

### <Report>

Symposium on the 60th Anniversary of Karl Polanyi's Death "Debt and Money in the Human Economy"/  
ILCAA Joint Research Project "Comparative Ethnographical Study on the Dynamism of Debt (2): Plurality,  
Conflict and Creativity around Human Economics" The 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting in 2024 (9<sup>th</sup> meeting overall)

Dates: December 21 (Saturday), 2024 10:00-17:00

Location: Room 1096, Meiji University, Tokyo Surugadai Campus and Online (zoom)

#### Program:

10:30-10:40 Yukako Yoshida, Yutaka Sakuma "Opening Remarks"

#### Session 1: Human-Economy

10:40-11:10 Gareth Dale "Karl Polanyi on Humanity, Economy, and Human-Economy: A Critical Appraisal"

11:10-11:40 Yutaka Sakuma "Human Economy in Graeber's Thought"

11:40-12:00 Comments and Discussion (Commentator: Taichi Kochiya)

#### Session 2: Politics of Debt

13:00-13:30 A.C. Lomo-Myazhiom "Haiti Versus France: The Problem of the Debt of Slavery or the Blamed Victim"

13:30-14:00 Masaharu Kawano "From Rank Order to "Human" Order: Social Hierarchy and Mutual Recognition in Pohnpei, Micronesia"

14:00-14:20 Comments and Discussion (Commentator: Keiichiro Matsumura)

#### Session 3: Money and the Monetary Sphere

14:30-15:00 Demba Moussa Dembele "The CFA franc and Underdevelopment in West Africa"

15:00-15:30 Chikako Nakayama, Juntaro Fukada "Monetary Sovereignty and Centricity focusing on a historical case of German New Guinea"

15:30-15:50 Comments and Discussion (Commentator: Kazuo Kobayashi)

16:00-16:50 General Discussion

16:50-17:00 Closing Remarks

(Participants: 74)

#### Summary:

This event was held on the above date and time, with 74 people participating in person and online. The event was moderated by Yukako Yoshida. In Session 1 (Human-Economy), Gareth Dale gave a presentation on Karl Polanyi's ideas on human survival and the economy, and Yutaka Sakuma gave a presentation on Graeber's ideas, which provide an innovative perspective on the concept of "human economy" as described by Polanyi (Taichi Kochiya provided comments on the two presentations). In Session 2 (Politics of Debt),

A.C. Lomo-Myazhiom gave a presentation on the “independence debt” of Haiti after its independence and the struggles surrounding it, and Masaharu Kawano gave a presentation on the construction of a “human economy” on the island of Pohnpei in Micronesia, which has a background of ranking systems and foreign rule (Keiichiro Matsumura commented on the two presentations). In Session 3 (Money and the Monetary Sphere), Demba Moussa Dembele gave a presentation on the struggle over the continuation and abolition of the CFA franc, a legacy of French colonialism in West and Central Africa, and Chikako Nakayama and Juntaro Fukada gave a presentation on the confusion surrounding monetary sovereignty in German New Guinea from the 1880s-1914 (Kazuo Kobayashi commented on the two presentations). Finally, there was a lively discussion in the general discussion. The abstracts of each reports are as follows.

### **Karl Polanyi on Humanity, Economy, and Human-Economy: A Critical Appraisal**

Gareth Dale (Brunel University of London)

This lecture began with some introductory remarks on Polanyi’s death and then link from it to the climate crisis, and the question of human survival. This lecture touched briefly on the genocide in Palestine, and on the link between it and the climate crisis. In this connection, this lecture mentioned Polanyi’s insights into the oil-industrial complex. At this point this lecture was home in on some of Polanyi’s thoughts on human survival, and on Polanyi’s Christian-socialist understanding of human nature and “moral community.” This lecture draw out the connections between this philosophy and Polanyi’s arguments on fictitious commodities and the ‘unnatural’ nature of the market system.

From there, this lecture moved to discuss Polanyi’s ‘two meanings of the economy.’ These are the substantive and formal senses. (Or: the ‘human’ and the ‘commercial.’) To elucidate what Polanyi means, this lecture look at two of the “other Karls” from whom he drew inspiration: Carl Menger and Karl Marx. From Menger, Polanyi drew the idea of two different ways of looking at ‘the economy.’ With Marx and Engels he shared several strands of the critique of capitalism: especially that it is anarchic, it is restrictive of human freedom, and it turns human beings and the natural world into commodities.

