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Beyond Supply and Demand: The Moral Economy of Price Formation in Slab City

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Correspondence: Bailey C. Hauswurz (bhauswurz@gmail.com)**Received:** 13 May 2024 | **Revised:** 20 November 2024 | **Accepted:** 16 April 2025**Keywords:** alternative currencies | anarchism | moral economy | supply and demand | symbolic anthropology

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the unique economic practices of Slab City, California, an off-grid community that rejects mainstream US values. Despite operating within the broader US economic system, Slab City residents have developed alternative forms of exchange, using cigarettes and cannabis alongside US dollars. The article examines the symbolic meanings associated with these alternative currencies, arguing that their value derives from symbolic gestures of trust and solidarity, reflecting a rejection of surplus value extraction and an embrace of shared economic experience. The analysis dives into Slab City's moral economy, highlighting the community's reliance on collective action for resource provisioning, such as weekly rituals of free meals, communal water tanks, and group efforts in resource acquisition and distribution. Contrasting Slab City's internal economic practices with the exploitative practices of the investor–state nexus in surrounding towns, the article underscores the community's commitment to mutual aid and challenges to capitalist norms. Finally, the article highlights the fluidity of monetary forms and the potential for alternative currencies to emerge within specific social contexts.

1 | Introduction

This article is a foray into the social scientific research of the place-based meaning and use of money. The place of interest here is Slab City, California, an off-the-grid community located ~150 miles east of San Diego and 45 miles north of the United States–Mexico border (for a detailed view, see Figure 1). Specifically, I ask, What can people buy with cash (USD), and what is not purchasable with cash? How is cash handled or stored? Are there substitutes for coinage and paper currency—and USD more generally—and if there are, what are they, and what can be purchased with them? What are the conventions of price formation? The data from which information presented in this article is derived were collected in December 2023, during my two-week immersive ethnography of Slab City conducted for my master's thesis. In this article, I suggest that the marginalized identities of people who populate Slab City, who either do not, cannot, or are unwilling to conform to USian¹ hegemonic values, partially create the conditions of relatively novel ways of

economic praxis in the United States, such as multiple media of exchange and means of payment, loose storage of cash, and the earmarking of different media of exchange for different reciprocal relations, and, perhaps most importantly, I probe the local conventions of price formation.

There is a vast and growing literature probing the meaning, function, and emergence of money. While Plato (1974) prefigures the “classical” theories put forth by Ibn Khaldūn (1967) and, later, Adam Smith (1776 1902), whereby money organically emerged from the division of labor and exchange due to its convenience, Karl Marx (1867 1990) criticized Plato for, effectively, ignoring the particularities of social relations that alter the use and meaning of money, for example, how resources are allocated in a family. Max Weber (1922 1978), on the other hand, proposed a definition of money that highlights it as a means of payment, a medium of exchange, with quantifiability and standardized divisibility, while also recognizing that the items used as media of exchange and as means of payment may not be

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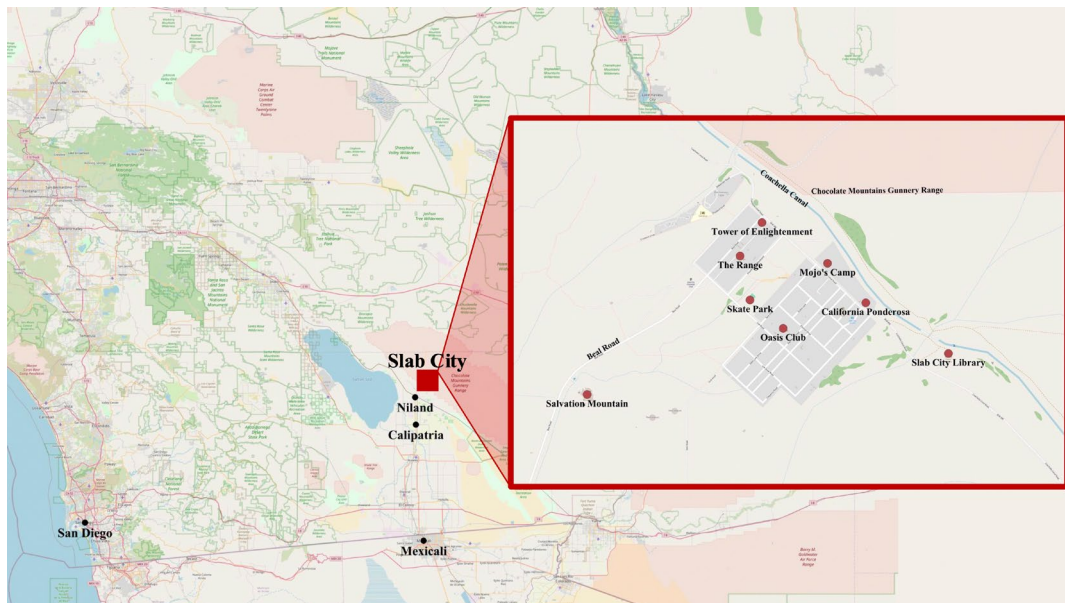


