

- Acts of exchange are not built upon individual rational interest, nor is it based on overarching moral law.
- Gift exchange must be understood as an entire social mechanism with great power, not individual acts.
- Exchange is something upon which entire social systems are dependent.
- It challenges the underlying assumption of homo economicus and Rational Choice Theory, with its assumption of rationally calculating individual actors. As Mauss put it in the Gift, it shows 'homo economicus is not before us, but after us'. Gift exchange may be symbolic of primary sociality.

Sahlins: Stone Age Economics (1974)

- Three types of reciprocity: generalised, balanced and negative.
- *Generalised* reciprocity refers to putatively altruistic transactions, the "true gift" marked by "weak reciprocity" due to the vagueness of the obligation to reciprocate. The material side of the transaction (the exchange of equally valuable goods) is repressed by the social side and the reckoning of debts is avoided. The time for the return gift is indefinite and not qualified in quantity or quality. A failure to reciprocate does not result in the giver ceasing to give.
- *Balanced or Symmetrical* reciprocity refers to direct exchange of customary equivalents without any delay, and hence includes some forms of 'gift-exchange,' as well as purchases with 'primitive money.' The exchange is less social, and is dominated by the material exchange and individual interests.
- *Negative* reciprocity is the attempt to get "something for nothing with impunity." It may be described as 'haggling,' 'barter,' or 'theft.' It is the most impersonal form of exchange, with interested parties seeking to maximize their gains.
- Kinship distance: the degree of social distance - kinship in particular - affects the kind of reciprocity.
- Type and quality of reciprocity refers to the specific quality of the relationship shared by the participants.
- Kinship distance is based on both consanguinity and geographical distance.

Pot (1999)

- Described his own confusion when attempting to integrate into Kabre lifestyle of exchange as "clumsy and inappropriate" - reflects the specific, culturally niche nature of exchange.
- Gift exchange is a "surrogate language": the power of exchange provides mastery over social relations and situations, through wielding the gift's social meaning.
- Acts of gift giving are never truly altruistic as there is always an expectation of return in some form, not necessarily through material means but equally through social means.
- True distinction between gifts and commodities lies in the unique exchange relation which is established by them.
- Poignantly described gift exchange's continuity as "a momentary episode in a continuous social relation". The true distinction between commodity exchange and gift exchange is captured here.

Malinowski on the Trobrianders (1922)

- Gift exchange initially difficult to distinguish from trade as the former is so integral to Trobriand life.
- Exchange enhances a sense of 'mine' and 'yours'.

Polanyi (1958)

LECTURE OUTLINE/READING LIST

Politics and Economic Life

Presents political organisation and processes and economic life in cross-cultural perspective.

Background Readings:

- Blom Hansen, T. & F. Stepputat (eds) (2001) *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*.
- Durham NC: Duke University Press. Hann, C. & K. Hart (2011) *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ho, K. (2009) *Liquidated. An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. (1940). *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mauss, M. (1990 [1950]) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. W. D. Halls. London: Routledge.
- Sharma, A. & A. Gupta (eds) (2006) *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Vincent, J. (ed.) (2002) *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory, and Critique*. Oxford: Blackwell.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- "With one, we started by buying each other beer in the markets. I bought him some beer one day and then, later, he bought me back. And so we went, back and forth... Later on, I wanted to borrow a field and noticed he had an extra field, so I asked if I could borrow it. Now we loan fields back and forth all the time." What is happening here, and what might it tell us about the nature of exchange. (supervisor-given)
- Does studying 'the gift' help us understand 'the market'? (2015)
- 'We can understand the economy much better if we start from a consideration of objects themselves, rather than abstract processes of production, exchange and consumption'. Discuss. (2014)
- What are the most important anthropological contributions to the study of one or more of the following:
 - Nationalism
 - Money
 - Markets
 - Bureaucracy
 - Gifts(2014)
- Discuss the ways in which at least two theoretical models of social and/or cultural life have influenced anthropological studies of at least one of the following: (a) state power; (b) gender; (c) exchange; (d) war and violence; (e) witchcraft; (f) corruption. (2013)
- What can the anthropology of gift exchange contribute to the understanding of contemporary life? (2013)
- What is special about gift exchange? (2012)
- Either (a): What does it mean to say that the economy is embedded in social relations? Answer with reference to gift and/or commodity economies.
Or (b): Is 'the market' universal? (2011)
- How does the concept of the 'biography' of an object aid analysis of economic life? (2010)
- What does the concept of the gift show us about the differences between societies? (2008)