

# SA3065 ANTHROPOLOGY OF ECONOMIC LIFE

Dr Mette M. High

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This module provides an introduction to the main anthropological approaches to economic life. The first part of the module explores classical analytical frameworks for understanding how people live and organise their lives in different ways. The second part focuses on contemporary issues surrounding value creation and contestation. Students should be aware that this module is not intended to be an economics course for anthropologists and others. Instead, grounded in the comparative and ethnographically-based discipline of anthropology, it brings together a wide range of regional, cultural and historical material. We will examine market and nonmarket economies, gift giving and commodity exchange, state and alternative currencies, human and posthuman economies. The aim of the module is to broaden the notion of 'the economy' and introduce students to the expansive and inclusive world within which people mobilize action.

In addition to the required readings set each week, students may find the following handbooks useful. These are all introductory and offer a broad overview of key debates in economic anthropology.

- Carrier, James G. (ed.). 2005. *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hann, Chris and Keith Hart. 2011. *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wilk, Richard R. and Lisa C. Cliggett. 2007. *Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology*. Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.

To complement the focused insights offered by articles and book chapters, students may also find the following monographs useful. These offer comprehensive and detailed insights into the economic practices discussed in the module.

- Boellstorff, Tom. 2015. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- High, Mette M. 2017. *Fear and Fortune: Spirit Worlds and Emerging Economies in the Mongolian Gold Rush*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ouroussoff, Alexandra. 2011. *Wall Street at War: The Secret Struggle for the Global Economy*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

Teaching: 2 hours per week

Lecture: Wednesday 12-1pm in Arts Seminar Room 3

Tutorial group 1: Thursday 12-1pm in Arts Seminar Room 7

Tutorial group 2: Thursday 1-2pm in Arts Seminar Room 9

Film screening: Wednesday 14 March at 1-3pm in School 1

Office hours: Wednesday 1-2pm in Room 58, School V, United College.

Alternative contact: Via email, mmh20@st-andrews.ac.uk

Course assessment: 3000 words essay (50%) and a 3 hours exam (50%)

Essay deadline: Monday 19 March 2018

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### **Week 1: Gift economies and the Kula ring**

Gift economies were central to foundational debates in economic anthropology and continue to intrigue us. What is a 'gift economy'? How are they governed? And to what extent can they be seen to form the basis of society?

#### **Required readings:**

- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Esp. Ch. 3. Pp. 82-104 [essential extracts also available in Edward E. LeClair and Harold K. Schneider. 1968. *Economic Anthropology*, pp. 17-40]
- Mauss, Marcel. 1954. *The Gift*. Esp. Introduction + Ch. 1. Pp. 1-23.

#### **Supplementary readings:**

- Dalton, George. 1965. "Primitive Money". *American Anthropologist* vol. 67, issue 1, pp. 44-65.
- Hart, Keith. 2007. "Marcel Mauss: In pursuit of the whole. A review essay". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 49, issue 2, pp. 473-485.
- Hart, Keith. 2014. "Marcel Mauss's Economic Vision, 1920–1925: Anthropology, politics, journalism". *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 14, issue 1, pp. 34-44.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1920. "Kula: The Circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagoes of Eastern New Guinea". *Man*, vol. 51, pp. 97-105.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1921. "The Primitive Economics of the Trobriand Islanders". *The Economic Journal*, vol. 31, issue 121, pp. 1-16.
- Young, Michael. 1979. *The Ethnography of Malinowski: The Trobriand Islands 1915-18*.

### **Week 2: Reciprocity**

The formalist-substantivist debate essentially concerned the kinds of explanations and models that could be used to understand economic life cross-culturally. To what extent can we assume generalized utilitarianism and maximization to be universal? Are markets always 'embedded'? And what role is played by the natural environment?

