

anthropology

what does it mean to be human?

FOURTH EDITION

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Why do anthropologists study economic relations?

All human groups must organize themselves to make available to their members the material things they need for survival, such as food, shelter, and clothing. This chapter explores the variety of economic patterns human societies have developed over the millennia. It also draws attention to the way large-scale connections forged by trade or conquest continue to shape—and be reshaped by—the local economic practices of societies throughout the world.

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Human beings are material organisms, and the seemingly endless meaningful ways we can imagine to live must always come to terms with the material realities of day-to-day existence. Culture contributes to the way human beings organize their social lives to meet such challenges. **Social organization** can be defined as the patterning of human interdependence in a given society through the actions and decisions of its members. This chapter and the two that follow will explore the ways anthropologists have investigated differences in human social organization in three key domains: economic relations, political relations, and more intimate forms of human relatedness associated with kin and families. The variation these forms of human social organization display across space and over time is truly remarkable, but that does not mean that people are free to do or be whatever they like. Rather, the adaptive flexibility of long-lived, large-brained social animals such as ourselves develops over the life cycle in response to a range of sometimes unpredictable experiences. This kind of developmental response would be impossible if human behavior were rigidly programmed by genes, firmly circumscribed by environments, or strictly limited by technologies.

How Do Anthropologists Study Economic Relations?

Fifty years ago, I. M. Lewis (1967, 166ff.) pointed out that the northern Somalis and the Boran Galla lived next to each other in semiarid scrubland and even herded the same animals (goats, sheep, cattle, camels) (see EthnoProfiles 11.1: Somalis [Northern] and 11.2: Boran). Despite these similarities, the Somali and the Boran were quite different in social structure: The Boran engaged in much less fighting and feuding than the Somali; Boran families split up to take care of the animals, whereas the Somali did not; and lineage organization was less significant among the Boran. Economic and political anthropologists have attempted to explain why this should be.

social organization The patterning of human interdependence in a given society through the actions and decisions of its members.

economic anthropology The part of the discipline of anthropology that debates issues of human nature that relate directly to the decisions of daily life and making a living.

EthnoProfile 11.1

Somalis (Northern)

Region: Eastern Africa

Nation: Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya

Population: 600,000 (3,250,000 total; 2,250,000 in Somalia)

Environment: Harsh, semidesert

Livelihood: Herding of camels, sheep, goats, cattle, horses

Political organization: Traditionally, lineage-based, ad hoc egalitarian councils; today, part of modern nation-states

For more information:

Lewis, I. M. 1967. *A pastoral democracy: A study of pastoralism and politics among the northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



What Are the Connections between Culture and Livelihood?

Although our physical survival depends on our making adequate use of the resources around us, our culture tells us which resources to use and how to use them. Economic anthropologists study the many variations in human livelihood that anthropologists have found in different societies. Richard Wilk (1996) has defined **economic anthropology** as “the part of the discipline that debates issues of *human nature* that relate directly to the decisions of daily life and making a living” (xv).

In ordinary conversation, when we speak of making a living, we usually mean doing what is necessary to obtain the material things—food, clothing, shelter—that sustain human life. As Chris Hann and Kevin Hart remind us (2011), “Ultimately, economic anthropology addresses questions of human nature and well-being, questions that have preoccupied every society’s philosophers from the beginning” (x).

Self-Interest, Institutions, and Morals

Wilk and Cliggett (2007) argue that it is possible to identify three theoretical camps in economic anthropology, each of which depends on a different set of assumptions about human nature, and that the “real heat and argument in economic anthropology comes from underlying disagreements over these starting assumptions” (40).

EthnoProfile 11.2

Boran

Region: Eastern Africa

Nation: Kenya and Ethiopia

Population: 80,000 (1970s)

Environment: Adequate rangeland, scrub, and desert

Livelihood: Herding of cattle by preference, also sheep and goats

Political organization: Traditionally, a kinship-based organization with a set of six elders who have certain responsibilities for maintaining order; today, part of a modern nation-state

For more information:

Baxter, P. T. W., and Uri Almagor, eds. 1978. *Age, generation and time*. New York: St. Martin's Press.



The first model Wilk and Cliggett identify is the *self-interested model*: This model of human nature originated during the Enlightenment and is based on the assumption that individuals are first and foremost interested in their own well-being, that selfishness is natural. Economists since Adam Smith have argued that people's resources (for example, money) are not and never will be great enough for them to obtain all the goods they want. This view of economy also assumes that economic analysis should focus on *individuals* who must maximize *utility* (or satisfaction) under conditions of scarcity. An economizing individual sets priorities and allocates resources rationally according to those priorities. Economic anthropologists who accept the self-interest model of human behavior should therefore investigate the different priorities set by different societies and study how these priorities affect the maximizing decisions of individuals.

Other economic anthropologists, however, are committed to the social model of human nature. This means that they pay attention to "the way people form groups and exercise power" (Wilk and Cliggett 2007, 42). This view of human nature assumes that people ordinarily identify with the groups to which they belong and, in many cases, cannot even conceive of having a self with interests that diverge from the interest of the group. This view of human nature suggests that economics ought to focus on **institutions**—stable and enduring cultural

practices that organize social life—not on individuals. From an institutional point of view, a society's economy consists of the culturally specific processes its members use to provide themselves with material resources. Therefore, economic processes cannot be considered apart from the cultural institutions in which they are embedded (Halperin 1994).

Wilk and Cliggett's third model of human nature is the moral model. Economic anthropologists committed to a moral model of human nature assume that people's motivations "are shaped by culturally specific belief systems and values . . . guided by a culturally patterned view of the universe and the human place within it" (Wilk and Cliggett 2007, 43). People are socialized and enculturated into these values and practices over a lifetime, such that they will experience distress and conflict if tempted to make decisions—including economic decisions—that are contrary to their internalized morality. From the point of view of the moral model, "modern society is one that has lost the morality and ethics that guided behavior in traditional cultures, replacing them with amoral selfishness" (Wilk and Cliggett 2007, 44). Wilk and Cliggett are unwilling to take any one model as a fact and are more interested in paying close ethnographic attention to the particularities of real human beings in real sociocultural settings. "The problem is explaining why people are guided sometimes by one set of motivations and at other times by others. . . . By suspending our preconceptions about human nature, we can give more direct attention to this fundamental question, which forms the basis of each culture's practical ethics and its distinction between moral and immoral" (Wilk and Cliggett 2007, 46). This concern can also be seen in Hann and Hart's (2011) insistence that economic anthropologists focus on persons (rather than abstract calculating individuals), "whose preferences and choices are sometimes shaped by calculation, but usually also by the familial, social, and political contexts in which human beings are enmeshed or embedded" (9).

How Do Anthropologists Study Production, Distribution, and Consumption?

Anthropologists generally agree that economic activity is usefully subdivided into three distinct phases: production, distribution, and consumption. Production

institutions Complex, variable, and enduring forms of cultural practices that organize social life.



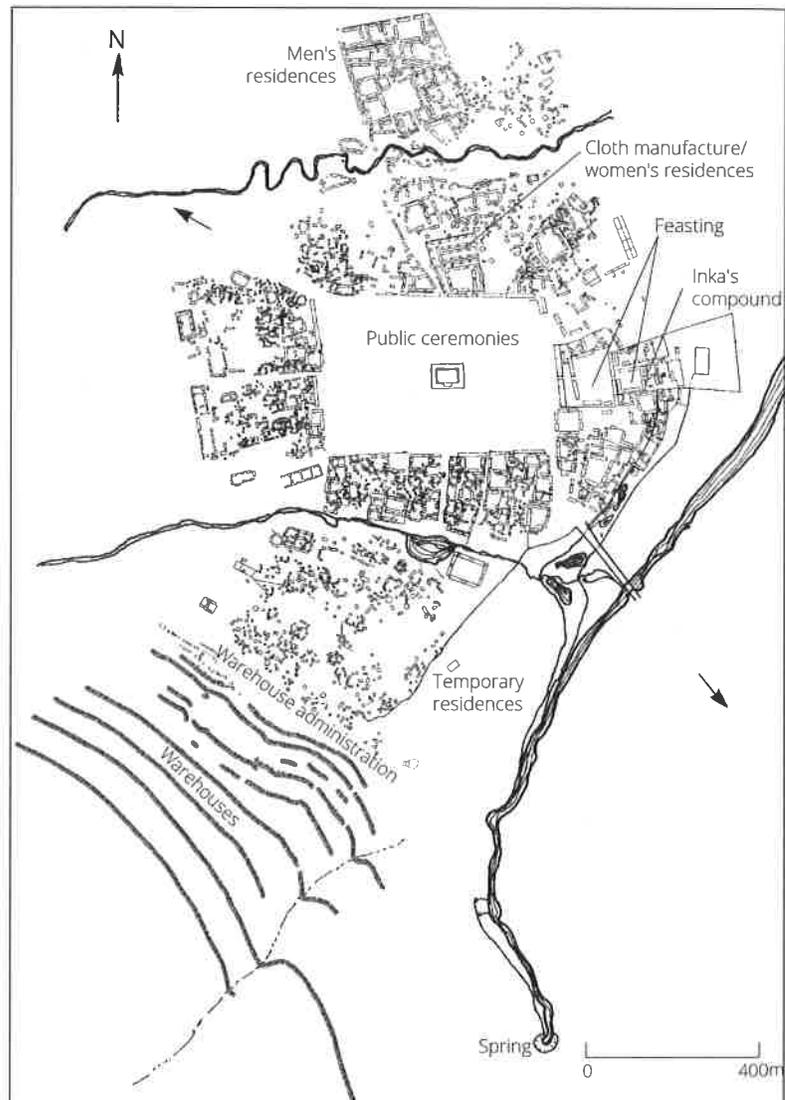
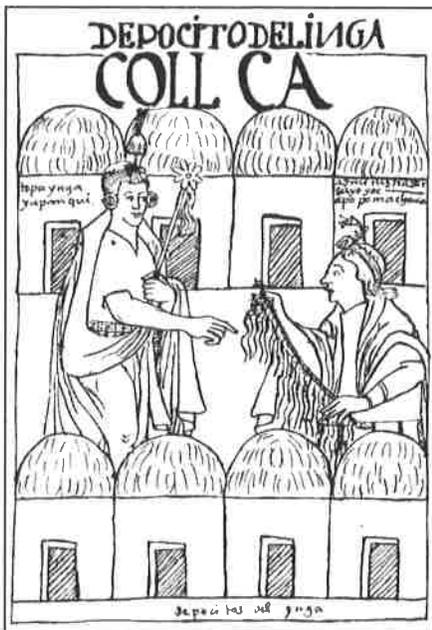
FIGURE 11.1 Locations of societies whose EthnoProfiles appear in Chapter 11.



