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Political Economy, Neoliberalism, and the Prehistoric Economies of Latin America

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Donald C. Wood
Editors



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POLITICAL ECONOMY, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE PREHISTORIC ECONOMIES OF LATIN AMERICA

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PREFACE

Four years ago I co-edited a book with Geert De Neve and two of his colleagues at the University of Sussex – Jeff Pratt and Peter Luetchford. The chapters had originally been presented at the Hidden Hands in the Market workshop held at Sussex in April of 2007 and organized by Geert, Jeff, and Peter. After hearing about the workshop I wrote to Geert, hoping to scoop up a few bits of gold for *REA*, but as it turned out I had struck the mother lode. Our co-edited book was Volume 28 of *REA – Hidden Hands in the Market: Ethnographies of Fair Trade, Ethical Consumption, and Corporate Social Responsibility* (2008) – one of the installments that I remain proudest of, and the first *REA* volume under Emerald with which I was directly involved. The volume explores the relationship between producers and consumers, focusing on its moral and political content, in a very broad sense.

Now I am pleased to introduce a new book that continues *REA 28*'s legacy – *Ethical Consumption: Social Value and Economic Practice* (Berghahn Books, 2012, 238pp.), edited by James Carrier and Peter Luetchford, both of whom were involved with *REA 28*. As the editors of *Ethical Consumption* explain in their joint preface, the volume's origins lie in the same 2007 workshop at Sussex that gave birth to *REA 28*. Their project, however, took a different form due to the influence of their continued exploration of the topic of ethical consumption at the 2008 meeting of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, which resulted in the participation of numerous researchers who had not contributed to *REA 28*.

Carrier and Luetchford's new volume shares many of *REA 28*'s concerns, bringing the theme of ethical consumption to the forefront (hence, the title) with its strong focus on the Fairtrade movement. In this way it differs slightly from the *REA* volume, which was somewhat broader in scope. However, it very well compliments its predecessor by expertly exploring the ways in which alternative marketing systems and business models that aspire to higher standards of morality often wind up being consumed by their more powerful mainstream counterparts (to which they were originally opposed), and then used to boost the credibility of those systems and models, and even to strengthen them. Examples include corporate social responsibility (CSR) and fair trade movements themselves. In addition, like

REA 28, the volume well illustrates the complexity of fair trade (and Fairtrade), including the fact that the relationship between Southern producers and Northern consumers is always mediated by someone else, which relates to the perpetual mismatch between ethical image and ethical practice (see especially chapters by Luetchford and Vramo).

Carrier lays out the purpose of the book in his well-crafted and timely introduction, designed not to scrutinize ethical consumption as a unique phenomenon but as one among many related social processes, movements, and belief systems. Carrier sets up the problem by establishing a dichotomy between two realms of life – economy and society – which merge in the shopping experience and therefore give rise to a variety of moral questions that lead to ethical consumption, defined as “a collective commentary on the relationship between economy and society” (p. 12), or more concretely as a movement that “seeks to replace the impersonal calculation and task orientation that is part of the economy with personality” (p. 31). In other words, ethical consumption can be seen as a situation in which values of the social realm are collectively applied to an activity of the economic realm. According to Carrier this raises three questions: (1) What kind of relationship between these two realms would be better? (2) How should this goal be met? (3) Who can help attain this goal and what kind of relationship should they have with the realm in question and with one another? Most of the chapters in *REA 28* addressed these questions in one way or another, and the chapters in *Ethical Consumption* address them as well.

The volume is divided into two sections. Section I explores the relationship between producers and consumers, its four chapters illustrating in different ways the fact that this relationship often exists primarily in the imagination of the purchaser. For example, Amanda Berlan (a contributor to *REA 28*) explores the complexities of the ethical consumption of chocolate and Cadbury’s relationship to producers in Ghana as it mediates between them and buyers elsewhere (see also Berlan’s and Dinah Rajak’s chapters in *REA 28*). Peter Luetchford takes a critical view of Fairtrade and its shortcomings as a coffee marketing system that succeeds at selling attractive images to purchasers while failing to equalize power relationships or significantly boost the financial standing of producers in Costa Rica (see also Luetchford’s contribution to *REA 28* and Julia Smith’s chapter in *REA 29*). Lill Vramo concentrates on the consumption/giving end of trade (meant to be supportive of women in Bangladesh) in Norway, which takes place in accordance within a “trade, not aid” paradigm – a reaction, in part, to a period of perceived overly-generous spending on foreign aid. The case

