

**THE MADJABS IN CENSU: A CASE STUDY IN
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE**

**A Thesis Presented To
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of San Carlos**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Anthropology**

**by
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Today, as once isolated simple societies are drawn more and more into the world cash economy, anthropologists are grappling with the concrete bearing of economic conditions on the character of social systems. This has occasioned the rapid rise of a sub-discipline known as economic anthropology which studies the economic aspects of pre-capitalist societies in economic terms rather than as "material culture, or myth and magic, or cultural psychology."¹

Anthropologists are indeed becoming aware of the importance of economic data to the analysis of social systems--a development which, some fifty years ago, was not the case. Then, anthropologists were confronted with the problem of what approach to use in describing and analyzing non-industrial economic systems. There was a lack of interdisciplinary communication which engendered the debate over the place of economy in society. The culmination of this debate is in the much-publicized substantivist-formalist controversy.

¹Melville J. Herskovits, Economic Anthropology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 60.

The formalists (represented by Herskovits, LeClair, Burling, Salisbury and Schneider) uphold that economic science should aim to study human behavior "as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses," or of "economizing" behavior.² Implicit in the formalist approach is the notion of the applicability of classical economic analysis to non-western societies. A second notion implicit in this approach is the recognition that economic man (homo economicus), driven by the need to maximize benefit, exists in all societies including so-called "primitive" societies.

Those who uphold the substantivist approach (e.g., Dalton and Polanyi) reject the applicability of the notion of "economizing" to non-industrial societies. They conceive of the economy as "embedded" in society, as a process of provisioning

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Edward LeClair, Jr., "Economic Theory and Economic Anthropology," American Anthropologist, 64 (May, 1962), 1188; see also Robbins Burling, "Maximization Theories and the Study of Economic Anthropology," p. 805.

society with its material needs.³ They reject the idea that all men exhibit "economizing" behavior and that, therefore, homo economicus is a product of history.⁴

Contemporary trends in economic anthropology still see the presence of the substantivist-formalist controversy (minus the rhetoric), with both sides coming up with more sober studies.⁵ However, the danger of a protracted debate like this one is that it can be fetishized to the point of mystifying rather than clarifying thought and analysis.

In the light of new ethnographic materials, the controversy has diminished because neither side alone has the monopoly of being able to predict behavior in new situations. In this regard,

³George Dalton, "Economic Theory and Primitive Society," American Anthropologist, 63 (April, 1961), 5.

⁴Harold Schneider, Economic Man (New York: The Free Press, 1974), viii.

⁵Stephen Gudeman, "Anthropological Economics: The Question of Distribution," in Annual Review of Anthropology, ed. Bernard Siegel et al (California: Annual Reviews, Inc., 1978), Vol. 7, 348.

Godelier says:

The formalist definition of economy, in reducing the field of economic science to a single aim, prevents the final analysis of the situation by excluding those characteristics of social and economic systems which are neither desired nor often even known by those individuals or groups who are their agents--the objective but unintentional characteristics which determine in the last analysis, a deeper logic and development.⁶

Regardless of one's theoretical position in the substantivist-formalist debate, there is still a need to define the "economy" in economic anthropology. This has given rise to a third position (exemplified by Sahlins, Friedman, Godelier, Terray) which rejects any formalist definition of economy along with the substantivists, but considers the substantive definition basically inadequate. The inadequacy, says this third camp, stems from the fact that the substantivists have entirely limited themselves to the study of the circulation of goods;

⁶ Maurice Godelier, Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 18.

and to do so results in an incomplete grasp of the economy in a given society.

Apart from the circulation of goods, there are other activities within the economic field which should be studied. The economy is composed of "three separate yet interdependent event sectors," viz: production (includes appropriation of materials from the physical environment and their transformation to a finished/semi-finished good); utilization (i.e., goods or services utilized to satisfy wants); and transfer (the shifting of control over, or rights in, commodities from one individual or group to another).⁷

It should be noted that these three event sectors are components of one process postulated as separate but invariably interrelated. As a starting point, however, production assumes a key role because through it, all other aspects of the economy become possible.⁸

⁷Scott Cook, "Production, Ecology, and Economic Anthropology: Notes Toward an Integrated Frame of Reference," in Social Science Information, XII, 1 (1978), 30-31.

⁸Ibid.

The emphasis on production is characteristic of this third theoretical position. By calling attention to the fact that the real logic of an economic system rests on the analysis of the production and not the circulation of goods, it has diminished the importance of the substantivist-formalist controversy.

The present study singles out the economic perspective--broadly defined as a focus on the members of a society's "calculated attempts to make a living"⁹--and explores the behavior of the Sama settlement in Cebu from this stance. Raymond Firth, an anthropologist who studied the functioning of the Tikopia, a Polynesian community for thirty years says:

. . . I analyzed the economic structure of the society because so many social relationships were made manifest in their economic content. Indeed the social structure, was clearly dependant on specific economic relationships arising out of the system of control of resources.¹⁰

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Raymond Firth, We the Tikopia (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), xix.

The concern in this present study is mainly to record the economic life of the Cebu Sama and to integrate knowledge of their economic system with other aspects of their culture. It takes as its starting point the phenomenon of production, or the appropriation of materials from nature, among them. From such a starting point, the one major socio-economic transformation which occurred among some of the Sama of Cebu--the shift from fishing to pearl marketing--is analyzed.

Economic anthropologists in general have actually been very much concerned with productive activities and organization in their ethnographic and analytic work. However, most of their theoretical views have been framed in terms of distribution and exchange.¹¹ This is true even for the three most prominent figures in the development of economic anthropological thought--Malinowski, Thurnwald and Firth. All three share the view that exchange processes and relations, not production processes and relations are fundamental in society.

¹¹Cook, op. cit., p. 35.

Why does this study focus on production? There are several reasons for this. As mentioned earlier, the production focus diminishes the substantivist-formalist debate by defining the economy as composed of production, utilization and transfer. Secondly, it should be noted that production results lend themselves easily to measurement as inputs (for example, capital outlay and man-days at sea) and outputs (as expressed in monetary equivalents). And, as the most important consideration, production leads one to tackle problems of access to resources and control of the products, finally leading to the power structure and social ranking or stratification in the community being studied.¹² It may be said that men's relationship to the production process, whether they exercise control over material means or actually participate as producers, determines their relationship to each other in society. This study is thus not interested in production or the

¹²Ibid., pp. 40-41.