FIGURE 1 | Map of slab city.

the same. Georg Simmel (1907 2004), breaking from Marxian tradition, emphasized that value emerges from exchange and relative desire—not from a qualitative use-value. Additionally, for Simmel, value is inseparable from desire, and the value of money is derived from a community of trust, that is, from the knowledge or trust that others will accept an item as money (Baron and Millhauser 2021).

Malinowski (1922) and Mauss (1925 1990) initiate a new tradition, whereby locality and community become paramount, for both Malinowski and Mauss describe circumstances that economists would consider as constituted by nonutility-maximizing agents and that therefore would not fit in neoclassical economic models. Keith Hart (1986) and Viviana Zelizer (1989, 1996) mark a turning point in the study and theorization of money. Both Hart and Zelizer introduce a semiotic analysis whereby the symbolic value of money and its use is derived from webs of complex, sociohistorical social relations and the character therewithin. David Graeber essentially subscribes to a chartalist view of money; however, his works (Graeber 2001, 2014) also emphasize cross-cultural differences and the different modes of payment over time, highlighting the historical waxing and waning use of virtual money (i.e., personal relations of credit). Finally, Christine Desan (2014, 2019) develops a new theory for the emergence of money, what she calls the “constitutional” approach to money. As opposed to the relatively simplistic, reductionist theories, such as the classical/metallist and chartalist/Keynesian theories of the emergence of money, Desan attempts to identify the variety of precipitating factors that create the social conditions for money’s emergence in a community by privileging neither a wholly top-down nor a bottom-up emergence (Sampeck 2021).

2 | A Brief Introduction to the Slabs

Slab City has been variously described as a “squatters’ paradise” (Du Bry and Rissolo 2001), an anarcho-republic

(Gercke 2024), a trailer park utopia (Perry 2011), and “the most dangerous city in the US” (Tales 2024), among countless other descriptions tending to reflect either a utopian or dystopian interpretation. Originally developed as a US military training facility during World War II, opening in 1942, the Marine Corps ceased operations in 1946 (Hailey 2018). According to Hailey, the federal government and the State of California dismantled the site, including capping the sewage system, thereby, effectively, abandoning the site. All that the military left behind were the concrete slabs upon which military structures were built, hence the name “Slab City.” The first “squatters” on this State of California–owned land were military veterans (Hailey 2018). Intriguingly, the “squat” has persisted for decades and is currently flourishing despite sub-optimal material conditions amid a hostile ecological environment, where water is scarce and temperatures can reach 130° Fahrenheit during summer months. Critically, because the State does not provide infrastructural support, Slab City does not have running water, electricity, or a sewage system. Slabbers have, therefore, built and continue to build their own infrastructure.

Although many Slab City residents are military veterans, the ones with whom I came into contact identified as anarchists. Remaining true to the genealogy of political-philosophical anarchism e.g., Déjacque (2012),² my interlocutors intimated a far-left orientation, which will be illustrated in greater detail later in the article. Further complicating the simplistic utopian–dystopian dichotomy is the nuanced relationship between freedom (or autonomy) and precarity that characterizes life in Slab City. While residents value autonomy and the ability to pursue their realization of values effectively disallowed by mainstream US society, this freedom comes at the cost of incessant material insecurity and vulnerability to hostile ecological conditions. This paradoxical reality highlights the complex interplay of choice, circumstance, and resilience that shapes the lived experience of Slab City’s inhabitants. Their stories,³ therefore, offer a unique lens through which to examine the creation of a new

economy—enfolded in the greater US economy—with alternative media of exchange, means of payment, and transactional practices more generally.

