



Economic Anthropology

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ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY

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This review covers the years 1962–64, with some glances into earlier literature where continuity or historical perspective is required. In the past five years economic anthropology as a substantive concern within social and cultural anthropology has exhibited a rapid rate of growth. If growth is measured by articles and books alone, then economic anthropology is already well beyond the stage of adolescence and on to a state of strapping maturity with little signs of the sort of compulsive iteration which heralds senility. To extend the biological metaphor, on its birth economic anthropology had apparently but three major concerns: (1) to develop a theory of economic evolution (2) to demonstrate that received neoclassical economic theory did not or could not apply to the sorts of societies and cultures anthropologists habitually analyze, and (3) to establish the presence of an economy as an aspect of the social system, even in the most simple non-monetary society. The fruition of these concerns may be seen in Herskovits' compendium (33), the second edition of which was brave enough to bear the title *Economic Anthropology*. Firth's (20) review and assessment of Malinowski's contribution to the field marks the end of the effort to "read the riot act" to economists, and Tax's work (75) as the most comprehensive and detailed study of a peasant economy lays forever the ghost of locating and describing economic phenomena by ordinary anthropological means and field work methods. Thurnwald's major summary (76) was the last attempt to come to empirical terms with the problem of economic change ordered by evolutionary formulae.

Interest and work in economic anthropology have largely aban-

done the three major concerns enumerated above in favor of a new set of highly productive problem areas. There are four major rubrics under which contemporary work in the field may be grouped:

1. Conceptual and definitional.—There is an abiding interest in sharpening the empirical referent economy and economic behavior shall have in peasant and primitive economic systems. There is also some effort in working with specific economic concepts (like capital interest, supply and demand, etc.) to see how far and in what ways they clarify or obfuscate real, non-Western economic activity. And finally, there is the never ending task of devising and improving techniques of counting, measuring, and quantifying in a realm where the field worker must necessarily construct as well as analyze his own basic economic facts.
2. Institutional aspects of economics.—This is primarily an interest in describing and accounting for the principal exchange systems found in the non-Western world. Recently the “market” both as a place for exchange and as a regulator of exchange has received the bulk of attention, closely followed by descriptions of various means of nonmarket exchange. This interest stems from the seminal work of Polanyi *et al.* (62), which in a way marks the transition, at least in the United States, from the older concerns to these newer interests.
3. Economic and social change.—Since the decolonization of Asia and Africa and the drive for development in Latin America, a great interest in economic development as both an economic and a social process has engaged an increasing number of students. The dominant themes have moved from indicating sources of cultural or economic resistance to change toward the fashioning of an image of the process of change in the economic system and of relating that image to concomitant cultural and social change. Myrdal’s complaint (51) that anthropologists are essentially conservative in their analyses and undynamic in their appreciation of peasant and primitive economies has lost whatever relevance it once had in the face of this body of research.
4. Multidisciplinary or cooperative.—Other disciplines have become concerned with the economic systems that were traditionally the

bailiwick of anthropology. Stemming from the general social scientific interest in the problem of "modernization" as perhaps the most challenging research interest of the next decades, economists, political scientists, sociologists, geographers, and even psychologists have worked with anthropologists and anthropological sources. Some of this work has contributed to the three areas of research interest listed above.

These four categories will serve, then, as a series of boxes facilitating an orderly sorting of the literature in economic anthropology in the past two years.

