
ACCOUNTS

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Zelizer Award for Best Book

The Economic Sociology Section invites nominations for the 2022 Zelizer Book Award for an outstanding book published in the field of economic sociology. Eligible books must have a 2020 or 2021 publication date. Authors are welcome to nominate their own work. Nominees must already be Section members or must join the Section. To nominate a book, please send a hard copy of the book to all four committee members listed below by March 16, 2022. Letters of nomination are not required from ASA members. Publishers who wish to submit a book for consideration must include a nomination letter that states how the book contributes to economic sociology. Please direct any inquiries to Klaus Weber, klausweber@kellogg.northwestern.edu.

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Granovetter Award for Best Article

The Economic Sociology Section invites nominations for the 2022 Granovetter Prize for an outstanding article published in the field of economic sociology. Eligible publications must have a 2020 or 2021 publication date. Authors are encouraged to nominate their own work. Letters of nomination are not required. Stand-alone chapters from edited volumes are eligible for this award. Nominees must already be Section members or must join the Section. An electronic copy should be sent no later than March 16, 2022 to all members of the Granovetter Award Committee. Please direct any inquiries to Roi Livne, rlivne@umich.edu.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Burt Best Student Paper Award

The Economic Sociology Section invites nominations for the 2022 Ronald Burt Outstanding Student Paper Award for a paper written by a graduate student in the field of economic sociology. Papers may be either published or unpublished, but must have been authored by students who have not received their Ph.D. by March 16, 2022. Students are encouraged to nominate their own work. Letters of nomination are not required. Nominees must already be Section members or must join the Section. Papers co-authored with faculty are not eligible for the Burt award. Electronic copies of the paper should be sent no later than March 16, 2022 to all members of the Burt Award Committee. Please direct any inquiries to Georg Rilinger, ril@mpifg.de.

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Best Student Paper in Economic Sociology and Entrepreneurship

The Economic Sociology Section invites nominations for a new travel award for the Best Student Paper in Economic Sociology and Entrepreneurship, awarded to a paper written by a graduate student on the topic of entrepreneurship, broadly defined, and accepted by the Economic Sociology Section for presentation at a session or roundtable. Papers that address pressing economic and/or social problems and possess practical implications are particularly welcome. Thanks to a sponsorship from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the prize comes with an award of up to \$3,000. Papers may be either published or unpublished, but must have been authored by students who have not received their Ph.D. by March 16, 2022. Students are encouraged to nominate their own work. Letters of nomination are not required. Nominees must already be Section members or must join the Section. Applicants must have no current existing financial relationship with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Papers co-authored with faculty are not eligible for this award. Electronic copies of the paper should be sent no later than March 16, 2022 to all members of the Student Paper in Economic Sociology and Entrepreneurship committee. Please direct any inquiries to Dali Ma, dm484@drexel.edu.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH YA-WEN LEI ON PLATFORM ECONOMY

Ya-Wen Lei is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. Her research interests include political sociology, law and society, economic sociology, sociology of media and information technologies, sociology of work, labor and labor movements, science and technology studies, development, and Chinese studies. Her book, *The Contentious Public Sphere in China* (2018), shows how an authoritarian project of modernization built on law, marketized media, and the internet unintentionally created a public sphere that the Chinese state strives to control. The book received awards from the ASA's sections on Sociology of Law and Human Rights. Her work has been published in *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Socius*, *Law and Society Review*, *Work*, *Employment and Society*, *Political Communication*, and *China Quarterly*.



Ya-Ching Huang, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Ya-Wen Lei about her latest article, "Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China's Platform Economy" (2021), published in the *American Sociological Review*.

Ya-Ching Huang: What sparked your interest in studying China's food-delivery platform economy, particularly in labor processes and collective contention?

Ya-Wen Lei: In 2016, I began to study the consequences of automation in China's electronics manufacturing sector. Both government and business actors consider automation a critical solution for upgrading China's economy. Developing robotics has been one of China's top priorities since the 2010s. Several local governments have launched initiatives focused on replacing humans with robots and other automated machinery. I was curious about how manufacturing workers would view such business efforts and government initiatives.

To my surprise, many of them, particularly male workers, did not care about automation because they wanted to work in the emerging platform sector. They complained about the harsh factory conditions and saw the platform economy as a land of freedom and opportunity. Then I followed the lives of some man-

ufacturing workers from factories to food-delivery platforms. In the beginning, many of my interviewees were fascinated by the game-like design of delivery applications and the environment in which they could use mobile phones at work and were not confined to factories or dorms.

However, approximately one year after moving to the platform sector, a former factory worker told me that he went on strike. The strike occurred in the absence of assistance from grassroots labor NGOs or government-organized trade unions. I was surprised and wondered why and how such a strike had occurred, given that he appreciated his new job so much when I had talked to him previously. Then I began to study labor contention in China's food-delivery platform sector.

Y. H.: You proposed the concept of "platform architecture" to explain the multidimensional aspects of labor control and management in the service platforms and gig platforms with which food-delivery workers are contracted. Could you elaborate a little more on

how the concept advances our understanding of platforms?

Y. L.: Initially, my investigation focused on platform companies' algorithmic control and management as many studies in other contexts examine such evolving modes of control. However, after a while, I found that although most of the platform workers I interviewed were angry with algorithmic control, they were more likely to initiate or join collective actions only under certain circumstances. I realized I would have to understand how multiple—instead of just one—dimensions of labor control and management operate, overlap, and lead or not lead to collective resistance.

In *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, Lawrence Lessig theorizes the coexistence of multiple models of control and regulation in society—law, technology, and social or organizational norms. Drawing on his idea, I develop the concept of “platform architecture” to examine the technological, legal, and organizational aspects of control and management in the labor process and the variable relationships between them. Technological control and management refers to control and management that uses artifacts or nonphysical, systematic methods of making or doing things. Platform economies also require legal arrangements that govern work and delimit the rights and obligations of various parties involved. Most studies of platform economies concentrate on the contractual classification of workers (independent contractors vs. employees), but I also find other contractual designs are critical. The organizational dimension of control and management refers to the extent to which management personnel can exercise normative influence and surveillance on platform workers.

Y. H.: What did you find when applying this theoretical framework to compare service platform couriers with gig platform couriers?

Y. L.: Labor scholarship suggests employers want workers to be both dependable and disposable. Indeed, Meituan and Ele.me operate two types of platforms—service platforms and gig platforms—to balance security and flexibility of the workforce. Service platform couriers (hereafter, SPCs) and gig platform couriers (hereafter, GPCs) both pick up food from a restaurant and deliver it to a customer. However, SPCs are full-time employees who work for a service

station—an actual physical station used to coordinate within a locality. GPCs, in contrast, can decide when they want to work and do not share a workplace. Service platforms and gig platforms have distinct architectures and exercise technological, legal, and organizational control and management differently. Although economic activities under both service and gig platforms are digitally mediated, service platforms rely less on technological control and management; they have labor contracts governing work relations; and they emphasize regular supervisory interactions between workers and human supervisors. In comparison, gig platforms rely more on technologies to automate control and management; they rely on work relations that fall outside of China's labor law; and they see almost zero regular interaction between gig workers and platform operators.

SPCs and GPCs both work under stringent algorithmic control, have similar demographic backgrounds and prior employment histories, and do *not* enjoy social insurance, despite their different employment statuses—and yet, they have different perceptions of their respective work relations. Whereas most SPCs do not consider their work relations unfair or exploitative, most GPCs do. Moreover, GPCs are much more likely to go on strike, protest, and express solidarity, even though they face higher barriers to collective action due to the atomization of their work. These patterns of labor contention across the two types of platforms provide an opportunity to examine how and when labor control and management leads to collective resistance.

I find that, within the service platform, technological control and management can cause dissatisfaction among SPCs, but the legal and organizational design of the platform architecture often serves to contain grievances and make collective action less appealing. Collective contention seems less appealing to SPCs because their injustice frames (i.e., violation of contracts and labor law) are based on well-established legal claims and they can communicate with management personnel. Labor contracts help stabilize labor relations. SPCs have clear expectations and feel their employers are constrained by contractual terms and labor law. No one challenges the legitimacy of the legal order based on contracts and labor law. Furthermore, the platform architecture's organizational design—particularly the constant presence of supervi-

sors—restricts the amount of free space for organizing collective contention. The organizational constraints through franchise contracts motivate supervisors to perform emotional labor and exercise normative influence—and surveillance—on SPCs.