Moreover, contributing to Slab City's unique character is the integral place of art within the community. What bourgeois society devalues, or unvalues as “trash” or “garbage,” Slabbers carefully revalue, or transvalue, as having both artistic value and value of inhabitation, which is also to say that the transvaluation of bourgeois refuse to art is an expression of Slabbers' creative will to power. Insofar as social activities actualize potential, they are creative, and therefore such social activities may be referred to as *social art*. Thus interactional praxes are art (i.e., social art), not just artifacts.⁴ Nietzsche (1968) best explains this phenomenon, that “creative positing ... [is] willing” (327) and that “‘will to power’ ... [is] a creative drive” (333). Critically, “*the will to power is essentially creative and giving*: it does not aspire, it does not seek, it does not desire, above all it does not desire power. It gives” (Deleuze 1962 1983, 85, emphasis original). This giving aspect of social art is revealed most clearly in the moral economy of Slab City.

3 | The Slab City Moral Economy

E. P. Thompson (1993) famously argued that the moral economy is a set of social norms and obligations that legitimize pushback against those in control of stocks of necessary resources who transgress such norms and obligations. He argued that the moral economy is “grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community” (188). Furthermore, he continued,

By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed of the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed and by some measure of license afforded by the authorities.

(188)

Interestingly, the hands-off approach of the Imperial Valley County police with respect to Slab City and its goings-on may be interpreted as “some measure of license afforded by the authorities” (188). Thompson also suggests that women were often the instigators of such pushback. Indeed, the most established camps in Slab City are matriarchal insofar as their conventionally agreed upon “owners” are women.

Here I argue that in Slab City, the moral economy orients the cash economy such that conventional pricing remains low, and the extraction of surplus value is viewed as transgressing the expected provisioning of goods and services. While the campsite where my partner and I stayed doubtless derived profit, conventional pricing was adhered to, and surplus value was, at least in part, returned to the community via various events, including

but not limited to chilly nights and movie nights. Crucially, the majority of surplus value accrued by this establishment was derived from tourists—and to a lesser extent from snowbirds—and not from Slabbers.⁵

Meat in Your Mouth at Community Coz's serves as a poignant embodiment of the principles underlying the moral economy, an organic system of communal support and resource distribution that sustains many within Slab City. Each Monday at Dark Thirty,⁶ Meat in Your Mouth at Community Coz's invites Slabbers with very different value orientations to gather for a hot meal, free of charge. This weekly ritual is not an isolated occurrence; it is part of a broader assemblage of provisioning that extends throughout the Slab City community. Consider the soup kitchen, where every Sunday at 3:00 PM, another opportunity is provided for Slabbers to gather for a free meal. Then, as the week progresses, the community ethos continues at Knight's Slabbaeraunt, where every Friday, an hour before sunset, people may receive a free meal. Additionally, on a Monday or Tuesday (depending on the month), “commodities” are distributed once a month. These commodities include nonperishable foodstuffs and fresh food, including produce. “Commodities” is shorthand for these distribution events, which are vital for Slabbers, many of whom grapple with food insecurity. The Tower of Enlightenment stands as another camp providing support, offering daily meals at 6:00 PM accompanied by a sack lunch. Another camp variously provides a free dinner plate in addition to a paper sack lunch.

The Skaters, an integral value-clique within Slab City, play a significant role in the community. With a camp by the skate park, they actively engage in initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for Slabbers. They are currently endeavoring to cultivate trees near the skate park, a strategic act intended to expand shaded areas, which offer refuge from the incessant Sonoran Desert sun. These shaded areas will prove invaluable and, without exaggerating, will save lives. Moreover, the Skaters, like many (most) Slabbers, are incredibly resourceful, and the Skaters, especially, are adept at procuring food and alcohol. Their practice of distributing leftovers the “morning after” not only minimizes waste but also engenders a sense, among all those who partake, of embeddedness within the community.

The Skaters, moreover, work to provide water for those in the community who cannot afford to buy water at the going rate of 30 cents per gallon, rationing two gallons of water per person per day. There are also other communal water tanks, and some are shared between the camps of different value-cliques. This ethos of communal sharing transcends individual interests, embodying a collective ethos whereby surplus is shared and scarcity mitigated through mutual aid. According to one Slabber, each of these places and times will provide each person with food no matter who the person is: “Everybody helps with food.” Food and water, as life necessities, are thus collectively procured and distributed without bureaucracy, governance structures, or leaders. Slabbers' anarchist identities are therefore enacted every day through a moral economy that entails collective action. This is the *giving* aspect of the creative will to power mentioned earlier.

