

Accounts

ASA Economic Sociology Section Newsletter

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Welcome to the Spring 2007 issue of *Accounts*!

As semesters, trimesters and quarters draw to a close, and with the ASA meeting in New York City approaching on the horizon, we are pleased to offer a unique and eclectic issue.

This issue begins with an article by Bruce Carruthers, who continues our ongoing discussion of how economic sociology transgresses disciplinary boundaries. Carruthers discusses the potential economic history has for infusing economic sociology with new ideas. He notes that most topics in economic sociology have a “historical angle,” and suggests that sociologists are well positioned to glean from economic historians many useful ideas. Next, Chris Yenkey contributes his interview of Paul Mbatia, Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Nairobi. This interview provides a glimpse of how a leading African sociologist addresses economic and political conditions in Kenya. In doing so, Prof. Mbatia provides food for thought for North American and European researchers interested in economic and institutional development.

The main portion of this issue is focused around a provocative discussion of Viviana Zelizer's book *The Purchase of Intimacy* that emerged out of a session at the recent Eastern Sociological Society meetings. Julia Adams suggests broadening the concept of intimacy, pointing to the diversity of types of relationships that exist in social life. Nancy Folbre puts forth the notion that the relative mix and importance of emotional, “interstitial” and economic values can vary. She also discusses the issues of how 'rational' mechanisms and institutions have the potential to both help and/or harm the emotional and lived lives of individuals. Mitchell Stevens brings in his theoretical work on commensuration to his review of Zelizer's work, arguing for a more careful examination of the role of law in economic phenomena. Zelizer's response provides an interesting hermeneutic perspective, revealing numerous dialogues both with reviewers and her own thoughts. Judging by the richness and enthusiasm of the discussion around *POI*, it is clear that Zelizer's work will be generative of future research and ideas in economic sociology for years to come. Zelizer challenges the scholarly community to develop an economic sociology that is capable of spanning and conflating the continuum from “economic” to “emotional” behavior.

We are also pleased to offer summaries of two new research programs. Brooke Harrington shares her experiences from a recent extended trip to China and India, noting the continued relevance of Max Weber's work regarding the two countries. Harrington also shares her thoughts on consumer behavior she observed and what the future might hold for each. Next, Rene Almeling provides a summary of her recent dissertation, in which she studies the phenomenon of commodification in genetic materials markets. This work shows that the impact of Zelizer's treatise is already being felt in the discipline.

This issue also features a review by Mauro Guillen of Francesco Duina's new book, *The Social Construction of Free Trade: The European Union, NAFTA, and Mercosur*. Roberta Iverson also provides an introduction to her new book, co-authored with Annie Laurie Armstrong, *Jobs Aren't Enough: Toward a New Economic Mobility for Low-Income Families*.

Until our next issue, we wish you the best in wrapping up your respective academic years!

All the best from the editorial team at Accounts,

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**“I wish I knew how to quit you
Economic History”**

Bruce G. Carruthers,
Northwestern University

Economic Sociology has had a long, complicated, fluctuating, hot-and-cold relationship with economic history. Karl Marx and Max Weber both knew a lot of (then) state-of-the-art economic history, and it is difficult to think of a contemporary topic of interest to economic sociologists that doesn't have an historical angle (in between Marx and today, consider Neil Smelser's analysis of the British cotton manufactures during the industrial revolution). But our warm embrace of economic history is filled with ambivalence because it remains important to have a separate academic identity, to maintain our sociological bona fides, to show that we aren't "merely" doing economic history, and so on. And indeed we aren't doing the same thing. So the relationship consists of wary distance punctuated by periods of close contact. Like it or not, economic sociology is saddled with economic history.

As an academic enterprise, economic history is now quite distinct from what might be called "business history" and it tends to be done in economics departments. Business history, largely housed in business schools and history departments, draws on the traditional skills and archive-based evidence used by historians to construct qualitative narratives about some aspect of the history of business. As exemplary business history, one thinks of Alfred Chandler's mountain of work on the rise of the large corporation, but many other worthy examples can be found in the pages of the *Business History Review*, and *Business History*. Historians of capitalism, like Fernand Braudel, operate on an even grander scale and longer duree. The separation of economic history from business history began during the "cliometric" controversies of the 1960s, where the adoption of quantitative methods became something of an issue. Business historians may or may not have a PhD in economics, but an economic historian in an economics department almost certainly has one.

In a social science discipline that values mathematical purity and econometric virtuosity, economic history has been something of a dubious specialty. Perhaps it is because economic historians get dangerously close to very messy data that often challenges core assumptions, but economic history seems like a "boutique specialty" that top departments can afford to indulge in but which second and third-tier economics departments try to avoid. Yale, Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Cal Tech, Northwestern, Berkeley and Chicago house people like Timothy Guinnane, Jeffrey Williamson, Peter Temin, Claudia Goldin, Avner Grief, Paul David, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, Joel Mokyr, Christina Romer, Jan de Vries and Robert Fogel. The

award of the Nobel Prize to Robert Fogel and Douglass North in 1993 provided much-needed affirmation that economic history was, in fact, "real economics" after all, and it is published in venues like the *Journal of Economic History* and *Explorations in Economic History*.