involves transforming nature's raw materials into products useful to human beings. Distribution involves getting those products to people. Consumption involves using up the products—for example, by eating food or wearing clothing. When analyzing economic activity in a particular society, however, anthropologists differ in the importance they attach to each phase. For example, the distributive process known as *exchange* is central to the functioning of capitalist free enterprise. Some anthropologists have assumed that exchange is equally central to the functioning of all economies and have tried to explain the economic life of non-Western societies in terms of exchange. Anthropologists influenced by the work of Karl Marx, however, have argued that exchange cannot be understood properly without first

studying the nature of *production*. They point out that production shapes the context in which exchange can occur, determining which parties have how much of what kind of goods to exchange. Other anthropologists have suggested that neither production nor exchange patterns make any sense without first specifying the *consumption* priorities of the people who are producing and exchanging. Consumption priorities, they argue, are certainly designed to satisfy material needs. But the recognition of needs and of appropriate ways to satisfy them is shaped by historically contingent cultural patterns. Finally, as noted in Chapter 7, many would agree that patterns of production, exchange, and consumption are seriously affected by the kind of *storage* in use in a particular society (Figure 11.2).

FIGURE 11.2 A seventeenth-century drawing of storage warehouses built at the height of the Inka empire (*below*). At *right*, the plan of Huánuco Pampa shows the location of these storage warehouses. Some anthropologists argue that food storage practices buffer a population from ecological fluctuations, making possible considerable cultural manipulation of the economic relations of consumption.



How Are Goods Distributed and Exchanged?

Capitalism and Neoclassical Economics

The discipline of economics was born in the late 1700s, during the early years of the Industrial Revolution in western Europe. At that time, such thinkers as Adam Smith and his disciples struggled to devise theories to explain the profound changes in economic and social life that European societies had recently begun to experience.

Capitalism differed in many ways from the feudal economic system that had preceded it, but perhaps the most striking difference was how it handled distribution. Feudal economic relations allotted goods and services to different social groups and individuals on the basis of status, or position in society. Because lords had high status and many obligations, they had a right to more goods and services. Peasants, with low status and few rights, were allowed far less. This distribution of goods was time honored and not open to modification. The customs derived from capitalist economic relations, by contrast, were considered “free” precisely because they swept away all such traditional restrictions. As we shall see in our discussion of “Sedaka” Village, Malaysia, capitalism also swept away traditional protections (see EthnoProfile 12.2: “Sedaka” Village). In any case, distribution under capitalism was negotiated between buyers and sellers in the market.

Capitalist market exchange of goods for other goods, for labor, or (increasingly) for cash was an important development in Western economic history. It is not surprising, therefore, that Western economic theory was preoccupied with explaining how the capitalist market worked. Markets clearly had a new, decisive importance in capitalist society, which they had not possessed in feudal times. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the views of early economic thinkers like Adam Smith were transformed into **neoclassical economics**, which remains the foundation of formal economics today. As Hann and Hart (2011) explain, neoclassical economics “still celebrated the market as the main source of increased economic welfare; but it replaced the classical view of economic value as an objective property of produced commodities, to be struggled over by the different classes, with a focus on the subjective calculations of individuals seeking to maximize their own utility” (37). This was a key turning point in the history of economics that produced the divergent theoretical positions, identified by Wilk and Cliggett, about which economists and economic anthropologists continue to disagree today.

What Are Modes of Exchange?

Some anthropologists argued that taking self-interested, materialistic decision making in the capitalist market as the prototype of human rationality was ethnocentric. They pointed out that the capitalist market is a relatively recent cultural invention in human history. Western capitalist societies distribute material goods in a manner that is consistent with their basic values, institutions, and assumptions about human nature. So too non-Western, noncapitalist societies might be expected to have devised alternative modes of exchange that distribute material goods in ways that are in accord with their basic values, institutions, and assumptions about human nature. Anthropologists differed, however, in their attempts to characterize these differences. In the early twentieth century, for example, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss ([1950] 2000) contrasted noncapitalist **gift exchanges** (which are deeply embedded in social relations and always require a return gift) with impersonal **commodity exchanges** typical of the capitalist market (in which goods are exchanged for cash and exchange partners need have nothing further to do with one another). For other anthropologists, however, Mauss’s binary division seemed to exclude too much variation. For example, Marshall Sahlins (1972) drew on the work of economic historian Karl Polanyi (e.g., 1977) to propose that three **modes of exchange** could be identified historically and cross-culturally: reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange.

The most ancient mode of exchange was **reciprocity**. Reciprocity is characteristic of egalitarian societies, such as the Ju/’hoansi once were (see EthnoProfile 11.4: Ju/’hoansi). Sahlins identified three kinds of reciprocity. *Generalized reciprocity* is found when those who exchange do so without expecting an immediate return and without specifying the value of the return. Everyone assumes that the exchanges will eventually balance out. Generalized reciprocity is often said to characterize the exchanges that ideally occur between parents and their children. In the United States, for example, parents

neoclassical economics A formal attempt to explain the workings of capitalist enterprise, with particular attention to distribution.

gift exchanges Noncapitalist forms of economic exchange that are deeply embedded in social relations and always require a return gift.

commodity exchanges Impersonal economic exchanges typical of the capitalist market in which goods are exchanged for cash and exchange partners need have nothing further to do with one another.

modes of exchange Patterns according to which distribution takes place: reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange.

reciprocity The exchange of goods and services of equal value. Anthropologists distinguish three forms of reciprocity: *generalized*, in which neither the time nor the value of the return is specified; *balanced*, in which a return of equal value is expected within a specified time limit; and *negative*, in which parties to the exchange hope to get something for nothing.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“So Much Work, So Much Tragedy . . . and for What?”

Angelita P. C. (the author's surnames were initialed to preserve her anonymity) describes traditional labor for farmers' wives in Costa Rica during the 1930s. Her account was included in a volume of peasant autobiographies published in Costa Rica in 1979.

The life of farmers' wives was more difficult than the life of day laborers' wives; what I mean is that we work more. The wife of the day laborer, she gets clean beans with no rubbish, shelled corn, pounded rice, maybe she would have to roast the coffee and grind it. On the other hand, we farm wives had to take the corn out of the husk, shuck it; and if it was rice, generally we'd have to get it out of the sack and spread it out in the sun for someone to pound it in the mortar. Although we had the advantage that we never lacked the staples: tortillas, rice, beans, and sugar-water. When you had to make tortillas, and that was every day, there were mountains of tortillas, because the people who worked in the fields had to eat a lot to regain their strength with all the effort they put out. And the tortilla is the healthiest food that was eaten—still is eaten—in the countryside. Another thing we had to do often was when you'd get the corn together to sell it, you

always had to take it off the cob and dry it in the sun: the men spread it out on a tarp, maybe two or three sackfuls, and they would go and bring the corn, still in the husks, up from the cornfield or the shack where it was kept. Well, we women had to guard it from the chickens or the pigs that were always in the house, but the rush we had when it started to rain and the men hadn't gotten back! We had to fill the sacks with corn and then a little later haul it in pots to finish filling them; that's if the rain gave us time. If not, all of us women in the house would have to pick up the tarps—sometimes the neighbor-women would get involved in all the bustle—to carry the corn inside. We looked like ants carrying a big worm! The thing was to keep the corn from getting wet.

It didn't matter if you threw out your spine, or if your uterus dropped, or you started hemorrhaging, or aborted, but since none of that happened immediately, it was the last thing we thought of. So much work, so much tragedy and that was so common that it seemed like just a natural thing, and for what? To sell corn at about 20 colones or at most at 24 colones per fanega [about 3 bushels] of 24 baskets! What thankless times for farm people!

Source: *Autobiografías campesinas*. 1979, 36 (translation from the original Spanish by Robert H. Lavenda).

ordinarily do not keep a running tab on what it costs them to raise their children and then present their children with repayment schedules when they reach the age of 18. The expectation is that children will eventually reciprocate by meeting the needs of their aged parents as best they can, whatever those needs turn out to be. *Balanced reciprocity* is found when those who exchange expect a return of equal value within a specified time limit (e.g., when cousins exchange gifts of equal value with one another at Christmastime). Lee (1992, 103) notes that the Ju/'hoansi distinguish between barter, which requires an immediate return of an equivalent, and *hxaro*, which is a kind of generalized reciprocity that

encourages social obligations to be extended into the future. Finally, *negative reciprocity* is an exchange of goods and services in which at least one party attempts to get something for nothing without suffering any penalties. These attempts can range from haggling over prices to outright seizure, as with cattle rustling.