### Required readings:

- Sahlins, Marshall. 1972. "Ch. 1: The Original Affluent Society". *In Stone Age Economics*. Pp. 1-40.
- Bird-David, Nurit. 1992. "Beyond 'The Original Affluent Society': A Culturalist Reformulation". *Current Anthropology*, vol. 22, Issue 1, pp. 25-47.

### Supplementary readings:

- Bird-David, Nurit. 1990. "The Giving Environment". *Current Anthropology*, vol. 31, issue 2, pp. 189-196.
- Woodburn, James. 1982. *Egalitarian Societies*. *Man* vol. 17, issue 3, pp. 431-451.
- Graeber, David. 2001. "Ch. 6: Marcel Mauss Revisited". *In Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*. Pp. 151-228.
- Kaplan, David. 2000. "The Darker Side of the 'Original Affluent Society'". *Journal of Anthropological Research*. Vol. 56, issue 3, pp. 301-324.
- Lee, Richard B. 1979. *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969 [1949]. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1972. "Ch. 4: The Spirit of the Gift". *In Stone Age Economics*. Pp. 149-184.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1972. "Ch. 5: On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange". *In Stone Age Economics*. Pp. 185-276.

### Week 3: Debt and credit

Anthropology's interest in debt and credit goes back to the very beginnings of the discipline. Why have debt and credit been such powerful mechanisms across the world? How do they relate to notions such as guilt, sin and redemption? And what can we learn from the escalating concerns about 'national debt'?

### Required readings:

- Graeber, David. 2014. "On the Experience of Moral Confusion". *In Debt - Updated and expanded: the first 5,000 years*. Pp. 1-20.
- Williams, Brett. 2011. "Seducing Students" *In Debt for Sale: A Social History of the Credit Trap*. Pp. 61-91.

### Supplementary readings:

- Firth, Raymond. 2013 [1964]. "Capital, Savings and Credit in Peasant Societies: A viewpoint from economic anthropology." *In Capital, savings and credit in peasant societies: Studies from Asia, Oceania, The Caribbean and Middle America*. Pp. 15-34.
- Gregory, Chris A. 2012. "On Money Debt and Morality: Some reflections on the contribution of economic anthropology." *Social Anthropology* vol. 20, issue 4, pp. 380-396.

- Hickel, Jason. 2016. "To Deal with Climate Change We Need a New Financial System". The Guardian 5 November.
- James, Deborah. 2014. "'Deeper into a Hole?' Borrowing and Lending in South Africa." *Current Anthropology* vol. 55, issue S9, pp. S17-S29.
- Maurer, Bill. 2013. "David Graeber's Wunderkammer, Debt: The First 5 000 Years." *Anthropological Forum*. vol. 23, issue 1, pp. 79-93.
- Peebles, Gustav. 2010. "The anthropology of credit and debt." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 39, pp. 225-240.
- Stout, Noelle. 2016. "# Indebted: Disciplining the Moral Valence of Mortgage Debt Online." *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 31, issue 1, pp. 82-106.

#### **Week 4: Money and spheres of exchange**

Studies of money have not only been central to economic anthropology, but also offered important insights to anthropology more generally. What can we learn from the cross-cultural study of money objects? What are its challenges? And how can we try to overcome such challenges?

#### **Required readings:**

- Bohannan, Paul. 1959. "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy". *The Journal of Economic History* vol. 19, issue 4, pp. 491-503.
- Bloch, Maurice and Jonathan Parry. 1989. "Introduction: Money and the Morality of Exchange". *In* J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds.) *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Pp. 1-32.