Examining contemporary economic history up close, the basis for the attraction becomes pretty obvious. An economic sociologist with an interest in how gender inequality has evolved in the U.S., for example, could hardly get off to a better start than to read Claudia Goldin's numerous books and articles. Someone curious about social institutions and how they influence economic growth would find much food for thought in Avner Grief's recent book, and Paul David's papers develop key conceptual tools (e.g., "path dependence") that economic sociologists can barely resist. Those who wish to know more about how banks and capital markets influence capitalist development should read Tim Guinnane's work, or Jean-Laurent Rosenthal's (or, preferably, both). And economic sociologists inquiring into the history of globalization should be having a look at Jeffrey Williamson's scholarship. The list could go on and on, but I don't wish to be tedious.

What will tempt economic sociologists about this kind of research is the combination of rich data, sharp empirical analysis, and provocative concepts, built around a rational-choice perspective that is tempered by an appreciation that naïve or "presentist" assumptions don't work well if one wants to study centuries of economic and institutional variation. Furthermore, given the interdependent nature of polity and economy, outcomes are frequently not "efficient" or "optimal." In reading economic history, I find much less orthodox "market fundamentalism" than in many other branches of economics.

But don't go looking for anything too meaningful. With the notable exceptions of North and Grief, economic historians don't have much to say about meaning, norms or culture. And mostly (thank goodness) they don't even try. These features of social life are notoriously difficult to measure, and lack the conceptual firmness that economists are comfortable with. Economists prefer hard facts, and aren't well trained in what to do with qualitative or interpretive data. Sociologists who appreciate the culture nuance of gift exchange, or who want to know more about how status orderings affect markets, should not look to economic historians for input. The thrust of economic historical research remains very much in the quantitative direction, and some things cannot easily be counted.

So I favor the ongoing exchange between economic sociology and economic history. Because of the disciplinary separation, economic sociology has the luxury of choosing what to appropriate and when. We can "cherry pick," as it were, when the fruit is ripest. The best work in economic history is absolutely terrific, and remains absolutely relevant to many of the questions we like to ask.



A Kenyan Perspective on Development and Institutions: A Conversation with Prof. Paul Mbatia

Chris Yenkey,
Cornell University

Prof. Paul Mbatia is Chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Nairobi. Dr. Mbatia received his B.A. in Sociology in 1985 from the University of Nairobi and his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Indiana in 1996. He was visiting professor of African Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005.

I had the pleasure of sharing an extended conversation with Dr. Mbatia during a visit to Nairobi in February of this year in which I conducted exploratory fieldwork regarding changes in regulatory institutions in Africa. Selected parts of that conversation are reproduced here.

Let's begin with a description of your research and teaching interests. I understand you are primarily interested in development studies?

Generally, I am interested in development-related issues; more specifically I am interested in understanding the role of the state in developing countries, whether the state is good or bad for development: if they have the capacity to manage the actors in the development space. Along that interest, I teach a course called Comparative International Development in which we look at factors contributing to global inequality, particularly the role of the state in third world countries, multinational corporations, particularly whether MNC's should be able to dictate terms to developing nations, and the role of the private sector including international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. We consider the impact of the IFI's (International Financial Institutions) structural adjustment programs and the potential and limitations of the private sector in reference to market-oriented reforms. The civil society sector is also of interest to us, particularly local actors such as community organizations and their role relative to the international NGO's.

We are of the belief that development in Kenya is best fostered if the impetus for change comes internally, if Kenyans take the leading role. In the 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF called the shots - deciding for third world countries what policies and reforms were most appropriate, and in the end we didn't get very far. That experience showed that unless the local actors got their acts together, we won't go very far. We ask ourselves if we are capable of an equivalent of the Asian miracle to lift us out of the current quagmire? Our experience has been that for such a miracle to happen, the local state must be structured to be more transparent and autonomous. Autonomy of the state is crucial in order to be able to manage the other actors, including the multinational corporations. If the MNC's are more influential than our states, then we

will not get very far. So we must rebuild the state and make it responsive to the needs of the people.

Could you say a few words about the theoretical framework you use in your work and the authors that influence your thinking?

Joel Migdal is a primary author of importance for us. Migdal is a statist, building state-based theories that seek to understand the role of states in third world countries, their contributions toward development. He gives a framework of state capabilities that emphasizes three qualities: first, the capability to penetrate to society, meaning its ability to reach out to all sectors and influence their activities while at the same time being influenced by those activities; second, the state's ability to collect tax revenue; the third is the state's ability to control the activities of its subjects, such as containing crime.

The Kenyan state has made great advancements in tax collection in recent years. The election of Kibaki in 2003 ushered in a time of much greater efficiency in tax collection. Through the Kenya Revenue Authority, an approximately 100% increase in government revenue collection has been achieved. In the 1990s, Kenya was only able to finance about 40% of its budget, the rest coming from international donors. By 2006, the government was able to finance about 95% of its budget from tax collection, thus reducing dependency on foreign donor financing. On the other hand, the current regime has a deep crisis in its ability to contain crime. There is a very large crime problem in Kenya today, so we see that the modern Kenyan state is making progress on some fronts but losing ground on others.

We also read Peter Evan's works from the 1970s, as well as local scholars including Peter Nyong, an Africanist scholar and political scientist whom writes about governance in third world states. We also look at world systems theory, dependency theory, and modernization theory. The work of Immanuel Wallerstein, Amaryta Sen, and Walter Rodney are also covered.

What are some main conclusions to be drawn from your work?