4 | The Slab City Cash Economy

It was at the camp that my partner and I were calling home for 2 weeks, and in which hospitality was gratefully extended, that the peculiar Slab use of money was revealed to us. At the bar where Michael—one of my key interlocutors—worked, alcoholic beverages cost US\$1; in fact, all beverages cost US\$1. Most cocktails sold for US\$1 unless one wanted something special, and in that case, a drink might cost US\$2 or US\$3, but one would also receive the Sprite can, for instance. So, in that case, beverages still cost US\$1. Moreover, a cannabis joint cost US\$1, and so did other cannabis products. Crucially, this camp charged money for overnight stays, providing a revenue stream that permitted the bar and other amenities to be (re)stocked. More than overnight stays, if one shot of tequila, for example, cost US\$1, a 750-mL bottle would generate approximately US\$17 in revenue. The profit margin is low, especially considering that a cocktail also costs US\$1 after accounting for the fact that one would receive the various components of the cocktail. In any case, this camp was the most economically viable as a going concern. It should also be noted that one could trade one's capacity to work to earn the good graces of the conventionally agreed upon owner(s) and, in doing so, receive overnight stays at zero-dollar cost.

At the Oasis Club, an internet café and morning social gathering space, coffee also costs US\$1. During morning hours, when it is open, the Oasis Club is a bustling place, crowded, loud, and lively, full of residents conversing with vigor, preparing for a new day with US\$1 coffee and their Slab City neighbors. It thus appeared that conventional pricing in Slab City limited prices for most products to US\$1. Olav Velthuis (2003) demonstrates how prices function as markers that signify various meanings to different market actors in the art markets of New York and Amsterdam. Significantly, the art dealers Velthuis researched resisted lowering prices because of the perception that lowering prices may signal devaluation of the artist, the artwork, and the dealer's social status. Velthuis also shows that dealers tend to price works of the same size similarly, despite the fact that buyers might ascribe different values to them. In the case of the Oasis Club, US\$1 pricing signals solidarity and embeddedness within the community. Indeed, the Oasis Club is a community cooperative, where “ownership”⁷ is communal and work is voluntary. The Oasis Club is thus deeply embedded in the community, and unilateral deviation from price conventions would be tantamount to symbolically extricating itself from the community. In fact, when the Oasis Club introduced a US\$5 annual membership, some residents viewed this as a betrayal of the noncapitalist values shared by many and as introducing a bourgeois coffee shop.

Critical to the atmosphere of the lively Oasis Club, populated by people of very different value orientations, were symbolic gestures of solidarity. When my partner and I entered for the first time, we were rather disoriented by its novelty (for us) and liveliness; however, one of my interlocutors, Kai, helped us navigate the place, directing us to where the coffee could be purchased and then to where the cream and sugar were located. Kai accompanied us to a park bench within the Oasis Club, where we continued to converse. In addition to Kai's demonstration of solidarity with us—the “new people”

(i.e., my partner and I)—the communal sharing of cannabis seemed to be a significant symbolic gesture of solidarity. While in different circumstances within Slab City, cannabis could be used as a medium of exchange, in the Oasis Club (and at other social gatherings, such as “Poetry Night”), it served as a medium of interaction, or rather a social lubricant, between people of divergent value orientations. Indeed, Kai offered cannabis to nearly everyone who entered the Oasis Club, regardless of value orientation. For example, Slab City has a relatively large queer population, who generally coalesce at the Flamingo camp, and within close proximity is the masculinist Pirate camp. But in the Oasis Club, cannabis served as a gestural symbol to mediate interaction such that solidarity as a value itself could be shared between agents of divergent value-cliques.