In contrast, under the gig platform, technological control and management leads to grievances and perceived injustice. This dimension of control and management overlaps at times with, and is reinforced by, legal and organizational control and management, generating moments of escalation. The contractual design enables intense algorithmic control and management by giving platforms unbridled legal and technological power. When gig platforms exercise their unbridled contractual power to change platform rules, workers not only discern this power but also consider it and the rules made by such power to be “despotic.” GPCs can mobilize restaurant owners and GPCs who work for the other gig platform to join collective action because they all suffer alike from asymmetric contractual power and share similar injustice frames. GPCs’ injustice frames (i.e., the illegitimacy of contracts) and the organizational design of the platform architecture make institutionalized dispute resolutions and individual informal legal mobilization seem implausible to GPCs. The platform companies’ focus on managing the platform system rather than couriers further renders free spaces available for GPCs to turn moments of escalation into moments of collective action and solidarity.

Y. H.: **What are your insights on the Chinese state’s attitude toward clickwrap agreements commonly used by platform companies? I’m curious why the government did not crack down on the strikes and protests organized primarily by gig platform couriers. To what extent was the authoritarian regime tolerant of the food-delivery workers’ injustice frames?**

Y. L.: A lot of problems in the platform economy are related to antitrust law. Technically, deciding whether certain market behavior (e.g., specific contracts) violates antitrust law is legally challenging. When I was working on my *ASR* article, the Chinese state had not yet dealt with antitrust problems in China’s platform economy, but it began to crack down on China’s Big Tech companies with China’s Anti-Monopoly Law in

2021.

In October 2021, Meituan received a 3.44 billion RMB (530 million USD) fine for violating the Anti-Monopoly Law from the Chinese antitrust authority. The penalty was 3% of Meituan’s 2020 revenues in China. Meituan was penalized for forcing restaurants to enter exclusive agreements and punishing restaurants that refused to do so. As I showed in my article, some restaurants complained about Meituan’s practices and joined gig workers’ collective actions against Meituan.

Strikes and protests organized by Chinese workers have been quite common in China. The Chinese state does not need to and has no way to arrest everyone. Instead, it targets organizations or individuals that can mobilize people and constitute more significant threats to social stability. The state has repressed labor NGOs and arrested labor activists, including a well-known activist who provided aid to platform workers.

It should be noted that scholars have argued that the Chinese party-state has been durable due to its “responsiveness,” meaning that it takes into account the demands of societal actors without sharing its monopoly on political power. This strategy strengthens the Party’s legitimacy among the mass public. In its recent clampdown on China’s tech giants, the Chinese state did ask China’s platform companies to address their labor issues and enacted administrative guidelines to protect the rights and interests of platform workers. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether and how such top-down measures will improve work conditions on the ground, particularly as the state also continues to restrict bottom-up organization and mobilization.

Y. H.: **You drew on interviews, news databases, and online and on-the-ground ethnography to collect and triangulate data. Given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, could you share some tips about data collection, particularly online ethnography?**

Y. L.: Perhaps because of my legal training and experiences in adjudicating legal cases, I collect, use, and evaluate evidence holistically. In other words, what I practice in my research is similar to fact-finding in a legal process. In a court setting, judges do not confine themselves to one type of evidence, such as testimo-

nial evidence. I do not restrict myself to specific kinds of evidence in my research. I want to collect as much evidence as possible, whatever type of evidence it is, as long as the evidence can advance fact-finding.

Indeed, the Covid pandemic has made fieldwork difficult for sociologists, especially for those who have to travel internationally. But technology still helps. Sociologists started to do online ethnography in the early days when people began to access the internet. One great example is Professor Guobin Yang's book *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online*. It was published in 2011 and heavily relied on online ethnography. This book remains the most influential book on online activism in China.

Before the pandemic, I already had good experiences with online interviewing. I do not find differences in data quality between in-person and online interviewing. But, of course, one has to be well-prepared before conducting any type of interview. Online ethnography provides a channel for me to understand some aspects of the phenomena I study and better prepares me for in-depth interviews. The platform workers I interacted with all joined social media groups. And it was in these social media groups that they discussed work and life issues, expressed their emotions, exchanged information, and even organized strikes or protests. My observation of their actions and interactions in social media groups helped me to understand workers' grievances and how they organized collective action.

Y. H.: How does your interdisciplinary training in law shape your research work? What are the major insights that socio-legal studies can offer to economic sociology?

Y. L.: I have benefited tremendously from my legal training and my experience of working in the legal profession. I mentioned how my legal training influences the ways in which I do empirical research. Also, writing a research paper is not that different from writing a court decision because these two genres of writing both emphasize making an argument supported by evidence and require one to go back and forth between arguments and evidence.

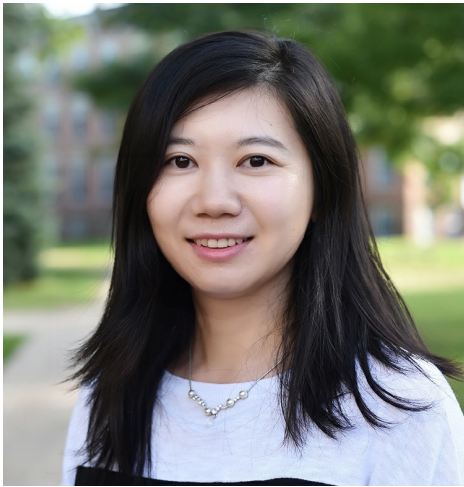
My training and experience also enable me to see certain aspects of social phenomena not apparent to peo-

ple without legal training. For example, in my research on the platform economy, I read many legal contracts and court decisions, which helped me recognize the importance of and theorize the legal dimension of platform architecture. Many economic sociologists—such as Professors Greta Krippner, Mark Suchman, and Richard Swedberg—have pointed out the importance of studying legal institutions (e.g., contract and property rights) in economic sociology.

Y. H.: What are you currently working on, and what is next for you?

Y. L.: I am currently finishing my second book, *Upgrading the Nation: The Promise and Peril of Techno-Developmentalism in China* (under contract with Princeton University Press). The book tells the story of how China sought to “upgrade” its economic development after the 2008 global financial crisis. I write about how the country's techno-developmental model has generated disconnection from reality, legal unpredictability, marginalization based on social class, and increased risk of deglobalization. And I note how these outcomes have come about *despite* the state's simultaneous pursuit of rationalization, the country's official socialist ideology, and the model's reliance on globalization. Essentially, the book is about the relationship between the state, nation, capital, labor, and technology in changing domestic and global contexts. •

AN INTERVIEW WITH WEIWEI ZHANG ON POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND CONSUMPTION IN CHINA



Weiwei Zhang holds a Ph.D. in Sociology with concentration on Consumer Culture Theory from Boston University. She was previously a postdoctoral scholar at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Zhang is currently an assistant professor of Marketing at Hartwick College. Her primary areas of research interest are consumer culture theory, consumer behavior, branding, and globalization.

Meghann Lucy, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Weiwei Zhang about her recent research on the role of political ideology and consumption in China.

Meghann Lucy: Let me first thank you for joining us in this issue. Your Ph.D. is in sociology and you are currently an Assistant Professor of Marketing. Could you tell us about your crossdisciplinary job path? What advice would you share with other sociologists who are considering academic careers in other disciplines?

Weiwei Zhang.: Thank you for having me, Meghann. Yes. My Ph.D. degree is in Sociology with concentration on Consumer Culture Theory. Marketing is an interdisciplinary science, and it is closely related to many other disciplines including Sociology, Economics, Psychology, and Management. The interdisciplinary nature of marketing has resulted in borrowing theories from other disciplines. For example, marketing has a long history of borrowing much of their paradigm from psycholo-

gy. But in recent years, they began to recognize the importance of sociology and started to introduce influential sociology theories to the field.