Ever since Polanyi and his colleagues emphasized Max Weber's differentiation between the formal and substantive meaning of "economy," there has been some debate on what the referent for economy is and what an economic analysis of that social subsystem shall consist of. The adequacy of economic theory—that is, at least an anthropological understanding of the main principles of contemporary academic economics—has been both embraced and rejected as bounding an economic system or in analyzing peasant and primitive economic systems. Dalton (10) is an exponent of rejecting much of economic theory because it relies on a formal set of rules which may or may not apply to a given economy. He views the anthropologist as having a different set of goals in his explanations from that of the economist, and hence economic theory may get in the way rather than aid. On other grounds, a stimulating paper by Meillassoux (45) also brushes aside the relevance of economic theory for anthropologists. In a modified form of historical materialism, Meillassoux sees the economy and economics as a reflex of crucial sets of social relations, especially the lineage and age-set groupings. Both Dalton and Meillassoux have reached their views on the basis of data from Sub-Saharan Africa, with little comparative illustration. Meillassoux's contentions are either irrelevant or alien in places like Middle America or even New Guinea. And I think Dalton overstates the inapplicability of formal rules of choice in peasant and primitive economics partly because the chief task in economic anthropology has been sort of sub- or pre-economic analysis—that is, erecting the schedules of wants and the supply potentials of different producers—and for this no body of theory is a tool. But the

analysis of these dimensions appears to lie well within at least the grand tradition of the economic analysis of choice. More moderate, but still skeptical of the utility of economic theory, is the paper by Le-Clair (39). Here, at least, is the recognition that much of the world observed by anthropologists is not included in the vocabulary of contemporary economists and hence one of the tasks is the fashioning of new concepts. This, however, is different from outright rejection because of conceptual lacunae. Burling (9) wrestles with the competing definitions of "economic" and "economy" and arrives at the conclusion that a form of maximization theory, with what is to be maximized left unstipulated, is probably the most useful point of departure in defining the field. Thus there appears to be something of a definitional convergence and a lifting of the semantic fog that once engulfed "economic" and "economy." Berliner (4), an economist, lays out in his methodological essay the ways of work of an economist which appear supplemental rather than opposed to anthropological methods and ideas. Unfortunately Berliner's understanding of what anthropologists actually do is little better than the average anthropologist's notions of what economists are engaged in.

The utility of borrowing, or incorporating, some parts of economic theory into economic anthropology is demonstrated by a series of short papers and is reflected in some recent books. By using the simple quantity of money equation (MV equals PT) for the explanation of the social effects of monetization among the Kapauku of West New Guinea (16), a powerful and quantitative explanation of the decline of traditional authority is erected. Several anthropologists have found simple notions like Gresham's law (11, 48) to be useful in explaining the interaction of native and imported monies. Mintz (50) went directly to economic theory for his concepts of standards of value and units of measure in Haitian markets. Nash (55) attempts to clear up the confusions between the context of choice and the rules of choice, taking the latter to be what the economists posit them to be. And Barth (2) even extends traditional economic analysis to the more current theory of games to set a framework for the interpretation of the behavior of Norwegian entrepreneurs in the backwoods. In a book-length study of a Vietnamese rural community, the economist Hendry (32), working with an anthropologist, finds no incompatibility be-

tween economic theory and anthropology. He provides further support for the empirically based premise that peasants are rational economic actors within the context of social and cultural forces. From Africa Dean (12) produces a neat essay indicating that prices are formed in African markets in just about the way economic theory would predict.

As I read this conceptual and definitional literature there appear three trends: (1) a movement away from semantic confusion and verbal shadow boxing (probably most aptly illustrated by the bootless controversy over whether the economy did or did not have a "surplus") in the wake of better information and more familiarity with the general set of economics; (2) a growing understanding that parts of economic theory can be incorporated with benefit by anthropologists along with the parallel conviction that much theory and concept building must be done to capture the phenomenal world of peasant and primitive economics; and (3) an emphasis on at least counting or estimating magnitudes of economic behavior so that the degree or amount of effect on other parts of the social and cultural system can be gauged. There is, as indicated, no consensus among anthropologists as to what is the economy or economizing, but there is a growing convergence in definitions and a sophistication in using parts of a sister social science. The anthropological emphasis on relating economic facts to other social facts will continue to give field reports by anthropologists a different cast or tenor from reports by economists on similar sorts of economies.

