
Stephen Gudeman


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2016.1182099

Published online: 08 Jun 2016.

Article views: 26

View related articles

View Crossmark data
occupations allowed the women to remain in Beijing, or at least to live in small towns rather than making the return to the village that they dreaded. However, there was often a balancing drawback in such matches. Urban husbands willing to marry migrant women might have low status jobs, poor health or accommodation, or difficult co-resident relatives.

To consolidate her position in her husband’s family, a migrant woman must bear a child. However, motherhood brings new difficulties and often the loss of highly prized independence. Migrant women are unlikely to be entitled to maternity leave or medical help with the costs of giving birth. Most, therefore, have to quit work. Some move in with in-laws in order to reduce expenses and get help with childcare. Others even return to their villages, enduring prolonged marital separations, because medical care and education cost less in the countryside.

Gaetano shows convincingly that many women gain agency and improve their lives and prospects through migration. Their achievements in pursuing new opportunities and acquiring and applying knowledge of the new world they have entered to enhance their prospects are impressive. Yet, as this study also shows, the life chances of rural migrants are limited by their inferior social status and by the entrenched discrimination and inequality that is a feature of contemporary Chinese society.

Delia Davin
Department of East Asian Studies
University of Leeds
Davin@leeds.ac.uk
© 2016 Delia Davin
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2015.1130113


The concept of surplus has a long history in anthropology and economics. Economists talk about consumers or producers of surplus when a buyer purchases for less than what was expected or a seller receives a higher price than anticipated. Governments have a surplus when taxes bring in more than expenses. Archaeologists and social anthropologists usually define surplus as the remainder above need or necessity. For archaeologists, surplus plays a role in theories about social evolution, power, and stratification. The idea has long been used, but does it still have shelf life?

The well-crafted essays in this collection bring us up to date with archaeological views of surplus. The collection is bookended by Morehart and De Lucia’s wide-ranging survey of the concept and its uses, and by Earle’s division between top-down and bottom-up ways of creating it. Surplus may be produced by political and religious forces or by incentives in the house and community. The range of the studies, the technical expertise of the collection, and the ways of spotting surplus in artefacts impressed me. I wondered, however, if archaeologists (and anthropologists) might make better use of the concept of rent to which I shall return.

To reveal processes of Inka expansion in highland Peru, Costin pulls together material about the production of chicha (fermented maize beer) and textiles, discusses caloric gains and losses in chicha making, tells about the number of hoes found, and relates these and other materials to the surplus needed to fulfil Inka obligations. In contrast, for central Mexico, De Lucia and Morehart investigate shifts in maize production, the building of chinampas (irrigated fields), the decline of crop diversity, and the production of surplus represented in
luxury goods and ritual objects for use in state religion. As in the other studies, the connections are supported and interesting.

The study by Miller takes us to the Indus civilisation and the different ways water was used for agriculture (rain-fed, inundation, canals, irrigation), their implications for the production of surplus, their labour requirements, and their relation to social organisation. The case of Småland in early Sweden (Thurston) displays the complexities in understanding the production of a surplus. Local potential and needs, population movements, varied forms of livelihood, marketing as well as a political superstructure with taxes and tribute along with armed resistance all influenced the amount and use of surplus.

Viking settlement in Iceland (Bolender) presents the interesting case of the way surplus land initially used by independent households becomes scarce, enclosed and then occupied by tenants from whom a surplus may be extracted. From this inequality, a larger political economy could emerge.

Religion, rituals, and feasting can be significant forces bringing forth surplus production. Using ethnohistorical accounts from the sixteenth century, Wells shows how craftsmen among the Yucatec Maya, who were supported by a surplus, produced figurines honouring deities at feasts. Even if we know less than we might wish about the beliefs represented, his chapter provides a different perspective on the motivations for surplus production.

House expansion linked to political elites and feasting represents a different use of surplus as Norman shows for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Benin. Accumulating a surplus was linked to building shrines, attracting followers, and providing feasts. The evidence comes from archaeological surveys, chronicles, and ethnographic reports, which is a welcome use of different sources.