In my first-year annual review letter, my department chair indicated that hiring a sociologist for the marketing position was an intentional choice to ensure that the academic underpinnings of the discipline were respected and maintained. Sociology is a fascinating and multifaceted discipline. Sociologists are able to leverage their strong traditional academic training in the sociology of their specific fields to different areas. For example, I know that business schools are interested in hiring sociologists who are specialized in organizational behavior. Also, I know that some graduates with a Ph.D. in Sociology received offers from consulting companies. So I think sociologists can look through a list of career options, because sociological issues are prominent

in all aspects of life.

M. L.: Your work on fashion in China questions the applicability of some important Western theories on how consumption functions in China and highlights the role of political ideology in its manifestation. For example, “Politicizing fashion: Inconspicuous consumption and anti-intellectualism during the Cultural Revolution in China” challenges the Veblenian and Simmelian ideas of conspicuous consumption and that those of lower class position emulate those above them in the name of aspirational class standing. Could you discuss your findings, and how the Chinese Cultural Revolution case nuances our understandings of Western consumption theory?

W. Z.: From a theoretical perspective, consumer cultural theories are Western-based. We cannot assume that Western-based theories are necessarily appropriate when analyzing the economic life in countries such as China that have unique institutions, a different culture, and special networks (guanxi) of its own. Hence, I argue that the analysis of economic behavior in Asia can offer beneficial supplements to these types of theories.

In this study, I use fashion as the case to explore how political ideology influences consumer behavior. Conspicuous consumption theory argues that people desire to turn wealth into status. However, during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976), people tried to turn poverty into status. Instead of showing off their wealth, consumers displayed their poverty. Even privileged groups were very modest, and their standards of living were not extremely different from that of ordinary people. That is, in most societies, the people who have more financial resources have higher status, but during Mao's China, the people who had fewer financial resources had higher status.

Another key finding is that cultural capital was not

a source of prestige nor a tool for differentiation and did not generate any benefits to the people possessing it during the Cultural Revolution. Different from other societies, having high cultural capital was neither popular nor fashionable during this era. What cultural capital brought to people was humiliation and persecution, because the more knowledge you had, the more reactionary you were. In most societies, people who have money and knowledge have more security. However, during the Cultural Revolution, convention was endowed with special meanings—poverty and illiteracy that could bring more security.

Overall, the Cultural Revolution led to a distinctive set of cultural values and ideologies, which resulted in particular fashion trends and consumption patterns. In most societies, people are eager to acquire wealth, come from privileged social origins, and have knowledge and an elite education because these things allow individuals to gain high social status and security. However, during the Cultural Revolution, such attributes brought people criticism and public denunciation. Influenced by cultural values and ideologies, poverty, and illiteracy, in contrast, could help one survive at that time. Clothing and other fashionable cultural activities were utilized as a means for the communist government to achieve its political purposes.

M. L.: In other articles, you explore changes in status consumption after the Cultural Revolution, during which consumption was controlled, to more contemporary times in which China has become one of the world's largest luxury good markets. Yet, even with the opening-up of China, you don't see uniform adoption of Western cultural values. Could you discuss which Confucian and socialist Chinese values shape contemporary Chinese consumption?

W. Z.: One of my research interests is providing theoretical contributions to homogenization, globalization, and deterritorialization theories. Fac-

ing the globalization of consumerism, I question the assumption that all consumer revolutions are fundamentally similar or are converging toward the American model. Hence, I offer a comparative perspective to examine if a variety of regions with different economic and historical backgrounds are joining the American consumption model by adopting the pattern of status consumption. I challenged the homogenization theoretical assumption that consumers lack agency. In my single-authored article, “No Cultural Revolution?: Continuity and Change in Consumption Patterns in Contemporary China” (*Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2017). I examine the role of culture and how it affects people’s consumption patterns. I found that although influenced by Western consumerism, Chinese traditional values were challenged but did not disappear. Contemporary Chinese consumers selectively choose certain cultural values from a range of options in order to legitimize their spending decisions.

China’s economic system shifted from socialism to “capitalism with Chinese characteristics” after the economic reforms in 1978. After this transformation, the exact nature of what has actually happened in Chinese society should be clearly understood. I argue that Chinese consumption patterns include both Western and Chinese characteristics. The Mainland Chinese value system comprises both Western values and Chinese traditional values. Most Chinese do not actually have a single, unified set of attitudes or beliefs toward consumption. They combined elements of different traditions. Although Chinese share similar cultural understandings, they integrate them differently into their lives. The older generation is mainly influenced by traditional Chinese values. Even this older generation buys some expensive items, but they are not willing to use them all the time. So it is different from the typical pattern of conspicuous consumption. In contrast, the younger generation combines Chinese traditional values and Western modern values to express themselves. On the one hand, they live frugally. On the other hand, they want to display their status and prove that they are also successful. Therefore, they resort to buying visible luxury items and counterfeit

goods when they cannot afford the genuine articles. After the opening up policy, although many Chinese people seem to have adopted similar materialist behaviors as Westerners, the driving-forces behind these behaviors are different because of unique historical experiences and cultural values. That is, similar consumption behaviors might be derived from a different set of motivations. For example, Chinese might also purchase luxury products, such as French fine wine, Italian made shoes, La Mer cosmetics, and Giorgio Armani suits. However, they do not buy them only for conspicuous consumption as Veblen argues nor to distinguish themselves from others as Bourdieu argues—Chinese traditional culture is also one of the main mechanisms that drive Chinese luxury consumption. Chinese indigenous concepts such as *Mianzi* (face), *guanxi* (maintaining relationships), and *renqing* (seeking favors) provide important explanations for Chinese luxury consumption. There is clearly a commonality between Westerners and Chinese, but ways of thinking are different. Chinese traditional values and culture directly and indirectly influence Chinese consumption practices and this legacy seems likely to continue in the future.

M. L.: In “Consumption, Taste, and the Economic Transition in Modern China,” you discuss a disconnect between how upper-class people in China consume and the values and rhetoric they use when speaking about it. What is “conspicuous frugality” and how are some of the ways that conspicuous consumption manifests in China?

W. Z.: In this article, I explore how Thorstein Veblen’s status-seeking model and Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus manifest in post-socialist China, which has a unique cultural, economic, and political background. Based on my research, I found that although Veblen’s conspicuous consumption theory is still relevant, there are variations in China because of its traditional culture. Chinese culture is mainly influenced by Confucianism, which places an emphasis on conservatism, leading to qualities such as Chinese frugality, modesty/humility, and self-effacement. Influenced by Chinese

culture, Chinese people have their own ways of standing out under the influence of Western materialism. I argue that the Chinese upper-middle class displays “conspicuous frugality” and “unostentatious conspicuous consumption” patterns.

The upper-middle class attempts to differentiate themselves from other groups by emphasizing their frugal moral qualities in what I have called “conspicuous frugality.” In contemporary China, the wealthy are easily judged as uncultured, corrupt, crass, and extravagant, because much of current Chinese society is considered to be lacking in morality and to be excessively money-oriented. The upper-middle class want to gain social recognition and differentiate themselves from the “vulgar, morally suspect, and money-grubbing” new rich (*baofahu*). Chinese tend to believe that people possessing virtue have higher status. Therefore, when the upper-middle class people were talking about their frugal behavior, they were emphasizing their virtue. In other words, it’s only their rhetoric that demonstrates the Confucian morals. Additionally, virtue is considered as part of one’s cultural capital. The upper-middle class are not satisfied to be seen merely as materially rich, they also wish to be known as culturally wealthy too. Emphasizing their virtue essentially stressed their cultural capital, which is a necessary way to secure their position on the hierarchical ladder.

The reasons for choosing unostentatious brand products in what I have called “unostentatious conspicuous consumption” can also be explained by Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese values emphasize modesty and humility. To Confucius, people should not boast and should not publicize their merit. Therefore, even as they purchase luxury products, the Chinese desire to express their modesty and humility. Furthermore, the Chinese doctrine of the mean also explains this behavior. One Chinese saying states “The nail that sticks out shall be hammered down.” But it’s often the literary equivalent of dropping the microphone at the end of a speech and walking away. Consequent-

ly, some of the Chinese upper-middle class try to stand out by dressing “conspicuously” in a low-profile manner, while others show off in a much more obvious way.