Much of recent substantive work deals with exchange systems, for, whatever concept one may hold of the economic, exchange is clearly and universally a relevant aspect of economic behavior. The "market" has received most attention. In the massive work *Markets in Africa* (7) twenty-eight authors combine to give fairly good descriptive data on markets in the Guinea Coast and the Congo, the Western Sudan, the Horn, and in the developing cities and industrial centers of Africa. The major themes in these papers have been struck in many earlier papers coming from Harskovits' students and are now somewhat familiar, but the level of descriptive detail is refreshing and novel. There is the contrast between the multicentered exchange systems of relatively indigenous economies and the money-dominant markets as a

product of acculturation running through most of the papers. The noneconomic aspects of the markets of Africa are also a common theme (as a meeting place, for ritual gathering and marriage and sexual recruitment, for juridical purposes, etc.). The markets of Africa described in the work are finally grouped in a taxonomic table along five axes: major source of livelihood, price formation, market price as allocating mechanism, money and money uses, and external trade. These axes give rise to the not unexpected classification of the economies into three types: marketless economies, economies with peripheral markets, and market-dominated economies. The major features of each type are listed. This taxonomic effort is, of course, a prelude to some sort of functional and/or causal analysis, for the features of each type do not, it seems to me, hang together in a necessary way nor do they appear susceptible of being abstracted to the higher level of a "variable" with some analytical power. Unfortunately the distinction between "special purpose" and "all purpose" money is perpetuated. Where in the world is money "all purpose" for all the goods and services exchanged in a society? Further, it is not clear in the Introduction and Summary or in many of the papers that the types of exchange systems are mutually exclusive and that a society must have just one of them. As Smelzer (73) remarked in a review of the Polanyi work, most societies have various types of exchange systems and their relative dominance and interrelation are the proper research focus. And as a final caveat to what is, doubtless, a landmark in the study of African markets, there is the objection of confounding the whole economic system with the mode and media of exchange. This is shortsighted and represses many interesting and researchable aspects of peasant and primitive economies (54).

The marketing systems of Indonesia, Meso-America, and parts of the Caribbean have received some synthetic treatment. Dewey's work on Java (14, 15) is a reasonably comprehensive description of a regional marketing system. The kinds of exchanges, the recruitment of traders, the linkage of kinds of persons are described. Dewey comes close to seeing the market as a microcosm of the jockeying for political power, social status, and wealth, but she never quite reaches these suggestive notions. Empirically oriented, Dewey barely transcends her data and does not give a coherent version of the controlling mech-

anisms of the pasar. For that one must turn to the work of Geertz (26). Dealing with the same market system, Geertz sees its underlying structure to rely on the following: sliding price system, a complex balance of managed credit, and an extensive fractionation of risks and consequently of profits. These control mechanisms allow a better appreciation of the patterned flow of goods and services and of the social and cultural system in which the market is embedded. This work is suggestive of how much can be learned of the social and political dynamics of peasant societies by viewing market structures as arenas for power struggles among differentially situated groups or role incumbents, and Southeast Asia is probably one of the best areas in the contemporary world for this sort of study.

In Mintz's papers (46, 47, 49) the characteristics of Haitian market systems are blocked out: their staggered, regional aspect, the competition between speculators and revendeuses, and the jockeying between town and countryside. The *pratik* custom of hedging is also described. Mintz is an exponent of the competitive arena view of market places and the market institution, a perspective sometimes overlooked when the process of monetization, as in the African studies, is in the foreground.

Nash (52) has attempted to subsume the monographic literature on Meso-American markets into a single scheme. He finds three major types of markets in Meso-America, naming them (1) the regional marketing system, (2) the adjunct export economy, and (3) the quasi-tribal system. For each type the ecological, social, and cultural conditions of maintenance are described, and some of the conditions moving societies toward one or another type are posited.

