

Course Title: Introduction in Economic Anthropology

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I. Course Description and Objectives

The present course aims to introduce students to the concepts, perspectives and methods of Economic Anthropology. Our goal is to place the study of economic aspects in larger cultural contexts by exploring the relation of power, kinship, religion and social transformations. We begin with an overview of the history of trends in Economic Anthropology. Then we examine basic concepts and theories in the field, related with the processes of production, exchange and distribution, and consumption. Finally we address the theme of property relations. Several ethnographic case studies regarding the social-economic transformations in post-socialist Romania are introduced during the course in order to assess the relevance of theoretical issues. Besides the theoretical training, the students will have the opportunity to develop their own research projects related to the explored topics.

To summarize, the objectives of the course are:

1. to critically evaluate the strengths and limits of the main concepts and theories developed in the field of Economic Anthropology;
2. to test the applicability of these theoretical issues in the study of contemporary social-economic realities and transformations;
3. to acquire necessary research skills in this field.

II. Course Requirements:

Students are expected to read the required texts and case studies, and to actively participate in class discussions and workshops. Each student has to make an oral presentation of one of the assigned texts. During this presentation he or she must stress the main points of the text and offer a personal critique of it.

Beside this, each course participant is expected to develop an individual field research project relevant for the thematic of the course. The exact research topic will be discussed in advance. During the whole period of the course I will be available for consultations. The research paper will be presented during the last class. The written version of this research paper is due one week later in order to give time for students to integrate the commentaries received from colleagues during the presentation seminar. Each research paper will be assessed according to the following criteria:

1. Internal organization of the text (clarity of thesis statement and supporting ideas, argumentative structure);
2. The ability to connect empirical findings with the theoretical issues;
3. The integration of the research in the larger cultural and political contexts.

III. Grading

Attendance, participation and one oral presentation 50%

Research paper 50 %

IV. Methods Used

1. Lectures.

Lecturing will take place at the beginning of classes and will provide the main points and a broader context for the later discussion.

2. Class discussion and group debates.

These will facilitate the comparison and critical assessment of the concepts and theoretical issues introduced through the lecture and assigned readings.

3. Two workshops.

The first workshop will be focussed on designing research projects, and on the methods of gathering, analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data. In the second workshop, the research papers will be presented and defended.

V. Course Content

I. Introduction.

What is Economic Anthropology? This field broadens the notion of what economic is. It focuses on the economic and non-economic motivations behind the economic acts. Economics involves human relationships and cultural ideas.

Required Readings: Plattner, S. "Introduction" in Plattner, S. (ed.) *Economic Anthropology* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Supplementary Readings: Salisbury, Richard F. *Economic Anthropology*, Volume 2 (1973)

II. The History of Economic Anthropology.

1. *The "Formalist" Approach.*

This earlier approach is rooted in neoclassical economic theory. In this perspective, the social actor is the individual motivated exclusively by economic reasons. Formalists also tried to apply neoclassical principles in non-monetary societies.

Required Readings: Dalton, George. "Theoretical Issues in Economic Anthropology" in *Current Anthropology*, 10, 1, 1969

Supplementary Readings: Gudeman, Stephen "Economic Anthropology" in Barnard, Alan (ed), *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London : Routledge, 1996.

2. “Substantivism” in *Economic Anthropology*.

This approach arose in reaction to formalism. For substantivists there is a social motivation for economic behavior. More than this, the human economy is always “embedded” in non-economic relationships and institutions.

Required Readings: Polanyi, Karl. “The Economy as Instituted Process”. E. E. LeClair jr. and Schneider, H.K. (eds.) *Economic Anthropology*, New York, London: Rinehard and Winston, 1968.

Supplementary Readings: Durrenberger E.P. “Economic Anthropology” in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, Davinson. D and Ember, M (eds.) New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

III. Concepts and Issues in Economic Anthropology.

A. Work and Production.

1. *The Rationality of Work*

This lecture deals with Max Weber’s perspective on work. Beginning with the spread of capitalism, work becomes an aim in itself. The main features of capitalist work are rational organization and the continuous reinvestment of profit, set in contrast with the “irrationality” of traditional peasant’s work.

The case study is based on field research in the Romanian Pucheni village (Dambovita County) and investigates the different types of rationality existent at villagers. An interesting case is that of the householder-entrepreneur who combines profit logic with apparent irrational economic actions necessary for remaining integrate in the local community.

Required Reading: Weber, Max. “Introduction” in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism* London and New York, Routledge, 1992

Case Study: Pucheni Village – Soflau, V. and Botea Bianca. “Between Customary Economy and Entrepreneurship” (Satul Pucheni – Intre Rostuire si Antreprenoriat) in *Caiete de Teren*, Bucuresti, vol. V, 1999.

2. *The Professional Culture in Industrial Societies.*

This lecture introduces the issue of professional culture, and the factors that contribute to and differentiate professional culture. Such factors are the nature of work, the relations with peers, language, gender or values associated with work.

The case study is based on ethnographical research in Jiu Valley, and deals with the professional culture of the miners in the region. Although there is a professional culture of solidarity between some groups of miners who realize the most difficult and dangerous work, culture that transgressed in their social life, this culture becomes increasingly fragmented, in the context of post-socialist massive dismissals, and of the increasing differentiation of individual strategies.

Required Readings: Applebaum, Herbert. “Economic Anthropology and the Anthropology of Work” in Applebaum, Herbert (ed.), *Perspectives in Cultural Anthropology*. State University of New York Press, 1987.

Case Study: Razvan Stan. “Professional Culture in the Jiu Valley – Searching for the Real Miner” in *The Unity of Mine and The Diversity of Miners*, Bucharest, Ed. Paideea, 2002.

