



# Money

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*Money is a formidable subject — an intimate object in our everyday lives, a claim over resources, and a topic of academic inquiry. Textbooks define money by its various functions, e.g., as a medium of exchange, a means of payment, a unit of account, and a store of value. While anthropologists also reckon with these functions, they are equally concerned with money as a social process, a material object, and a political token, concerns that lead them to emphasise money's diversity and instability over its universality and coherence. This entry highlights four areas of inquiry in the anthropological literature on money: (1) debates over what counts as money; (2) investigations into money's role in maintaining and overturning social boundaries; (3) studies of monetary pluralism in light of the failure of state-centric monopoly currencies; and (4) approaches that engage the role of technology in creating new platforms and networks for creating and distributing money. By way of concluding, the essay addresses how anthropologists reflect on the future of money.*

## Introduction

Most definitions of money begin with its functions. While varying in their elaboration, these functions usually include a medium of exchange, a means of payment, a unit of account, and a store of value. Upon closer inspection, we see how these functions are just starting points that open up additional questions, including how price or value is constructed; who or what authorises money; how people use different units to express hierarchies, solidarities, and identities; and even how money as a store of value or asset is protected. Because anthropologists confront a great diversity of objects that channel value, they are less concerned with identifying a universal conception of money, turning instead to wonder at the 'breathtakingly ambitious project that [anthropologists] set out, simply by defining Melanesian and African currencies, the greenback and the "Euro" as part of the same domain' (Guyer 1999: 245). Even archaeologists no longer assume coinage is a familiar medium to be studied in isolation from other contextual evidence—coins described in an archaeological context tell a different story than when any coin find is assumed to represent commercial value or exchange (Haselgrove & Krmnicek 2012). Challenges arise not simply because of the range of money objects or the diversity of their uses but because of how money travels beyond the horizon, along pathways not always visible to its participants (Hart & Ortiz 2014: 475). Given these dilemmas, scholars now argue money may be better understood as a process, 'inextricably social, inherently dynamic, complex, and contradictory' (Dodd 2016: 88), and one usefully approached through the material and political systems that create and govern money, whether payment systems (Maurer 2015), central banks (Holmes 2014; Riles 2019), or even mining for bitcoin (Ferry 2016;

Zimmer 2017).

This entry considers debates about what counts as money, and then addresses how money mediates social [relations](#) and identities. It next examines what happens when people manage multiple currencies, particularly when state-centric monopoly currencies unravel and monetary pluralism is on the rise. Finally, the entry highlights those platforms and [infrastructures](#) that channel value, exposing the stubborn materiality of money.

### **What counts as money?**

When we begin with the function of money as a means of exchange in the marketplace, we privilege utilitarian need over other [values](#) (Guyer 1999: 242). This starting point is reinforced by the popular view that money emerged out of barter, a resolution to the problem of the ‘double-coincidence of wants’, in which each participant fails to possess what the other wants and so requires a third medium to initiate and complete an exchange (Menger 1892). Anthropologists argue this story is better understood as a myth for several reasons. First, evidence for this claim is built not on the [historical](#) record but from examples conjured up by scholars themselves (Graeber 2011: 37). Second, archaeological records suggest that the idea of money preceded the object, a ‘virtual currency’ that encoded information in accounting systems, such as the knotted strings made by the Inca, or Mesopotamian clay tablets. Only later did money circulate as physical objects such as tokens (Graeber 2011: 40), a point made by John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s, who highlighted the role of the state in creating a unit of account to express value (e.g., a token) over money as a commodity (Hart 2005: 168). Finally, and most importantly, insofar as myths do political work, the claim that money originates in barter reinforces the dominant values of capitalism, including the sanctity of private property over inalienable possessions and the emphasis on exchanging equivalent rather than asymmetrical values (Graeber 2011; Hart 2005: 161; Guyer 2004). It also mystifies the role of the state or political authority in conjuring money. Anthropologists, as we shall see, have different stories to tell about money.