Redistribution, the second mode of exchange, requires some form of centralized social organization. Those who control the central position receive economic contributions from all members of the group. It is then their responsibility to redistribute the goods they receive in a way that provides for every member of the group. The Internal Revenue Service is probably the institution of redistribution that people in the United States know best. A classic anthropological example of redistribution is the *potlatch* of the indigenous peoples of the northwest coast of North America. In the highly stratified fishing and gathering society of the Nootka, for

redistribution A mode of exchange that requires some form of centralized social organization to receive economic contributions from all members of the group and to redistribute them in such a way as to provide for every group member.



FIGURE 11.3 Shirts for sale at the market in Guider, Cameroon. Markets can be found in many societies, but capitalism links markets to trade and money in a unique way.

EthnoProfile 11.3

Nootka

Region: North America

Nation: Canada (Vancouver Island)

Population: 6,000 (1970s)

Environment: Rainy, relatively warm coastal strip

Livelihood: Fishing, hunting, gathering

Political organization: Traditionally, ranked individuals, chiefs; today, part of a modern nation-state

For more information:

Rosman, Abraham, and Paula G. Rubel. 1971. *Feasting with mine enemy: Rank and exchange among northwest coast societies*. New York: Columbia University Press.



example, nobles sought to outdo one another in generosity by giving away vast quantities of objects during the potlatch ceremony (see EthnoProfile 11.3: Nootka). The noble giving the potlatch accumulated goods produced in one village and redistributed them to other nobles attending the ceremony. When the guests returned to their own villages, they in turn redistributed the goods among their followers.

Market exchange, invented in capitalist society, is the most recent mode of exchange, according to Polanyi (1977) (Figure 11.3). Polanyi was well aware that trade, money, and market institutions had developed independently of one another historically. He also knew that they could be found in societies outside the West. The uniqueness of capitalism was how all three institutions were linked to one another in the societies of early modern Europe.

According to Polanyi (1977), different modes of exchange often coexist within a single society, although he argued that only one functions as the society's overall mode of economic integration. The United States, for example, is integrated by the market mode of exchange, yet redistribution and reciprocity have not disappeared. Within the family, parents who obtain income from the market redistribute that income, or goods obtained with that income, to their children. Generalized reciprocity also characterizes much exchange within the family: as noted earlier, parents regularly provide their children with food and clothing without expecting any immediate return, and children regularly feel obligated to do what they can to meet the needs of their parents as they age.

The Maisin and Reciprocity

John Barker (2016) has studied the Maisin of Collingwood Bay, Papua New Guinea, for many years. Part of his research has looked at the way in which reciprocity

market exchange The exchange of goods (trade) calculated in terms of a multipurpose medium of exchange and standard of value (money) and carried out by means of a supply-demand-price mechanism (the market).

forms the social structure of the Maisin and how the cash economy and the reciprocity economy have affected each other.

Barker notes that Maisin society is based on reciprocity. A steady give and take of gifts, labor, and advice should characterize the relationship of close relatives. The Maisin do not keep track of what each person gives, gets, or is owed. Rather, people demonstrate their mutual trust and support by allowing things to balance out over time. This is what we have just referred to as *generalized* reciprocity. This kind of sharing is what the Maisin refer to as *marawa-waive*, which translates as "love, peace, or social amity," and is a Maisin central value (50). It represents the way family and close friends should treat each other. "Indeed, it is what makes family and close friends." It is at this level that the obligation to reciprocate is most strongly felt. Barker distinguishes three different types of relationship at this level: sisters and brothers and wives and husbands employ complementary reciprocity, with each making distinct contributions to the household. Their exchanges denote separate if not equal status. Parents and children, and older and younger siblings engage in asymmetrical reciprocity—the elder should take care of the child or younger sibling by providing general food and good advice, and the child or younger sibling should listen respectfully and obey the parents' or older siblings' wishes. Over the course of a lifetime, children should return the original gifts of food or support to bring the relationship into balance. Exchange among members of different households, clan mates, and friends is symmetrical, such that the exchange is more or less in balance. This marks their equivalence.

The circle of neighbors and relatives in which the steady give and take is found tends not to extend much beyond nearby households that usually belong to close relatives. While these circles overlap, forming what Barker calls a dense interwoven exchange network, they do not form a unitary system. Rather, the more distant people are in terms of relatedness and residence, the harder it is to create the easy give and take of the inner circle. Exchanges are far less frequent, more carefully organized, and are recognized as balanced. This is *balanced* reciprocity.

As one moves from trusted family and close friends to increasingly distant exchange partners, one reaches the edges of social relationships, marked by *negative* reciprocity. Negative reciprocity in the Maisin world occurs between parties that have little or no social connection and so have no moral obligation to each other. They are strangers or nearly so. They are also potential antagonists, targets for barter rather than exchange, and for stealing rather than giving.

As Barker puts it,

Reciprocity lies at the heart of the Maisin subsistence economy, but it should be clear by now that it is neither simple nor limited to the business of moving items between producers and consumers. Reciprocity provides the key means by which the Maisin create and sustain social relationships. The constant give-and-take of daily exchanges embodies an essential assumption that social relationships cannot be taken for granted. They must be created, affirmed, reproduced, and modified through giving and receiving. (54)

But there is more to the story. As well as growing their own food and building their own houses out of material from the forest, since the 1890s, the Maisin have simultaneously lived in a world of cash and commodities, a world with different rules and a different moral logic. Over the years, Barker tells us, villagers have become increasingly dependent on purchased commodities, ranging from clothing or fish hooks to soccer balls and cigarettes, travel to visit relatives in town, or school fees for their children (56–57). Although villagers complain about the problems money brings, no one wants to return to a time when people relied on local resources alone.

Opportunities for earning money locally are limited; the best and most reliable source of money now is remittances from relatives who are working elsewhere, either in Papua New Guinea or in another country. Villagers expect that their relatives who find work outside the village will "not forget" the people at home. "While life in the towns is expensive, most employed Maisin routinely put aside part of their salaries to assist their rural relatives in medical emergencies, bride wealth exchanges, funerals, and local business start-ups. They accommodate relatives visiting from the village and send them home with parcels of clothing and other goods" (58). They do this because they have been brought up in a world based on reciprocal exchange, and because their rural relatives regularly remind them of the debt owed to those who brought them up. They also do it in order to leave open the possibility of being able to retire in their native village. By helping their rural relatives, they are assisting the people who care for the land and protect their property rights. As of 2016, almost all adult Maisin have lived for a time—and in many cases, a long time—in their towns, either working or visiting employed relatives.

There appears to be a conflict between a "traditional" economic system built on reciprocal exchange and a "modern" one, based on money and commodities. The conflict can be seen as between an egalitarian system, in which there are no permanent ranked socioeconomic

classes based on unequal access to wealth and prestige. Money can disrupt the obligation to return a gift, in part because it can be hidden. "At a deeper level, money and markets imply a different type of morality, one focused on the individual who through hard work, good luck, or a combination of both succeeds on his or her own merits, with no help from others. Thus the introduction of money can be understood as the main engine of a series of transformations—for reciprocity between people to transactions mediated by abstract markets in which value is set; from self-reliance to dependence upon wages paid by employers; from a relatively egalitarian to an economically stratified society; from a moral emphasis upon one's kin and community to the celebration of the self-reliant individual" (60–61).

Although there are indications of a market-oriented change in Maisin society, Barker observed that at every stage, Maisin have used their assumptions about reciprocity and morality to shape their understanding and use of money. The requirement to reciprocate remains strong and public. Indeed, employed Maisin often complained privately to Barker about the pressure they receive from villagers to share their cash. Yet most people share what they have because it is the normal thing to do. Those who have more take pleasure and pride in demonstrating their generosity. The subsistence, reciprocity-based economy is actually being subsidized by the cash economy.

Barker concludes his discussion of the interacting economic systems by noting that in recent years, the Maisin have become more tolerant of the inequalities money creates. Some households are better off than others. Villagers have become accustomed to using money in the village. Even so, reciprocity remains central to both the Maisin economy and moral system. "There is no hunger in Maisin communities; the requirement to share, to support others, is too compelling. Maisin are keenly aware of the dangers money can bring or the threat it represents to their ancestral way of life. They need money; there is no turning back. Yet, at least for the time being, the Maisin appear to have been more or less successful in balancing the opposed logic of gift and commodity systems of value" (63–64).

Does Production Drive Economic Activities?

Some economic anthropologists have argued that production is the driving force behind economic activity, creating supplies of goods that must accommodate people's demand, thereby determining levels of consumption. Anthropologists who take this view borrow

their perspective, as well as many key concepts, from the works of Karl Marx. They argue that studying production explains important economic processes ignored by views that emphasize market exchange as the driving force of economic activity.

Labor

Labor is perhaps the most central Marxian concept these anthropologists have emphasized. **Labor** is the activity linking human social groups to the material world around them: human beings must actively struggle together to transform natural substances into forms they can use. Human labor is therefore always *social* labor. Marx emphasized the importance of human physical labor in the material world, especially in the production of food, clothing, shelter, and tools. But Marx also recognized the importance of mental or cognitive labor: human intelligence allows us to reflect on and organize productive activities in different ways.

Modes of Production

Marx attempted to classify the ways different human groups carry out production. Each way is called a **mode of production**. Anthropologist Eric Wolf (1982) defined a mode of production as "a specific, historically occurring set of social relations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge" (75). Tools, skills, organization, and knowledge constitute what Marx called the **means of production**. The social relations linking human beings who use a given means of production within a particular mode of production are called the **relations of production**. That is, different productive tasks (clearing the bush, planting, harvesting, and so on) are assigned to different social groups, which Marx called **classes**, all of which must work together for production to be successful. Wolf notes that

labor The activity linking human social groups to the material world around them; from the point of view of Karl Marx, labor is therefore always social labor.

mode of production A specific, historically occurring set of social relations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge.

means of production The tools, skills, organization, and knowledge used to extract energy from nature.

relations of production The social relations linking the people who use a given means of production within a particular mode of production.

classes Ranked groups within a hierarchically stratified society whose membership is defined primarily in terms of wealth, occupation, or other economic criteria.