One major conclusion we can draw about the Kenyan state since the start of the structural adjustment policies the 1990s is that the size of the state, the size of the bureaucracy, has been intentionally reduced. The cutting of the public sector to size, the term used by the World Bank, has resulted in the retrenchment of the civil servants. There has been a very high degree of forced retirement by civil servants, which has had the effect of increasing poverty in Kenya. These forced retirees are unable to find other work, so they join the ranks of the unemployed and fall into poverty, and the practice continues today. Questioning this whole philosophy, we are at a point in the dis-

course of states where we should ask if we should be reducing the size of the state or whether we should be strengthening the strength of the state. I'm persuaded to argue that reducing the role of the state in development in Africa has not born fruit. Perhaps a better way of reforming that state is increasing its capabilities, not necessarily reducing its size. You can have a state modest in size that is capable; you can enhance the capability of a modest state. Development of a country has to be understood in the context of a particular country. 47% of Kenyans live on less than \$1 per day, so when you implement a policy that increases the number of unemployed, you increase the numbers of citizens living in poverty. Reducing the size of the state without reforming it, without building it into a more efficient institution responsive to the needs of the population, that does not help solve the problem. I think the view of the foreign reformers, meaning the World Bank and other donors, is to focus on size of the bureaucracy, and not enough into strengthening the state institutions.

My second contribution is that reforms, institution building, that are imposed from external sources are not likely to succeed if they are not supported locally. We see this in many third world countries- the reforms are imposed as conditionalities by outside donors, and often these reforms have not been meaningful in the local context. For any policy to make sense, it is mandatory for the local actors to be part of that process. *This is a key sociological insight: development is only meaningful to the people if it meets their needs.* The question to ask is who should spearhead reforms? In the 1990s the whole bit in development has been about reforming the state. Outsiders took the center stage, telling developing countries what they should want and how they should get it. That is not development. In the true meaning of the term, development is about empowering the people so they can decide what they want, while outsiders assist. When states are not autonomous, then they are captives of donors and not likely to escape that relationship.

So far we've spoken mainly about foreign efforts to affect change in Kenya. Have there been notable indigenous efforts to reform Kenyan institutions?

There is a success story I can talk about in Kenya. The local civil society actors have organized themselves to challenge authorities and take the initiative to spearhead reforms from within. In the 1990s the political system started changing and continued to change not because of external influences but because there was adequate investment by local actors to challenge the system. This was Kenya's "second liberation." This was only possible because of adequate support by local actors to challenge the existing regime. The lesson learned was that unless the local people initiate programs and projects, unless the people unite to challenge any regime that does not respond

to the needs of the Kenyan population, it is unlikely that any successful outcome will result.

In the past, local actors have been quite docile and the regime has been very tough, like a police state. But through the combined efforts of local NGO's, CBO's, and local donors, we have managed to expand the democratic space. And that is a breakthrough- the moment you expand the democratic space, you give people the ability to build institutions, to reason together, to challenge the existing social evils in a society. If you look back in the recent history of Kenya, that is a major achievement. When I am in Kenya today, I feel like I can enjoy my democratic freedom just like you would in the United States. Just this morning I had a phone call from a personal friend who is a very senior person in the anti-corruption ministry, and we were exchanging ideas on the police institutions in Kenya- whether the police boss is able to manage, to connect with other heads of departments, etc. You can only hold such a conversation in an environment in which there is democracy. I would not have been able to have that conversation in the 1980s. My phone would have been tapped and within a few minutes after ending the call, some people would have come to my office to ask me about that conversation. Unless and until conditions exist for having free and democratic thought, you have not met the preconditions for building more complex and efficient institutions. Institution building is a process that can only start after certain conditions have been fulfilled.

**Author Meets Critics:
Viviana Zelizer's *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005)**



“Only Connect...”: Connected Lives and Differentiated Transactions

Julia Adams
Yale University

The Purchase of Intimacy questions what is still widely perceived in the social sciences as a stark and settled dichotomy between intimate and economic realms. It's a subtle and challenging analysis, particularly with respect to the law, of the ways that people draw and redraw practical boundaries between intimate and commercial ties. And as I will detail below, Viviana Zelizer opens important new territory for historical as well as economic and cultural sociologists.

Zelizer begins by highlighting what she argues are two pervasive misunderstandings about the relationship between intimacy and economics. The first sees them as “separate spheres” or “hostile worlds.” Scholars (not to

mention plenty of politicians, lawyers, and people in everyday life) are wont to insist that economic practices and intimate matters are cordoned off from one another, and often that they should be so. It's not just that the spheres are separate, in this view: they are mutually polluting. The cash nexus degrades and denatures close personal relations, and close personal ties get in the way of the workings of the capitalist economy. The second misanalysis, which Zelizer dubs the "nothing but" approach, claims that those intimate ties, practices and settings have no social reality in their own right, being merely bargains over economic resources or power. We encounter the former assessment in the work of Gary Becker (2005) on the family, and the latter in Catherine Mackinnon's (1989) or Michel Foucault's (1990) convergent analyses of sexuality.

Instead, Zelizer shows, economic transactions are interwoven with but not reducible to personal intimacy at every turn. That does not mean that what we have are simply a chain of hybrid structural forms and that sociologists can file them neatly under some new Parsonian rubric. These blended modes of action involve actors' active management of the boundaries and crossovers. Zelizer contends that people create "connected lives" by "differentiating their multiple social ties from each other, marking boundaries ... by means of everyday practices, sustaining those ties through joint activities..." (p. 32). En route, they underline relevant differences among relationships while striving for coherence within and among them; use money to manage those ties, and signal the ensuing connections to others (p. 33). The book is devoted to analyzing the spaces in which these intimate and cash-connected lives are most sharply delineated.