In the early twentieth century, anthropologists promoted empirical fieldwork as a method to avoid researchers’ biases and prejudices. They were concerned with documenting trade [relations](#) and other sorts of exchanges, such as ceremonial exchanges and life-cycle rituals. When confronted with the immense range of objects that people used in exchange, from shells to axe blades to cattle, anthropologists questioned whether such objects counted as money. Bronislaw Malinowski (1921: 14) famously declared that axe blades, shell necklaces and arm shells, and pigs—highly valued among the Trobriand Islanders—were not money. Nor were those objects likely to become money because, according to him, the islanders did not need a ‘common measure of value’. Instead, in the Pacific, shell necklaces and arm shells projected the reputation of men, demonstrating how their value was irreducible to a common standard. Elsewhere, however, shells did convey value over long distances. In Africa and Asia, cowrie shells served as

a convenient currency—easily recognisable by their colour and shape, difficult though not impossible to counterfeit, and highly transportable (Şaul 2004). Malinowski's contemporary, Marcel Mauss, cautioned that defining money in terms more relevant for European metropolises than Pacific Islands would only foreclose the possibility of focusing on its social significance in extending and even repairing relations (1990: Note 29, 100-2).

This debate set the stage for how anthropologists conceptualised non-state and non-standard objects that fulfilled some but not all of the functions of money taken for granted today. Such objects came to be called 'primitive money', in opposition to 'modern money' issued by a single issuing authority like a state bank (Dalton 1965). Other terms came into play, including 'special-purpose money' to denote objects restricted to certain kinds of people and types of relationships, in contrast to 'general-purpose money'. Could, then, any object in circulation serve as 'primitive' money? Mary Douglas (1958) posed this question about cloth woven from the raffia palm. Among the Lele, a group in what was then the Belgian Congo, people wore the cloth, and while it quickly wore out, it could not be purchased; instead, people exchanged the material as peace offerings, [gifts](#) upon the delivery of a [child](#), and even as a mortuary gift. These conventions ensured that older men received or wove the cloth, while younger men borrowed it, thus remaining indebted to their seniors. Raffia cloth, Douglas argued, had not evolved into a form of money because it circulated but without buying and selling; again, a claim that rested on an a priori definition of money as mediating market transactions, not social payments. Raffia cloth also raises the question of whether the physical stuff of money matters. If money represents exchange value (Menger 1892) or indexes social relationships of credit and [debt](#) (Graeber 2011), then the medium is either neutral or a 'veil' that conceals those underlying relationships. Yet the patterning of exchange relations, such as bridewealth, point to the specificity of relations and political processes that support money's materiality. In societies where bridewealth involves paying respect to elders, even money and other goods are displayed so they are 'seen by all, measured against one another, and displayed to function as memory devices about those prior obligations' (Maurer 2018: 13).

These so-called 'primitive currencies'—pigs raised by kin, raffia cloth woven by elderly men—circulated against the backdrop of an ever-widening set of state-issued currencies and expanding markets (Wolf 2010). Anthropologists analysing their difference initially drew on evolutionary paradigms, arguing that 'primitive currencies' would evolve into, or be displaced by, 'modern' ones. A well-known case is the model of co-existing 'spheres of exchange', in which Paul Bohannan (1955) described how members of the Tiv [ethnic](#) group in western Nigeria organised their transactions into three hierarchically-ranked spheres, each one defined by the object(s) that circulated as currency. The lowest sphere of exchange was concerned with subsistence. Here people exchanged foodstuffs and everyday utensils. The middle sphere mediated prestige through transactions with cattle and metal bars, and the highest sphere designated rights over [dependent](#) women and children. While these spheres were distinct, they were also permeable. People

occasionally traded iron rods downward for foodstuffs or upward as social payments for marriage. In the nineteenth century, however, [colonial](#) administrators viewed metal rods as money and established a rate of exchange with the new coinage, which then circulated as an 'all-purpose currency', eventually collapsing the spheres, and, by extension, the social relations and cultural values held by the Tiv. Frustrated elders cursed money as bride payments increased and foodstuffs were trucked away to larger markets (1955: 69).

This story of money dissolving customary arrangements and social bonds has proven to be remarkably enduring among anthropologists, a myth that opposes culture and money (for a critique, see Maurer 2006). Like barter, Bohannan's model also has significant limitations. For example, he does not account for how people came to possess metal rods in the first place. These objects did not just circulate in contained spheres; rather, some rods originated in Europe and then moved across Atlantic Africa as people converted them into assets with greater longevity and security than other currencies or objects (Guyer 2004: 30). Consequently, anthropologists now emphasise asymmetrical values, stressing how the value of objects shifts across different social and political landscapes (Appadurai 1986). People seek to realise gains in their conversions, propelled by competition, war, and conquest as much as by trade.

