: except for literature and finance
- Connections and disconnections between devil, gold, and God

Impact of money on social relations

- Critique (Parry & Bloch 1989):
 - money is present in wide range of societies
 - neither perilous nor subversive in many traditional societies
 - different cultures give different meanings to money
- Transactional orders
 - views on morally legitimate and illegitimate forms and uses of money
 - transform morally dangerous money into positive meaning
 - de-contamination practices, transformative discourses
 - mutual reproduction of long-term cosmic order and the short-term individual competition

Malay fishermen and “cooking money”

- Men earn money, spending money fully in the hand of women
- Puzzle: men “want to get rid of money” (and the power that comes with it)
- Economic activity (fishing) based on competition ⇔ kinship and household based on solidarity
- Moral order based on kinship ⇔ trading mentality of Chinese businessmen
- Cooking as a metaphor:
 - transforming raw fish to edible food
 - ≈ transforming money from means of exchange to consumption good



Neutral and universal?

- Zelizer (1994)
- General view: money is neutral and universal in modern societies
- Reality: non-neutral (“dirty”) money is still common
- Networks, social relations, systems of meaning control and limit use of money
- Taboo on gifting money
 - gift cards
 - envelopes
 - limited to group of people (close kins)

”Earmarking”

- Transformation of neutral and universal money to special purpose money through ritual practices
- Methods:
 - different names
 - modification of physical appearance
 - designating separate locations for particular money
 - attaching special meaning to particular amounts
 - appointing proper users

