

ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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Course Material Developed by Department of Economics,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University Budapest (ELTE)

Department of Economics, Eötvös Loránd University Budapest

Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Balassi Kiadó, Budapest



Authors: Tamás Dombos, Viola Zentai

Supervised by Viola Zentai

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Capitalism embedded in postcolonial settings

The concept of postcolonialism

- Long-term impact of colonization for newly independent societies outside of Europe
- Economic aspect:
 - specific role in the economic world order
- Cultural aspect:
 - alternatives against dominant Western concepts
- Colonisation:
 - 15-20th century: following discovery of America
 - extending economic and political dependence to territories outside of Europe
 - different powers: Portuguese, Spanish ⇔ Dutch ⇔ English, French
 - ideology: religion, profit, sense of superiority, development
 - wars of independence since 18th c.: United States ⇔ Latin-America ⇔ Asia
⇔ Africa

World-systems theory

- Relevant unit of analysis is not nation states, but the whole world system (international division of labour)
- Dependence theory:
 - 1960s, interpreting history experience of Latin-America
 - Frank (1969): centre-periphery relationship
 - poor countries: cheap raw materials + markets for goods
 - unbalanced development, refusal of international trade
- World-systems theory
 - Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989)
 - unified capitalist world economy + interstate system
 - semi-periphery: dynamism (can become centre)
 - link between states and national capitalist class

World-systems theory in anthropology

- Eric Wolf (1982)
- History of world economy in 15-19th centuries
- Impact of development of global economic processes (encounters between societies) on local social relationships
- „People without history”: active agents in history
- Theoretical model – modes of production:
 - kin-ordered \Rightarrow tributary capitalist mode of production
- Latin-America: colonisers take over tributary mode of production of established Amerindian states
- Caribbean: from kin-ordered to tributary based on slavery
- India: system of tributes based on inherited status to capitalist propertied class

Anthropology and colonization

- Subject of anthropological knowledge = societies under colonial rule
 - “primitive societies” outside of Europe
- Institutional connection: anthropologists as cultural experts in establishing colonial rule
- Eurocentric anthropological knowledge:
 - evolutionary theories (primitive societies = long gone past of the West)
 - Orientalism (Said 1978)
 - romanticised view of the Middle East not based on facts
 - “the other” of Europe
 - anthropologist (active “author”) ⇔ primitives (passive subject)
- Postcolonial anthropology:
 - give voice to subaltern people
 - reconstitute non-Western knowledge as legitimate

The devil and commodity fetishism

- Taussig (1980)
- Tin miners in Bolivia, sugarcane producers in Colombia
- Local beliefs:
 - contract with the devil:
 - beliefs held by landed peasants
 - plantation workers: contract with devil brings them higher productivity and higher wages
 - can be spend on consumer goods only
(land, livestock
bought from money barren)

- untimely, painful death
 - baptism of money:
 - secretly, instead of the child
 - note gets a special name
 - Godfather becomes godfather of note
 - will return to Godfather in the company of others
 - Ordinary interpretation:
 - survival of pre-capitalist belief systems
 - egalitarian social ethic
 - New interpretation:
 - critique of capitalist relations of production told in local language
 - collective representation of a way of life under destruction
 - contract with devil: losing control over means of production
 - baptism of money: M-C-M expressed in exotic form
 - West: language of capitalism taken as natural
- ⇔ periphery: new insight into capitalism in opposition to Western thinking



Occult economies

- Jean and John Comaroff (1999)
- Occult practices in South Africa:
 - witch-hunt, organ trade, pyramid schemes
 - not limited to locality, widespread in the whole world
- Necessary counterpart of late modern global economy
- Reason: lack of transparency in market mechanisms



- Economic processes:
 - rapid, immaterial flows of value
 - income polarization
 - sudden enrichment and impoverishment
 - unfulfilled (consumer) promises / desires
 - inability to govern or control economic processes
- Distil complex material and social processes into comprehensible human motives
 - tie translocal processes to local
 - translate translocal discourses into local vocabularies of cause and effect
- Destroys conventional patterns of social reproduction (end of „community”)
- Breaking conventional bounds of legality:
 - crime and magic as a mode of production for those lacking other resources
 - violence as a tool of redistribution of incomes
- ⇔modernity = disenchantment (Weber)

Coca Cola in Trinidad

- Miller (1998)
- Analysis of the production, advertising and consumption of Coca Cola in local cultural settings
- Coca Cola:
 - symbolic product, meta-commodity
 - stands for commodification, Americanization, imperialism
 - earlier approaches:
 - corporate strategy of Coca Cola
 - power of advertisement
 - lacking efforts to understand it as embedded in local contexts
- Red⇔ black sweet drink
 - economic practices as dependent on local meanings

- Black sweet drink:
 - markedly modern and American
 - accompanying American soldiers (Americans ⇔ British colonisers)
 - rum and Coke: national drink
 - price for Coke fixed by authorities
 - for whites (=for Black-Africans considered as cultural mainstream)
- Red sweet drink :
 - tradition, nostalgia
 - for Indians
- Complexity of ethnicity:
 - ideology (for whom?) ⇔ practice (who actually buys it?)
- Impact of advertisement hard to assess:
 - no real feedback
 - competition between producers, rather than for consumers



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