Producing Sorghum and Millet in Honduras and the Sudan

Applied anthropologists carry out much work in international development, often in agricultural programs. The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) is the principal instrument of U.S. foreign development assistance. One direction taken by AID in the mid-1970s was to create multidisciplinary research programs to improve food crops in developing countries. An early research program dealt with sorghum and millet, important grains in some of the poorest countries in the world (Figure 11.4). This was the International Sorghum/Millet Research Project (INTSORMIL). Selected American universities investigated one of six areas: plant breeding, agronomy, plant pathology, plant physiology, food chemistry, and socioeconomic studies.

Anthropologists from the University of Kentucky, selected for the socioeconomic study, used ethnographic field research techniques to gain firsthand knowledge of the socioeconomic constraints on the production, distribution, and consumption of sorghum and millet among limited-resource agricultural producers in the western Sudan and in Honduras. They intended to make their findings available to INTSORMIL as well as to scientists and government officials in the host countries. They believed sharing such knowledge could lead to more effective research and development. This task also required ethnographic research and anthropological skill.

The principal investigators from the University of Kentucky were Edward Reeves, Billie DeWalt, and Katherine DeWalt. They took a holistic and comparative approach, called *Farming Systems Research* (FSR). This approach attempts to determine the techniques used by farmers with limited resources to cope with the social, economic, and ecological

conditions under which they live. FSR is holistic because it examines how the different crops and livestock are integrated and managed as a system. It also relates farm productivity to household consumption and off-farm sources of family income (Reeves et al. 1987, 74). This is very different from the traditional methods of agricultural research, which grow and test one crop at a time in an experiment station. The scientists at INTSORMIL are generally acknowledged among the best sorghum and millet researchers in the world, but their expertise comes from traditional agricultural research methods. They have spent little time working on the problems of limited-resource farmers in Third World countries.

The anthropologists saw their job as facilitating "a constant dialog between the farmer, who can tell what works best given the circumstances, and agricultural scientists, who produce potentially useful new solutions to old problems" (Reeves et al. 1987, 74-75). However, this was easier said than done in the sorghum/millet project. The perspectives of farmers and scientists were very different from one another. The anthropologists found themselves having to learn the languages and the conceptual systems of both the farmers and the scientists for the two groups to be able to communicate.

The anthropologists began research in June 1981 in western Sudan and in southern Honduras. They were in the field for 14 months of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, as well as survey interviewing of limited-resource farmers, merchants, and middlemen. They discovered that the most significant constraints the farmers faced were uncertain rainfall, low soil fertility, and inadequate labor and financial resources (Reeves et al. 1987, 80). Equally important

Marx speaks of at least eight different modes of production in his own writings, although he focused mainly on the capitalist mode.

Wolf finds the concept of mode of production useful and suggests that three modes of production have been particularly important in human history: (1) a *kin-ordered mode* (Figure 11.5), in which social labor is deployed on the basis of kinship relations (e.g., husbands/fathers clear the fields, the whole family plants, mothers/wives weed, children keep animals out of the field); (2) a *tributary mode*, "in which the primary producer, whether cultivator or herdsman, is allowed access to the means of production while tribute [a payment of goods or labor] is exacted from him by political or military means" (Wolf 1982, 79); and (3) the *capitalist mode*, which has three main features: the means of production

are private property owned by members of the capitalist class, workers must sell their labor power to the capitalists to survive, and surpluses of wealth are produced that capitalists may retain as profit or reinvest in production, to increase output and generate further surpluses and higher profits.

The kin-ordered mode of production is found among foragers and those farmers and herders whose political organization does not involve domination by one group. The tributary mode is found among farmers or herders living in a social system that is divided into classes of rulers and subjects. Subjects produce both for themselves and for their rulers, who take a certain proportion of their subjects' produce or labor as tribute. The capitalist mode, the most recent to develop, can be found in the industrial societies of North America and

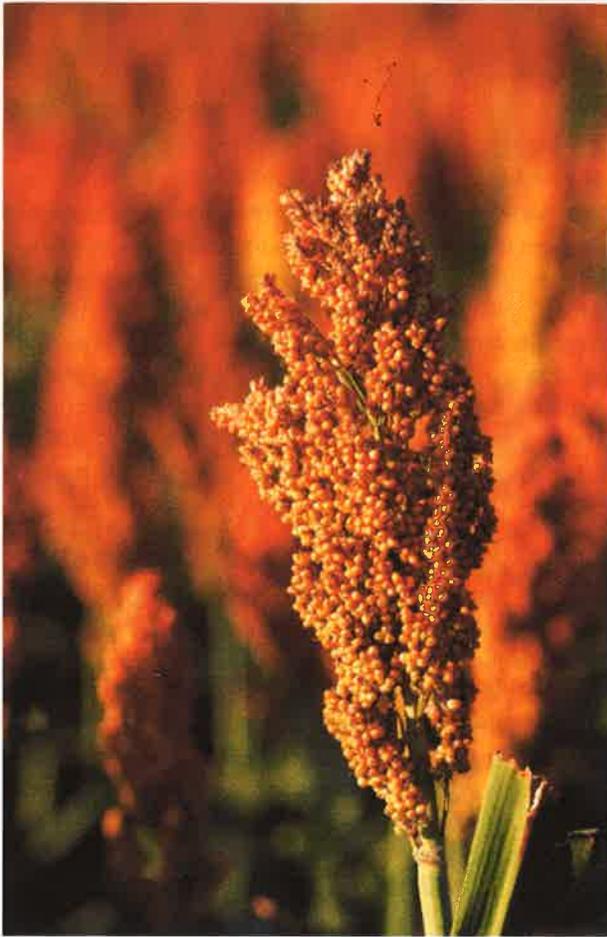


FIGURE 11.4 INTSORMIL has been involved in the improvement of the cultivation of sorghum and millet. This is sorghum.

were the social and cultural systems within which the farmers were embedded. Farmers based their farming decisions on their understanding of who they were and what farming meant in their own cultures.

As a result of the FSR group's research, it became increasingly clear that "real progress in addressing the needs of small farmers in the Third World called for promising innovations to be tested at village sites and on farmers' fields under conditions that closely approximated those which the farmers experience" (Reeves et al. 1987, 77). Convincing the scientists and bureaucrats of this required the anthropologists to become advocates for the limited-resource farmers. Bill DeWalt and Edward Reeves ended up negotiating INTSORMIL's contracts with the Honduran and Sudanese governments and succeeded in representing the farmers. They had to learn enough about the bureaucracies and the agricultural scientists so they could put the farmers' interests in terms the others could understand.

As a result of the applied anthropologists' work, INTSORMIL scientists learned to understand how small farmers in two countries made agricultural decisions. They also learned that not all limited-resource farmers are alike.

The INTSORMIL staff was so impressed that it began funding long-term research directed at relieving the constraints that limited-resource farmers face. Rather than trying to develop and then introduce hybrids, INTSORMIL research aimed to modify existing varieties of sorghum. The goal is better-yielding local varieties that can be grown together with other crops.

In summary, Reeves et al. point out that without the anthropological research, fewer development funds would have been allocated to research in Sudan and Honduras. More important, the nature of the development aid would have been different.



FIGURE 11.5 This drawing from 1562 shows Native American men breaking the soil and Native American women planting, a gender-based division of labor.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Solidarity Forever

Anthropologist Dorinne Kondo, who worked alongside Japanese women in a Tokyo sweets factory, describes how factory managers, almost despite their best efforts, managed to engender strong bonds among women workers.

Our shared exploitation sometimes provided the basis for commonality and sympathy. The paltry pay was often a subject of discussion. . . . My co-workers and I were especially aware, however, of the toll our jobs took on our bodies. We constantly complained of our sore feet, especially sore heels from standing on the concrete floors. And a company-sponsored trip to the seashore revealed even more occupational hazards. At one point, as we all sat down with our rice balls and our box lunches, the part-timers pulled up the legs of their trousers to compare their varicose veins. In our informal contest, Hamada-san and Iida-san tied for first prize. The demanding pace and the lack of assured work breaks formed another subject of discussion. At most of the factories in the neighborhood where I conducted extensive interviews, work stopped at ten in the morning and at three in the afternoon, so workers could have a cup of tea and perhaps some crackers. Nothing of the sort occurred at the Satō factory, although the artisans were, if the pace of work slackened, able to escape the workroom, sit on their haunches, and have a smoke, or grab a snack if they were out doing deliveries or running up and down the stairs to the other

divisions. Informal restrictions on the part-timers' movement and time seemed much greater. Rarely, if ever, was there an appropriate slack period where all of us could take a break. Yet our energy, predictably, slumped in the afternoon. After my first few months in wagashi, Hamada-san began to bring in small containers of fruit juice, so we could take turns having a five-minute break to drink the juice and eat some seconds from the factory. Informal, mutual support enabled us to keep up our energies, as we each began to bring in juice or snacks for our tea breaks.

The company itself did nothing formally in this regard, but informal gestures of thoughtfulness and friendliness among co-workers surely redounded to the company's benefit, for they fostered our sense of intimacy and obligation to our fellow workers. The tea breaks are one example, but so are the many times we part-timers would stop off at Iris, our favorite coffee house, to sip banana juice or melon juice and trade gossip. We talked about other people in the company, about family, about things to do in the neighborhood. On one memorable occasion, I was sitting with the Western division part-timers in a booth near the window. A car honked as it went by, and Sakada-san grimaced and shouted loudly, "Shitsurei yarō—rude bastard!" The offender turned out to be her husband. In subsequent weeks, Sakada-san would delight in recounting this tale again and again, pronouncing *shitsurei yarō* with ever greater relish, and somehow, we never failed to dissolve in helpless laughter.