One form of exchange system has come in for a renewed burst of interest, namely, the *jajmani* system of India. Notwithstanding Wiser's pioneer work on the subject, the *jajmani* system has long been poorly understood or misunderstood. The basic questions of its area distribution, its relation to land holding, its role as leveler or exploiter, and other matters of fact have been disputed. *Jajmani* is theoretically significant as purportedly the most complex redistributive system discovered in a hierarchically arranged society. Beidelman's review of the literature on the *jajmani* system (3) can be contrasted with the later review of Mahar (44). Mahar lists all of the unanswered ques-

tions about the form, function, and social correlates of jajmani systems. Recent works (71, 28, 61, 59, 5, 69) do little to dispel the empirical and theoretical fog that surrounds the interpretation of these redistributive systems.

There has been some scattered but interesting work on the institutional features of recruitment of traders and on the development of organizations for savings and investment in peasant and primitive societies. Geertz (26) provides a good interpretative summary on the conditions for the emergence of rotating credit associations, and Lebra and Maretzki (38) give a sophisticated account of credit experience in Northern Okinawa.

Pride of place in economic anthropology, however, must go to the burgeoning literature on economic development and cultural change. There continues to be a stream of useful articles and case studies of a descriptive nature (43, 77, 8, 29, 78, 65, 32, 68, 13, 36, 72, 40, 18, 66, 17, 22, 64), but there is also a growing understanding of the major variables involved in development and a healthy shift toward analytical studies of how development occurs. Against an earlier background of solid regional and local studies (53, 1, 79), recent study is devoted to three major themes: (1) the process of monetization and its social concomitants; (2) the transformation of relatively stagnant marketing systems; and (3) the process of modernization as it includes industrialization, political reorganizations, familial changes and religious reorientations, with local or regional social systems viewed as part of a larger, usually national system.

The most complete study of monetization is Salisbury's monograph (67) on the Siane of New Guinea. This work can serve as a model for one sort of monetization, and future work can show what aspects of the transformation as it was undergone in New Guinea are parochial and what are universal. Part of the interest in this work stems from an ingenious use of "man labor hours" as the standard of value measurement; since this has often been advocated in nonmonetary economies, it can be inspected here with all its advantages and drawbacks. More theoretical is the emergence of a five-stage or step process in the shift to a money economy. In Siane the traditional economy exhibited three trade circuits: subsistence, ceremonial, and luxury. Each circuit of

exchange had its appropriate media, and distinctive set of social relations (intraclan and village, interclan and village, and between trading partners). Into this economy were introduced money (first from wages) and a labor-saving device (the steel axe). The effects are:

1. An expansion of gima trade (because of time saved and no need for further subsistence activity).
2. A widening of political integration (partly because of the pax Britannica, and partly because of expanded search for luxury goods).
3. A demand for European goods (some of which the people have now learned to use and value).
4. Corporate investment (the clan and lineage groups, still intact, invest in farming things Europeans will buy to secure the money to buy things Europeans make).
5. Emerging individual entrepreneurs (some are better handlers of the new money economy than others and reach a level where the claims of the group are onerous and can be partly avoided).

This analysis, showing in a temporal sequence what happens in the face of the introduction of money and some technological innovation, is clearly different from earlier speculative and common-sense accounts of monetization. Furthermore it emphasizes the positive aspects of development more than the negative features of cultural and social loss. Even so, it probably is a more contingent process than Salisbury's book indicates. Gima trade will expand only in a relatively well-fed population, as the people of New Guinea were despite their constant protein hunger. Stage two, the increase of scale in political organization, is obviously dependent upon a good administrative and police system established by the metropolitan power, for otherwise aggrandizing warfare would be likely. The demand for European goods is also contingent upon the learning experiences of those who accompany patrols or go to the coastal areas or abroad to work. And corporate investment is contingent on the continuing authority of the clan leaders and the ratio of workers absorbed by the modern economy away from local society. Finally, new individual entrepreneurs need some quick cash crop in order to speed their escape from invest-

ment-destroying obligations. All these contingent factors do not, however, negate the theoretical strength of Salisbury's stages; they serve merely to explicate the situational factors underlying the unfolding of the full five-step sequence.

