SAN2: Economic Anthropology
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Textbooks


Lecture 1: The economy and economic thought
This first, introductory, lecture discusses the concept of economy, and provides a brief introduction to how it has been used by political economists, economists and anthropologists.


Lectures 2 and 3. Circulation, embeddedness and homo economicus
Economic anthropologists have been particularly interested in how we exchange things. One classic type of exchange for anthropology has been gift exchange, which you will no doubt be familiar with now. This lecture will look a little more closely at this, and other forms of exchange including market and barter exchange. We will look at how the social in both things and relations have been emphasised in anthropology and sociology.


Parry, J., 1986. The Gift, the Indian Gift and the “Indian Gift.” *Man*, 21(3), pp.453–473. (this is a useful article to help anchor yourself in the 'gift' literature)


Lecture 4. Labour and production
This lecture examines how anthropologists have studied the role of labour, both material and immaterial, in production. In particularly, it will examine what is distinctive about the political economy approach and the importance it places on labour.


Lecture 5. Feminism and economic life
This lecture examines how feminist anthropology has engaged with economic issues, challenging and pushing forward economic anthropology in the process, for example by questioning the very distinction between a public economic sphere, and a private non-economic or domestic one.


Lecture 6. Money and markets
Keith Hart has stated that anthropologists don't like money, and Bill Maurer has argued that they see it like an acid which dissolves social relations. This lecture explores the way that anthropologists have understood and written about money. A distinction was made in anthropology a long time ago between general-purpose and special-purpose money. But in more recent decades, anthropologists have not been content with this distinction and the assumption that we know what money is and what it does.


Lecture 7: Debt and crisis
Anthropologists have been drawn to understanding what debt is, and how it works, not only because of the way it transforms lives, but also because it speaks to topics that anthropologists are familiar with, such as the nature of obligations. But there is also a sense amongst many people that we are in a debt and financial crisis. This lecture explores how anthropologists have sought to understand these issues.


Lecture 8: Anthropology of finance and the performativity of economics
In this final lecture we consider an influential approach in economic sociology called the performativity of economics. This literature investigates the work that goes into making what we call market economies. These sociologists argue that the discipline of economics does not discover universal laws of the market, but rather it creates them. This involves not just social relations, as we have already discussed, but certain materialities as well. This lecture will explore this approach, and consider the challenges it has provoked, particularly from anthropologists.


The following readings are also a useful debate to get stuck into:


Suggested supervision questions

- What does it mean for anthropologists to take a political economy approach?
- Assess the arguments for calculation as a universal human trait.
- How useful is the concept of embeddedness for anthropologists?
- In what ways has feminist anthropology contributed to the study of economic life?
- What does it mean to study the pragmatics of money?
- The performativity of economics theory fails to acknowledge the role of failure. Discuss.
- To what extent can the classics in anthropology help us understand new forms of debt?