

Chapter 9

Economic Anthropology

Economic anthropologists are interested in the variety of ways people make a living

The "Arts of Subsistence"

Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-81) was one of the first to present the unilineal view of subsistence

1. Savagery
2. Barbarism
3. Civilization

Anthropologist began to realize this was an over simplification of subsistence realities and that "civilization" is not the ultimate goal of a society. Groups throughout the 1800 and even 1900's used this idea to justify the drive to dominate other cultures and society. Think about colonialism

Subsistence Strategies

Franz Boas took a different approach to economic organization

His subsistence strategies are:

1. Hunting and gather (foraging)
2. Pastoralism
3. Extensive (horticulture, slash and burn, swidden)
4. Intensive agriculture (surpluses)

Explaining the Material Life of Processes of Society

There have been a variety of economic views in anthropology just like there has been in the field of Economics.

Melville Herskovits was the founder of formal economic anthropology (formalists)

The idea was to take ideas from the capitalist market economy and find the analogies in noncapitalist societies. A noncapitalist society might not have money like a capitalist society but it would have something similar like the use of shells.

One key part of neoclassical economics idea of scarcity

So since the world is made up of individuals competing for scarce resources the rational thing to do is look out for yourself thus maximizing your happiness

Critics of these ideas said that humans actually have obligations to other members of society

Thus they see the economy in a concrete way in which material goods and services are made available to members in a given society. These anthropologists are known as substantivists

Modes of Exchange

The main modes of exchange are:

1. Reciprocal (generalized, balanced, negative)

The closer the relational connection the greater the time allowed for counter flow.

It isn't as if a person does not care but that there is:

1. no need for immediate return
2. no systematic calculation of the value of the services and products exchanged
3. an overt denial that a balance is being calculated or that the balance must come out even

2. Redistributive (Potlach)

3. Price Market

Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Both formalist and substantivists agree that economic life can be divided into production, distribution and consumption

Mode of Production

Mode of production is the way in which the production of material goods is carried out
One question is which group or class of people is responsible for various productive activities
This brings in the question of division of labor and even the idea of the caste system

There is the modes of production between labor and management and also lineage mode of production which may be found in noncapitalist societies e.g. the younger people wanting to gain control of what the elders control

Peasants

Peasant mode of production is found in some Latin American countries. Peasants control certain things like simple tools, seed and basic equipment but landowners control the more valuable part, land

Formal economies are more structured than informal economies

Neoclassical anthropologists believed that societies would advance from "traditional" to capitalist "modernity"

Marxist anthropologist believed that a mix of modes of production would emerge (articulating modes of production)

The fall of communism in the late 1980's showed a greater direction toward the articulating model with it being called the global assemblage

Consumption

All humans have basic human needs and each society develops its own way of access these needs

Ecological anthropologists study ways in which human populations relate to other populations of other living organisms.

Cultural ecology shows a large range of food that people eat around the world

Culture does appear to play an important role in consumption patterns

1. Consumption is often related to membership in particular social group
2. Sometimes the things we consume have nothing to do with needs

Thorstein Veblen and conspicuous consumption

What people consume makes a statement about who they are, what they value and where their loyalties lie

Just because a culture uses American products that does not mean they will be Americanized

The Anthropology of food and nutrition

Cultures borrow a variety of things from each other and adapt it to their own needs

Coca-cola in Trinidad and McDonalds in China and Moscow