The law is a crucial generalized Other in this account (Mead 1934). Law is the type case of a cultural discourse that functions as ideology – as sociologists like to say, cryptically, it is 'real in its effects' and has its own structuring force (Zelizer: p. 35). But it also molds relations among people in ways particular to the legal system's truncated understanding of human relationships (e.g. p. 284), and the interplay of those successive legal compressions and the people who are participating "in intimate relations [who] are simply trying to pursue their lives more or less satisfactorily" (p. 293) is precisely what Zelizer studies. Zelizer sometimes sounds apologetic about the restrictions that this imparts to the analysis, but to my mind this is one of the book's strongest features, giving the argument rigor and force.

So what is intimacy, anyway? The book defines intimacy relatively narrowly as a relationship "in which at least one person trusts, and at least one has information that – if widely known – could damage the other" (p. 15). This definition recalls the logic of Georg Simmel's (1950) triad, in which two self-conscious actors orient themselves to a third, either another individual or a generalized Other (like the law). This crisp concept has the advantage of separat-

ing intimacy from any notion of positive emotion whatsoever. In the extreme case it would even enable analysis of situations in which two actors – and not just those in a typical David Mamet play – simulate an intimate moment or tie for gain by knowingly colluding in presenting a social face vis-a-vis a third party. That simulation would itself be just another form of intimacy. Overall the approach is a network-based one, and it focuses our attention on some important properties of at least some kinds of intimacy. As Zelizer astutely notes, "coupling poses problems, paradoxically, precisely because it almost always has strong implications for third parties" (p. 156).

It strikes me, however, that this particular network definition doesn't jibe with the plethora of social relationships described throughout the book. The core definition stands apart from many everyday intimate ties and settings, including those described in the argument. It excludes certain fundamental relationships we typically consider intimate, like that between parent and baby, both of whom trust, in their separate ways, and neither of whom have much to do with the threatening the release of potentially damaging information. Perhaps the problem is that a cognitive-informational approach keyed to triadic relationships can't capture either (a) the emotional features or bases of many intimate relationships or (b) the characteristics of many intimate dyads. This doesn't mean that I'm rejecting the whole argument! Maybe sociologists will end up arguing the postmodernist position that there is no one best concept, and that many ideas of intimacy come into play under differing conditions, social and historical. Or perhaps the ruling definition here is less a general one than a vision of intimacy as circumscribed by American law.

In any case it's what people *do* that is of primary interest here, and Zelizer's penetrating analyses of cash and coupling, caring relations, and household commerce all focus in different ways on the practical work that goes into constituting the perceived differentiation among forms of relation/genres of ties. Some of these ties can be normatively mingled and others can't, in our as in any society, and people's efforts to keep the different kinds straight is a key motor of action here, leading to patterned, perhaps even predictable behavior. For example, Zelizer suggests that when people perceive that some categories of relations threaten other more established relations of trust, we can expect them to engage in 'hostile worlds' practices (p. 36). This is a fascinating hypothesis that deserves further exploration, particularly insofar as such action might reproduce the partially differentiated spheres that Zelizer is questioning.

More generally, Zelizer argues that people, both in everyday life and in legal systems, systematically match relationships, transactions and media, in the process struggling to separate "approved from forbidden forms of care" (162). This seems to me to be a tremendously promising theoretical departure from simplistic versions of the "hos-

tile worlds” or “nothing but” approaches, and I hope that it is widely influential. With respect to the latter crude economic approach, however, I do think it’s important to note that recent modes of thinking within the discipline of economics itself no longer follow “nothing but” prescriptions: as Zelizer surely knows, economists if not sociologists have moved away from neo-classical assumptions about economic actors and transactions. With respect to the former critique, however, Zelizer is on strong disciplinary ground. She rightly suggests that to study intimate economies effectively, we need to take into account people’s evolving normative and calculative orientations to what they understand belongs to the space of intimacy and what is defined as the province of money, how the law practically enforces and therefore changes them, providing the basis for new forms of practice. Excellent idea! This is far preferable to the simplistic “hostile worlds” assumptions that continue to dominate legal reasoning as well as social scientific thought *and* popular culture. We could extend this even farther to include the analysis of intimate economic interactions, transactions even more momentary than ties -- fugitive connections in which people impart new meanings to social relationships, in turn prompting new connections and perhaps new legal interventions.

I suppose that there is some danger that Zelizer’s “connected lives” alternative represents social action as so subtle, so challenging in its multiple matching processes that we have to wonder whether people will need portable computers to make such complicated calibrations. If they don’t, in real life, I think that the reason is that actors in the sorts of contemporary capitalist settings highlighted by Zelizer are working with categories and institutions that are indeed complex but also partly canned. It is not simply that we all hire and make use of specialists, agents to help us negotiate the thickets of law and monetized intimate relations, and that those specialists work with stereotyped vocabularies of action, although that is important. It’s also true that the discourses and relations on which we rely to do our daily relational work are fairly schematized. I would suggest that without the primary historical process of (dare I say it) Durkheimian differentiation, individual and collective action, and the whole modernist cultural bricolage that Zelizer investigates, would long ago have come apart, its network transactions having ground to a halt.