explored by Vramo points to a discrepancy in consumption-side values and production-side effects (see also Geert De Neve's and Catherine Dolan's chapters in *REA 28* on production-side issues). Finally, this section closes with Audrey Vankeerberghen's analysis of organic farming in Belgium. Venkeerberghen's chapter illustrates the ways in which organic farming in many different parts of the world has been tamed by regulation and transformed through its market successes into somewhat of a parallel, almost complimentary, system – despite the fact that it originally arose as a critique of conventional agriculture. In this way, organic farming resembles Fairtrade itself (see also Carrier's chapter in *REA 28*).

Section II of the volume focuses on ethical consumption as a practical activity shaped by the contexts in which it is carried out, seeking to discover the processes through which ethical consumption spreads and takes root, why this happens, and what arises from it. First, Tamas Dombos (also a contributor to *REA 28*) presents case studies from Hungary to show that individual reasons to engage in ethical consumption are highly varied and do not necessarily mesh with larger and higher goals of ethical consumption espoused by the Association of Conscious Consumers and others. Next, Giovanni Orlando investigates ethical consumption as practiced in Palermo, Italy, where it is known as “critical consumption.” Orlando's is a case in which residents who feel powerless to change a system they perceive as corrupt attempt to do so in at least small ways through the practice of consumption. The final three chapters of this section focus on social motivations to consume ethically and some results of doing so (or not doing so). Cindy Isenhour looks at consumers in Sweden who choose to consume less but aim for higher quality and how this relates to their social networks, which often change because they have elected to go against the grain; Peter Collins investigates religion as a factor in consumption activity among Quakers in Britain, for whom proscriptions and conformity are strong motivational factors (recalling the focus of *REA 31*); and Cristina Grasseni concentrates on cheese production and marketing in northern Italy, showing that cultivating direct relationships between producers and consumers can become quite complicated when issues of food authenticity are involved and contested (see also Jeffrey Pratt's and Jennifer Esperanza's chapters in *REA 28*).

The Preface to *Ethical Consumption* declares that the book represents a collaborate effort more so than do most edited volumes, and indeed its chapters are expertly linked not only by the way they are handled in the introduction and in the introductory material to each section of the volume, but also by the authors themselves, and – additionally – by the very fitting

conclusion to the book, written by James Carrier and Richard Wilk. As editor of the Research in Economic Anthropology series, I am elated to see that participants in the 2007 Hidden Hands workshop that gave birth to *REA 28* have continued their explorations of the moral aspects of production and consumption, and I am thrilled by the appearance of a volume of this magnitude to complement *REA 28*, expand on its achievements, and carry the messages of the entire project to new audiences. *Ethical Consumption* and *REA 28* are must-reads for anyone interested in the intricacies of moral production and consumption, and who wants to deepen their understanding of both the demand-side and the supply-side of Fairtrade and other related movements. I expect that many more exciting publications will appear in the future from the continued research and collaboration of the contributors to *REA 28* and *Ethical Consumption* and their respective organizers.

Donald C. Wood*
Editor

*Volume 28 of REA is scheduled to be released in paperback in August of 2012.

UNDERSTANDING
INTERSECTIONS OF
DEVELOPMENT, NEOLIBERALISM,
AND PREHISTORIC ECONOMIES:
AN OVERVIEW OF *REA*
VOLUME 32

Donald C. Wood and Ty Matejowsky

This thirty-second volume in the *REA* series represents a joint effort between two former students of Norbert Dannhaeuser, who edited *REA* together with his colleague Cynthia Werner from 2001 to 2005, and who served as the chair of both Donald's and Ty's M.A. thesis committees at Texas A&M University. Norbert also was chair of Ty's Ph.D. committee. Donald was just settling on Japan as his geographic focus in anthropology around 1993, and although this was not Norbert's specialty he was very familiar with the canon of postwar Japanese village studies. Introducing Donald to this body of work had a tremendous influence on his academic development and his future path. Prior to this more intensive and focused guidance, however, it was taking Norbert's core Anthropological Theory (ANTH 410) course at Texas A&M in the autumn term of 1992 – exactly 20 years ago – that convinced Donald to commit himself to a career in anthropology in the first place. Similarly, Ty's career development as an anthropologist owes a considerable debt to Norbert. The knowledge acquired from him both in the field (the Philippines) and classroom (Texas A&M University) has proven indispensable in influencing Ty's geographical and topical focus. Both of us would like to take this opportunity to thank Norbert for all of his guidance and encouragement. We humbly dedicate this volume of *REA* to him in honor of all of his contributions to the field of

anthropology, and also out of gratitude for his support when we were just starting out.