Source: Kondo 1990, 291–92.

western Europe beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The concept of mode of production thus draws attention to many of the same features of economic life highlighted in traditional anthropological discussions of subsistence strategies. Yet, the concept emphasizes forms of social and political organization as well as material productive activities and shows how they are interconnected. That is, the kin-ordered mode of production is distinctive as much for its use of the kinship system to allocate labor to production as for the kind of production undertaken, such as farming. In a kin-ordered mode of production, the *relations of kinship* serve as the *relations of production* that enable a particular *mode of production* to be carried out. Farm labor

organized according to kin-ordered relations of production, where laborers are relatives to whom no cash payment is due, is very different from farm labor organized according to capitalist relations of production, where laborers are often nonrelatives who are paid a wage.

What Is the Role of Conflict in Material Life?

Anthropologists traditionally have emphasized the important links between a society's organization (kinship groups, chiefdom, state) and the way that society meets its subsistence needs, either to demonstrate the stages of cultural evolution or to display the functional

interrelationships between a society's parts. In both cases, however, the emphasis of the analysis has been on the harmonious fashion in which societies operate. For some observers, this carried the additional message that social harmony was "natural" and should not be tampered with. Social change was possible, but it would take place in an orderly fashion, in the fullness of time, according to laws of development beyond the control of individual members of society.

Many anthropologists, however, have not been persuaded that social organization is naturally harmonious or that social change is naturally orderly. They find the Marxian approach useful precisely because it treats conflict and disorder as a natural part of the human condition. The concept of mode of production makes a major contribution to economic anthropology precisely because it acknowledges that the potential for conflict is built into the mode of production itself. And the more complex and unequal is the involvement of different classes in a mode of production, the more intense is the struggle between them likely to be. The links between economic and political relations become particularly obvious and must be addressed (see Chapter 12).

Why Do People Consume What They Do?

Consumption usually refers to the using up of material goods necessary for human survival. These goods include—at a minimum—food, drink, clothing, and shelter; they can and often do include much more. Until quite recently, the study of consumption by economists and others has been much neglected, especially when compared to distribution or production. It seemed clear either that people consume goods for obvious reasons (i.e., because they need to eat and drink to survive) or that they consume goods as a result of idiosyncratic personal preferences (e.g., "I like the flavor of licorice and so I eat a lot of it, but my neighbor hates the flavor and would never put it into his mouth"). In either case, studying consumption seemed unlikely to reveal any interesting cultural patterns. As we will see below, however, anthropologists have always noticed striking differences in consumption patterns in different societies that seemed hard to reconcile with accepted economic explanations. Historically, anthropologists have taken three basic approaches to account for these patterns: (1) the internal explanation, (2) the external explanation, and (3) the cultural explanation.

The Internal Explanation: Malinowski and Basic Human Needs

The internal explanation for human consumption patterns comes from the work of Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski's version of functionalist anthropology explains social practices by relating them to the basic human needs that each practice supposedly fulfills. Basic human needs can be biological or psychological. Whatever their origin, if these needs go unmet, Malinowski argued, a society might not survive. Malinowski proposed a list of basic human needs, which includes nourishment, reproduction, bodily comforts, safety, movement, growth, and health. Every culture responds in its own way to these needs with some form of the corresponding institutions: food-getting techniques, kinship, shelter, protection, activities, training, and hygiene (Malinowski 1944, 91).

Malinowski's approach had the virtue of emphasizing the dependence of human beings on the physical world to survive. In addition, Malinowski was able to show that many customs that appear bizarre to uninitiated Western observers make sense once it is seen how they help people satisfy their basic human needs. However, Malinowski's approach fell short of explaining why all societies do not share the same consumption patterns. After all, some people eat wild fruit and nuts and wear clothing made of animal skins, others eat bread made from domesticated wheat and wear garments woven from the hair of domesticated sheep, and still others eat millet paste and meat from domesticated cattle and go naked. Why should these differences exist?

The External Explanation: Cultural Ecology

A later generation of anthropologists was influenced by evolutionary and ecological studies. They tried to answer this question with an external explanation for the diversity of human consumption patterns. As we saw in earlier chapters, ecology has to do with how living species relate to one another and the physical environment. To explain patterns of human consumption (as well as production and distribution), cultural ecologists have often turned to the resources available in the particular habitats exploited by particular human groups. Hence, the particular consumption patterns found in a particular society cannot depend just on the obvious, internal

consumption The using up of material goods necessary for human survival.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Questioning Collapse

*Since the late 1990s, geographer Jared Diamond has published two books that have enjoyed wide popular success, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997) and *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). At the same time, some anthropologists—including those who admire Diamond's achievements—are concerned by the selective way in which he makes use of anthropological data to support his arguments. These issues are explored in *Questioning Collapse* (2010), a recent volume of essays edited by Mesoamerican archaeologist Patricia A. McAnany and Near Eastern archaeologist Norman Yoffee.*

What's the Beef between Scholars and Popular Writers?

Among the issues we wanted to explore in our AAA [American Anthropological Association] symposium and in our subsequent seminar were the reasons for the incredible success of Jared Diamond's books. After all, Diamond is a professor of geography at UCLA, not an anthropologist, archaeologist, or historian. He obviously reads prolifically the obscure (to most laypersons and students) publications of historians, archaeologists, and sociocultural anthropologists and can present their research with verve and clarity and as important knowledge for a larger public. In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Diamond confronts racist views of the past that claim that Western superiority is due to the genes and genius of Westerners. In *Collapse* he warns of real and potential environmental destruction in the present by arguing that past societies and cultures collapsed because they damaged their environments. His successful writing style of distilling simple points from complex issues is a remarkable gift; it is no wonder that his books win prizes and are used in classrooms. . . .

In this book most of the chapters are critical of Diamond's stories. This is why the AAA session was organized in the first place. Whereas we are indebted to Diamond for drawing together so much material from our own fields of research and for emphasizing how important anthropological and historical knowledge is for the modern world, as scholars we want to get things right. We also want to write in such a way that the public can grasp not only the significance of research findings but also how we do research and why we think that some stories are right, whereas others are not as right or are incomplete and still others are dead wrong.

Thanks to Diamond's provoking inquiries and more generally those of the popular media, we focus this book on several questions: (1) Why do we portray ancient societies—especially those with indigenous descendants—as successes or failures, both in scholarship and in the popular media? We want to get the story of social change right, and descendants of the ancient societies we study demand it. (2) How do we characterize people who live today in the aftermath of empires? Today's world is the product of past worlds, and the consequences of the past cannot be ignored. (3) How are urgent climatic and environmental issues today similar to those faced by our ancestors? Can we learn from the past? . . .

The Question of Societal Collapse

Over two decades ago the sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt wrote that societal collapse seldom occurs if collapse is taken to mean "the complete end of those political systems and their accompanying civilizational framework." Indeed, studying collapse is like viewing a low-resolution digital photograph: it's fine when small, compact, and viewed at a distance but dissolves into disconnected parts when examined up close. More recently, Joseph Tainter, after a search for archaeological evidence of societal "overshoot" and collapse, arrived at a conclusion similar to Eisenstadt's: there wasn't any. When closely examined, the overriding human story is one of survival and regeneration. Certainly crises existed, political forms changed, and landscapes were altered, but rarely did societies collapse in an absolute and apocalyptic way. Even the examples of societal collapse often touted in the media—Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Norse Greenland, Puebloan U.S. Southwest, and the Maya Lowlands—are also cases of societal resilience when examined carefully, as authors do in the chapters in this book (see Figure 11.6). Popular writers' tendency to approach the past in terms of a series of societal failures and collapses—while understandable in terms of providing drama and mystery—falls apart in light of the information and fresh perspectives presented in this book.

Abandoned ruins—the words themselves evoke a romantic sense of failure and loss to which even archaeologists—most of whom are reared in the Western tradition—are not immune. But why is it that when we visit Stonehenge we don't feel a twinge of cultural loss, but simply a sense that things were very different 5,000 years ago? Is it because Stonehenge is somehow part of *our* civilization? On the other hand, the Great Houses of Chaco Canyon, the soaring pyramids of ancestral

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



FIGURE 11.6 One case study by Jared Diamond that has been criticized by anthropologists is that of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), where enormous human figures were carved between the years 1250 and 1500.

Maya cities, the fallen colossal heads of Rapa Nui tend to invoke a sense of mysterious loss and cultural failure, and a notion that something must have gone terribly wrong environmentally. For many of us these places and people are not part of the Western experience. Moreover, descendant communities—in all three cases—live marginalized on the edge of nation-states without the resources and connections to worldwide media that are needed to tell their own story, at least to an English-speaking audience. Might these abandoned places, in many cases, be just as accurately viewed as part of a successful strategy of survival, part of human resilience? . . . Abandonment also can be read as indicative of opportunity elsewhere and of the societal flexibility to seize that opportunity. . . .

Although it would be wonderful to feel that scholarly understanding of abandonment stood outside contemporary social concerns, it is pretty clear that today's worries about the future make their way into our explanations of the past. . . . Historians and archaeologists, who are not immune to seeing the past through modern lenses, try to test the relevance of their ideas by looking for multiple lines of evidence that point to the same conclusion.