By the mid-twentieth century, as money proper coalesced into a paradigmatic form of state-issued national currencies, so did the story of money's evolution from commodity-money to coins and paper notes backed by precious metals to state-issued currencies. Today, however, anthropologists recognise how debates over 'primitive money' staged other dichotomies between 'us' and 'them', the assumed 'savage' and self-declared 'civilized', allowing standard monetary objects to signal the arrival of the 'modern'—impersonal, objective, and impervious to the particularities of historical and cultural difference (Nelms & Maurer 2014: 45). Once we accord non-standard variants the status of money, we can address questions such as when something is money, where something is money, and for whom something is money (Agha 2017: 300). What comes into view in asking these question is 'moneyness' as a relational property between objects and subjects (Zickgraf 2017). It is not that alternative forms of money express solidarities, hierarchies, and differences, and modern money does not; instead, we may want to conceptualise not just what money is but also when and how things and ideas work as money (Maurer 2006; Nelms & Maurer 2014: 39).

### **Money at the threshold of persons and relations**

Anthropological interest in money has engaged concepts of neoclassical economics as well as those of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century European philosophers, who reflected on money through the provocations of industrialization (Marx 1977 [1867]) and the seduction of urban metropolises (Simmel 1990). For anthropologists, the question was whether money gave rise to a particular worldview, or whether it reflected specific [historical](#) and social circumstances. In the book *Money and the morality of exchange*, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry argued that money had no intrinsic meaning; instead, it was an existing worldview that gave rise to 'particular ways of representing money' (Bloch & Parry 1989: 19). They also

emphasised broader patterns, noting how across different societies, people evaluated the morality of transactions in relation to different temporal orders. In short-term activities, such as bargaining in the marketplace or spending a windfall from [gambling](#), people tended to express [values](#) of competition and acquisitiveness. Over the long-term, however, they evaluated monetary transactions in relation to moral and even cosmological orders. [Farmers](#) in Kenya, for example, referred to the gains from the selling of land holdings that did not benefit them in the long-run as 'bitter money' (Shipton 1989), while young men in northern Madagascar [working](#) in sapphire mines spent their earnings or 'hot money' in daring ways, signalling their rejection of their place on the social landscape (Walsh 2003).

Through earning, spending, saving, and even investing, money mediates personhood in multiple ways, as we saw above with young men in Madagascar. In the post-Civil War United States (from the 1870s to 1930s), as [household](#) incomes increased and consumer goods became more widely available, the meanings associated with wages for men and women diverged (Zelizer 2017). Men were considered to earn a 'family wage', sufficient enough to support spouses and [children](#), whereas women received 'pin money', even as wages, intended for incidental expenditures (Zelizer 2017: 27). In Southeast Asia, where scholars long associated women with markets and money, anthropologists found the wives of Malay fishermen and Javanese batik makers handled money, not because they had more power or status than their husbands, but because they were seen to domesticate money by channelling it for household expenses (Brenner 1998; Carsten 1989). Such gendered conceptions of money have spurred microfinance organisations to promote their activities as empowering women. Yet joint-collateral loans made to groups of women, in which all borrowers are equally responsible for repaying the loan, can heighten the vulnerability of female borrowers. Loan collectors in Bangladesh, for example, relied on social codes of honour and shame to recover loans, which has led to some women being ostracised from community life (Karim 2011). In Paraguay, microfinance organisations instrumentalised women's social ties via group-based loans, whereas men were seen as autonomous subjects and so responsible for only their individual share (Schuster 2014).

The many ways in which money relates to worldviews and personhood shows that how we assign meanings to transactions matters. For example, measurements of the GNP (gross national product) exclude those activities that are said not to produce economic value such as government transfers, [charitable](#) donations, family [gifts](#), and bequests, even though they involve money (Gibson-Graham 2006). Yet money is promiscuous, often crossing the interpretive boundaries that people seek to maintain (Akin & Robbins 1999: 7). In capitalist societies, people tend to oppose commodities and gifts for ideological reasons, an opposition that reasserts money's proper place in the market (Bloch & Parry 1989: 9) and highlights gifts as subjectively constituted (Weiner 1992; Strathern 1988). However, money can be a powerful gift itself, evident in the energy that people expend to disguise the economic nature of transactions (Bourdieu 1977), or invoke the 'perfect gift', to resolve the contradiction between commodities in the marketplace and gifts in the family domain (Carrier 1990). For migrants, money now constitutes the 'internal essence of the

transnational family today' (Gregory 2012: 392), evident in how remittances are intended to secure a place for the migrant, supplementing their absence (Cliggett 2005). This role of money is so powerful that in some countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, the overall economic value of remittances surpasses that of major exports in the home country.