This volume is divided into three parts, which are reflected in its title, and which in turn reflect the themes explored in the chapters that comprise them. Part I is the least homogeneous of the three sections, and it consists of five investigations of economic thought and practice in a variety of situations. First, Jamie Cross investigates the delicate intersections of giving and working on a diamond-cutting shop floor in India. The chapter shows how acts of giving help to define and maintain relationships inside the company, to boost the prestige of givers, and also at times to smooth the giver's upward movement. The case presented by Cross recalls discussions of the "embeddedness" of the economy in social relations. (See also G. De Neve's chapter in *REA* 28 on a factory situation in India and R. Prentice's chapter in the same volume on resistance to authority on a factory floor. In addition, see C. Danby's critical take on the gift/exchange dichotomy in *REA* 21.)

In the next chapter of Part I of the present volume, Monica L. Smith draws on a broad spectrum of studies to argue for a greater influence of individual abundance-seeking activities in the historical formation of large population centers and complex societies than has heretofore been granted in investigations of the phenomenon. In her ambitious enterprise, Smith builds her argument on a foundation of research on the importance of surplus production in economic, social, and political development, where property is created through labor, and where increasingly complex production in centers where labor and materials are plentiful encourages the extension of political power, which also supports the creation of more complex items. Importantly, the focus here is on the abundance-seeking and abundance-creating activities of non-elites, and not so much as responses to orders from above but rather as part of the perpetual human quest for a better life and increased survival (see also A. Martin's chapter in *REA* 30, and see P. McAnany's chapter in *REA* 27 on Maya elites). This is surely not the last time we will hear of the argument put forward here by Smith.

In the third chapter, Justin A. Elardo revisits the (in)famous substantivist – formalist debate in economic anthropology that had already largely faded away by the time *REA* first appeared in 1978. But he does this not to rehash old arguments for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the so-called Great Debate, but rather to investigate the evolution of the substantivist and formalist positions vis-à-vis their relations to institutional economic anthropology since that debate. Elardo does this as a means of reaching four different ends: to illuminate the persistence of the debate's theoretical disagreements among institutional economic anthropologists (both "new"

and “old”), to outline recent critiques of the “new” institutional approach in economic anthropology, to attempt to explain the origin of the debate and its perpetuation by institutional economic anthropologists, and to seek a way for institutional economic anthropology to move beyond the debate. In its concern with the work of Karl Polanyi and the Great Debate, Elardo’s chapter digs into the question of the power of scarcity in determining human economic thought, behavior, and organization, and the usefulness of scarcity as an analytical construct. In this way, Elardo’s chapter resonates off the chapter by Monica L. Smith that precedes it. It also continues *REA*’s long-standing interest in the substantivist – formalist debate and its various implications (see especially Part IV and the introduction to *REA* 25, B. Isaac’s and R. Halperin’s chapters in *REA* 14, Halperin’s chapter in *REA* 7, and also *REA* 4).

The fourth chapter of this part of the volume investigates religion (Protestantism, precisely) as a factor in vegetable production in a small community in Guatemala. As one might surmise from the title of the chapter, authors Andrés Marroquín Gramajo and Luis Noel Alfaro are treading ground prepared for them by Max Weber in his famous essay on the topic. Indeed, the authors support Weber’s thesis with data from a small indigenous highland community, where Protestantism appears to have been a strong driving force in local farming success and prosperity (see chapters in *REA* 31). Just as the previous chapter by Elardo had a conceptual link with the one before it by Smith, Marroquín Gramajo and Noel Alfaro’s chapter has a methodological connection to Elardo’s in the general institutional economics approach to the problem it tackles.