Furthermore the law is itself differentiated, internally rationalized and relatively autonomous of other social institutions: it is no longer “the father’s word” or conflated with the person of the sovereign – and that’s a legacy of centuries of often bloody battles that have, at least in the contemporary United States, separated those ties and spaces. I think it’s tricky but absolutely essential to register these historical forms of differentiation – which have encoded some ideas and practices of “separate spheres” and “hostile worlds” -- while at the same time foregrounding the ways in which they may be incomplete, melded or re-

versible. There *is* differentiation between intimate and economic transactions, in other words (or so I would argue), but as *The Purchase of Intimacy* rightly insists, people continually struggle with themselves and others, and via the law, to do things that effectively contest, undermine and reinstate it. Sociologists should learn to take this unresolved and conflicted legacy into account. That would be a major step forward in the field, and a welcome departure from the usual assumptions that (a) a relentless engine of economic commodification is wiping out the space of the intimate or (b) differentiation is architecturally definitive of modernity and, once settled, remains fixed in place forever.

The Purchase of Intimacy lives up to its terrific title. Having read it, we better understand both how the fraught nexus of money and intimate relations is mediated in American law, and how the optic of intimacy gives us surprising traction on many seemingly very unintimate economic and rational-legal bureaucratic transactions in our everyday lives.

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Care Worries

Nancy Folbre
University of Massachusetts

At a Women’s World conference in Korea two years ago some community artists laid out a large piece of canvas on smooth ground, along with pencils, markers, and paints for passersby to express themselves. The resulting piece of collective art was tapestry-like, with a layered intricacy exceeding that of most renegade graffiti.

My camera framed one particular rectangle within it that featured a heart outlined in red paint, the word “love” printed in red crayon, and the word FREE painted in large pink capitals. Two smaller hearts, in pink and sky blue, are evident, a mysterious letter R, some numbers, patches of dark blue, several yellow swirls, and other background scribbles. Something complicated but compelling is pictured here.

This photograph helps introduce my comments on Viviana Zelizer’s recent book, *The Purchase of Intimacy*, a masterpiece of qualitative reasoning about quantitative things. Much of economic sociology bears the imprint of the University of Chicago’s most Rational Economic Man. Viviana cleans the slate and turns the tables, explaining how this man’s picture of exchange oversimplifies our lives. We all use money to buy things. But our uses can have different meanings and, as a result, different consequences.

Standard economics relies heavily on a polarity called “for love OR money.” Individuals are assumed altruistic within families but selfish within markets. “Work” is defined as an activity performed only in return for money. The bright conceptual line creates an illusion of separate territories. Look closer, however, and the boundaries begin to fade.

The Purchase of Intimacy offers important examples of transactions that involve both love and money. It reveals a complex interface between market and non-market activities. Like the new behavioral economics influenced by the work of Dan Kahneman and other psychologists, it demonstrates the impact of contexts and frames on individual decisions.

I value Viviana’s critique of the “hostile worlds” hypothesis. While my research often takes a more quantitative turn, I too argue that many transactions lie somewhere on a continuum characterized by surprising combination of calculation and affection. I emphasize the impact of emotional connection on the quality of paid care services and also develop estimates of the economic value of unpaid care services.

Yet I am less optimistic (or perhaps just less cheerful) than Viviana about the ways in which this continuum, this spectrum, is evolving. As markets expand, so too does our ability to interpret and mediate them. But market expansion often has dislocating effects on those who lack sovereignty within it—not just children, the elderly, the sick or disabled, but all those who lack adequate independent access to human and financial capital.

Figure 1. 2 Pure Types of Transactions—Separate Worlds

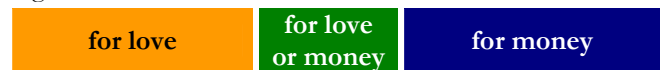


Visual images can help explain my argument. Figure 1 represents the implicit image of separate spheres—in this case separate rectangles—underlying the hostile worlds hypothesis. Transactions motivated by love take place on the left (if colors were available here I would give that space a pinkish hue) and transactions motivated by money on the right (with a light blue tinge). The boundary between the two is a solid black line. Here, the relative size of the two domains is—arbitrarily—drawn about the same.

Figure 2. A Big Zone of Mixed Transactions



Figure 3. A Small Zone of Mixed Transactions



Rather than moving all the way to a spectrum (hard to picture in black and white) consider a simple step in the direction of greater complexity with Figure 2, featuring an intermediate space for transactions motivated by both love and money (imagine it a light, gender-neutral yellow). This seems a much more realistic picture of the world than Figure 1, and many of the transactions Viviana describes belong somewhere here in the middle. Still, the qualitative insight raises quantitative questions. How big is that intermediate space, compared to the extremes at both ends? Does it occupy most of the spectrum, as in Figure 2, or does it represent a narrower, smaller space, like the more vulnerable-seeming buffer zone of Figure 3? These figures are more than conceptual illustrations. They can be interpreted as bar charts representing the relative frequency of the three transaction types.

Figure 4. An Increase in the Relative Frequency of Transactions Motivated by Money Alone



For instance, hold the total number of transactions constant, and imagine that the total length of the bar represents 100%, the sum total of the percentages of all transactions represented by the three segments. An increase in the percentage of all transactions motivated by money alone reduces the percentage of transactions motivated in any way by love—literally reducing their share, as in Figure 4. In a probabilistic sense, a random draw from the universe of transactions is more likely to yield one in which pecuniary considerations dominate.

One could, of course, imagine many variations on this theme. For instance, the absolute number of transactions for love might remain constant, while the number of transactions for money increase. Random draws might be unusual—perhaps individuals engage in a stable percentage of transactions in which love comes into play, and simply exercise more choice among transactions based on money alone.