Yet the meaning of money as gift is highly unstable. It may spur recipients to imagine idealised capitalist landscapes (Small 2019) or even to re-arrange social relationships. Young Thai women who migrated from rural farming communities to cities seeking work in factories are a case in point. They have been shown to try to reconcile their family obligations and roles as dutiful daughters who remit their earning to their parents with their desires to spend these earnings on expressing themselves as modern women (Mills 1999). Consumption practices enable them to constitute social selves, but they may bring about new forms of [indebtedness](#). The expansion of shopping malls in [Latin America](#) and post-apartheid South Africa, for example, has contributed to growing consumer debt. Salaried individuals now enjoy new possibilities of enrichment as they become eligible for consumer loans that they, in turn, lend to others, creating a 'money-go-round' aimed at aspirational consumption (James 2014). In the face of the pleasures associated with the expanding consumer goods market, combined with a volatile banking sector, people come up with new strategies to improve their lives. For example, in Nepal, urban residents participate in *dhukuti*, whereby a group contributes a specific monthly sum to engage in consumption, much like rotating savings and credit associations yet redirected to allow members to participate in consumer markets (Bajracharya 2018: 94). Thereby, money extends sociality, even though its physical form is neither fixed nor constant (Dodd 2016; Yuran 2014). Its flows erode some [relations](#) but expand and extend others, potentially creating a 'human economy' (Hart 2017: 5).

Money mediates cosmological worlds as well. In China, people used different replicas of money as offerings to gods, ancestors, and ghosts, their hierarchy secured by specific material objects (Wolf 1974; Feuchtwang 2001: 19). In Vietnam, where a similar relationship to money prevails, people contend with a post-war landscape where they offer replica US hundred dollar bills to both gods and ghosts, materialising the changing relations with the [dead](#) in which the hierarchy of gods and ghosts no longer pertains (Kwon 2007). Likewise, in Cuba where political legitimacy rests upon the revolution, practitioners of Ifá, a [divination](#) cult, offer money to the *orichas*, deity-figures presumed to exert divine influence over people's everyday life (Holbraad 2005). In the lowlands of South America, peasants forced to work on expanding sugar plantations sought to increase their earnings by drawing on the logic of capital—the power of money to beget more money. During baptismal rites conducted by Catholic priests, godparents-to-be would ask that *peso* notes be baptised instead of the child, a ritual that exposed the metaphysics of capitalism, where making money was elevated above human life (Taussig 1977: 137). In a princely polity of Madagascar, the ritual use of coins served a different purpose—to channel sacred ancestral power (Lambek 2001). The coins placed in the mouth of the deceased were not those issued by the contemporary state but ones that

predated [colonialism](#) and mercantile trade, notably the slave trade, exposing how royal power ‘is derived ultimately from violence . . . a life for a life’ (Lambek 2001: 754). The use of money for metaphysical ends—appeasing ghosts, blessing coins, and conveying ancestral power—encodes not just cosmologies but also legacies of economic and political upheaval. No wonder, then, that people engage in gambling, an activity that reimagines money by decoupling value from [labour](#), investment, and return (Pickles 2019).

### **Monetary pluralism**

How people and institutions manage money’s various functions is a vital concern, especially in the Global South, where monetary pluralism has long prevailed. Monetary pluralism refers to how people juggle not one but many currencies. In [postcolonial](#) settings, state-issued currencies have never entirely displaced indigenous media. In Papua New Guinea, for example, shell valuables are still used in exchange, especially in contexts where young men have more access to cash than older men (Foster 1999: 221). Even the foundation of ‘hard currencies’, so called because they serve as storing and protecting wealth in money, can be unmade and remade. In 1971, President Richard Nixon ended the US dollar-gold convertibility, a move that engendered new sources of insecurity and profit (Gregory 1997) and eventually ushered in a new regime of central banking based on inflation targeting and price stability (Holmes 2014).