M. L.: What are you working on now? What is next for you?

W. Z.: I am working on a book project integrating my previous projects but also extending them by further comparative research examining whether a variety of regions, with different economic, cultural, and historical backgrounds, are repeating the American developmental path. I am also exploring the roots of differences and similarities of economic behavior between three societies and the multiple possibilities emerging for new economic and sustainable futures. American consumer society necessarily serves as the reference point against which my three Chinese cases—Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan—can be measured. I intend to examine the factors that drive similar or different consumer behavior between these three settings in order to predict the future direction of China itself. To what extent has globalization resulted in the homogenization of consumption patterns in East Asia? If there are any differences in consumer behavior among the people in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, what are the reasons behind these different consumption patterns? The long-term aim is to predict Chinese consumers’ preferences towards products and services and what causes drive these outcomes. •

AN INTERVIEW WITH GOZDE GURAN ON INFORMAL MONEY TRANSFER MARKET



Gözde Güran is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Princeton University in 2020 and was an Academy Scholar at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies in 2020-2021. Broadly, her research brings together economic sociology, migration studies, and cultural sociology, drawing primarily on ethnographic and experimental methods.

Elif Birced, a Ph.D. candidate at Boston University, talked to Gözde Güran about her journey to economic sociology as well as her book project on the informal money transfer market in Lebanon and Turkey.

Elif Birced: How did you become a sociologist and specialize in economic sociology?

Gözde Güran: I became a sociologist by (happy) accident. I was always fascinated by how economic life works. Even as a kid I was my family's unofficial accountant. But when I decided to pursue a career in academia I didn't really have a strong disciplinary preference. Ever since my undergraduate studies at Boğaziçi University, I equally enjoyed taking classes in political economy, economic history, anthropology of markets, and, of course, economic sociology. And I did apply to graduate programs in almost all these fields. To be honest, a big reason that I hesitated to pursue my research in Sociology was what I perceived as its geographic narrowness, particularly because my research was bound to be located in the Middle East. Several mentors had warned me that I would have limited professional prospects as a sociologist if I didn't research the United States. But come visit days at Princeton I met Viviana Zelizer, my future advisor, and the rest is history. She was very interested in an

undergraduate paper I had written about rural credit markets in Turkey, looking at how olive farmers categorized the value of alternative loans based on their social, moral, and financial costs. Her curiosity and interest in the empirical context and findings, and my conversations with other faculty at Princeton, really reassured me that my research would not necessarily be peripheral to the discipline. Now, I wouldn't exactly say my work is considered mainstream sociology, but I am also convinced that I have been rewarded more than marginalized for bringing sociology to less-traveled contexts, like conflict settings in the Middle East.

So in a sense, I was drawn to economic sociology before I decided I wanted to be a sociologist. But what also made sociology appealing to me was its inclusive approach to methods compared to other social sciences. Because while I felt strongly that I wanted to study economic life I didn't yet know *how*. And as I learned how to think like a sociologist, I found it very generative to be in an environment where I wasn't

constrained by having to choose between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Instead, I could focus on my research design and fieldwork, and collecting a range of different types of data—from ethnographic to experimental.

E. B.: Could you please describe your research and the main implications of your book project, *Brokers of Order: How Money Moves in Wartime Syria*?

G. G.: My book project is motivated by one big question: How do economic activities persist through episodes of crises and social upheaval? I answer this question by examining the expansion and resilience of *hawala* money transfer networks over the course of Syria's war. *Hawala* is a money-transfer system based around spatially dispersed brokers who send and receive money on behalf of customers. It has a very long history (though sparsely documented). It first emerged to fund the dense trade networks across the Indian Ocean, and more recently with the rise of labor migration, it has become more of a conduit for remittance transfers across the globe.

The book explains how this trust-based exchange system not only endured but in fact flourished in and around Syria during one of the most destructive episodes of war in our lifetime. During my fieldwork I was struck to find that *hawala* networks have effectively met a tremendous wartime demand for money transfers. They provide a vital and reliable service to the world's largest refugee community, to NGOs funding aid programs in Syria, and to traders moving goods across borders. During my ethnographic fieldwork in Lebanon and Turkey, two countries that host more than eighty percent of Syrians who escaped the war, I talked to customers, like ordinary Syrians and humanitarian organizations, and followed *hawala* brokers to observe transactions-in-action and locate these transfers within the broader social worlds of these migrant networks.

I use this case to revisit some of the key concepts and questions that motivate sociological studies of economic action. For instance, I trace processes of trust formation among *hawala* brokers to explain long-distance cooperation even during volatile and

unsettled times. In doing so, I am interested in answering questions like where trust comes from and showing how wartime migration might reconfigure social networks in generative ways. I also explore how brokers' relational work with diverse customers like refugees and NGOs help sustain *hawala* as a reliable institution. But I think that the most important implication of this research is what *hawala*'s resilience and reliability means for wartime social order. In fact, I propose that informal institutions like *hawala* can be rare sources of predictability and cohesion for communities afflicted by crisis. Hence the title of the book project, *Brokers of Order*.

E. B.: What are the major insights that your research on the informal money transfer market, which is run by networks of Syrian brokers in Lebanon and Turkey, can offer for economic sociologists? And how can economic sociologists build upon your work?

G. G.: I hope my work can encourage fellow economic sociologists to pay more attention to shifting and unstable exchange settings. Economic sociology has already fruitfully analyzed uncertain, risky, or taboo exchange settings, and a significant body of scholarship has emerged, for instance, to explain the 2008 financial meltdown as a systemic crisis. Still, not unlike economists (dare I say!), our subfield largely assumes the stability of the broader political, economic, and infrastructural systems as background conditions in our analyses. I think we need to take it even further and investigate the creative action that economic agents take in making exchange possible in volatile conditions, which can emerge from conflict, from climate disasters, from infrastructural or technological breakdowns, or from revolutions. I would make a similar case for studying migrant networks as crucial sites for economic action—especially given their unique dynamism and crossborder scope. Granted, it is hard to study these volatile contexts and transnational networks. But if we can devise ethical strategies to negotiate access to these sites and social worlds, they offer immense analytical potential to reveal key social processes, like trust formation, brokerage, relational work, institutional resilience, market stratification, and so on.

E. B.: As a junior faculty member in the field of economic sociology, what lessons do you think that you have learned might be valuable for those who are doctoral students, on the job market or at earlier stages of their careers?

G. G.: On the practical side of things, I think one underappreciated part of our work is the process of data collection, which is both the most exhilarating and daunting stage of being a graduate student. As I started my fieldwork and promptly began hitting walls (turns out people don't like talking about money!), I was terrified that I wasn't ever going to get enough data, or that it wouldn't be rich enough to write a full dissertation. But as I now tell my students in my qualitative methods class at LSE, being there in your fieldsite and making yourself useful to people eventually pays off. Same goes for not shying away from trying one's hand at different methods and being open minded about what kind of data you will

collect in the field.

More broadly, it might sound like a cliché, but I would emphasize the value of thinking outside the box. In other words, I would take up projects and questions that you genuinely think are important and exciting—and most importantly that pique your curiosity. And I would do this even when these questions or projects may not be in the mainstream of the discipline or the safest route. Because at the end of the day your own curiosity is what will push you forward, and will also be what generates the provocative ideas that will push the field forward. •

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ON FEMINIST ECONOMICS AND WOMEN'S POVERTY

Emel Memiş is a research associate in the Gender Equality and the Economy program at the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College and a professor of economics at Ankara University. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Utah and is a feminist economist working on unpaid work, poverty, and time poverty. She has been involved with the International Working Group on Gender, Macroeconomics, and International Economics (GEM-IWG) and the Initiative for Women's Labor and Employment (KEIG) in Turkey both as a researcher and an activist.



Gökhan Mülayim, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Emel Memiş about feminist economics, women's poverty, and the promise of interdisciplinarity, if there is any.