In our chapters we hold interpretations of past environmental abuse up to critical scrutiny for two reasons. First, because the fit between ideas and evidence is never straightforward. Second (and for better or worse), humans have a long history of both interacting assertively with their environments and coalescing into fragile political groups that fission easily. Archaeologists such as Sander van der Leeuw have shown that landscape alteration has occurred in human societies since the end of the Pleistocene (Ice Age), 10,000 years ago. It is not difficult to find evidence of preindustrial landscape alteration . . . but

it is another matter altogether to link that evidence in a convincing and rigorous fashion to site abandonment or changes in political forms. The notion that the present recapitulates the past is not necessarily true. We ask how long human societies have possessed the technological ability to profoundly change and destroy their environment and bring down their societies.

In concluding comments to this book and elsewhere, J. R. McNeill amasses a formidable body of evidence suggesting that the human ability to impact environment on a global scale is newfound and cannot be pushed back beyond the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s. . . .

Choice and Geographic Determinism

In his book on societal collapse, Jared Diamond proposes that societies choose to succeed or fail. On the other hand, in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, there was no choice: today's inequalities among modern nation-states are argued to be the result of geographic determinism. In the first scenario, societies (or power brokers within societies) make the decisions that result in long-term success or failure. . . . At the root of this thesis is the modern neoliberal theory of self-interested motivation as well as the assumption of unconstrained and rational choice. . . . Many economists view the motivational assumptions of self-interest and rational choice as lacking explanatory power, even when applied to Western societies. When applied globally and into deep time, this theory has particular difficulties. . . .

If we are to understand global events today, we must perceive that the basis of intentionality and motivation can differ profoundly across the globe. . . . For those of us studying early states, archaeologists and historians alike, it isn't easy to discern intentions and their effects in the remote past. . . . Many current global inequalities indisputably are the product of historical colonialism and its enduring legacy. . . .

If one takes a long view, as archaeologists and historians are wont to do, then the situation in the year 2009 seems less the manifestation of a geographic destiny than it is a temporary state of affairs. Can anyone say that the present balance of economic and political power will be the same in 2500 as it is today? For example, in the year 1500 some of the most powerful and largest cities in the world existed in China, India, and Turkey. In the year 1000, many of the mightiest cities were located in Peru, Iraq, and Central Asia. In the year 500 they could be found in central Mexico, Italy, and China. In 2500 B.C.E., the most formidable rulers lived in Iraq, Egypt, and Pakistan. What geographic determinism can account for this? Is history a report card of success or failure?

Source: McAnany and Yoffee 2009, 4–10.

hunger drive, which is the same for all people everywhere; instead, people depend on the particular external resources present in the local habitat to which their members must adapt.

How Is Consumption Culturally Patterned?

Why do people X raise peanuts and sorghum? The internal, Malinowskian explanation would be to meet their basic human need for food. The external, cultural ecological explanation would be because peanuts and sorghum are the only food crops available in their habitat that, when cultivated, will meet their subsistence needs. Both these answers sound reasonable, but they are also incomplete. To be sure, people must consume something to survive, and they will usually meet this need by exploiting plant and animal species locally available. However, Malinowski and many cultural ecologists seem to assume that patterns of consumption are dictated by an iron environmental necessity that permits only narrow adaptive options. They further seem to assume that human beings are by and large powerless to modify what the environment offers (at least, it is sometimes implied, until the invention of modern technology).

But we have seen that human beings (along with many other organisms) are able to construct their own niches, buffering themselves from some kinds of selection pressures while exposing themselves to other kinds. This means that human populations, even those with foraging technologies, are not passive in the face of environmental demands. On the contrary, people have the agency to produce a range of cultural inventions—tools, social relations, domesticated crops, agroecologies. Or as Marshall Sahlins (1976) put it, human beings are *human* “precisely when they experience the world as a concept (symbolically). It is not essentially a question of priority but of the unique quality of human experience as meaningful experience. Nor is it an issue of the reality of the world; it concerns *which worldly dimension becomes pertinent*, and in what way, to a given human group” (142; emphasis added). Because human beings construct their own niches, they construct their patterns of consumption as well.

What Is the Original Affluent Society? Many Westerners long believed that foraging peoples led the most miserable of existences, spending all their waking hours in a food quest that yielded barely enough to keep them alive. To test this assumption in the field, Richard Lee went to live among the Dobe Ju/'hoansi, a foraging people of southern Africa (see EthnoProfile 11.4: Ju/'hoansi). Living in the central Kalahari Desert of southern Africa in the early 1960s, the Ju/'hoansi of Dobe were among

EthnoProfile 11.4

Ju/'hoansi (!Kung)

Region: Southern Africa

Nation: Botswana and Namibia

Population: 45,000

Environment: Desert

Livelihood: Hunting and gathering

Political organization: Traditionally, egalitarian bands; today, part of modern nation-states

For more information: Lee, Richard B. 1992. *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.



the few remaining groups of San still able to return to full-time foraging when economic ties to neighboring herders became too onerous. Although full-time foraging has been impossible in the Dobe area since the 1980s and the Ju/'hoansi have had to make some difficult adjustments, Lee documented a way of life that contrasts vividly with their current settled existence.

Lee accompanied the Ju/'hoansi as they gathered and hunted in 1963, and he recorded the amounts and kinds of food they consumed. The results of his research were surprising. It turned out that the Ju/'hoansi provided themselves with a varied and well-balanced diet based on a selection from among the food sources available in their environment. At the time of Lee's fieldwork, the Ju/'hoansi classified more than 100 species of plants as edible, but only 14 were primary components of their diet (Lee 1992, 45ff.). Some 70% of this diet consisted of vegetable foods; 30% was meat. Mongongo nuts, a protein-rich food widely available throughout the Kalahari, alone made up more than one-quarter of the diet. Women provided about 55% of the diet, and men provided 45%, including the meat. The Ju/'hoansi spent an average of 2.4 working days—or about 20 hours—per person per week in food-collecting activities. Ju/'hoansi bands periodically suffered from shortages of their preferred foods and were forced to consume less desired items. Most of the time, however, their diet was balanced and adequate and consisted of foods of preference (Lee 1992, 56ff.; Figure 11.7).

Marshall Sahlins coined the expression “the original affluent society” to refer to the Ju/'hoansi and other



FIGURE 11.7 Ju/'hoansi women returning from foraging with large quantities of mongongo nuts.

foragers like them. In an essay published in 1972, Sahlins challenged the traditional Western assumption that the life of foragers is characterized by scarcity and near-starvation (see Sahlins 1972). **Affluence**, he argued, is having more than enough of whatever is required to satisfy consumption needs. There are two ways to create affluence. The first, to *produce much*, is the path taken by Western capitalist society; the second, to *desire little*, is the option, Sahlins argues, that foragers have taken. Put another way, the Ju/'hoansi foragers used culture to construct a niche within which their wants were few but abundantly fulfilled by their local environment. Moreover, it is not that foragers experience no greedy impulses; rather, according to Sahlins, affluent foragers live in societies whose institutions do not reward greed. Sahlins concluded that, for these reasons, foragers cannot be considered poor, although their material standard of living is low by Western measures.

Original affluent foraging societies emphasize the longstanding anthropological observation that the concept of economic “needs” is vague (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Hunger can be satisfied by beans and rice or steak and lobster. Thirst can be quenched by water or beer or soda pop. In effect, human beings in differently constructed niches define needs and provide for their satisfaction according to their own *cultural* logic, which is reducible to neither biology nor psychology nor ecological pressure. In every case, the human need for food

is met but selectively, and the selection humans make carries a social message. But what about cases of consumption that do not involve food and drink?

Banana Leaves in the Trobriand Islands Anthropologist Annette Weiner traveled to the Trobriand Islands in the 1970s, more than half a century after Malinowski carried out his classic research there (see EthnoProfile 10.3: Trobriand Islanders). To her surprise, she discovered a venerable local tradition involving the accumulation and exchange of banana leaves, which were known locally as “women’s wealth” (Figure 11.8). Malinowski had never described this tradition, although there is evidence from photographs and writing that it was in force at the time of his fieldwork. Possibly, Malinowski overlooked these transactions because they are carried out by women, and Malinowski did not view women as important actors in the economy. However, Malinowski might also have considered banana leaves an unlikely item of consumption because he recognized as “economic” only those activities that satisfied biological survival needs, and banana leaves are inedible. Transactions involving women’s wealth, however, turn out to be crucial for the stability of Trobrianders’ relationships to their relatives.

affluence The condition of having more than enough of whatever is required to satisfy consumption needs.



FIGURE 11.8 In the Trobriand Islands, women's wealth, made from banana leaves, is displayed during a funeral ritual called the *sagali*, which serves to reaffirm the status of the women's kinship group. Here a woman prepares the leaves with a design.

Banana leaves might be said to have a "practical" use because women make skirts out of them. These skirts are highly valued, but the transactions involving women's wealth more often involve the bundles of leaves themselves. Why bother to exchange great amounts of money or other goods to obtain bundles of banana leaves? This would seem to be a classic example of irrational consumption. Yet, "as an economic, political, and social force, women's wealth exists as the representation of the most fundamental relationships in the social system" (Weiner 1980, 289).

Trobrianders are *matrilineal* (i.e., they trace descent through women; see Chapter 14), and men traditionally prepare yam gardens for their sisters. After the harvest, yams from these gardens are distributed by a woman's brother to her husband. Weiner's research suggests that what Malinowski took to be the *redistribution* of yams, from a wife's kin to her husband, could be better understood as a *reciprocal exchange* of yams for women's wealth. The parties central to this exchange are a woman, her brother, and her husband. The woman is the person

through whom yams are passed from her own kin to her husband and through whom women's wealth is passed from her husband to her own kin.

Transactions involving women's wealth occur when someone in a woman's kinship group dies. Surviving relatives must "buy back," metaphorically speaking, all the yams or other goods that the deceased person gave to others during his or her lifetime. Each payment marks a social link between the deceased and the recipient, and the size of the payment marks the importance of their relationship. All the payments must be made in women's wealth.