Inext turn to Marx and Engels’ evaluation of so-called ‘primitive peoples.’ They were not the first socialists to find affirmation for a socialist perspective among those peoples whom the mainstream cast as barbarians, even animals. In this they were following Charles Fourier. But this idea, found in Fourier and Marx, that civilized Europe was in important respects ‘beneath the savages’ was audacious indeed.

Polanyi was drawn to the idea, found in Morgan and Engels, that in ‘primitive’ communities’ relations among people were personal, direct, and immediate. Yet he reads Engels through a Tönniesian lens. While for Engels the absence of classes and political organizations of class rule (such as states) demarcates ‘primitive communism’ from all forms of class society, including those in which exploitative relations take a ‘face-to-face, inter-personal’ form, for Polanyi the fault line is between ‘impersonal-opaque’ and ‘personal-transparent’ modes of social interaction, and this, historically, translates into the distinction between market society and all previous formations in which Gemeinschaft-type relations prevailed—

including European feudalism.

### **Human Economy and David Graeber's Thought**

Yutaka Sakuma (Meiji University)

In recent years, against the backdrop of the development of artificial intelligence and the worsening of environmental problems, there has been a growing trend toward “post-human” studies, in which the modern assumption that “humans” as subjects dominate “non-humans” (robots, animals, plants, etc.) as objects is being reexamined. Even before the “post-human” movement was in full swing, cultural anthropology had pioneered the study of the boundary between humans and non-humans. This is the field of economic anthropology, founded by Polanyi.

According to Polanyi, the modern economy, which was established in Western Europe in the 18th century at the earliest, is underpinned by the idea that the distribution of all goods is self-regulating through the market. In a market economy, man is not the ruler of the economy, but is represented as an individual (*homo economicus*) who seeks to maximize his own self-interest, as well as a private owner who buys and sells his goods, land, and labor in the market. Polanyi, on the other hand, pointed out that it is a fiction to consider labor power, which is not produced for the purpose of buying and selling in the market, as a commodity, unlike general goods, and that the economy is essentially "an instituted process of interaction between man and his environment", not one in which private owners as subjects buy and sell goods, land, and labor power as objects. By relying on ethnographic data on non-Western modern societies, he elucidated the ways in which humans have realized economic activities through reciprocity and redistribution, and pioneered a vision for a non-market economy.

Polanyi sometimes referred to the non-market economy as the human economy. However, Polanyi did not necessarily clarify this concept himself. The anthropologist David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011) opened up a revolutionary perspective on the concept. In his book, which traces back 5,000 years of human history to explore the process by which debt, originally a moral phenomenon, was transformed into an economic phenomenon, Graeber defined the human economy “those where money acts primarily as a social currency, to create, maintain, or sever relations between people rather than to purchase things” and contrasted this with the market economy (commercial economy). In the human economy, human beings are not individuals pursuing private interests, but “nexus” embedded in various relationships such as family, friends, and local kinship, each of which has its own unique and incomparable value. On the contrary, Graeber argued, the market economy transforms human beings with such value into abstractions that can be substituted for other things, commodities that can be “quantified” by money, thus economizing moral debt.

Thus, by focusing on the human economy, economic anthropology has clarified the problem of a market economy in which “humans” are transformed into “non-humans” such as commodities and numbers. This is an argument that deserves renewed attention precisely in the post-human age, when the boundary between

human and non-human is being reconsidered. However, conventional research, especially that of Graeber, has tended to overly disconnect the human economy from the market economy and to treat the transition from the former to the latter as irreversible. But society is not necessarily helplessly destroyed by this action; as Polanyi argued in 18th century England, the forces that dehumanize all things create defensive forces to resist those forces. Moreover, this force does not necessarily take the form of an explicit protest movement. Rather, it is latent in the daily life practices of those who are partially involved in the market but not completely dependent on it. Following Polanyi's description of the economy as an interaction between humans and the environment, the human economy is a relational movement that embeds the market economy as an environment in its own interaction with itself.

### **Haiti Versus France: The Problem of the Debt of Slavery or the Blamed Victim**

A.C. Lomo-Myazhiom (University of Strasbourg)

The first independent “Black” republic to emerge from transatlantic slavery in 1804 after a fierce struggle, Haiti paid a high price for its resistance. Following an order issued by King Charles X on April 17, 1825, the newly independent republic had to pay 150 million gold-francs to compensate former colonists and continue “privileged commercial exchanges in favor of France”. Until 1947, Haiti repaid the iniquitous debt.

