

Book Review

Chris Hann and Keith Hart: *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Published by: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., Manhattan, USA, June 2015, First Edition. Pages: 208, ISBN: 978-0-7456-9940-0 (Paperback), Price: \$22.95

The book *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*, starts with a short preface and is divided into nine chapters that end with bibliographical notes and references. The book is an innovative introduction to the history and practice of economic anthropology in the field by two leading authors Chris Hann and Keith Hart. They are two leading economic anthropologists in the world today. Hann is the Director at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany and Hart is Professor Emeritus at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The book is innovative of its kind in anthropology, but excellent introduction for social science readers at all levels, also its purpose is to present general readers with a challenging perspective on today's world economy and introduction to the history and current state of economic anthropology. The authors aim to rejuvenate economic anthropology as a humanistic project at a time when the global financial crisis has undermined confidence in free market economics. Authors' tries to confirm that economic anthropology is highly relevant to our understanding of the great economic questions that we face in the modern world. The authors strive to show that anthropologists have contributed to understanding the three great questions of modern economic history: *development*, *socialism*, and *one-world capitalism*. In doing so, they connect economic anthropology to its roots in Western philosophy, social theory and world history.

They argue that up to the World War II anthropologists tried and failed to draw the interest of economists in their exotic findings. They then launched an energetic debate over whether an approach taken from economics was appropriate to the study of non-industrial economies. Since the 1970s, they have developed a critique of capitalism based on studying it at home as well as abroad. Focusing on the importance of humanistic project, authors argue for the continued relevance of predecessors such as Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, while offering an incisive review of recent work in this field.

The authors draw on their substantial ethnographic experience to offer a rich rehearsal of economic anthropology, and trace its intersection between the primary disciplines of economics and anthropology and against thematic currents such as Marxism and Feminism. The authors argue that considering the impact of the contemporary Western financial crisis on the world now,

it is the ideal time for all to re-engage with economic anthropology and understand the conceptions of economics that play out in the media and in the academy. They sought to scrutinize changes in discourse and meaning of key terms such as *economics* and *development*. They source the root of understanding *development* as the migration of people to urban life and *economic development* as the term for examining how to bring such migration about in an equitable manner that defy the detrimental effects of such change. The authors highlight the flexibility or even outright confusion of the term *economics* in contemporary usage. They trace its origin to budgetary management of large household estates in ancient Greece *oikonomia* to modern division of labour from markets and successive dominance of markets by firms and their *complicated* relationships to national governments and national interest.

This book is on purpose written with two vital points that need prominence here, as they will help the person who reads to relate to the material. Firstly, the book is written from a critical anthropological perspective, that is to say, authors standpoint wishes to examine the foundations of contemporary civilization by having recourse to judgment. Judgment in turn is the ability to form an opinion on the basis of careful consideration of the past and present. This is in contrast to other modes of anthropology that repudiate to make judgment (if that is possible) or seek to limit judgment and overlook statements in the presentation of research, or alternatively to advocate on behalf of those researched.

The second point emphasized is their agenda: to establish, or at least prepare the ground for, a self-standing discipline of economic anthropology. A discipline that makes statements and offers critique and advice based on a cumulative tradition that they believe can offer answers to contemporary crises. In distinction to mainstream anthropology, an *economic anthropology* would not run counter to the human sciences in the mode of *unmasking* or *unmaking* the products of other knowledge-producing bodies. Instead they argue for a *disciplined* branch of anthropology that can engage and be productive in parallel to the wider human sciences. They argue in Page 164: “We conclude our short history by arguing that economic anthropology has the potential to become a true *discipline*, with its own objects, theories and methods, taking its place confidently alongside siblings like political anthropology and the anthropology of development, and cousins such as economic sociology, anthropology is exclusively unlocked to the whole range of human sciences and so we need to undermine, not reinforce, the barriers that fragment them. In the end we are less interested in labels and demarcation lines than in developing new strategies for addressing the predicament of the planet we all share.”

These points serve as bookends to the main content which is informative and thought provoking, covering a wide time-span and stirring a desire for further reading. This makes the section *Notes*

on *Further Reading* a useful inclusion. Their treatment of historical developments in theory and practice is quick and concise but covers a lot of ground. The summation of material and perspectives from the *Ancient World to the Age of the Internet* allow the reader to see the development of current economic anthropology in a wide-angle view but if the reader seeks thorough detail on any particular aspect they should use this book as a guide only.

The book offers a solicitous, well-planned overview of economic anthropology but due to its size and scope it cannot offer the definitive critique of the field nor authors were able to develop their arguments on a substantial theoretical base. The chapters or sections that stanchly draw upon authors' fieldwork are made well-off by it but left readers requiring more. Of course more is available in their works, but many issues are orientated as an introduction for those new with the discipline rather than an in-depth critique. Despite this, this book will make a precious addition to anthropology/sociology text-books or as a sourcebook for modules on economic anthropology.

One of the best accomplishments of this book is that it has tried to look for the linkage between anthropology and economics. As a textbook for beginners to economic anthropology it should be grasped with the help of theoretical approaches of social sciences or by referring to primary texts and here the notes for further reading towards the end of the book will be of great benefit.

In nutshell, this is a *big* book, embarking big questions in skillfully simple writing style drawing on considerable ethnographic data to put forward an affluent practice of economic anthropology, drawing its meeting point between the primary disciplines of economics and anthropology and providing answers to three *big* questions of modern economic history: *development*, *socialism*, and *one-world capitalism*. Hence, educationally and intellectually stimulating, the book will do good to both economic anthropologists' and economists.

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