#### **Supplementary readings:**

- Godelier, Maurice. 1972. "Ch. 5: 'Salt Money' and the Circulation of Commodities among the Baruya of New Guinea". *In* *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*. Pp. 127-151.
- Guyer, Jane. 2004. *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*.
- Sallnow, Michael. 1989. "Precious metals in the Andean moral economy". *In* J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds.) *Money and the morality of exchange*. Pp. 209-231.
- Shipton, Parker. 1989. *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden Commodities*.
- Werthmann, Katja. 2003. "Cowries, Gold and 'Bitter Money': Gold-mining and notions of ill-gotten wealth in Burkina Faso". *Paideuma*, vol. 49, pp. 105-124
- Zelizer, Viviana. 1997. *The social meaning of money*.
- Znoj, Heinzpeter. 1998. *Hot Money and War Debts: Transactional Regimes in Southwest Sumatra*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, issue 2, pp. 193-222.

## **Week 5: The social life of things**

Value is embodied in exchanged objects. If we focus on the objects rather than the transactional mode, what can we learn about exchange, commodification and value? Why do we give and receive objects? And how to reciprocate?

### **Required readings:**

- Kopytoff, Igor. 1988. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process". In A. Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*. Pp. 64-94.
- Weiner, Annette. 1985. "Inalienable Wealth". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 210-227.

### **Supplementary readings:**

- Appadurai, Arjun. 1988. "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value". In A. Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*. Pp. 3-63.
- Barber, Suzanne and Matt Hale. 2013. "Ch.9: Enacting the Never-Was: Upcycling the Past, Present, and Future in Steampunk". In J.A. Taddeo and C.J. Miller (eds.) *Steaming into a Victorian Future: A Steampunk Anthology*. Pp. 165-184.
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen. 1992. "Ch. 3: Yesterday's Luxuries, Tomorrow's Necessities: Business and Barter in Northwest Amazonia". In C. Humphrey and S. Hugh-Jones (eds.) *Barter, Exchange and Value: An Anthropological Approach*. Pp. 42-74.
- Miller, Daniel (ed). 2005. *Acknowledging Consumption*.
- Myers, Fred (ed.). 2001. *The Empire of Things: Regimes of value and material culture*.
- Reno, Joshua. 2009. "Your Trash Is Someone's Treasure: The Politics of Value at a Michigan Landfill". *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 14, issue 1, pp. 29-46.
- Weiner, Annette. 1992. *Inalienable Possessions: The paradox of keeping-while-giving*.

## **Week 6: Currencies**

Although national banks often play a central role in managing and authorizing currencies, they are rarely the sole contributors of value. How do currencies become valuable? What is value? And what are currencies?

### **Required readings:**

- High, Mette. 2013. "Polluted Money, Polluted Wealth: Emerging Regimes of Value in the Mongolian Gold Rush". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 40, issue 4, pp. 676-688.

- Swartz, Lana. 2017. "Blockchain Dreams: Imagining Techno-Economic Alternatives After Bitcoin". *In Another Economy Is Possible: Culture and Economy in a Time of Crisis*. Ed. Manuel Castells. Pp. 82-105.

#### Supplementary readings:

- Gamburd, Michele. 2004. "Money That Burns Like Oil: A Sri Lankan cultural logic of morality and agency". *Ethnology*, vol. 43, issue 2, pp.167-184.
- Hart, Keith. 1986. "Heads or Tails? Two Sides of the Same Coin". *Man*, vol. 21, issue 4, pp. 637-656.
- Hermann, Gretchen. 2006. "Special Money: Ithaca Hours and Garage Sales". *Ethnology*, vol. 45, issue 2, pp. 125-141.
- Keane, Webb. 2010. "Ch. 17: Money is No Object: Materiality, Desire, and Modernity in an Indonesian Society". *In Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: The New Pragmatism*. Pp. 347-361.
- MacKenzie, Donald. 2008. "Ch. 5: The Material Sociology of Arbitrage". *In Material Markets: How economic agents are constructed*. Pp. 85-108.
- Maurer, Bill, Taylor C. Nelms, and Lana Swartz. 2013. "'When Perhaps the Real Problem is Money Itself!': The practical materiality of Bitcoin". *Social Semiotics* vol. 23, issue 2, pp. 261-277.
- Strassler, Karen. 2009. "The Face of Money: Currency, Crisis, and Remediation in Post-Suharto Indonesia". *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 24, issue 1, pp. 68-103.