The chapter by Brown and Kelly on Cahokia returns the reader to the Americas. They focus on the idea of surplus labour that was drawn together by an increase of social relationships in a central place. Through collective rituals and feasts, this labour was expended in agriculture and projects moving earth and building mounds for rituals. Then, as the communal aspect increased, inequality developed. Their focus on labour, indebtedness and stratification brings in a Marxist perspective.

Thompson and Moore’s study takes us to hunters and gatherers of coastal Georgia in 5000 to 3000 BP. In this region, large shell rings up to 250 metres across were built. The rings defined habitation sites, and the shells were both the waste products of food and a surplus from rituals and ceremonies. Gathering and arranging surplus shells allowed social relationships and a sense of community to develop. The essay by Stahl on Africa turns us to a surplus accumulated in people, specifically slaves. Slaves were taken from within or without a group, and were acquired by predation, ritual means, and debt. Put to work, they provided owners with prestige and status.

The wide range of these studies by area, time period, research techniques, and focus will inspire further explorations by archaeologists of the traditional topic of surplus. I am left wondering, however, if the concept of rent might be equally if not more usefully deployed than surplus. Rent refers not only to ground rent but also to any return received without labour. In market society, it includes interest, dividends, capital gains, excessive salaries, royalties, and the like. More broadly, rent encompasses the collection of tribute, tithes, religious offerings, slaves, and even unearned returns from the environment. The idea of surplus, as in most studies in this volume, refers to the excess above subsistence or maintenance needs, but what comprises a necessity? If a priest’s blessing is needed for my garden to prosper, is the return to him to be counted as a necessity or use of the surplus? Surplus and necessity are inverse amounts that vary by cultural definition. In contrast, rent refers to a relationship between a rent taker and a rent giver. Surplus and necessity is a material relationship, but
rent taking and giving is a social relationship that is connected to power differentials, stratification, and social ‘evolution’. It is usually justified or legitimated by an ideology based on religious or political authority, by the holding of a resource, or by the possession of special knowledge or skills. The rent concept places a study in the framework of production encompassing distribution, or political economy, and is one part of the analysis of distribution in an economy. The concept also travels well across societies. Might rent, by placing social relationships at its core, be a useful way to explore the many processes described in this volume?

Stephen Gudeman

Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota
gudeman@umn.edu

© 2016 Stephen Gudeman

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2016.1182099


This book relates in narrative format the 1830 kidnapping of Dako, a man from the island of Uneapa in the South Pacific and the supposed ‘cannibal’ of the book’s title, by Yankee merchant captain Benjamin Morrell; their travels to and in the USA and Dako’s eventual return home; and the aftermath of this encounter for both men and their societies. The story behind this epic tale began with the serendipitous archive find of firsthand descriptions of the South Pacific related by Dako to an early ethnographer. Author James Fairhead, a professor of social anthropology at the University of Sussex, found them riveting, and with reason. His resulting detailed account of the adventures and misadventures of Dako and Morrell would perhaps read as too far a stretch of the imagination were it a work of fiction; as history, the book is a largely successful effort towards recovering an unheard voice, while balancing biography, micro-history, and global history.

Rather than following a strict chronology throughout, Fairhead takes advantage of his narrative format and follows the ancient storyteller’s advice to begin in media res, introducing his title actors at the moment of their rather dramatic meeting, in a cloud of gun smoke off the shore of the South Pacific island of Uneapa. Having thus set the stage, he uses the remainder of the book to explore both men’s stories in as equal detail as possible given the limitations of the available sources. Indeed, as an historian, I was equally fascinated with the story of teasing out those sources, sometimes present in the background, and wish Fairhead had given the reader more of it. Fairhead strives to explicate Americans’ interpretation of Dako’s life and his meaning to the cultural and intellectual climate of the young republic, while he also interrogates Dako’s understanding of Americans and America, his attempt to integrate these new visitors and experience into his own worldview and past, and his successful use of the captain and ship for his own economic and political purposes upon his return home. An epilogue follows the island of Uneapa into the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tracing the ripples of the Dako/Morrell encounter through the political and colonial histories that followed.

At the same time, the book integrates the biographies of Dako and Morrell into a broader history of global maritime trade. Fairhead’s story touches on everything from the downfall of the Bank of the United States to South Pacific environmental and agricultural history to the intricacies of the closed-port China trade, with tendrils in the Second Great Awakening and