Still, Figure 4 helps explain how one could reject a “hostile worlds” hypothesis but nonetheless worry about what might be termed “competing worlds.” Even if many transactions are characterized by mixed motivations, growth in the proportion of transactions based on money alone could begin to overshadow others. Even if instrumental reasoning is not literally toxic to affective connections, it may reduce their relative importance.

For instance, what if participation in a certain type of transaction in a first round increases individual propensity to seek out such types of transactions in a second round? In economic parlance, preferences may be partially en-

dogenuous. For instance, a person who buys sex for money may acquire a taste for it. In this case, increased availability of prostitutes would increase the probability that a person purchases sexual services, which could in turn increase desire to purchase such services in the future and reduce their demand for non-market sex.

Most of the great critics of commodification, including Karl Polanyi, were less concerned about statics than dynamics. Indeed, when Polanyi emphasized how most early markets were embedded in local communities, he foreshadowed some of Viviana's claims. But he worried loudly about what would happen as those markets gradually became disembedded. In my view, his worries were exaggerated by an unrealistic and romantic vision of community. But I doubt that a reading of *The Purchase of Intimacy* would change his mind.

Viviana offers no evidence that we are not moving toward a world where the relative importance of transactions based on money alone will expand even beyond the Figure 4 scenario. This is hardly surprising. No measures that I know of allow us to reliably categorize all transactions in these terms. But precautionary principles dictate a certain skepticism that love and money are now reconciled.

Market logic can deliver non-market benefits. Prenuptial contracts can protect marriage partners against misunderstanding. Assigning a market value to parental work can increase public support for children. Market institutions can strengthen non-market outcomes. The services of gestational surrogacy can help people become parents. For-profit dating services can help people fall in love. But markets can also have negative effects, creating incentives for fraud and exploitation.

Conspicuous recent events provide ample illustration. When major corporations link an higher share of executive pay to stock options, malfeasance tends to increase. When pharmaceutical companies fund drug research the results tend to benefit their bottom line. When health care providers focus on cutting costs, the quality of care that is difficult to measure tends to decline. When universities focus on national rankings that help them raise alumni money they divert resources from the realization of goals one could describe as more profound.

More importantly, issues of "commodification" are often a site of political struggle. Efforts to regulate consumption of harmful drugs such as nicotine have faced tremendous opposition. Parent activists have campaigned for years against the proliferation of soda vending machines in elementary schools. Efforts to certify products such as "fair trade coffee" or "sustainable forestry products" have met substantial, and well-organized opposition. Likewise, collective interests have and will continue to shape debates over the purchase of intimacy.

Advertising campaigns routinely use the language of love to their own ends. As MasterCard famously put it: "Some things are priceless. For everything else there's

MasterCard." In the examples given, individuals don't make it to the priceless part until they've signed the credit charge. Some Citibank "Live Richly" campaign billboards explain that "Money can't buy happiness. But it can buy marshmallows, which are kind of the same thing." Others coyly ask, "Wouldn't it be great if you could pay for things with a kiss?" Of course, if you miss a payment, a kiss won't reduce the interest charged.

Why make consumerism sound so cute? To make those who challenge it seem like party poopers. I feel proud to be a sourpuss. In developing Powerpoint presentations on the care sector I have learned that the phrases "we care," "we care more" and "we care about you completely" have now been trademarked. Technically, I can't use them without permission from their owners. Don't worry, I plan to lay claim to a phrase that could become my very own: "I don't believe they really care."

Of course, I think they probably do care, at least a little bit. Viviana has taught me not to be so...black and white. But for whatever reasons I feel more vulnerable than she. I want some kind of buffer between me and the just-for-money types of markets that loom so large these days. It should be flexible. It should be permeable. It should be resilient. But it should also be...permanent.



Falling in Love with Economics

Mitchell L. Stevens
New York University

Contrary to large bodies of scholarship in socio-legal studies and feminist theory, *The Purchase of Intimacy* argues that intimate relations and economic transactions are not mutually corrosive. They are not, to use Viviana Zelizer's term, "hostile worlds." Nor are intimate relations merely economic transactions occluded by the fog of culture. They are not, in Zelizer's term, "nothing but" economics. Rather, as this book eloquently demonstrates, intimate relations are supported and even constituted by economic transactions. What distinguishes intimate exchanges from other kinds of transactions is not the extent to which there is money involved in them, but rather the way in which the monetary part of the transaction is defined by the transactants and explained to third parties.

In one of her clearest examples of this insight, Zelizer points out that the distinction between buying a baby and adopting one has little to do with the fact that money changes hands – adoption and surrogacy fees can sometimes be high enough to require second mortgages, after all. Rather, the distinction has to do with the ways in which all of the parties in the transaction make sense of what they are doing and officially define it to themselves, to one another, and in court. Or, to cite another of Zelizer's exam-

ples that I suspect may become famous: the distinction between exotic dancing and prostitution is not defined by the amount or kind of sexual satisfaction purveyed and consumed, but rather by the official rules distinguishing one kind exchange from another. Legal codes may specify, for example, the minimum physical distance that must be maintained between performers and clients if the transactions are to be licit, and may also specify the organizational pathways through which money changes hands. Third parties (i.e., nightclubs) may be required to make the sex licit. Tipping may be prohibited.