#### Week 7: Anthropology of finance

Anthropologists have in recent years brought attention to the cultural underpinnings of financial systems. To what extent is the *Homo Economicus* assumed by Western orthodox financial theory and regulation illusory? What are the visions of corporate capitalism? And how are risks and uncertainties experienced, communicated and managed?

#### Required readings:

- Ho, Karen. 2009. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Ch. 6. Pp. 249-294.
- Zaloom, Caitlin. 2006. *Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London*. Ch. 2. Pp. 51-72.

#### Supplementary readings:

- Appel, Hannah. 2014. "Occupy Wall Street and the Economic Imagination". *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 29, issue 4, pp. 602-625.
- Hart, Keith and Horacio Ortiz. 2008. "Anthropology in the Financial Crisis". *Anthropology Today* vol. 24, issue 6, pp. 1-3.
- Holmes, Douglas. 2009. "Economy of Words". *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 24, issue 3, pp. 381-419.

- Maurer, Bill and Sylvia Martin. 2012. "Accidents of Equity and the Aesthetics of Chinese Offshore Incorporation". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 39, issue 3, pp. 527-544.
- Orta, Andrew. 2013. "Managing the Margins: MBA training, international business, and 'the value chain of culture'". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 40, issue 4, pp. 689-703.
- Ortiz, Horacio. 2013. "Financial Value: Economic, moral, political, global". *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* vol. 3, issue 1, pp. 64-79.
- Ouroussoff, Alexandra. 2011. *Wall Street at War: The Secret Struggle for the Global Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

### **Week 8: Global markets**

The production and accumulation of capital is a profoundly geographical and spatial affair. How are these global markets rationalized and justified by financial and other directly-involved professionals? And to what extent can global markets be seen as collective experiments?

#### **Required readings:**

- Applbaum, Kalman. 2000. "Crossing Borders: Globalization as Myth and Charter in American Transnational Consumer Marketing". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 27, issue 2, pp. 257-282.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2007. "Between Arbitrage and Speculation: An economy of belief and doubt". *Economy and Society* vol. 36, issue 3 pp. 396-415.

#### **Supplementary readings:**

- Appel, Hannah. 2012. "Offshore Work: Oil, modularity, and the how of capitalism in Equatorial Guinea". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 39, issue 4, pp. 692-709.
- Callon, Michel. 2009. "Civilizing Markets: Carbon trading between *in vitro* and *in vivo* experiments". *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, vol. 34, issue 3, pp. 535-548.
- Dilley, Roy. 1992. *Contesting Markets*.
- Mazarella, William. 2003. *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and globalization in contemporary India*.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2013. *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of capitalism at the end of finance*.
- Riles, Annelise. 2010. "Collateral Expertise: Legal knowledge in the global financial markets". *Current Anthropology*, vol. 51, issue 6, pp. 795-818.
- Walsh, Andrew. 2010. "The Commodification of Fetishes: Telling the difference between natural and synthetic sapphires". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 37, issue 1, pp. 98-114.

## Week 9: Cosmoeconomies

Religious practice and economic life are often closely intertwined and in ways that are not necessarily oppositional. How does the presence and participation of spirit beings affect our economic practices? How can we approach such economies? And what does it tell us about human economic agency?

### Required readings:

- Haynes, Naomi. 2012. "Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money: Prosperity, inequality, and religious sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* vol. 18, issue 1, pp. 123-139.
- Rudnyckij, Daromir. 2011. "Ch. 3: Spiritual Economies". *In Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development*. Pp. 131-156.