Gökhan Mülayim: Thank you for joining us. Let me start with a broad question about the present moment of crisis, the pandemic. UN Women and UNDP announced that the pandemic disproportionately affects women. While the poverty rate for women had been expected to decrease by 2.7 percent from 2019 to 2021, the expectations were revised drastically with the pandemic. The new projections are indicating an increase by 9.1 percent, which means 47 million more women will be pushed below the poverty line. What is more, for every 100 men living in extreme poverty, there will be 121 women by 2030, while the ratio was 100 to 118 in 2021. Why did the pandemic hit women severely and disproportionately?

Emel Memiş: No matter how odd it seems, yes, women are more likely to be infected than men even though a virus cannot discriminate per se. Ironically again, women are disproportionately affected by the employment cuts, despite the fact that women's share of employment has been much higher than men in the essential sectors including health, education, and retail sectors across the world. Migrant women, women of color, younger women, women in informal jobs, and

women with small children were affected the most severely amongst all. Disproportionate impacts of crises are not new; similar impacts were observed in previous experiences though at a more limited scale than now. Women are among the most affected fundamentally because the impacts of the pandemics or economic crises are all gendered, like the issues of violence and poverty. The adverse impacts of any health crises could be considered and addressed within the course of development; yet if women are categorically more severely affected; then this is obviously an ethical issue, which could only be understood through a rights-based framework, i.e., women's human rights.

We know that women and men encountered the pandemic with quite different statuses both in the market and outside the market. There were large gender gaps during the pre-pandemic period: women are more prone to job losses and to falling into poverty as they are more likely to be working in precarious jobs with low wages and be excluded from public life due to social attitudes and social commitments regarding their caring roles. With the pandemic, among those who did not lose their jobs and continued to work, the rate of transition to working at home was higher for women compared to men. Disproportionate impacts led to disruption in

women's employment or putting their jobs on hold at a higher rate. The most important obstacle to gender equality as we've seen with the pandemic continues to be the unequal burden of unpaid care work (such as cooking, cleaning, attending to the needs of young children, the elderly, etc.) for women, which has increased to unsustainable levels during the pandemic.

To give evidence from the field, the time use survey conducted in Turkey during the lockdown shows that while men's participation in unpaid work increased, particularly for men who switched to working from home; the relative increase for women further widened the gender gap in unpaid work.¹ The total workload of employed women reached levels that made it hard to sustain a decent allocation of work time. Employment disruptions were also experienced differently among women and men. Rather than transitioning to the unemployed pool when they lost their jobs, women dropped out of the labor force at a higher rate. Women's higher unemployment risk is not a new issue. In fact, in many countries, pre-pandemic unemployment rates for women were higher than those of men, even though their participation in the market is lower. What the pandemic revealed more clearly is that women's becoming unemployed is also not considered as important of an issue as men's when they lose their jobs. This is one major factor we need to recognize in answering why women are hit more severely. Since men are accepted as the main income earner and women are taken as "contributors to the household's budget," since their main jobs are thought to be taking care of the family and doing housework—as per existing patriarchal norms—being unemployed is considered more like returning to their "normal jobs" rather than being a problem.² Women's unemployment experiences are also ignored, as in the case of women's poverty.

It may be useful to recall that it is the capitalist society we live in that reproduces the social hierarchies and economic inequalities repeatedly, in that gender regimes as social constructs determine who would fill these hierarchical places. Those in power make use of gender, class, ethnic affiliation, and sexual orientation for their own benefit. I believe the pandemic just makes these more visible and sharpens the stratifications.

G. M.: Feminist economists have played an important role in the advancements in poverty research. The classical economic perspec-

tives have long been criticized for being gender-blind by feminists. These critiques have brought important tools and dimensions into the field of poverty studies, such as the gendered division of household labor, unpaid work, and so on. And, in the last two decades, we are witnessing a surge of interest in time use studies. Could you please tell us a bit about the promise of time as a tool of measurement and analysis of women's poverty?

E. M.: Absolutely, let me first mention a couple of features of time as a resource before sharing how I'm making use of time as an extended poverty measurement. Time is a limited resource, as we all experience, but it's also the ultimate resource and perhaps the only resource that is sort of evenly distributed when looking at the factor endowments at the beginning. Philosopher Noonan says about time in his article discussing leisure and freedom leisure: "The inevitable finiteness of human life makes the way time is experienced a fundamental ethical issue in any society. If all or most of human life is consumed by routine daily work, then humanity is dominated by the socially determined way of experiencing time." So, the knowledge of how we experience time is an inevitable task for the science of economics, which aims to reach the knowledge of the social and improve human life.³

Time-use data makes hidden inequalities and discriminations visible and sheds light on the household division of labor and its connections to the division of labor in public space. To provide an example, time-use data provides important findings on child labor, not only for the children working in the market but also for domestic unpaid work. The Turkish time use survey collects diary information from all household members aged 10 and over, including the duration of time children spend at school, on paid work activities, and in domestic work. We explored children's time spent on unpaid care activities and domestic work in Turkey and argued that domestic work is an important dimension of child labor that is very difficult to detect and measure. This facet of child labor is not reflected in statistics; it is not addressed with the due care even in the regulations for the elimination of child labor. Our findings revealed that unlike boys whose work time is dominantly spent outside home, girls in all age groups allocate more time to household chores. The negative correlation between school enrollment rates and work time, however, is commonly observed both for girls and boys; its impacts

on children's enrollment rates are alike. I should note here that the aim of that study was not to seek equality based on gender in child labor but to learn much richer data about how they work, for whom, and how long girls and boys provide care can enable us to challenge the existing data in terms of inequality and discrimination. Daily activities can sometimes show how welfare increases when economic indicators present opposite trends, as put by Gershuny, sometimes it allows us to see that people live in poverty and misery while those indicators paint an optimistic picture. The activities carried out within the unpaid economy play an important role in the improvement of economic and social welfare. The questions, such as where, and with/for whom, play very important roles in understanding the process people are going through while participating in a specific activity.

Studies on poverty have revealed that it is insufficient to analyze poverty as simply a one-dimensional income below a determined threshold level. Poverty is the deprivation of resources and values that limits the potential of people; it deprives them of using the social and economic rights that can produce economic value; and it deprives them of secure, decent work opportunities and financial and other public resources that will provide income. Poverty is the inability to meet basic human needs, such as food and shelter, and it brings with it the deprivation of access to public goods and services. It is known that people in poverty are systematically discriminated against in accessing education and health services. The capacity of individuals who do not have access to secure and dignified work opportunities to organize and fight for their rights is also restricted due to poverty. While research on poverty mostly concentrates on deprivation of physical, financial, human, and social capital, time-use research shows that poverty leads to inequalities in the use of time and these inequalities can ultimately be the cause of poverty. These data, for example, provide more information on the constraints and problems of households with incomes below the poverty line. At the very least, it can help identify and provide for their needs. It was found that people living in income-poor households in many developing countries spend almost one-fourth of their working time on providing basic vital needs such as water transportation and fuel supply to the household. Although these activities are not considered economic activities and are considered activities with low productivity, poor household members have to spend much of their time meeting their needs. From this point of view, it also prevents

them from working in an income-generating job. The well-being of the members of households depends on a combination of paid work, unpaid work, and publicly provided goods and services to ensure access to socially necessary consumption of basic goods.

G. M.: What are the limitations of time-use in making sense of poverty?

E. M.: Of course, there are several limitations to the use of time in understanding poverty and various experiences of poverty. First, since the primary purpose of time-use surveys is not to measure poverty, the variables included in both activity classifications and standard surveys are limited in understanding poverty. In addition, information on income or consumption is not always collected or is only available in discrete forms in time-use surveys. It is often not possible then to measure multidimensional poverty indicators using time-use data alone unless paired with other data sources using technical statistical matching techniques. Furthermore, most datasets are not collected in diary forms, which may provide questionable data in terms of precision when the questions are in a memory-based form, like, "Yesterday how much time do you think you spent on caring for the elderly?" There is no standardized age or demographic coverage, and data is generally not collected from all members of the household, which may have limitations for country comparisons. Concurrent events are often not collected or very difficult to compile. There are also criticisms put forth about clock time as a unit of measurement, which may not be appropriate in some people's lives, such as the population living in rural areas who spend most of their time in the field or raising animals.