The big point in both examples is that the financial parts of the transactions are hardly inimical to the intimacy being exchanged. The money part is elemental to the intimate part. Separating the dollars from the nurturance, or vice versa, is simply wrong. Zelizer's insight about the commingling of economics and intimacy opens up a whole new terrain for social-scientific analysis. We should not parse the "social" from the "economic" and see the former as shaping or constituting the latter. We should do precisely the opposite, considering how the economic relations sustain the social ones – not in a nothing-but-economics sort of way, but nevertheless giving dollars their due in every single kind of modern human relationship. This is a major intellectual advance, one that has potentially far-reaching consequences for scholarship in economic sociology and feminist theory.

One of the book's most provocative insights is that the dense webs of economic and intimate relations that constitute what Zelizer calls "connected lives" are negotiated not only to take care of the negotiators, but also to appease the expectations of consequential third parties. How I negotiate the financial terms of a marital separation, for example, has as much to do with how I want my children and my friends to think of me, and with what the law will let me get away with, as it does with redefining myself as a not-married person. The ultimate third party in *The Purchase of Intimacy* is the formal legal system, which Zelizer assesses as a sort of final arbiter of connected lives. Despite the evident fruitfulness of this approach, I think it also limits how other scholars might apply their own sociological imaginations to Zelizer's insights, and it is in the interest of seeing the ripples of this book extend as far as they can that I would encourage Zelizer and her readers to see the law as but one of a great many third parties in the negotiation of connected lives.

Purely by happenstance, I read *The Purchase of Intimacy* simultaneously with the book-length essay, *Why?*, by Zelizer's longtime friend, Charles Tilly (Princeton University Press, 2006). In *Why?*, Tilly argues that the reasons people give for what they do both map and instantiate the relationships between reason-givers and reason-recipients. "Whatever else they are doing when they give reasons," he writes, "people are clearly negotiating their social lives. They are saying something about relations between them-

selves and those who hear their reasons. Giver and receiver are confirming, negotiating, and repairing their proper connection (p. 15)." He goes on to distinguish four general kinds of reasons: conventions, codes, technical accounts, and stories. I won't go into the many subtleties of the argument here; the big point is that how we explain ourselves variably glues us to those who hear our explanations. The reasons we can give for things are precisely as varied as the kinds of relationships it is possible, in any given social and cultural milieu, to have. This insight provides a dazzlingly elegant bridge, I think, between the social and the cultural. It enables us to see how reason-giving, a fundamentally cultural phenomenon, literally constitutes all social relations.

If you take this idea with you into the pages of *The Purchase of Intimacy*, a whole new way of thinking about the negotiation of economic transactions, intimate or otherwise, opens up. It becomes possible to hear economic talk as an especially pervasive vernacular for crafting reasons. Economics is not its own category of reasoning so much as a medium of communication that infuses the entire wide range of social accounts. Zelizer shows how talk of dollars and cents is woven into the fabric of virtually every kind of human relationship that it is possible, in our particular historical context, to have. But – and here is one of Zelizer's signal insights – despite the brilliant ruminations of Richard Posner, those relationships are not reducible to their economic components. There is almost always other stuff and other talk going on. And it is here, at the crossroads of Zelizer, Tilly, and the Chicago school of economics that we come face to face with one of the most enduring puzzles of modernity.

Critics of the modern world as varied as Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, John Meyer, and Michel Foucault have all noted the power of numbers to remake human relationships. In their admittedly divergent ways, all four of them have argued that transformation of qualities into quantities entails a fundamental reordering of social life. All four of them have considered how the quantification of value tends to standardize human difference, rendering comparable and commensurable relationships long thought distinctive, peculiar, or sacred. But here's the thing: several hundred years in to the history of modern quantification, Gary Becker notwithstanding, numbers are still not the only way of accounting for human relationships. This is the case not only or even primarily because human beings have built a thick wall between the economic and the intimate, as the hostile-worlds school of social theory would have it. Rather, we have multiple ways of accounting for human relationships because we have woven quantification into virtually all of our other systems of sense-making and legitimation. It turns out that numbers do not bulldoze all other kinds of reason-giving – and therefore, à la Charles Tilly, all other kinds of human relationships – so much as infiltrate them. We count and we care at the same time,

and the ways in which we explain what we are doing map and instantiate the full range of relationships it is possible, within this particular social context and at this point in the history of modernity, to have.

If my integration of Zelizer and Tilly is reasonable, then the law becomes a kind big fish in a competitive ecology of reason-makers. It assimilates some kinds of reasons and, by extension, the relational systems they sustain, while killing off or simply ignoring others. Those reasons and relationships the law finds legitimate receive the official sponsorship of the state and all of its ecology-shaping power. Reasons that the law does not legitimate may survive, however, through their instantiation by other organizational systems: social movements, organized crime or kin networks, religions, and professions, to suggest but a few examples.

I suspect that this way of thinking about the law might accommodate more variety in how people infuse their reasons with numbers than I fear might come from a cursory read of *The Purchase of Intimacy*. The book can rather easily be misread as presenting the law not as one powerful reason-making creature in a competitive ecology but rather, and erroneously, as the ecology itself – or perhaps as a sort of Emerald City of reasons, the glittering metropole to which all of the provinces ultimately and necessarily defer. In the real world this is not necessarily so. Systems of intimate exchange may hum quite handily along for a long time almost wholly independent of law. Of course, relations and their reasons get a big leg up when the law officially condones them, but many people pursue their intimate exchanges just fine and indefinitely at the far outer reaches of law's shadow.