Finally, Part I of this volume concludes with an analysis of maize storage choices among Fremont Indians, who dwelled in the modern-day state of Utah and several other western states up until about seven centuries ago. The authors, Kerk L. Phillips and Renee Barlow, seek to prove that financial theory can help to comprehend perceived threats of maize raids, which would relate to Fremont people’s choosing to use cliff granaries – difficult to both build and fill, but better for security. To achieve their goal, the authors utilize two mathematical models that take into account factors such as the caloric content of maize and the caloric expenditure necessary to transport it to granaries located at high elevations. They find that relatively low threat levels could have been enough to prompt the use of such storage facilities (and also their initial construction). Phillips and Barlow’s chapter illustrates one possible way in which large gaps in archaeological evidence might be filled with methods borrowed from other disciplines.

The two chapters that comprise Part II of this volume offer differing but nevertheless critical assessments of neoliberalism's inequitable impact on everyday lives in today's global political economy. With a long-standing concern for the local and an abiding interest in how macro-level processes are eventually articulated among diverse populations, it is really not all that surprising that anthropologists, especially economic anthropologists, would gravitate toward topics involving intersections of this increasingly dominant market ideology and the lived experiences of ordinary and often marginalized groups. For well over 30 years, the political and socioeconomic landscapes of many countries has been drastically reshaped through policies favoring, among other things, the privatization of state assets, market deregulation, and enhanced private sector participation in public life. This ongoing transformation has clearly benefitted some and marginalized many – so much so, in fact, that the significant inequalities perpetuated by neoliberalism's hegemonic tendencies have effectively emerged as major points of contention for contemporary social movements including 2011's Occupy Wall Street.

Although Part II represents the shortest of volume 32's three sections, it nevertheless addresses timely issues that will have real resonance for readers; particularly those who have lived through and were adversely affected by the global recession of late-2000s. In the section's first chapter, Anna Ochoa O'Leary examines properties of social capital vis-à-vis the experiences of migrant women who have crossed the border into the United States from Mexico without official authorization. This work is grounded in a solid narrative base and calls into question the efficacy of social capital as a means for solving real world problems. The tensions between already-vulnerable female migrants and the human smuggling rings or *coyotes* are laid bare amid the increased border enforcement and anti-immigrant sentiment that pervades much of the recent political discourse in North America and elsewhere. By focusing on the gendered dimensions of this type of immigration, O'Leary offers new insights into the pros and cons of enhanced border security and how social capital can sometimes have very problematic outcomes. (See Tamar Diana Wilson's chapter in *REA 29*, and also see the introduction and W. Tseng's and Marroquín Gramajo's contributions to *REA 25* in regards to social capital.)

Part II's second chapter is by Sidney M. Greenfield and it considers the ramifications and contradictions of the recent global economic crisis from a substantive economic anthropological perspective. Greenfield explores notions of responsibility and rationality within the framework of a moral philosophy that he terms "just deserts." That is, those who have more are

viewed as arguably more deserving. Challenging accepted beliefs at the core of modern economic thought, Greenfield envisions a more thoughtful and in some ways humane way to mediate economic anomalies such as the recent collapse of the U.S. housing market. In this way the work of economic anthropologists can add clarity and depth to the defining political and economic debates of our time (also see Greenfield's chapter in *REA* 30).

Readers will notice a decided shift in historical and geographical focus as they encounter the chapters collected in volume 32's third and final section. As indicated in its title, Part III considers the prehistoric economies of Latin America primarily from an archaeological perspective. Such analysis compliments work presented in previous *REA* editions and reflects the series' inclusive approach to the work of economic anthropologists who study past societies. Over subsequent chapters, analysis that is both theoretical and data-driven teases out the profound and subtle patterns that characterize ancient economic practices from this part of the world. In a very real sense, these chapters serve as an indicator of the dynamic work currently being done by archaeologists in various countries of Central and South America.

In the first of these chapters, Stephen A. Kowalewski takes something of a macro-level approach by addressing questions of how the ancient Mesoamerican economy arguably worked. Relying on previous historical and archaeological studies, he develops an ideal-type of societal model to theorize about the role of market-based principals in shaping the region's economy. In essence, his argument is predicated on notions that "the Mesoamerican economy, at least in Classic and Postclassic times, operated far more as a market economy than one structured by tribute." This premise does not, however, discount the role of non-market forces as Kowalewski goes on to note in the latter sections of his article. Among other concepts explored in his chapter are notions that households operate as firms, ritual obligations effectively stimulate economic activities, and consumption and exchange serve as the primary agents of specialization. Perhaps more than anything, Kowalewski offers a viable model that other Mesoamerican archaeologists can explore in future research endeavors.