On the other hand, the measurement of poverty is very complicated as well. Who is identified as poor? How can we identify people in poverty? How can we measure the poverty of a woman for instance, who could not divorce her husband despite being exposed to violence and not allowed to work in the market? What if their household equivalent income per capita is higher than the threshold level? Can we measure the poverty rate of a woman who is unable to live on the money she earns despite working part-time? No matter how many dimensions we include in a measure, is it possible to measure the poverty of a woman who cannot survive on alimony she receives that is very low or not even paid? If time-use data is collected while maintaining a high sample of households living under poverty, then at

least more representative information can be obtained with regard to daily activities. In the social sciences, there is a general obstacle to the measurement, in terms of how comprehensive a measure can be while at the same being objective, but this is an issue common to all measures. There is also the debate in the sociology literature whether there are different time concepts, such as scientific and natural time. Some surveys go beyond collecting just the type of activity and duration of time spent on the activity by including several subjective and qualitative questions or perception-based questions about feelings. In different rounds of the survey, specific modules could be added. For example, a separate module on elder care was conducted in Turkey during the last round of the time use survey, which provided much richer information about both elderly persons and caretakers.

G. M.: In the field of economics, the schools of thought as diverse as feminist, Marxist, institutionalist, Keynesian, post-Keynesian, and the like, have long been dominated by neoclassical economics. What does it mean to be a feminist economist today?

E. M.: The neoclassical paradigm has long set the frontier in the field. However, without the recovery of the global economy after the global financial crisis, we encountered the devastating impacts of the pandemic. We've all seen clearly that our lives are quite intertwined. It's the collective well-being what we should seek. Market stability and obsessions about efficiency do not make much sense without the reproduction of life. So, the boundaries of economics limited to the market, whether from a neoclassical or Marxist, or Keynesian perspective, cannot be adequate to understand today's issues. And at this point, I think being a feminist economist today carries more responsibilities to contribute to shifting to a new paradigm in the field. We are heard more than before. Yet this needs to continue and become stronger with the solidarity of social coalitions with other researchers who are willing to contribute in our endeavor to redefine and retake the definition of economics to its origins, which aim to improve human well-being and create a better life for all the living and the planet as a whole. Knowledge is experiential, but I just hope that this knowledge gained during this pandemic is not erased later by ideology.

G. M.: What are your thoughts on interdisciplinarity in the field of economics? The neo-

classical orthodoxy has long disregarded the broader field of social studies of the economy, ranging from economic sociology and anthropology to political economy and even to organizational studies. How do you think feminist economics could benefit from that wider field?

E. M.: I believe none of the fields would escape this transformation. The deep specialization in science appears to have reached its limits. For instance, climate justice cannot be addressed only by technocratic solutions without contributions from the field of political science and economics. Economic decision-making is now explored more deeply with economists' collaborations with psychologists. Feminist economics has always been fed by research in sociology, anthropology, and political science much more than any other schools in economics. The international network of feminist economics (IAFFE) has many members with various backgrounds and from all over the world. This is very difficult to achieve, but this is what makes feminist economics stronger than others for the upcoming paradigmatic shift. When I attend international conferences, I love being a panelist along with a feminist historian, feminist sociologist, or political scientist and enjoy learning other scientific methodologies, and I learn a lot. I think feminist economics has already been benefiting from this network of different fields. But there is always room for improvement, as during the pandemic we have seen several opportunities to discuss our common issues with philosophers, medical doctors, and biologists. So, I believe our social scientists' networks could open our doors to the "nonsocial" sciences and other fields.

G. M.: Given your position as a U.S.-trained scholar who is currently based outside of the United States, how do you see your work in the context of the continental divide? What are your thoughts on the state and the trajectory of feminist economics at the center and the periphery?

E. M.: As a full-time faculty member of the Department of Economics and Women Studies Program at Ankara University, I consider myself very fortunate to have so many opportunities in our field. At the time, I was not fully aware of how important my decision to apply for a Ph.D. Program in the United States would end up being for me. Feminist economics as a field has been, and continues to be, marginalized in Turkey—

though recently there has been improvement, there are still a very limited number of scholars and students who are interested in the field. Rather, it is more common for researchers in sociology, political science, labor relations departments, and gender studies to be doing feminist research.

When I think about my work in the context of the continental divide, I guess I can say that I tried to contribute to building closer ties between the two. Most of my research focuses on Turkey, and I tried to explore social and economic inequalities from a feminist economics perspective that I learned in the United States. My professors are researchers who have made fundamental contributions to the formation of the literature on feminist economics. The content of the courses and readings were never limited to Western countries or Western issues, but I realized that there is an incredible accumulation of feminist knowledge in Turkey that I had missed before I started my Ph.D. I was trying to move that experience to Turkey. When I joined the Women's Studies program and started offering lectures there, I recognized this was not just my problem: Any economics undergraduate would miss the debates since all were ignored in economics curricula. Feminist contributions in political science, sociology, and labor relations went far beyond those in economics in Turkey, though perhaps I can exclude the development literature from this criticism. The program I joined is (and was) a very multidisciplinary one, and best of all, we were very involved in feminist activism. In a sense, we were practicing well-known feminist methodological approaches to knowledge production. We were working closely with women's groups and rights-based organizations and so doing feminist research gained a very different connotation for me beyond academic curiosity. We are trying to continue despite all the backlash we've been experiencing in academia, but we lost much with the suspension of the academics for peace, from universities.

Regarding the trajectories of feminist economics in the center and in the periphery, I believe and I am very hopeful that we will be observing a wider and more powerful leap in the periphery. We can also call this a dialectical prediction. The efforts of uniformization or homogenization never succeeded; why would it in economics? If we, I mean "we" the women, become targets of the autocratic antidemocratic regimes; if women's studies programs are closed; if gender courses are discontinued at our universities in illegitimate

ways this simultaneously helps build stronger feminist movements influencing the academy. In addition, of course, there are clues that conventional approaches to economics failed in comprehensively understanding any economic issue. All those years—at least over the last half-century—all those brilliant minds tried to develop market-based modeling of monetary policy-making. These were the single most important economic issues a hard-core economist "should" study. Can we say now that with the conventional way of thinking or modeling we can understand today's developments? Can we understand the major inequalities regulating the system; why those inequalities still exist and even expand; and why societies move away from democracy, without understanding the nature of power? Conventional thinking in economics has lost its paradigmatic features. This would help create a better trajectory for feminist economics not only in the periphery but also in the center. I expect a convergence between the center and periphery, as development-based issues have become common issues for the center as well. For the first time, a human development report is being prepared for the United States. On the other hand, when I think about research opportunities, facilities, and resources, frontier research in feminist economics may continue to be based in the center, expanding the topics of the field.

Footnotes:

1 <http://hdl.handle.net/10.1080/13545701.2020.1849764>

2 <https://www.kadinisci.org/2021/05/18/bir-kadin-so-runu-olarak-issizlik/>

3 A very interesting historical example is cited by Jonathan Gershuny. He underlines that it is very difficult to present the accounts of social and economic developments social scientists have been trying to create for centuries. He emphasizes that the difficulty of this task is that the indicators and classifications in the national accounts must actually exist before we become aware of them and classify them. In the late 1800s when there was a decline in mining, agriculture, and manufacturing activities, there was also an expansion in income tax in Britain, which was puzzling. By observing the activities of individuals inside and outside the household, Giffen saw a large increase in the number of people who produce "immaterial things" and argued that this solves the puzzle. While quoting Giffen's grit, Gershuny says that he actually discovered a new sector of production that we call the service sector today. In the later years, the service sector was included in the national accounts system, albeit by going through difficult processes, and it is now followed by the usual surveys and measurements. This example explains quite clearly how important it is to identify the activities we perform in daily life, which is the most concrete form of life. •

BOOKSHELF: HORACIO ORTIZ ON THE EVERYDAY PRACTICE OF VALUATION AND INVESTMENT

Horacio Ortiz is a researcher at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France and an Associate Professor of Anthropology at East China Normal University.

Elif Birced, a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology, talked to Horacio Ortiz about his new book, *The Everyday Practice of Valuation and Investment: Political Imaginaries of Shareholder Value*, which was published by Columbia University Press in 2021.