### Supplementary readings:

- Chu, Julie. 2010. *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. Esp. Chs. 5, 6 and Conclusion.
- Comaroff, Jean and John L. Comaroff. 1999. "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, issue 2, pp. 279-303.
- Gudeman, Stephen. 2012. *Vital Energy: The Current of Relations*. *Social Analysis*, vol. 56, issue 1, pp. 57-73.
- High, Mette. 2013. "Believing in Spirits, Doubting the Cosmos: Religious Reflexivity in the Mongolian Gold Mines". *In M. Pelkmans (ed.) Ethnographies of Doubt: Faith and Uncertainty in Contemporary Societies*. Pp. 59-84.
- Moore, Henrietta and Todd Sanders (eds.). 2001. *Magical Interpretations and Material Realities: Modernity, witchcraft and the occult in postcolonial Africa*.
- Moore, Sally Falk. 1999. "Reflections on the Comaroff Lecture". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, issue 2, pp. 304-306.
- Scott, Rachelle. 2009. *Nirvana for Sale? Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakaya Temple in Contemporary Thailand*.

## Week 10: Posthuman economies

Posthumanism demands that we recognize the existence of a plurality of worlds and beings. What constitutes 'economic life' if we allow for such a decentering of 'the human' and open up for such a radical questioning of self and other, essence, consciousness, intelligence, reason, agency, intimacy, life and, not least, society?

### Required readings:

- Boellstorff, Tom. 2008. "Ch. 8: Political Economy". *In Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Pp. 205-236.



- De la Cadena, Marisol. 2010. Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual reflections beyond “politics”. *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 25, issue 2, pp.334-370.

### Supplementary readings:

- Candea, Matei. 2010. ““I fell in love with Carlos the meerkat”: Engagement and detachment in human–animal relations”. *American Ethnologist*, vol. 37, issue 2, pp. 241-258.
- De la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of practice across Andean worlds*.
- Kirksey, S. Eben and Stefan Helmreich. 2010. “The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography”. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, issue 4, pp. 545-576.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2007. “How Dogs Dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of transspecies engagement”. *American Ethnologist*, vol. 34, issue 1, pp. 3-24.
- Kosek, Jake. 2010. “Ecologies of Empire: On the new uses of the honeybee”. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 25, issue 4, pp. 650-678.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. “Introduction: How to Resume the Task of Tracing Associations”. *In Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Pp. 1-20.
- Svendsen, Mette and Lene Koch. 2013. “Potentializing the Research Piglet in Experimental Neonatal Research”. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 54, Issue S7, pp. 118-128.

### Week 11: Economies of/in the Anthropocene

Atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen has proposed that the influence of human behaviour on the Earth’s atmosphere is now so significant that we have now entered a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene. What are the implications of the Anthropocene’s associated timescale and ecology for questions of economic life? To what extent is human presence a disturbance? And what kinds of economic practices may flourish under conditions when humans have become a ‘force of nature’?

### Required readings:

- Howe, Cymene and Dominic Boyer. 2016. *Aeolian Extractivism and Community Wind in Southern Mexico*. *Public Culture* vol. 28 issue 2(79), pp.215-235.
- Tsing, Anna. 2012. “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species”. *Environmental Humanities* vol. 1, pp. 141-154.

### Supplementary readings:

- Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. 2007. “The Anthropocene: Are humans now overwhelming the great forces of nature”. *Ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment*, vol. 36, issue 8, pp. 614-621.

- Fortwangler, Crystal. 2013. "Untangling Introduced and Invasive Animals". *Environment and Society: Advances in Research*, vol. 4, issue 1, pp. 41-59.
- Graham, J. K. and Gerda Roelvink. 2010. "An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene". *Antipode*, vol. 41, issue s1, pp. 320-346.
- Haraway, Donna. 2015. *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making kin*. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, issue 1, pp.159-165.
- Latour, Bruno. 2014. "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene". *New Literary History*, vol. 45, issue 1, pp. 1-18.
- Lorimer, Jamie. 2012. "Multinatural Geographies for the Anthropocene". *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 36, issue 5, pp. 593-612.
- Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*.