Salisbury's scheme gets empirical support from Epstein's study of the effects of European contact on the Tolai of New Britain (19). Epstein works out four stages rather than five, but in the same sort of sequence. Now there must be further research on the applicability of this kind of model beyond the bounds of Melanesian multicircuited economies which come under the impact of a sophisticated Australian dominance.

Some economists have studied the process of monetization, and it is instructive to compare Ghosh's little book (27) and Schultz's larger work (70) to the work done by anthropologists. Ghosh depends much more on supplies of money and rates of return than any anthropologist is likely to do and is of course less interested in a confrontation with social modification. Schultz works with the notions of investment in human beings (chiefly through education and extension work) and sees the provision of technological opportunity to people prepared to seize it as the engine of transformation of traditional agricultural systems. What contemporary anthropologists and economists interested in the first stages of economic growth now have in common, as a result largely of anthropological research and scolding, is the abandonment of the simple view that capital accumulation equals economic development and an insistence on seeing the process as one of social and cultural transformation, not merely the addition of increments of capital and technology.

The developmental problems of already monetized but still nonprosperous societies are different from those of the so-called emerging nations. (It is of some passing interest to note the changing official designations of these societies over the last decade from backward to underdeveloped to the currently popular "poor" or nonprosperous. The terminology does reflect an increase in the data on these societies as well as greater insight into the developmental problems.) These emerging nations—specifically those just coming into the orbit of the monetized, industrialized West in the wake of the spread of the economic frontier or through the export of wage labor—tend to be new

nations. They are the recently sovereign with long colonial backgrounds, with complex cultural traditions of long historical depth, with various ethnic and political complexities, sometimes with wide status and class differentials, and always with some sort of social gap if not antithesis between the Westernized and modernizing elite and the bulk of the peasantry engaged in a mixture of subsistence and cash crop farming. Such societies tend in economic structure to approximate what Levin (41) has aptly termed the "foreign factor" economy. And I think this economic designation is more clarifying than Boeke's (6) older notions of the "dual economy" or "oriental economics."

A good historical analysis of how a foreign factor economy can get set into a spiral of ever decreasing per capita income while expanding its population and filling up the interstices in its economy is Geertz's aptly titled *Agricultural Involution* (23). Indonesia is the classic case of involution, but parts of the analysis may fit sectors of the Indian peasantry and may be extended to other densely populated parts of Asia.

In establishing how a foreign factor economy or a new nation may start and continue the process of economic development, an anthropologist must slightly modify the techniques and concepts that have served so well in the studies of tribal societies or peasantries treated as virtually bounded systems, choosing instead some model which more closely captures the social reality of complex societies. One effort to face the vexing part-whole problem is Geertz's work (25) on two towns in Indonesia. This contrast also touches on sudden versus gradual change and highlights some of the conditions for successful change as against failure. One town in Java has long been in the money and market economy. Intrinsic to the rest of the social structure, however, is a group of expert, full-time, and outcaste traders who have conducted the market operations. The traders have developed an intricate, individualistic, and speculative mode of market operation. They are now faced with the problems of modernization, or the carrying through of a Javanese analogue to the commercial revolution of Europe. This entails a movement from social outcastes to true bourgeois, which means a set of commercial relations based on firms, in an organized market with long-term transactions and investments. Leading this change is a group of reformed Moslems, religiously inspired; part

of their success is due to the weakened social structure, which, like the old burghers of Europe, they are subverting like termites eating rotting wood. And of course their success or failure depends on what happens in the cities and on the national level in Indonesia, for a continuing urbanization and political integration provide the dynamics for change in such backwoods towns as these.

The analysis of the Bali town by Geertz turns attention to an aristocratic group leading an agrarian readjustment in an almost caste-like social structure. Here the traditionalism to be overcome is of another variety, and hence the process looks different from that in Java. Geertz ends up with six propositions which subsume and transcend his data.