In addition to the US\$1 price convention and cannabis's symbolic value of solidarity, cigarettes could function as a medium of exchange. Whereas cannabis, as a medium of interaction, was gifted *without the expectation of future reciprocation*, cigarettes, as a medium of exchange, mediated transactional acts, whereby the agents' accounts would balance upon the completion of the exchange. The dollar value of a cigarette was akin to US\$1, thereby conforming with price conventions. However, more meaning could be ascribed to an exchange mediated by a cigarette or cigarettes, which is to say that paying in cash was more impersonal than paying in cigarettes. One explanation for this could be that a dollar only has exchange-value, whereas a cigarette has exchange- and use-value. The relative personality of an exchange mediated by cigarettes also implies a form of solidarity. For the most part, Slab City is a cash-poor (and materially poor) place; therefore to express an exchange in terms of a cigarette instead of cash further implies a *shared experience*, that is, further implications of solidarity. Whereas cash is the “alienated *ability of mankind*” (Marx 1978, 104; emphasis in original), cigarettes humanize the relationship, enacting a mutual recognition of circumstance and subversion of hegemonic values by, indeed, subverting the US dollar.

4.1 | Provisioning Necessary Resources in the Sonoran Desert

Water is the most critical resource in Slab City. During the summer, temperatures can reach 130° Fahrenheit, and rainfall is effectively nil. One of my key interlocutors, Michael, a bartender in Slab City, informed me that two “water guys” sell water at 30 cents per gallon.⁸ Competition between the water guys is not based on prices but is waged via gossip, and indeed, there is much gossip on Slab City Facebook groups. For those who can afford water, many have hundred-gallon tanks attached to their RVs or housing structures and can fill them for US\$30. A “wholesale” discount can be applied to purchases of 250 gal at 18 cents per gallon for a total of US\$45. Michael tells me that the price of water never changes relative to abundance or scarcity; even if it is 130° Fahrenheit and water is scarce, the price remains the same. This is consistent with the findings of Radcliffe-Brown (1948 1957) and Louis Dumont (1986), namely, “when the rate of exchange is seen as linked to the basic value(s) of the society is stable, and it is allowed to fluctuate only when and where the link with the basic value and identity of the

society is broken or is no longer perceived" (259–60). Thus the positing of a universal law of supply and demand does not conform to conventions of price formation in Slab City.⁹ This finding is significant in that it is occurring within the United States, where, according to Marx (1973), abstract labor developed its deepest roots.

In addition to water, food is a necessary resource.¹⁰ Although some within Slab City are trying to grow their own food, the ecological conditions are prohibitive—not to suggest that it is impossible. Despite much food being communal or communally shared, Slab City is not wholly self-sufficient. Slabbers must rely on nearby towns—the closest of which is Niland—for food and other necessities, such as gasoline for generators and propane for heating and cooking. While cigarettes and cannabis may be used as media of exchange in Slab City, one still needs USD to purchase things outside of the Slabs. Consequently, insofar as one saves cigarettes, especially, but also cannabis, for use as media of exchange, one is implicitly earmarking these media for specific purchases in place (Slab City) and with specific people who will accept them as valid means of payment (Zelizer 1996). By the same logic, Slabbers earmark their USD for purchases outside of Slab City, where media other than USD are not accepted as valid means of payment and where personal relations may not earn them extensions of virtual credit.¹¹

And while cash buys things, it does not buy much in Niland—not that Niland sells much. Mary commented that she would spend US\$10 more on propane if she purchased in Niland instead of driving to Calipatria, which, according to Google Maps, is 8.3 miles away from Niland and 12 miles away from Slab City. Moreover, gasoline at the pump in Niland costs well over US\$6 per gallon, a full US\$2 per gallon more than one would pay in Calipatria. This price differential cannot be explained by the Niland gas station being the last one within a significant distance because there are gas stations 8.3 miles to the south and 43 miles to the north (which is admittedly far, but not so far as to justify that price differential). With this tremendous price differential over a relatively short distance, one cannot help but conclude that the “investor–state nexus” (Peña 2017, 14) is waging a battle against Slabbers—to evict them, not by forced removal, but by leaving them without the necessary resources to survive, that is, eviction without eviction.

Indeed, for the last few years, Slabbers have voiced concern that the nearest towns have restricted access to water and jacked up prices for necessities like gasoline and propane. This also coincides with the national trend of price increases due to sellers' inflation, whereby “large firms are price makers” (Weber and Wasner 2023, 19), capable of dictating prices due to a lack of effective competition. Thus AmeriGas Propane and the local 76 gas station can increase prices beyond the means of Slabbers because there are no alternatives except to drive a fair distance. Moreover, in 1999, California passed a law requiring gas stations to provide free access to a tire pressure gauge, compressed air, and water if one purchases fuel (Sams 1999). In my and my partner's experience, gas stations regularly refuse to provide free water after a fuel purchase, even in the coldest, wettest season of the year. Mentioning this

to one of my interlocutors, he told me it is because water is so valuable—but the water being withheld at gas stations is not for value of life but for value of capital. Aligned with this is the fact that California grows 75% of the world's walnuts and 80% of the world's almonds, which consume 26.7 gal and 28.7 gal of water, respectively, per ounce of nut production (National Peanut Board 2022; State of California 2017). Interestingly, the gas stations that do provide water make one pay for it—even after purchasing fuel.