The dead person's status, as well as the status of her or his family, depends on the size and number of the payments made; and the people who must be paid can number into the hundreds. Women make women's wealth themselves and exchange store goods to obtain it from other women, but when someone in their matrilineage dies, they collect it from their husbands. Indeed, a woman's value is measured by the amount of women's wealth her husband provides. Furthermore, "if a man does not work hard enough for his wife in accumulating wealth for her, then her brother will not increase his labor in the yam garden. . . . The production in yams and women's wealth is always being evaluated and calculated in terms of effort and energy expended on both sides of production. The value of a husband is read by a woman's kin as the value of his productive support in securing women's wealth for his wife" (Weiner 1980, 282).

Weiner argues that women's wealth upholds the kinship arrangements of Trobriand society. It balances out exchange relationships between lineages linked by marriage, reinforces the pivotal role of women and matriliney, and publicly proclaims, during every funeral, the social relationships that make up the fabric of Trobriand society. The system has been stable for generations, but Weiner suggests that it could collapse if cash ever became widely substitutable for yams. Under such conditions, men might buy food and other items on the market. If they no longer depended on yams from their wives' kin, they might refuse to supply their wives' kin with women's wealth. This had not yet happened at the time of Weiner's research, but she saw it as a possible future development.

How Is Consumption Being Studied Today?

The foregoing examples focus attention on distinctive consumption practices in different societies and demonstrate that the Western market is not the measure of all things. These studies also encourage respect for alternative consumption practices that, in different

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Fake Masks and Faux Modernity

Christopher Steiner addresses the perplexing situation all of us face in the contemporary multicultural world: given mass reproduction of commodities made possible by industrial capitalism, how can anybody distinguish "authentic" material culture from "fake" copies? The encounter he describes took place in Ivory Coast, western Africa.

In the Plateau market place, I once witnessed the following exchange between an African art trader and a young European tourist. The tourist wanted to buy a Dan face mask which he had selected from the trader's wooden trunk in the back of the market place. He had little money, he said, and was trying to barter for the mask by exchanging his Seiko wrist watch. In his dialogue with the trader, he often expressed his concern about whether or not the mask was "real." Several times during the bargaining, for example, the buyer asked the seller, "Is it really old?" and "Has it been worn?" While the tourist questioned the trader about the authenticity of the mask, the trader, in turn, questioned the tourist about the authenticity of his watch. "Is this the real kind of

Seiko," he asked, "or is it a copy?" As the tourist examined the mask—turning it over and over again looking for the worn and weathered effects of time—the trader scrutinized the watch, passing it to other traders to get their opinion on its authenticity.

Although, on one level, the dialogue between tourist and trader may seem a bit absurd, it points to a deeper problem in modern transnational commerce: an anxiety over authenticity and a crisis of misrepresentation. While the shelves in one section of the Plateau market place are lined with replicas of so-called "traditional" artistic forms, the shelves in another part of the market place—just on the other side of the street—are stocked with imperfect imitations of modernity: counterfeit Levi jeans, fake Christian Dior belts, and pirated recordings of Michael Jackson and Madonna. Just as the Western buyer looks to Africa for authentic symbols of a "primitive" lifestyle, the African buyer looks to the West for authentic symbols of a modern lifestyle. In both of their searches for the "genuine" in each other's culture, the African trader and the Western tourist often find only mere approximations of "the real thing"—tropes of authenticity which stand for the riches of an imagined reality.

Source: Steiner 1994, 128–29.

times and places, have worked as well as or better than capitalist markets to define needs and provide goods to satisfy those needs. But many anthropologists also draw attention to the way in which the imposition of Western colonialism has regularly undermined such alternatives, attempting to replace them with new needs and goods defined by the capitalist market. This helps explain why, as Daniel Miller (1995) summarizes, "much of the early literature on consumption is replete with moral purpose" (144–45), emphasizing the ways in which vulnerable groups have resisted commodities or have developed ritual means of "taming" them, based on an awareness at some level of the capacity of those commodities to destroy. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the consumption of market commodities occurs everywhere in the world. Moreover, not only are Western commodities sometimes embraced by those we might have expected to reject them (e.g., video technology by indigenous peoples of the Amazon), but this embrace frequently involves making use of these

commodities for local purposes, to defend or to enrich local culture, rather than to replace it (e.g., the increasing popularity of sushi in the United States).

Daniel Miller has therefore urged anthropologists to recognize that these new circumstances require that they move beyond a narrow focus on the destructive potential of mass-produced commodities to a broader recognition of the role commodities play in a globalizing world. But this shift does not mean that concern about the negative consequences of capitalist practices disappears. In a global world in which everyone everywhere increasingly relies on commodities provided by a capitalist market, Miller (1995) believes that critical attention must be refocused on "inequalities of access and the deleterious impact of contemporary economic institutions on much of the world's population" (143).

Coca-Cola in Trinidad The change of focus promoted in Miller's writing about anthropological studies of consumption is nowhere better in evidence than in his own

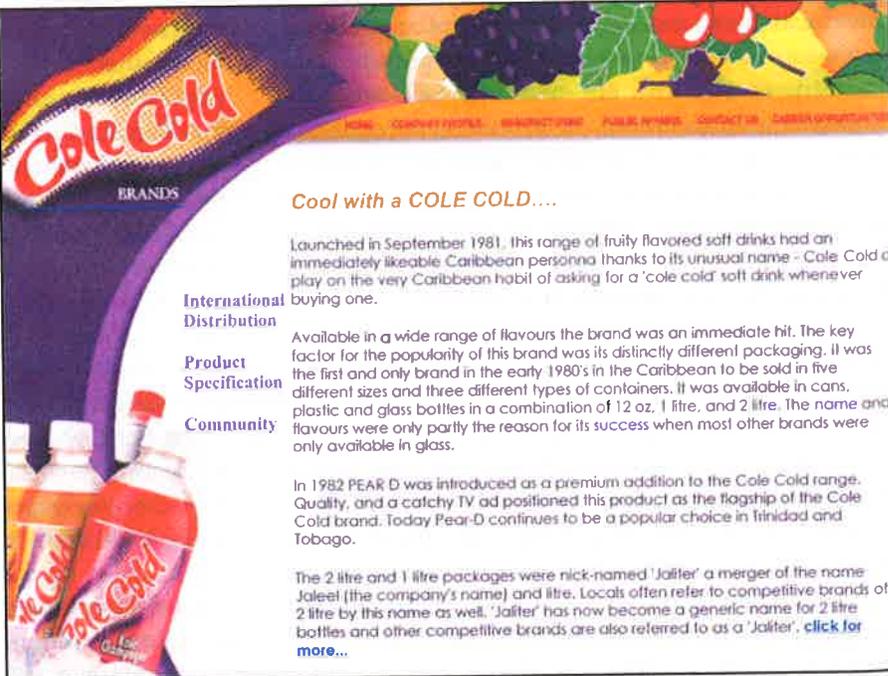
research on the consumption of Coca-Cola in Trinidad (Miller 1998). He points out that for many observers of global consumption, Coca-Cola occupies the status of a *meta-symbol*: "a symbol that stands for the debate about the materiality of culture" (Miller 1998, 169). That is, Coca-Cola is often portrayed as a Western/American commodity that represents the ultimately destructive global potential of all forms of capitalist consumption. Extracting profits from dominated peoples by brainwashing them into thinking that drinking Coke will improve their lives, the powerful controllers of capitalist market forces are accused of replacing cheaper, culturally appropriate, locally produced, and probably more nutritious beverages with empty calories. Based on his own fieldwork, however, Miller is able to show that this scenario grossly misrepresents the economic and cultural role that Coca-Cola plays in Trinidad, where it has been present since the 1930s.

First, Coca-Cola is not a typical example of global commodification because it has always spread as a franchise, allowing for flexible arrangements with local bottling plants. Second, the bottling plant that originally produced Coca-Cola in Trinidad was locally owned (as is the conglomerate that eventually bought it). Third, apart from the imported concentrate, the local bottler was able to obtain all the other key supplies needed to produce the drink (e.g., sugar, carbonation, bottles) from local, Trinidadian sources. Fourth, this bottling company exports soft drinks to other islands throughout the Caribbean, making it an important local economic force that accounts for a considerable proportion

of Trinidad's foreign exchange earnings. Fifth, the bottler of Coca-Cola also bottled other drinks and has long competed with several other local bottling companies. Decisions made by these companies, rather than by Coca-Cola's home office, have driven local production decisions about such matters as the introduction of new flavor lines. Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, Coca-Cola has long been incorporated into a set of local, Trinidadian understandings about beverages that divides them into two basic categories: "red sweet drinks" and "black sweet drinks"; in this framework, Coke is simply an up-market black, sweet drink, and it has traditionally been consumed, like other black sweet drinks, as a mixer with rum, the locally produced alcoholic beverage. Finally, the Trinidadian categories of "sweet drinks" do not correspond to the Coca-Cola company's idea of "soft drinks," a distinction that has baffled company executives. For example, executives were taken by surprise when Trinidadians objected to attempts to reduce the sweetness of Coca-Cola and other beverages since this did not correspond to the trend they were familiar with from the United States, where taste has shifted away from heavily sugared soft drinks in recent years (Figure 11.9).

Beverage consumption in Trinidad is connected with ideas of cultural identity. "Red sweet drinks" have been associated with the Trinidadian descendants of indentured laborers, originally from the Indian subcontinent, and "black sweet drinks," with Trinidadian descendants of enslaved Africans. But this does not mean that the drinks are consumed exclusively by members of those communities. On the contrary, both kinds of sweet drink

FIGURE 11.9 The soft-drink market in Trinidad is both complex and idiosyncratic, reflecting Trinidadian understandings of beverage categories.