Why, despite the multiple forms of money, do conceptions of it remain so stubbornly state-centric (Guyer 2012)? One answer may lie in that state currencies reinforce the idea of national markets and the nation as a collective body (Helleiner 2003). That said, national currencies have never been coterminous with the boundaries of modern states, some mediating trans-border exchanges, while others, like the US dollar and the euro, traverse state borders and challenge national sovereignty. In socialist and [post-socialist](#) states, the appearance of the US dollar signalled the ascendance of the market (Lemon 1998; Truitt 2013). However, in Haiti, people uphold the fictional ‘Haitian dollar’ (alongside the national currency known as Haitian gourdes) as a placeholder for national sovereignty, especially valued among those people not subject to international humanitarian efforts denominated in US dollars (Neiburg 2016).

Producing a standard measure of value, or unit of account, involves political work (Desan 2010). Just as individual [households](#) use strategies of enclosure, taboos, and concealment to protect their assets, states do as well, using central banks to maintaining reserves that bolster their credibility and confidence (Peebles 2008: 236). In Argentina, the 2001-2002 forced conversion of U.S. dollar-based accounts into *pesos* led residents to look for alternative assets for storing value, exposing the national currency as a failed state project (Muir 2011). If national currencies circulate as instruments of state power and symbols of popular sovereignty, they are also materials through which people assess the authority of the state and the legitimacy of markets. In the former Soviet Union, people attributed the reliability of the US dollar to the material qualities of the currency (Lemon 1998), while in Indonesia, [citizens](#) used the national currency in other representational forms such as advertisements and billboards, thus remediating

it as a means of political communication (Strassler 2009). In Mongolia, state-issued currency is not standardised but valued within specific transactions; shopkeepers viewed the cash held by small-scale gold miners as ‘polluted’ (High 2013), underscoring how they assigned value through the status of its possessor. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, people likewise rejected the state’s authority to guarantee the value of its currency by relying instead on the material qualities of cash (Walker 2017). In Cuba, the state issued two different currencies: a domestic *peso* to represent collective [labour](#), and a convertible *peso* for use by [tourists](#); however, in everyday exchanges, people often handled the domestic Cuban *peso* in pursuit of profits (Tankha 2018). In such instances, money reveals its performative dimension, seen in how even indices that purported to simply measure money’s fluctuating values are used to adjust actual prices and wages (Neiburg 2006).

Monetary pluralism is a strategy by which people sidestep formal [financial](#) institutions, even though they are still ‘saving, loaning, hedging risk, and investing’ (Maurer, Musaraj & Small 2018: 2). These practices of so-called ‘low finance’ can be unexpectedly transnational. Somalis in Kenya draw on informal *hawala* money-transfer systems for remitting money and financing new businesses as well as meeting basic social needs. *Hawala* channels value over long distances through a network of brokers, and today it exists alongside formal banking systems, allowing people to remit money often more quickly and without the fees of formal financial institutions. Through this system, Somalis mobilise financial capital through their continued investment in family relationships that stretch from Africa to Europe and North America. It enables people to cultivate social capital that has been at the root of their business success in spite of the collapse of the Somali state (Omeje & Githigaro 2018).

Monetary pluralism challenges normative assumptions of the social foundations of money, namely trust and confidence. While textbooks may insist all monetary systems are equal, alternative [voices](#) such as Positive Money in the United Kingdom argue for new models that recognize that how money is created and governed is central to our collective life (Di Muzio & Robbins 2017). In Macedonia, for example, the authoritarian regime tightened its grip on power as vendors accepted in-kind payments—unfinished apartments or cars—that lost value over time (Mattioli 2018). At the same time, Wall Street stockbrokers, driven by a belief in maximising shareholder value, justify business practices that destabilised markets, companies, and jobs (Ho 2009). Anthropologists have consequently turned to investigating the material and political processes that create, regulate, and circulate money.

### **Networks, platforms and open questions**

As people bypass [financial](#) institutions and state-issued currencies, they create new forms of money. Airtime, or prepaid cell phone minutes, is one of the most celebrated instances of how people’s strategies of channelling value became formalised as mobile money (Maurer 2012). In Kenya, people purchased airtime cards and sent the verification code to a recipient who would either use the airtime or



sell those minutes to a vendor at a discount for cash, effectively bypassing formal financial institutions and their transaction fees. Alternative monetary forms and money-like objects now abound, uncanny descendants of the 'primitive monies' once described by anthropologists.