On April 7, 2003 and again in January 2004, on the occasion of Haiti's Bicentenary and the death of Toussaint Louverture, former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide demanded that the former colonial power pay the “independence debt”. A few months later, he was overthrown by a coup d'état and deported to Bangui in the Central African Republic. To this day, France refuses to return anything. This is the story of the accused victim and the “colonial pact” of domination. And to see slavery as a crime against humanity with no one responsible or guilty. How can we explain that slaves pay their former masters for fighting for their freedom? Knowing that in 1789 there was the French revolution...

For decades, Haitians and an international coalition have been demanding that France repay the debt, in the name of reparation and equality between all human beings. Many observers consider this debt to be one of the factors behind Haiti's socio-economic and political decline over the past two centuries.

### **From Rank Order to “Human” Order: Social Hierarchy and Mutual Recognition in Pohnpei, Micronesia**

Masaharu Kawano (Tokyo Metropolitan University)

This study examined how people construct a “human economy” in Pohnpei, Micronesia. The study was based on ethnographic research on the social hierarchy and ceremonial feasting practices observed in traditional chiefdoms in Pohnpei, conducted primarily from 2011 to 2012.

In light of David Graeber's social theory of economic relations, the human economy can be defined as an economic system in which each person is recognized as a unique and incomparable human being, as

opposed to a commercial economy, which treats each person as a mere commercial entity. Although Graeber critically portrays the dehumanizing process through which commercial economies subsume human economies, he does not sufficiently elucidate the concrete process through which people construct human economies in opposition to the spread of commercial economies. Thus, this study aims to contribute to comparative ethnographic research on human economies by demonstrating how people create a “human economy” within a hierarchical society.

Pohnpei is comprised of five chiefdoms. Each is presided over by a respective paramount chief. The chiefdoms are subdivided into numerous sections, each of which is led by a section chief. The majority of male adults are bestowed their ranking titles by their respective paramount or section chiefs. A married woman holds the counterpart to her husband's title.

Each chiefdom is distinguished by a "rank order," which is a linear ranking system of the titles held by each resident. The ranking of titles is inextricably linked to the local concept of "honor," which represents the core values within Pohnpeian custom. It is the responsibility of each individual to demonstrate respect for the "honor" of others in both their daily interactions and during ceremonial events. Ceremonial feasts, such as annual festivals, weddings, funerals, and family gatherings, provide opportunities for individuals of lower rank to demonstrate, in a ritualized manner, respect for those of higher rank. Feasting occasions showcase the "honor" of all participants and reaffirm the social hierarchy under the chief's authority. Islanders are in political debt to their chiefs who have bestowed upon them ranking titles and the accompanying “honor,” thereby establishing each person's identity within the hierarchical structure.

However, the advent of cash economies under foreign rule (Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States) and the growing inclination to utilize commodities and currency in place of ceremonial goods at feasts led to a transformation in the traditional “rank order” under commercial principles. For example, with the administration of Pohnpei by the United States through the United Nations' Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), there was an increase in wealth among government employees, which contributed to the growth of local economic disparities. In response, the paramount and section chiefs began to leverage their status for financial gain by conferring high-ranking titles on affluent residents in return for substantial quantities of commodities and money. Furthermore, individuals occupying the high ranks were required to provide a substantial financial contribution to their respective chiefs according to their rank. Consequently, ceremonial feasting has become an avenue for ranking titles to be “bought and sold” like a business.

Despite the prevalence of market-driven social mobility in contemporary Pohnpeian society, traditional feasts have not entirely succumbed to the practice of “buying and selling” rank and titles. Occasionally, participants at these feasts engage in improvisational performances for one another, regardless of ritual compliance and social hierarchy. These performances include redistributing ceremonial goods to a person all participants agree is deserving of care at that moment, without expecting any reward, such as rank or “honor,” in return. The performances demonstrate that every person is intricately connected to a vast network of social relationships that empower them as human beings capable of receiving multifaceted

evaluations that transcend the boundaries of rank. Each participant is acknowledged as a unique and invaluable human being through the ethical performance of the other participants, with mutual acknowledgment occurring as needed.

The notion of rank order is not necessarily a defining characteristic of the social lives of ordinary people in Pohnpei. On significant occasions, they engage in improvisational performances that foster a sense of mutual approval, regardless of individual status or honor. These ethical acts give rise to a “human” order, which is based on the Pohnpeian version of the “human economy” rather than on a rank order, which has easily been linked to the “commercial economy.”