Despite the investor–state nexus rendering resource provisioning difficult, Slabbers find a way. Slabbers are resourceful, using what bourgeois society would consider trash as material for building housing structures and creating artwork. In times of desperation, water may be siphoned from the Coachella Canal, an agricultural irrigation canal that abuts Slab City. Mary informed me, however, that it is wise to wait until the workday is over before accessing the canal for fear of reprisals by the Coachella Valley Water District.

5 | Discussion

Through the preceding discussion of Slab City's moral economy, I hope to have illustrated the basis on which the Slab City cash economy functions. The community ethos of collective action—in terms of food and water provisioning—forges and reinforces, indeed, a *community*. Community members thus have reason to trust in one another, a critical factor in the acceptance of cigarettes and cannabis as media of exchange and means of payment. This is not to suggest that there is no conflict within Slab City; there is a great deal of conflict, much of it hashed out in Slab City Facebook groups, but it can boil over into dangerous altercations. Nevertheless, symbolic gestures of trust and solidarity, enacted by communally sharing cannabis in place and paying in cigarettes, for example, affirm the symbolic value of solidarity to cannabis and valueate cigarettes as a medium of exchange and means of payment. It is not exchange and the relative desire that produce value, as is the case for Simmel ([1907] 2004, 88–90), nor is it the labor embodied in a cigarette. Instead, the value of a cigarette, as a medium of exchange and means of payment, is derived from symbolic gestures of trust and solidarity.

Further regarding trust, in one establishment I frequented that sold various items for US\$1, the cash that would be stored in a till was effectively left in an open box for all to see. Clearly, in this instance, to leave cash visible and, in some sense, relatively accessible required trust on the part of the people who possessed it. Unlike the classic instances of the display and consumption of wealth theorized by Veblen (1899) as conspicuous consumption, or practices of agonistic exchange in the case of the Kwakwaka'wakw (Boas 1897 1970), to store money relatively conspicuously in Slab City, I suggest, is *not* a show of status or prestige, as if to signal that one has so much that one can treat money as if it is nothing. Instead, this sort of storage of money is more akin to saying, “This is Slab City, we are openly non-capitalist, and money *actually* means nothing to us.” Of course, as illustrated, Slabbers do indeed need money and earmark (Zelizer 1996) it for purchases outside of Slab City, and therefore money means *something*. Nevertheless, it is a symbolic act, symbolizing the subversion of hegemonic USian values.

Thus symbolic acts—acts of trust, solidarity, and subversion of hegemony—which are inevitably interactional, are how cigarettes and, to a lesser extent, cannabis become media of exchange and means of payment. They do not serve as units of account, but as Max Weber (1922/1978) noted, as have recent archaeological studies (Baron 2018; Baron and Millhauser 2021; Sampeck 2021), money need not take on all functions of money (as theorized) in a society as a medium of exchange, means of payment, store of value, and unit of account.

6 | Conclusion

This article has explored the unique economic practices of Slab City, California, revealing a complex interplay between a cash economy and a moral economy. While Slabbers operate within the broader US economic system, their marginalized identities and anarchist values foster alternative economic practices. Cigarettes and cannabis emerge as viable media of exchange and means of payment, underpinned by a communal ethos of trust and solidarity. The US\$1 price convention for most goods and services further reflects a rejection of surplus value extraction and an embrace of shared economic experience. This value orientation contrasts starkly with the exploitative practices of the investor–state nexus operating in nearby towns, where necessities like water, gasoline, and propane are subject to price gouging.