Elif Birced: Could you please tell us a bit about the story of this book? What sparked your interest in studying stock valuation in New York and Paris?

Horacio Ortiz: My interest in studying the financial industry started when I was a student in the 1990s. For many students at the time, it seemed clear that the regulatory transformations of the 80s and the collapse of the Soviet Union created a new scenario where banks, investment funds, and insurance companies that were not controlled by states had an increasing role in the conduct of state policy and in the production of worldwide inequalities. I was attracted by the qualitative approach in anthropology and sociology, which I thought would allow me to observe the concrete working of the financial industry, beyond its abstract representation in economics. Thus, from the beginning of my research as a PhD student until today, my interest in studying the financial industry concerned what I understood to be its political role: the way it contributes to the production of social hierarchies. I grew up in Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s and, for me, looking at the financial industry in New York and Paris was directed at understanding this political role in its global dimension and not reduced to a particular national territory, be it considered “central”

or “peripheral.” My initial observations only strengthened my understanding that financial valuation and investment for any asset in any locale can only be understood in relation to all other investment objects of the financial industry, which compares them and puts them in competition. Studying the financial industry in New York and Paris was thus part of an attempt to understand the practices at the centers of this global political organization.

This book is the result of about 20 years of research, which started with my PhD in 2000. I did participant observation as an assistant in financial analysis with stockbrokers in New York for five months, then with a team of hedge fund consultants in Paris for four months and, finally, with a team investing in credit derivatives at a major global investment firm, also in Paris, for another four months. This was complemented with about 100 interviews with financial professionals in New York, Paris, and London. This fieldwork was carried out between 2002 and 2005, and I later pursued it by obtaining a professional certification of valuation and investment proficiency (called Certified International Investment Analyst and almost identical to the US-based Chartered Financial Analyst certification), which I started in Paris in 2008 and finished in Shanghai in 2010. Between 2008 and 2014, I taught

finance in business schools at BA and MA levels in Paris and Shanghai, something which eventually became additional fieldwork. And between 2011 and 2016, I conducted interviews with professionals working in private equity, venture capital, and mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. That fieldwork included ten months of participant observation in a consultancy firm for crossborder M&A in Shanghai. Although the book focuses on the participant observation I conducted in New York and Paris between 2002 and 2005, it brings together empirical knowledge and analytic insights that I could only gain later, as I studied financial methodologies further and expanded my understanding of the strongly standardized character of professional practice in the financial industry worldwide. Thus, although the book is based on fieldwork done during my PhD and on the translation of a book published in French in 2014, it has been a chance for me to go well beyond those two sources, in order to conduct a much more systematic and informed analysis of the financial industry than I did in the past.

E. B.: **Could you please describe your research and the main implications of your book, *The Everyday Practice of Valuation and Investment: Political Imaginaries of Shareholder Value*?**

H. O.: The aim of the research design was to observe processes that have global implications with the detail afforded by qualitative research in the form of interviews and participant observation. This involved using qualitative research to address several levels of analysis of the financial industry, some of which could only be brought into the research through secondary literature and interdisciplinary dialogue. The research thus combines different scales of analysis concerning: the technical and political meanings of financial valuation and investment methods; the life trajectories of employees combining their professional and nonprofessional lives; how employees of the financial industry in diverse sites apply these methods in standardized procedures; the organizational aspects of these practices, concerning relations among employees within and between companies, as well as relations between companies, including across state borders; the regulatory frameworks where these people operate and how these regulatory frameworks have more or less common features worldwide; and the global distribu-

tion of money by the financial industry, across assets and state jurisdictions, in order to situate the observed practices within the global relations of which they are a part.

The multisited character of the research and the in-depth study of financial methods of valuation and investment allowed me to observe the standardized character of procedures within the financial industry on a global level, also using, of course, insights produced by other researchers. Combining different theoretical and disciplinary approaches, I could then problematize the financial industry as a global political institution, bringing together three analytic insights. From the point of view of the anthropology and sociology of money (for instance the work of Nigel Dodd, Jane Guyer, Keith Hart, Bill Maurer, and Viviana Zelizer), I could identify the political character of the activity of the financial industry, which was contributing in creating social hierarchies and inequalities by the way it collects, produces, and distributes money worldwide. The sociology of organizations and the political economy of financial regulation and financial companies allowed me to stabilize analytically the institutional character of the financial industry, showing how across a myriad of companies with different aims and interests there is a series of shared rules, among which the methods of valuation and investment play a prominent role. These rules are compulsory for employees due to similar regulatory frameworks worldwide and to the complex web of contracts that bind companies to each other (for instance the book *Chains of Finance* co-authored by Diane-Laure Arjaliès et al. and the work of Olivier Godechot, Karen Ho, Peter Miller, Sabine Montagne, Saskia Sassen, and Caitlin Zaloom). Finally, the sociology of knowledge, the anthropology of numbers and mathematics, and the political economy of financial concepts provided tools to show how financial methods contain statements about the politically legitimate distribution of money in society at large. For the professionals who apply them, these methods have meanings that can be technical, but also moral and political, in a way that connects them with concrete global power relations and long genealogies of political thought present in financial regulation and neoclassical economics (for instance, the work of Jane Guyer, Marieke de Goede, Paul Langley, Donald MacKenzie, and Fabian Muniesa).

The analysis of everyday practice shows that financial

methods of valuation and investment contain contradictions and fragmentations that nevertheless all contribute to justify monetary distribution from the point of view of a maximizing investor and with the presupposition that prices are meaningful representations of financial value because they are produced by markets, whose definition is strongly connected to the idea of informational efficiency supported in neoclassical economics. At the same time, looking at the concrete volumes of money managed by the financial industry and the places the money goes worldwide, there is clearly a concentration in Western Europe, the U.S., Japan, and increasingly China, according to a complex history of colonial conquest (including the World Wars) and the Cold War and its aftermath. The distribution of the more than 200 trillion US dollars managed by the financial industry worldwide creates power relations in multiple ways. These power relations occur where the money is invested, for instance between workers, top management, and shareholders in listed companies and, in the case of sovereign bonds, between financial companies and, through indebted states, the potential beneficiaries of state expenditure. But the financial industry also contributes to global exclusions and hierarchies by the way the money is concentrated or refused worldwide, for instance accumulating money in certain activities and organizations and maintaining over 800 million people in a constant state of malnutrition. The way in which the application of financial methods of valuation and investment tends to reproduce and slowly transform global hierarchies is thus connected to other power relations, industrial and extractive, but also military and marked by imaginaries of race and gender, among others. The analysis of the everyday practice of financial professionals allows for understanding how the financial industry connects these multiple power relations that stand outside of it and how these power relations contribute to transform the financial industry in the same process. This interconnection happens, in everyday practice, as these different power relations are brought together through the imaginaries of investors and efficient markets that are applied, for instance, to social practices as diverse as the savings of U.S. middle classes, the operations of state-owned Chinese banks, or the issuance of sovereign bonds by impoverished, indebted, and geopolitically dominated states. Although the book does not explore all these power relations in detail, it shows how they are brought together, compared and combined in the everyday practice of fi-

ancial professionals. Studying the financial industry as a political institution, in the terms proposed above, allows thus to combine the multiple scales of analysis without reducing the financial industry to a single logic and shows, on the contrary, how the financial industry is a constitutive part of a multiplicity of global power relations.

E. B.: In your book, you demonstrate the importance of ideologically laden notions of investing skill and efficient markets in shaping the everyday practices of financial valuation. Could you please elaborate on how these notions play an important role in financial valuation as well as in producing and legitimizing global inequalities?

H. O.: In the book I identify seven concepts that are central in valuation and investment methods: the investor, the market, three definitions of financial value, risk, and the state. I organized the book around the concepts of investor, market, and value because I thought that they were fundamental not only in the everyday practice of financial professionals, but also in financial regulation and in the political justifications proposed by governments and other organizations to endow the financial industry with a major role in the distribution of social resources.