### **The CFA franc and Underdevelopment in West Africa**

Demba Moussa Dembele (Forum for African Alternatives)

The CFA franc is one of the most controversial legacies of French colonialism in West and Central Africa. Created in December 1945 by the French government, the CFA was meant to help France reassert its control over its African colonies at the end of World War Two and German occupation. It is among the few institutions that have survived the wave of political independence in Africa in the 1960s. Many in Africa and elsewhere wonder why the CFA franc continues to exist, more than 60 years after the so-called independence of African countries. This lecture was attempted to provide answers by examining a number of economic, political and geopolitical factors.

Clearly, the CFA franc is part of the system of domination of the French Empire. It never served the development of African countries. For this reason, the paper will argue that the CFA franc has been and remains one of the major obstacles to African countries’ development. Indeed, these countries in West and Central Africa are among the “poorest” in the world, as evidenced by their poor economic and social performance which puts them at the bottom of the human development index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is in view of such dismal record that the struggle against the CFA franc started. It began with academics and researchers who exposed the real nature of the currency and its role as an instrument of plunder and control by the former colonial power, namely France. Later, social movements and artists joined the struggle and gave it a larger echo in the public opinion.

In the face of this growing and widespread resistance, France and African leaders were compelled to make superficial concessions in order to keep the CFA franc in one form or another. But the future of the CFA franc is very cloudy. The CFA franc countries are now split into two entities. The first is composed of those who remain faithful to France and therefore want to keep the CFA. Among them, Côte d’Ivoire, Benin and Togo. The other group is composed of members of the Confederation of Sahel States (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) who have taken a radical stand against France by shutting down its military bases and severing diplomatic ties. In those three countries, public opinion is overwhelmingly against the CFA franc and people are calling the Sahel Confederation States to leave the CFA and create their own currency in order to strengthen their sovereignty and cooperation.

On the other hand, there is the long-running ECOWAS project aimed at creating a single currency, to replace the CFA franc and the other currencies currently used in the Community. After several attempts, a new date has been agreed, to adopt the single currency in 2027. But most people are very skeptical.

If the ECOWAS<sup>[1]</sup> single currency fails, some countries may be tempted to go it alone, with their own national currencies. This may be the case of Senegal, whose newly elected President raised the idea during the presidential campaign, back in March 2024. The lecture examined the current alternatives to the CFA franc and analyze their feasibility.

[1] ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES, comprising 15 countries : Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

### **Monetary Sovereignty and Centricity focusing on a historical case of German New Guinea**

Chikako Nakayama (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) & Juntaro Fukada (Mie University)

This lecture investigated a historical case of German New Guinea to examine the concept of centricity Karl Polanyi raised in “The Great Transformation”. More concretely, it inspects the discrepancy between the theory and practice of monetary sovereignty shown in the German colonial period and the head tax's function in the monetary system of governance.

Polanyi, in his exploration of money, counted much on his contemporary anthropological literature of Bronislaw Malinowski and Richard Thurnwald, etc., both of whom had experiences in fieldwork in the Southern Pacific and New Guinea. Polanyi placed importance on centricity together with symmetry to indicate the function of redistribution and reciprocity, respectively, to show that market exchange is not the only economic activity. According to him, money is an institution of symbolic embodiment of social value and one of the fictitious commodities that cannot be sold or bought at the markets. Besides, he emphasized there were functions of money other than that of exchange: The means of payment of debt and storage of value, for example. However, it was not explicit in his writings whether such principles as centricity or payment of debt, different from market exchange and apparently seen in pre-modern societies, could survive and co-exist in the increasingly integrated and globalized world of economy.

Thus, we dealt with a historical case of German New Guinea between the 1880s and 1914 and investigate the complex and confused situation around monetary sovereignty. We have found that different kinds of intervention had hampered, to a considerable extent, the attempt by Germany to exercise monetary governance over this territory. Germans tried their monetary governance by Mark system under the gold standard, which did not work well in New Guinea, (nor in Germany itself, by the way). The valid symbol of people's value in New Guinea remained in the shell money used for a long time in economic and socio-cultural contexts of life events.

Then, we paid attention to the introduction of head tax around 1907 as an effective tool of centricity in the complicated situation. We argued that the tax system addresses the prevalence of centricity of power,

but the influence and effects might not be as straightforward as expected by the administrative power. Finally, we concluded that we can see the contemporary outcome of this historical case that the same shell money has survived to this day and has become one of the tools to pay the tax at the place.