New money platforms and networks are successful only insofar as they draw on existing behaviours, [moral](#) frameworks, and socialities, a point that has been made about bitcoin, the cryptocurrency that first appeared as a critique of the 2008 financial crisis (Nelms & Maurer 2014). Unlike national currency issued by a centralised state, transactions with bitcoin are authenticated by a distributed bookkeeping function known as blockchain. Maintained on a far-flung network of computers, the blockchain logs and verifies transactions. People let the blockchain do this work from their computers because it enables them to receive bitcoin in return (a process known as '[mining](#)'). The blockchain as a platform provides an alternative to the power traditionally conferred on centralised record-keepers. Users, however, invoke familiar practices and moral discourses, or 'digital metallism', by attributing the value of bitcoin to its scarcity, much like gold (Maurer, Nelms & Swartz 2013). They also attribute their trust to the distributed network of the blockchain, thus conflating the object and the system that enabled it, exposing the importance of networks in materialising transactional activity, including the coin itself.

The rise of [digital](#) and mobile monies foregrounds the [infrastructures](#) through which value flows, especially the 'currency interface' or conversion of value across different platforms (Guyer 1994). Such infrastructures include a vast apparatus of objects and recording devices such as payment cards, mobile phones, networks of wire, and electronic point-of-sale terminals. The assemblages of transactional objects and ideas that make the transfer of value possible are often 'forgotten, ignored, or operate in the background' (Maurer & Swartz 2017) yet they operate as the 'rails' that carry value from one location to another. By noticing these payment systems, we can ask questions such as who owns the rails, who or what authenticates payments, and who bears the cost of supporting and maintaining the infrastructure. Today, for example, data breaches take on a ritual form. Corporations publicise the number, often in the millions, and then pledge greater [surveillance](#) of the vast amounts of data that still leave individuals exposed to data breaches.

Despite the growing importance of electronic and digital payments, cash persists as a vital part of monetary ecologies, especially in the Global South. One of the most spectacular examples of how cash operates was the demonetization campaign in India, in which the Reserve Bank withdrew high denomination rupee notes from circulation (Dharia & Trisal 2017). While the campaign was promoted as an effort to eradicate 'black money', or untaxed cash transactions, the withdrawal of cash had differential effects across India. Recipients of microloans, for example, could not repay or receive loans unless they participated in digital payments (Kar 2017). The campaign also exposed other inequities: people who hoarded cash hired those who were cash-poor to wait in line to deposit money, exposing how the scheme to reduce illegal practices and [tax](#) avoidance relied on the [labour](#) of already-marginalised [citizens](#) (Dharia

2017). Even while scholars agree that money is a 'token', more a concept than a thing, people still handle paper notes as though they were inherently valuable, a dilemma that asks how money as a social object relates to money as a physical object (Vasantkumar 2019: 318) and returns to the preoccupations of anthropologists over defining what counts as money (Maurer 2018).

Anthropologists have long highlighted the political and economic systems in which money circulates, from families that seek to maintain their kinship ties across space and time, to the performances of legitimacy among state actors like central bankers. They are thus well-positioned to investigate future monies, by asking how objects travel, generate prestige, and introduce new forms of inequalities. Anthropologists also continue to examine the role of beliefs that accrue to some monetary objects but not others. If money rests on a social foundation backed by its institutional authority, do the specific material properties bolster people's confidence in money and its issuing authority? What is the difference between money and valuables or assets? Do asset-classes like [houses](#) and securities, for example, have attributes like valued shells when they serve as stores of wealth? By posing questions around the material practices of stockpiling and accounting and the means of channelling value across space and time, anthropologists will continue to ask questions that challenge our received wisdom about money.

## Conclusion

Confronted with a range of objects that have money-like features, anthropologists have highlighted the multiple practices and beliefs animating the idea of money. Just describing the meanings people assign, however, is not enough to understand what money is. As the recent [financial](#) crisis has made clear, the nature of money is sometimes not even visible to or understood by its users and governing technocrats like central bankers. Today, it is imperative to recognize money's malleability—its new objects, [relations](#), and even platforms—that expose how it is continually being unmade and remade. If we acknowledge that money is 'not bestowed upon us by nature or some god, and if it can be shown that the present monetary system is undemocratic, unfair and unstable' (Di Muzio & Robbins 2017: 39), then what are the possibilities of remaking money? Anthropologists work with designers, engineers, and religious scholars who are also invested in creating alternatives to our present monetary systems (Rudnyckyj 2018). Their efforts to represent money in ever new ways parallel those of the [ethnographer](#) (Maurer 2005). The challenge is therefore not just to define what money is, but also to understand how the institutional and collective efforts to make, unmake, and remake money are on-going projects of human sociality.

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