The book shows how financial professionals carry out valuation and investment using three definitions of financial value that are technically interdependent (the results of each are necessary for the others) and partly contradictory, as they include different definitions of the concepts of value, investor, and market. Fundamental value is defined as the income that the maximizing investor will obtain from the object of investment. Valuation and investment are then oriented to gauge whether the market price reflects this value correctly, with the idea that if it does not, the price will reflect it in the future thanks to market efficiency (so you should buy if the current price appears too low or sell if it appears too high). Relative valuation compares the price of an asset to the prices of other assets, considering that those prices reflect fundamental value thanks to market efficiency. The value of the asset and its definition as investment opportunity are then mediated by the analysis and investment in all other assets considered to be part of a single efficient market. Speculative valuation considers that prices

reflect opinions unrelated to a fundamental value, so what matters is assessing where these opinions are going, so as to benefit from often short-term price movements. It tends to reject the idea of market efficiency but may use fundamental and relative valuation as the rationales supposed to guide opinions. Combining these three approaches, the notion of market efficiency is used in the most extended method of investment, called “classical.” This method mobilizes Modern Portfolio Theory (MPT), to “buy and hold” the “whole market,” with only minor short-term bets based on fundamental, relative, and speculative valuation. There is a great number of variations in the use of these concepts, with new ones often marketed as financial innovation. But their centrality remains not only for valuation and investment for listed stocks, which are the focus of my book, but also for all other financial assets. These methods are indeed the way in which a social activity comes to be defined as a financial asset, once it is compared to the sovereign bonds of rich states that are considered to be “risk free.”

The analysis of everyday practice shows that different professions tend to stress their connection to different forms of valuation and investment. For instance, many financial analysts tend to stress the legitimacy of fundamental valuation, some traders may focus on speculative valuation and fund managers using MPT may hold contradictory views on market efficiency. But in the concrete procedures they apply, financial professionals must mobilize all these approaches together. In their complex relations of cooperation, competition, and hierarchy, employees and companies thus constantly mobilize the interdependencies and contradictions between different definitions of value, investor, and market. This produces global hierarchies, because the concept of investor is always central for valuation and investment, thereby establishing a power relation that gives total priority to the source of money over the object of investment. At the same time, employees tend to apply the concept of market efficiency to organize investment globally, buying “the whole market,” which is often represented by indexes. This form of monetary distribution tends thus to favor the existing hierarchy among financial assets, collecting and producing money to invest in them, to the exclusion of other social activities, and defining this distribution as socially optimal because it is the product of market efficiency. Shifts in global power relations may reorient this distribution, as happened for instance when some stocks listed in Chinese ex-

changes were included in the most dominant global indexes.

My analyses of the concrete practices of valuation and investment of financial analysts, stockbrokers, traders, and fund managers in New York and Paris show how they produce these global hierarchies in their every day, through the complex relations among employees within and between companies and across state borders. Studying their personal relation to their professional and nonprofessional lives, I show how they can do this with various relations, for instance with rejection, indifference, or enthusiasm. But in all cases, they must mobilize the notions of investor and market to account officially for their work. In cases where justification seems necessary, for example, in conflicts within the industry or when a “financial crisis” is officially declared, they will take positions using the concepts of investor, value, and the role their professional practice is supposed to play in relation to market efficiency. Financial regulation worldwide tends to reproduce the idea that the financial industry is a site of market efficiency where investors meet to exchange, so that prices would tend to reflect the true value of assets and constitute thus appropriate signals for an optimal allocation of resources. The concepts of value, investor, and market have thus political meanings that employees are expected to use as they justify their actions, whether in the everyday relations among themselves or in marketing materials that claim, for instance, that the financial industry “creates value.”

E. B.: What are the major insights that your research on stock valuation can offer for economic sociologists? And how can economic sociologists build upon your work?

H. O.: I hope this work can contribute to three ongoing debates, concerning the focus on the production and distribution of money, a critical analysis of financial concepts, and the fruitfulness of starting with a global view of the social processes we study using an interdisciplinary and multi-scalar approach.

The book shows the fruitfulness of the approaches in the sociology and the anthropology of money that stress that money has multiple meanings, which depend on the relations where it is used and contribute to shaping these relations in return. Applying this approach to the everyday practices in the financial industry, we can then understand the limited multiplic-

ity of meanings with which professionals operate and situate these meanings in their every day. This allows for seeing how the meanings of money, for instance, the idea that it is distributed according to the views of investors in more or less efficient markets, are part of broad organizational settings that depend on multiple power relations where these meanings may be absent or transformed. In this sense, the book contributes to the sociology of finance, but also to economic sociology in general, for as long as it is concerned with social processes that include the organization of monetary production and distribution. This approach avoids the limitations of studies that consider that the meaning of money is fixed, such as Marxian or neoclassical approaches that make it very difficult to understand how the financial industry connects multiple power relations that stand outside of it. These other relations operate with imaginaries of colonialism, state power, war, race, and gender, among others, that cannot be subsumed under a single logic of capitalism or neoliberalism. This does not mean we should reject the critical contribution of Marxian approaches, but it implies going beyond them by including them in the study of the multiple power relations that are produced by the way in which the financial industry produces, collects, and distributes money.

The book also contributes to a reflexive critique of concepts like investor, market, and value. It shows that there is no embodied investor, but that the concept is ubiquitous with multiple and partly contradictory definitions. The category is produced in a relation of representation, where money owners are considered investors because they entrust the money to the financial industry and financial professionals are considered investors because they act on their behalf. Besides, the concrete practices of financial professionals include rules that combine the concept of investor with many other concerns that are unrelated to it. Similarly, the concept of market focuses the attention on transactions and the production of prices. Yet, in this bureaucratic setting, employees used standardized rules to determine what is an asset, how it should be integrated in an investment strategy and what are the multiple definitions of value that can be applied to it, so that transactions occupy only a small part of the process whereby the distribution of money is decided and realized. Finally, professionals mobilize various, partly contradictory definitions of value. This means that sociologists should not use the concepts of investor, mar-

ket and value (and we could add risk, state, and many others) as analytic tools to describe what happens in the financial industry. These concepts must be taken as objects of analysis, to understand how they are used in the power relations established by the financial industry. This goes beyond a critique of the approach of the performativity of economic concepts, which clearly does not apply to these concepts, unless one thinks that current global inequalities are a socially optimal allocation of resources. Using the concepts of investor, market, and value as analytic tools may obscure the political meanings these concepts contain. This may lead the analysis to reproduce these presuppositions as results of the research, instead of turning them into the objects of a critical analysis. This goes beyond the analysis of the financial industry and could apply to the many social processes where the actors we study use variously defined concepts of market and value.

Finally, the book starts the analysis of the financial industry by looking at its global space of operations. This corresponds to a political standpoint that considers that the object of sociology is human society. Conceptually and methodologically, this also allows for situating the processes we can study in detail within the broader power relations of which they are a part. It prevents reducing the analysis to national borders or to specific assets, even when the material we have access to seems initially bound by those limits. To do this, interdisciplinary dialogue and a multi-scalar approach are necessary. This book is based on very qualitative research, but that research only makes a critical contribution when it is put in relation with meso- and macro-analyses of the global financial industry. Similarly, to study how the financial industry produces global hierarchies, we must look at the complexity of valuation and investment practices in order to understand how these global hierarchies are brought together and reproduced in a way that does not simply correspond to the imagination of neoclassical economics. This book mobilizes analytic approaches, theoretical concerns and methodological insights established in anthropology, sociology, and political economy. Economic sociology has been a site of critical creativity in the last decades. I wrote the book with the conviction that critical contribution can only be made through interdisciplinary dialogue. Hopefully the book can contribute to this view, beyond the sociology of finance, for sociology and social science at large. •

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE



Gökhan Mülayim is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Boston University. Working at the intersection of economic and cultural sociology; organizations, occupations, and work; and urban studies, he studies how the so-called extra-economic is being translated into the economic. He looks specifically into how peculiar goods and services are being economized, and how the markets for those goods and services are being constructed. Using ethnographic research tools, his dissertation examines the economization of security as a political, social, and affective good and service in the market for private security in Istanbul. He received his B.A. with honors in political science and international relations, and his M.A. in sociology from Bogaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey.



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