

**ETNOFOOR anthropological journal**  
**Call for papers: GOLD**

What other 'stuff' has proven to be as attractive to people as gold? In virtually every continent people proudly wear gold rings, bracelets and necklaces and nearly all societies know mythical stories of places where the streets are 'paved with gold'. Competitors in contemporary sports events around the world dream of winning gold medals and expressions such as 'silence is golden' and 'good as gold' indicate that modern English is riddled with references to gold as a sign of superior value.

Gold is closely connected to the history of monetary systems, European colonial projects, the rise of capitalism and the world economy. The use of gold as a monetary means goes back millennia and gold has been considered commodity money (Marx 1976) with intrinsic value (Gregory 1997; Maurer 2005, 2006). As such it seems to be able to serve as the ultimate substance of value to ground fiduciary (paper) currencies. According to many economists and other observers, the international gold standard, abolished in 1914, was a crucial mechanism to prevent hyperinflation and to balance international trade in the early stages of the world economy (Polanyi 1944; Green 1981). The Bretton Woods agreement, which was in place until 1971, tied international exchange rates to the dollar, but the dollar itself remained tied to gold, reaffirming gold's status as the foundation of global systems of value. This aspect comes to the fore most prominently in the current economic crisis. The sudden flight to investments in gold at the start of the credit crunch of 2007-2008 demonstrated once more the firm belief that investors have in gold as a safe haven. When other systems of valorization fail, gold is seen as the anchor, the stuff of 'real' tangible value. Examining the status of gold as the ultimate foundation of value can help us to radically question the nature of value and wealth in modern society.

Arguably, gold also has a number of qualities that make it exceptionally interesting in practical and analytic terms. Notwithstanding its universal allure, the significance of gold varies across place and time (e.g. Werthmann 2003). As with all 'materials', gold is embedded in different socio-cultural settings and its significance is therefore largely dependent on a range of specific notions and cosmologies concerning wealth, aesthetics,

security and so forth. Though, like other materials, the production trajectories of specific gold products are often difficult to discern, gold has a shape-shifting quality that far exceeds other precious things. Gold is soft in relation to other precious metals, making it relatively easy to melt and transform. Furthermore, gold does not oxidize. Given these qualities, gold is extremely malleable – a gold bar can be transformed into a piece of jewelry and back – but it is also nearly impossible to trace the origin of a piece of gold or to monitor the contexts of its (re)production.

For the forthcoming issue of ETNOFOOR, we invite authors to rethink gold, to explore its agency and to analyze its social, economic and material embeddings. The material qualities of gold bring forth a number of questions in relation to the agency of gold in the contexts in which it circulates. What kind of possibilities and limitations does the materiality of gold provide for people who work with it, and how is this related to its significance in different contexts? For some, gold signifies success, for others it symbolizes purity, love or trust. How is the value of gold related to its historical presence and how did it serve to mark the distinctions between certain groups or classes? What can we say about the relation between gold and power?

Last but not least, what are the social, economic and environmental conditions in which gold is mined and what are the consequences of this mining process? Historically, the mining of gold has had a huge impact on both material environments and social relations. Some of the questions Etnofoor also hopes to explore with this call for papers is whether and how the current economic crisis – which has led to an enormous increase in the price of gold – has affected gold mining and, equally important, the social relations that sustain it. Has the economic crisis affected mining industry conditions and incentives to keep production high, and with what consequences? If you are interested in contributing to this issue about gold please send an article abstract to the editors before October 15 2012.

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For more information about the journal: [www.etnofoor.nl](http://www.etnofoor.nl)

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