Next, in relation to Monica L. Smith's chapter in Part I of this volume, Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas narrow focus to examine the late prehispanic economy of Mexico's Valley of Oaxaca. Building upon and diverging from long-standing explanations for the region's development that are primarily based on Marx's Asiatic mode of production, Feinman and Nicholas highlight the dynamic role played by households and market exchange in this process as opposed to the top-down control and

management of irrigation and administered systems of production and distribution. Utilizing residential exaction findings from three different Classic-period sites as well as ethnographic data from other sources, Feinman and Nicholas provide alternative explanations for understanding the economic character of this part of prehispanic Mesoamerica. Significantly, the flexibility and/or variability in domestic productive practices, residential mobility, inter-household interdependence, and market reliance that they emphasize suggest a type of local agency that is largely absent from earlier held paradigms.

Part III's third chapter centers on Christine Beaulé's analysis of the camelid faunal remains and subsistence practices of a highland Bolivian village. The processing of herd animals that have served as a primary dietary staple for centuries in the Andes provides significant insights into emerging patterns of local status and wealth. The author is able to reconstruct disparities in accessibility to faunal packets or cuts of meat at the site of Jachakala in Oruro, Bolivia (ca. AD 150–1100). These differences, she argues, provide strong evidence for those interested in answering questions about how wealth differences first develop within the context of a subsistence oriented community. Complimenting Beaulé's Andean focus is Part III's final chapter, by Sarah R. Taylor. In this work she considers the developmental trajectory of frontier communities based on their interactions with neighboring populations. Data collected from the archaeological site of El Dornajo in southwestern Ecuador offers various insights into how inter-regional exchanges can foster heretofore unavailable opportunities for political-economic development for moderately complex frontier communities. She argues that an emerging regional prestige economy developed in El Dornajo even amid periods of fluctuating subsistence resources, due to interactions with more complex neighboring groups. Interested readers might benefit from considering Taylor's argument in light of Monica L. Smith's contribution to Part I of this volume.

In sum, Volume 32 of *REA* represents continuity and coalescence – continuity of research themes and coalescence of approaches. The series' long-standing tradition of supporting archaeological research on human economic thought and behavior (established by past editor Barry Isaac) and its strong historical interest in the legacy of Karl Polanyi, established by its first editor, George Dalton (and continued by Isaac), are evident. In fact, it is usually not easy to obtain as many archaeological papers for consideration as were obtained for this volume. Hopefully this will not always be the case. In addition, this volume represents continuity and coalescence in that the academic paths of two students of Norbert Dannhaeuser (also a

past editor of *REA*) have crossed in it with the collaboration of its two editors. Neither of us would be doing what we are doing now if it had not been for Norbert's instruction, encouragement, and general influence during our respective times at Texas A&M University and later, which is why we have decided to dedicate this volume to him, as explained at the start of this introduction.

Herzlichen Dank Herr Professor Dannhaeuser!
Ohne Sie, ohne Ihre tiefen Kenntnisse und Ihre Weisheit,
haetten wir es kaum geschafft.

CONTENTS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	vii
PREFACE	ix
UNDERSTANDING INTERSECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT, NEOLIBERALISM, AND PREHISTORIC ECONOMIES: AN OVERVIEW OF <i>REA</i> VOLUME 32 <i>Donald C. Wood and Ty Matejowsky</i>	xiii
PART I: VIEWING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY	
SWEATSHOP EXCHANGES: GIFTS AND GIVING IN THE GLOBAL FACTORY <i>Jamie Cross</i>	3
SEEKING ABUNDANCE: CONSUMPTION AS A MOTIVATING FACTOR IN CITIES PAST AND PRESENT <i>Monica L. Smith</i>	27
ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY AFTER THE GREAT DEBATE: THE ROLE AND EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONALIST THOUGHT <i>Justin A. Elardo</i>	53
PROTESTANT ETHIC AND PROSPERITY: VEGETABLE PRODUCTION IN ALMOLONGA, GUATEMALA <i>Andrés Marroquín Gramajo and Luis Noel Alfaro</i>	85