Cole Cold
BRANDS

HOME COMPANY PEOPLE MANUFACTURING PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONTACT US CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Cool with a COLE COLD....

Launched in September 1981, this range of fruity flavored soft drinks had an immediately likeable Caribbean persona thanks to its unusual name - Cole Cold a play on the very Caribbean habit of asking for a 'cole cold' soft drink whenever buying one.

International Distribution
Available in a wide range of flavours the brand was an immediate hit. The key factor for the popularity of this brand was its distinctly different packaging. It was the first and only brand in the early 1980's in the Caribbean to be sold in five different sizes and three different types of containers. It was available in cans, plastic and glass bottles in a combination of 12 oz, 1 litre, and 2 litre. The name and flavours were only partly the reason for its success when most other brands were only available in glass.

Product Specification

Community
In 1982 PEAR D was introduced as a premium addition to the Cole Cold range. Quality, and a catchy TV ad positioned this product as the flagship of the Cole Cold brand. Today Pear-D continues to be a popular choice in Trinidad and Tobago.

The 2 litre and 1 litre packages were nick-named 'Jalifer' a merger of the name Jaleel (the company's name) and litre. Locals often refer to competitive brands of 2 litre by this name as well. 'Jalifer' has now become a generic name for 2 litre bottles and other competitive brands are also referred to as a 'Jalifer'. [click for more...](#)

make sense as elements in a more complex image of what it means to be Trinidadian: "a higher proportion of Indians drink Colas, while Kola champagne as a red drink is more commonly drunk by Africans. Many Indians explicitly identify with Coke and its modern image," whereas "In many respects the 'Indian' connoted by the red drink today is in some ways the Africans' more nostalgic image of how Indians either used to be or perhaps still should be" (Miller 1998, 180). There is no simple connection between the political parties that different segments of the Trinidadian population support and the owners of different local bottling companies producing red or black sweet drinks. Finally, the Trinidadians Miller knew emphatically did *not* associate drinking Coke with trying to imitate Americans. "Trinidadians do not and will not choose between being American and being Trinidadian. Most reject parochial nationalism or neo-Africanized roots that threaten to diminish their sense of rights of access to global goods, such as computers or blue jeans. But they will fiercely retain those localisms they wish to retain, not because they are hypocritical but because inconsistency is an appropriate response to contradiction" (Miller 1998, 185). Miller concludes, therefore, that it is a serious mistake to use Coca-Cola as a meta-symbol of the evils of commodity consumption. Miller's conclusion is reinforced by studies of consumption that focus on the many ways in which global commodities are incorporated into locally defined cultural practices.

The Anthropology of Food and Nutrition

One of the most recent areas of anthropological specialization centers on studies of food and nutrition. For some time biological anthropologists have carried out cross-cultural comparisons of nutrition and growth in different societies, and cultural anthropologists, such as Daniel Miller, have written detailed studies of particular local or ethnic food habits. Today, however, the anthropology of food and nutrition is increasingly concerned with the way the global capitalist food market works, favoring the food security of some consumers over others. At the same time, exploring links between food and culture in a globally complex world exposes changing understandings of fatness and thinness, and it reveals the many ways different kinds of food and cooking can be embraced by different groups in society to bolster their gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, class, or national identities.

Carole Counihan is a pioneering anthropologist of food and nutrition whose work was initially inspired by a feminist desire to give an ethnographic voice to women.

She found that food was an aspect of culture that many women used to express themselves when other avenues were blocked. Beginning in 1970, she lived and worked in Italy for fourteen years. During this time she developed a "long term relationship with a Florentine I call Leonardo," and most of the data for her book *Around the Tuscan Table* (Counihan 2004) comes "from fifty-six hours of food-centered life histories tape-recorded in Italian with Leonardo's twenty-three living relatives in 1982–84" (2).

Counihan began collecting food-centered life histories from women but eventually collected them from men as well. Because these life histories came from individuals from different generations, they reflected historical changes in the political economy of food that had shaped the lives of her interview subjects over time. For example, situating the food memories of the oldest members of her sample required reconstructing the traditional *mezzadria* sharecropping system in Tuscany. This system was based on large landholdings worked by peasant laborers whose households were characterized by a strict division of labor by gender: the patriarch (male head of the family) managed food production in the fields, and his wife supervised food preparation for the large extended family. The *mezzadria* system would disappear in the early twentieth century, but it constituted the foundation of Tuscan food practices that would follow.

Counihan's interviewees ate a so-called "Mediterranean" diet consisting of "pasta, fresh vegetables, legumes, olive oil, bread, and a little meat or fish" (Counihan 2004, 74) (Figure 11.10). Food was scarce in the first part of the twentieth century but more abundant after World War II. "This diet, however, was already being modified by the postmodern, ever-larger agro-food industry that continued to grow in 2003, but which Florentines and other Italians shaped by alternative food practices" (Counihan 2004, 4).

The postwar capitalist market also drew younger Florentines into new kinds of paid occupations, which led to modifications of the earlier gendered division of labor, without eliminating it entirely. Counihan describes the struggles of Florentines of her generation, especially women, who needed to work for wages but who were still expected to maintain a household and a paying job at the same time and often could not count on assistance from their husbands with domestic chores, including cooking. Counihan is especially critical about Italian child-rearing practices that allow boys to grow up with no responsibilities around the house, learning to expect their sisters (and later their wives) to take care of them, explaining away their incompetence at housekeeping tasks as a natural absence of talent or interest. She also describes men who cook on a regular basis but who often do not take on the tasks of shopping for ingredients or

FIGURE 11.10 Tuscan women making pasta in a farm kitchen.



cleaning up and who tend to dismiss cooking as easy, thereby diminishing the status of work that has long been central to Florentine women's sense of self-worth.

Food-centered life histories from Counihan's oldest interviewees traced nearly a century of changing Tuscan food practices and revealed, surprisingly, older people's nostalgia for the more constrained patterns of food consumption in their youth. "When my older subjects were young before and during the second world war, consumption was highly valued because it was scarce and precarious. Yet their children, born after the war in

the context of the Italian economic miracle, grew up in a world where consumption was obligatory, taken for granted, and essential to full personhood—a transformation lamented by older people" (Counihan 2004, 5).

Even as Counihan's research documents continuities in Tuscan diet and cuisine, it also demonstrates the way deeply rooted consumption practices were upended by the Italian state under Mussolini in the 1920s and 1930s and by the international cataclysm of World War II. Anthropologists have long argued that economic life cannot be considered apart from political relations in any society.

Chapter Summary

1. Contemporary cultural anthropologists are interested in how cultures change, but they are suspicious of evolutionary schemes that give the impression that social arrangements could not have been—or could not be—other than the way they are. They also point out that no society anywhere is static. The power that human beings have to reproduce or to change their social organization is an important focus of anthropological study. Anthropological approaches can provide insights often overlooked by other disciplines.
2. Human economic activity is usefully divided into three phases—production, distribution, and consumption—and is often shaped in important ways by storage practices. Formal neoclassical economic theory developed in Europe to explain how capitalism works, and it emphasizes the importance of market exchange. Economic anthropologists showed that noncapitalist societies regularly relied on nonmarket modes of exchange, such as reciprocity and redistribution, which still play restricted roles in societies dominated by the capitalist market.
3. Marxian economic anthropologists view production as more important than exchange in determining the patterns of economic life in a society. They classify societies in terms of their modes of production. Each mode of production contains within it the potential for conflict between classes of people who receive differential benefits and losses from the productive process.
4. In the past, some anthropologists tried to explain consumption patterns in different societies either by arguing that people produce material goods to satisfy basic human needs or by connecting consumption patterns to specific material resources available to people in the material settings where they lived. Ethnographic evidence demonstrates that both these explanations are inadequate because they ignore how culture defines our needs and provides for their satisfaction according to its own logic.
5. Particular consumption preferences that may seem irrational from the viewpoint of neoclassical economic theory may make sense when the wider cultural practices of consumers are taken into consideration. In the twenty-first century, those whom Western observers might have expected to reject Western market commodities often embrace

them, frequently making use of them to defend or enrich their local culture rather than to replace it. In a global world in which everyone everywhere increasingly relies on commodities—including

food—provided by a capitalist market, some anthropologists focus on inequalities of access and the negative impact of contemporary economic institutions on most of the world's population.

For Review

1. Explain the connection between culture and livelihood.
2. Describe each of the three models presented by Wilk and Cliggett.
3. Define production, distribution, and consumption.
4. What is neoclassical economics?
5. Describe each of the three modes of exchange.
6. What is a mode of production? What are the three modes of production that Eric Wolf found useful?
7. Explain how conflict is built into the mode of production.
8. Define consumption. Summarize each of the explanations offered in the text for human consumption patterns.
9. Explain the significance of food storage and food sharing in economic activity.
10. What are the key elements in Marshall Sahlins's argument about "the original affluent society"?
11. The text offers two case studies about the cultural construction of human needs—the original affluent society and banana leaves in the Trobriand Islands. Explain how each of these illuminates the cultural construction of human needs.
12. Summarize Miller's argument about the significance of Coca-Cola in Trinidad.
13. Discuss the connections between gender and food in Italy, as presented by Carole Counihan.

Key Terms

affluence 355	economic	reciprocity 343
classes 347	anthropology 338	redistribution 344
commodity	gift exchanges 343	relations of
exchanges 343	institutions 339	production 347
consumption 351	labor 347	social organization 338
	market exchange 345	neoclassical
		economics 343

Suggested Readings

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- Wilk, Richard, and Lisa Cliggett. 2007. *Economies and cultures*. Boulder, CO: Westview. *A current, accessible "theoretical guidebook" to the conflicting views of human nature that underlie disputes in economic anthropology.*