OCCUPY ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY[1, 2]

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The 2008 global financial crisis sparked a significant questioning of economic policies around the world. Anglophone free-market defenders have embraced Keynesian interventions to guide and control markets and economic practices. Whereas the fall of the Berlin Wall appeared to have given (near) global reign to neoliberal politico-economic thinking, governments have now been attributed a new role, via bailouts and supervising legislature for financial institutions. Not satisfied with the one-sided, i.e., business-saving, government measures, in 2011 the Occupy protests erupted, first in the U.S. and later in other parts of the globe.[3] While the movement is heterogeneous, a connecting principal concern is the belief that large corporations and the global financial systems control the world in a way that disproportionately benefits a minority, undermines democracy, and is generally unstable. The movement gained much popularity through its emphasis on the large and increasing wealth gap in the U.S. The slogan "We are the 99%" also took aim at the fact that the majority of people affected by the crisis

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1 The title of this text is taken from Maurer (2012).

2 I would like to thank Claudia Steiner, general editor of ANTIPODA until May 2013, and Monica Espinosa, the new general editor of the journal, for their enthusiasm and continuous support throughout this project. We could not have finished the issue without the invaluable work of our editorial assistant Nidia Vargas Medina. I would further like to thank Fabricio Cabrera for his advice and suggestions as regards the topic and possible contributors. Finally, I owe special thanks to Mauricio Montenegro for his commitment to the realization of this issue on anthropology and economy.

3 Although the Occupy Movement is most active in the United States, by October 2012 there had been Occupy protests and occupations in dozens of other countries across every continent except Antarctica.

did not benefit from the governments' crisis management, but instead were actually those who had to pay for the mistakes of a tiny minority. Meanwhile, those identified as the culprits of the cascading global debacle, such as investors, financial speculators, banks, etc., not only went "scot free", in many cases they also continued to receive enormous bonuses. The Occupy Movement has quieted down since it was evicted from its camp at Zuccotti Park in Manhattan at the end of 2011. Nonetheless, it has remained active as evidenced by the news on web pages, such as http://occupywallst.org/.

The Occupy Movement has also made explicit the role of the economy in our daily lives, an economy that we often perceive as an abstract system beyond our influence, i.e., "financial politics," "trade agreements," the "GDP," or the "stock exchange." On television, in the newspapers, and in public and academic debates the economy is discussed in terms of "investments," "taxes", "unemployment rates," "national debt", and "inflation rates". The economy appears to be something powerful and abstract; a massive system represented and understood through charts, models, and numbers; global flows and processes detached from humans. The only people appearing in this picture are politicians, economists, and financial analysts, experts in the science of economy, which is portrayed as being a "benevolent machine of growth" (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010:3). We know that "the economy" affects us in our daily lives. It affects our job perspectives and salaries; the cost of food and education; our rent and mortgage rates; and the retirement age and safety of our pensions—all of which are connected to the apparently distant and abstract "economy." Yet, for most of us, exactly how these spheres converge and what the human factor in these processes is remains obscure (Anderson 2011).

The economic crisis has produced a number of books calling for a "Human Economy" (e.g., Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010), an economy that satisfies *all* human needs, not only those met through market transactions (Hann and Hart 2011:8). This project opposes neoliberal politics and, more generally, the idea of human nature propagated by economists, i.e., that we all strive for our own personal benefit; that all our actions are rational and motivated by maximizing our advantages vis-à-vis others in a fight over limited goods. Moreover, the human economy also takes aim at dominant economic thinking, which suggests that an insurmountable dichotomy exists between self-interest and mutuality, rational economic behavior and social consideration.

For a long time now, anthropologists (and, more generally, social scientists) have questioned the rational-choice-based understanding of economic processes upheld by economists. Exploring how actors' perceptions, social relations, and obligations affect economic decisions, anthropologists have highlighted the importance of culture, power, and local social conditions. Inspired by the work of Karl Polanyi and the "substantivists", they have shown that *homo economicus* is "absent from many societies and does not even reflect what is best about ourselves" (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010:2). Moreover, the supposed inherent contradiction between self-interest and mutuality is not globally applicable; in many societies, self and other are actually often inseparable in practice (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010:4-5). "The economy" is not an isolated domain; in fact, it is part of a wider series of affective and causal relations. As such, it is a human creation and the result of human meanings, values, desires, choices, politics, and decisions. Thus, Hann and Hart (2010:9) state:

> Whereas rational choice theorists emphasize the individual, in the tradition of Robinson Crusoe, and believe that even decisions to cooperate with others are ultimately to be explained as the outcomes of individual calculation, the emphasis in speaking of the 'human economy' is on persons, whose preferences and choices are sometimes shaped by calculation, but usually also by the familial, social and political contexts in which humans are enmeshed or embedded.

The 2008 financial crisis and the Occupy Movement have sparked a renewed interest in the subdiscipline of economic anthropology. Over the last several years, the resurgence in the use of Marx's name in panel titles at international anthropological conferences has been remarkable; anthropologist David Graeber, who helped organize the original Occupy Wall Street movement, has become a public figure beyond academia; and a flurry of new books in the field of economic anthropology[4] have taken issue with the reification of "the economy" and suggest an "embedded" analysis of economic processes. As such, to anthropology, the Occupy Movement is a welcome reminder of the field's activist project/side; "studying up" also means to study the powerful and the wealthy, and to contribute to contemporary questions and problems.

As I write these lines, Colombia's peasants (and parts of the country's transportation sector) are on strike. Blocking vital roads and supply lines in different regions of the country, the strikers protest against unfulfilled government promises and demand different agricultural politics. Meanwhile, Colombia's government is pushing the extractive and re-primariza-

4 For example, David Graeber's *Debt, the First 5,000 Years* (2012), Chris Hann and Keith Hart's *Economic Anthropology* (2011), Stephen Gudeman's *Economy's Tensions: The Dialectics of Community and Market* (2012), Hart, Laville, and Cattoni's *Human Economy* (2010), Karen Ho's *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (2009), and Michael Chibnik's *Anthropology, Econimics, and Choice* (2011).

tion economy (as in mining and oil-drilling) (Herreros and Durán 2011). Concomitantly, the educational sector is increasingly experiencing cuts in funding. Observing a global tendency to especially underfund the humanities and foster subjects to economic growth, Martha Nussbaum complains in her book (or manifesto, as she calls it) *Not for Profit* (2010) that students are being trained to become "useful profit makers with obtuse imaginations" (XX:141-142), but without critical thinking. She rightly laments that, in education today, there appears to be little effort to nurture our values of democracy, empathy, tolerance, and free speech. All of these processes are questions where the on-the-ground, person-centered, and contextual approach of anthropology can—and I would like to emphasize, *should*—make its contribution.

Hart, Laville, and Cattani (2010:5) call for rescuing "the project of economics from the economists." The idea behind this volume, then, is an invitation to examine "the economy" in anthropological and sociological research and writing. As such, this volume is consciously *not* an exploration of the subfield of "economic anthropology"; rather, it is an invitation to widen our scope of analysis and overcome narrow definitions of academic disciplines and subdisciplines; indeed, it is an invitation to "Occupy Economic Anthropology"!

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