Slab City's moral economy, characterized by communal provisioning of food and water, operates in direct defiance of the logic of capital that pervades the surrounding areas. The weekly rituals of free meals at various camps, the Skaters' efforts in resource distribution and environmental improvement, and the overall emphasis on collective action exemplify the community's commitment to mutual aid and shared possibilities for the realization of their own values. This intricate web of reciprocal relations, much like those described by Granovetter (1985), transcends the impersonal transactions of an exchange-based economy that posits equality amid deep inequalities, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. The case of Slab City underscores the importance of Zelizer's (1996) concept of "ear-marking," where different monies are designated for specific uses, places, and social relations. Slabbers carefully earmark USD for transactions outside Slab City, where it is the only accepted medium, while reserving cigarettes and cannabis for internal exchanges imbued with symbolic and interpersonal meaning. This practice highlights the fluidity of monetary forms and the potential for alternative currencies to emerge within specific social contexts.

Ultimately, the economic practices in Slab City offer a compelling case study of how alternative forms of money and economic organization emerge within marginalized communities. Slabbers forge a unique economic landscape that reflects their values and challenges mainstream capitalist norms by privileging trust, solidarity, and communal reciprocity over conventional market mechanisms. As such, the study of Slab City's economy not only enriches our understanding of money and exchange but also highlights the resilience and creativity of communities in navigating socioeconomic challenges.

Endnotes

- ¹ In this article, *USian* is used to index that which is of or from the United States. It is the preferred demonym here because of the ethnoracial baggage associated with *American* when the hegemonic values of the United States crosscut all identity groups to varying degrees. Moreover, it is a more accurate term, as reflected by the Spanish word for "American," *estadounidense*, literally "United States'ian," reserving *americano/a* as a demonym for anyone of the Americas. Although I am unsure who coined the neologism, my first exposure was from Julia K. Steinberger, a professor at the Université de Lausanne.
- ² I am grateful to reviewer 2 for bringing Joseph Déjacque to my attention, the first to use the term *libertarianism* in a political-philosophical sense and indexing affinity with far-left anarchism.
- ³ The American Anthropological Association's Principles of Professional Responsibility guided my ethical praxis, including obtaining informed consent as well as anonymizing my interlocutors' names with pseudonyms.
- ⁴ In my MA thesis—from which this article is derived—I go into greater detail on the concept of social art. There I argue that specific techniques of interaction, which I call social art, are necessary for an anarchist community composed of people of very different value orientations to cohere. I identify "responsivity" and "adjustment" as critical artistic interactional techniques: "Whereas judgment and responsibility imply a crystallization of valuations and morality, adjustment and responsivity are fluid interactional praxes that permit people of very different value orientations and ideologies to maintain amicable relations within close proximity" (Hauswurz 2024, 23–24).
- ⁵ "Slabbers" are those who live in Slab City year-round. One must live through a summer in Slab City to be considered a Slabber. However, according to John, one of my interlocutors, only approximately 250 people stay in Slab City through the summer, and the population swells to approximately 2000 in the winter. These seasonal visitors are referred to as snowbirds. What constitutes a tourist is rather ambiguous, but I witnessed quite a few luxury vehicles drive through, filming Slab City residents without their consent. This certainly constitutes a tourist and explains why "tourists" here are ascribed the lowest status. The social boundaries delineating "Slabber," "snowbird," and "tourist" appeared to be the most apparent and critical.
- ⁶ "Dark Thirty" is an ambiguous place-based event-time index. Relative to monochronic 24-h time, Dark Thirty does not always occur at the same time every night or in every place in Slab City. It is thus loosely related to Evans-Pritchard's (as cited in Munn 1992) concept of *oecological time*, whereby "time is identified essentially with time-reckoning concepts that convey 'social activities' or a 'relation between activities'" (96).
- ⁷ Because Slab City is a "squat," there is no legal ownership of business and land recognized by the State of California. However, the community certainly recognizes ownership by convention.
- ⁸ During my short, two-week stay, I did not meet the "water guys."
- ⁹ See also Sahlins (1972/2017) and Graeber (2001, 2014) for more on various economic organizations found in the anthropological literature that do not conform to orthodox economic models. The law of supply and demand in price formation has also been empirically investigated by Uzzi and Lancaster (2004) and Velthuis (2003), among others.
- ¹⁰ The necessity of resources like water and food is revealed by their communal provisioning during times of hardship, especially during the summer. Critical resources at other times of the year may include alcohol; however, alcohol is not rationed or communally distributed during the summer. Furthermore, Michael tells me that many of the deaths from dehydration and overheating during the summer can be associated with alcohol consumption.

¹¹ Although I saw virtual credit extended to people in bars within Slab City, I was not exposed to evidence suggesting that virtual credit was extended to relationships centered outside of Slab City.

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