B. Exchange and Distribution

1. *General Forms of Exchange and Economic Integration: Market, Redistribution and Reciprocity.*

This lecture explores the integrative economic patterns theorized for the first time by Karl Polanyi. Although market, redistribution and reciprocity can coexist, each of them is

facilitated by certain institutional models. Thus, reciprocity is based on symmetrical exchanges, redistribution depends on the existence of allotment centers, and market requires a price system.

Required Readings: Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation*. Boston, Beacon Press, 2001, p 43-56

Supplementary readings: Dalton, George. "Theoretical Issues in Economic Anthropology", *Current Anthropology*, 10, 1, 1969

2. Gift Exchange.

This lecture deals with the theory of gift exchange starting from Marcel Mauss's contribution. It addresses the forms of gift in archaic societies – kula and potlach, the rules and obligations of gift exchange and the concepts of "spirit of the gift" and "total social fact".

Required Readings: Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift*. London: Routledge, 1997. p 1-46

Sahlins, M.D. "The Spirit of The Gift" in *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago: Aldine, 1976,

Supplementary Readings: Gregory, C.A. *Gifts and Commodities*. London: Academic Press, 1982

3. Commodity exchange.

This lecture introduces the specificity of "commodities" and commodity exchange. Marcel Mauss distinguishes between the "commodity" as an exchange of alienable things between aliens, and the "gift" as the exchange of inalienable things between non-aliens. Arjun Appadurai enriches the conceptualization of commodity exchange. Whether in previous Western assumptions, thing's existing value makes it an object of exchange, Appadurai maintains that the "value in a commodity" is created by exchange, if not actual than an imaginary exchange. A thing can become and cease to become a "commodity" according to its interchangeability.

Required readings: Appadurai, Arjun “Introduction: Commodities and The Politics of Value” in Appadurai, A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986

Supplementary readings: Kopytoff, Igor “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commodization as Process” in Appadurai, A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986

4. *Money Exchange. The Symbolical Representation of Money*

Far from carrying only a material value, money has multiple meanings from one culture to another. In order to understand the symbolic value of money, it is important to understand the cultural matrix into which it is integrated, and not to impose alien meanings derived from other cultures. But the meaning of money also differ inside the same society from one period to another. In an interesting case study, Katherine Verdery explores the changing meanings and morality of money in the context of Caritas pyramidal scheme.

Required Readings: Bloch, M, and Parry, J. “Introduction: Money and The Morality of Exchange:” in *Money and The Morality of Exchange*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989

Case Study: Verdery Katherine “ ‘Caritas’: And the Reconceptualization of Money in Romania.” *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 11, 1, 1995

5. *Credit Exchange.*

This lecture addresses the specificity of informal credit in contrast with the formal one. One of the main differences is the nature of sanction for non-returning debts. In informal credit relations there are no legal means to constrain the debtor but there are moral sanctions that can lead to the exclusion of the debtor from the community.

The case study deals with the phenomenon of informal credit in post-socialist Romania and is based on field research in Tismana village (Gorj County). As a direct result of the local scarcity of money, the informal credit takes an unprecedented expansion. The credit

relations between the shop-keepers and the villagers are embedded in the local spheres of kinship, religion, morality, gender and politics.

Required Readings: Firth, Raymond. "Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies: A Viewpoint from Economic Anthropology". Firth, Raymond and B.S. Yamey *Capital, Saving and Credit in Peasant Societies*. Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, 1964

Case Study: Razvan Stan *Selling on Credit in Tismana – Between Business and Charity* (to be published)

Supplementary Readings: Burds Jeffrey. "The Social Control of Peasant Labor in Russia: The Response of Village Communities to Labor Migration in the Central Industrial Region, 1861-1905" Esther Hingston-Mann and Timothy Mihter (eds.) *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of Euopean Rusia 18000-1921*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1991

C. Consumption

1. Consumption and Identity

This lecture deals with the concept of consumption seen as a cultural activity that constitute identity. Studies show that commodities are accommodated in a variety of ways. For instance, in most cases, imported commodities do not break down local culture but rather are appropriated as a part of this culture.

Required readings: Miller, Daniel "Consumption and Commodities", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, p 141-161

Supplementary readings: Gell Alfred "Newcomers to the World of Goods: Consumption among the Muria Gonds" in Appadurai, A (ed.) *The Social Life of Things*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986

2. *Culture of Consumption*

This lecture explores the ways in which cultures of consumption are created in the light of convergence and divergences of markets, strategies of promotions, and tastes.

Required Readings: Miller, Daniel “toward a Theory of Consumption.” In *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1987.

Supplementary readings: Cambell, Colin: “The Puzzle of Modern Consumerism.” In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Consumerism*. Oxford: Basil Blackweel., 1987

D. Property.

1. *Property and De-collectivization*

This lecture explores the process of de-collectivization in Rural areas in the post-communist period. According to Hann and Verdery, new property rights were generated through the changing meaning of relations between individuals, family networks and local community on one side, and land, on the other side.

Required Readings: Hann, C “Introduction: The Embeddedness of Propriety” in Hann, C *Property Relations* New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998

Case Study: Verdery, Katherine “Property and Power in Transilvania’s Decollectivization. ” in Hann, C (ed.) *Property Relations* New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998

IV. Final Sessions:

1. *Workshop.*

This is a field preparation workshop. Students will have the occasion to clarify the last aspects regarding the design of their research projects. Beside this, the workshop will be focussed on the methods of gathering, analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data

2. *Workshop*

In this second workshop, the research papers will be presented and defended. Students will also have the opportunity to receive the comments of their colleagues.