A short paper based on Burmese data (57) attempts to conceptualize the problems of modernization in Southeast Asia and to assess some of the dynamics in breaking away from the foreign factor economy on the national level in interaction with the peasantry. The earlier concept of a "multiple society" is refined, and it is interesting to mark the responses of an economist familiar with the region (35) and a political scientist who worked with the urban elite of Burma (63).

In the attempt to work with large processes like modernization or urbanization or industrialization, anthropologists usually transcend the strictly economic focus and move into other subsystems of the society, especially politics, stratification, values, religion, and family and kinship organization.

One significant product of this widening horizon is the collection of papers called *Old Societies and New States* (24), in which a group of social scientists attempts to triangulate the dimensions of the process of modernization in new nations. Returning to a more limited anthropological focus on modernization, a paper (56) comparing certain situations in Latin America and Southeast Asia attempts to discriminate among varieties of traditionality and to point to some of the various routes by which modernization may be attained.

The interest in the larger processes of social transformation inevitably leads to multidisciplinary cooperation, on the one hand, and to the involvement of allied social sciences in anthropology, on the other. An outstanding instance of cooperation between anthropology and economics is *Capital, Saving, and Credit in Peasant Societies* (21).

Firth's Introduction places the problems of accumulation, the use of credit, and the ratio of savings in anthropological perspective. There are some provocative comments on the difficulties of adapting the usual notions of capital to the sorts of social entities anthropologists study, and also some suggestions for further elaboration of the social constraints and incentives to the accumulation of capital and its channeling into productive enterprises. In the Conclusion, Yamey enumerates several ways in which economists must learn from anthropologists if they are to reason sensibly about the problems of capital formation and capital employment and investment in non-Western societies. Between the Introduction and the Conclusion are nineteen reports of the operation of the capital, savings, and investment aspects of as many non-Western societies. The data come from everywhere in the world except Africa, and the volume helps redress the anthropological imbalance of an undue economic stress on African materials. The essays are of fairly uniform high caliber, but since they are all "anthroprofessional" in style and language, only the most dedicated or puzzled economist is likely to spend the time to absorb the relevant message the cumulative impact of the papers delivers. Among other things, the contributors lay bare the social and cultural factors underlying the rate of capital formation, the forms of capital accumulation, and the means of channeling capital into one or another kind of investment. Taken together, the essays add to economic anthropology in pinpointing a specific aspect of economic behavior, and to economics in providing the social dynamics involved in savings-income ratios and in modes of capital accumulation.

Another cooperative effort focused on Africa is the collection edited by Herskovits and Harwitz (34), in which aspects of African social systems are viewed as changing under the impetus of economic and political modernization.

On the periphery of economic anthropology but related to problems of modernization and with a marked interdisciplinary outlook are collections like those of Hoselitz and Moore (37), Nash and Chin (58), and Hagen (30). The Hoselitz and Moore compilation surveys the impact of industrialization on selected aspects of non-Western societies. Much use is made of data from economic anthropology, but the framework of analysis is derived from sociology and economics.

Smelzer's introductory essay, which provides a theoretical skeleton for the separate articles in this volume, relies heavily on the kind of theory developed in Parsons and Smelzer (60) and seems more suited to summarizing field data than to promoting the gathering of significant new data. Eight papers make up the Nash and Chin collection, a collaborative work of anthropologists, economists, psychologists, and sociologists. In these papers some attempt is made to survey the role of psychocultural variables in Asian economic development, and collectively they add to, or subtract from, ideas set forth in books like those of Hagen (30) and McClelland (42), both of whom contributed to the collection.

Finally, a book by the sociologist Smelzer (74) is a good introductory guide to the differences and similarities between anthropologists and sociologists in the handling of the relations between economy and society.

This survey has run a chain and compass across the frontier of economic anthropology for the period 1962-64. The intention was to provide a vade mecum for those interested in the trends, findings, and research problems in economic anthropology. With this aim, literature was, of course, selectively rather than exhaustively reviewed. And what may appear as the carps and crotchets of a critic are meant to be hopes for and spurs to future research.

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