Here is my point: *The Purchase of Intimacy* rather overestimates the preponderance of law in the organization and arbitration of intimate relations. That said, it does so in the service of an argument that is of great importance to social theory generally. Money may change everything, but it does not necessarily make human relationships any less nuanced and complicated and contradictory, and humane. Dark critics of modernity, hear this: the heart still has its reasons.



A Reply: Reflections on Intimacy

Viviana A. Zelizer
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Once you publish a book, it belongs to readers, not to you as the author. All the more reason for pleasure when engaged, knowledgeable, and sympathetic readers address their doubts and questions directly to the author, and give her a chance to reply.¹

¹ I am grateful to Julia Adams, Nancy Folbre, and Mitchell Stevens for giving such close attention to my book. Let me also

In order to situate the critics' comments, let me give you some background on the book. I started working on the material for the new book soon after publishing another book, *The Social Meaning of Money*. That book took an historical approach to the transformation of monetary practices in the US, starting with the time when the federal government was working strenuously to impose uniform legal tender and drive out other competing currencies. The book showed that people did adopt legal tender, but at the same time they created a set of earmarking practices attaching different kinds of monies to significantly different social relations. *The Social Meaning* followed this process in households, gifts, and welfare.

Having finished that book, I saw clearly that there was much more to do on how people connected economic activity, including monetary transactions, with their varying social relations. That became the project of my new book, which took me ten years to complete.

At the same time, I began to see that a comparison between ordinary people's practices in this regard and legal practices offered an illuminating way of explaining both. By the time I had undertaken that comparison, I further realized that I would have to downplay the historical changes around which I had organized *The Social Meaning of Money* in favor of getting two kinds of differences right:

1. differences between legal and everyday practice
2. differences among various kinds of social relations

In fact, this led me to yet another narrowing. The book, as my critics say emphatically, does not deal with all kinds of social relations, but concentrates on intimate relations, specifically the intersection between intimate relations and economic activity. That narrowing has the advantage of focusing the analysis on an area where people have often thought that economic activity and social relations were utterly incompatible, or that at least they should be protected from each other.

Thus, the main project became to explain how people work out the variable connections between different kinds of intimate relations and different kinds of economic activities, both in everyday practice and the legal arena. This brought me into disputed territory, precisely because critics, moralists, and social scientists at large have so frequently thought not only that money corrupts, but more generally that economic rationality and the sentiments attached to

thank Carol Heimer for organizing the author-meets-critics session on *Purchase of Intimacy* at the 2006 ASA meetings at which the first round of this discussion took place. My connection to Carol runs even further back in time. Carol was the anonymous reviewer of my very first article in a major sociological journal; twenty years later she served as a demanding editor of another major journal for my very first article concerning the subject of my book.

intimate relations rest on fundamentally contradictory principles. To mix both, they argue, brings trouble. My book challenges those assumptions, but also explains why those concerns exist.

Collectively, the three critics raise four general questions about *The Purchase of Intimacy* (POI): first, why does the book employ relatively simplified versions of the positions that it criticizes? Second, what view of current economic analysis is it supposed to convey? Third, what is the place of law in its overall analysis? And fourth, to what extent does the book aspire to offer a general account of interpersonal relations, or at least of intimate interpersonal relations?

First, I take aim at multiple targets: separate spheres and hostile worlds arguments, reductionist economic, power, or cultural approaches, mistaken notions of intimacy, and erroneous definitions of money. Instead of providing a nuanced catalog or intellectual history of these various positions, I cartoon them. I do so not to trivialize them but to clarify the distinctive implications of my own position. It counters prevalent misunderstandings which for intellectual and policy reasons I find it urgent to challenge. For that reason, I felt it important to provide clear, albeit simplified versions of positions I reject but which are broadly accepted misconceptions. For example, theorists, columnists and moralists often portray the commercialization of intimate relations as an unmitigated social and moral disaster. My book offers reasons for doubting that widespread one-way view.

Second, what am I saying in particular about economics? In my arguments against economic reductionism, am I stuck with a naïve neoclassical view of economics? My book contrasts the reality of connected lives with long-standing economic approaches that reduce accounts of social life to single-principle explanations. I am of course aware of -- and even enthusiastic about -- recent successes of behavioral economics, game theory, feminist economics, organizational economics, institutional economics, and household analyses, all of which have produced welcome openings for dialogue between economics and sociology. Certainly, Nancy Folbre, along with Julie Nelson and other like-minded scholars, have seriously modified standard economic accounts. Nevertheless, enough reductionist economic interpretations of intimate relations remain in both scholarly and popular discussion that I felt it necessary to contrast my own analysis with its reductionist alternatives.

Third, how does law figure in this book? Despite the fact that intimate relations only rarely become legal cases, law becomes a privileged arena for the study of intimacy and economic relations in three different ways. First, in legal disputes participants necessarily bring out the contending principles and reasoning much more explicitly than happens for example in most religious or organizational discussions of similar issues. Second, the law is cru-

cial because it constitutes a shadow theater for everyday life. People bring to court experiences drawn from their ordinary interactions and dramatize them with the aid of lawyers and other experts. Finally, legal decisions strongly and directly affect the relationship between intimacy and economic activity, for example the rights of same sex couples, the legal claims of full-time housewives when they divorce, the organization of baby markets, and children's rights to inheritance.

The fourth is the more challenging question: to what extent am I trying to develop a general theory of how social relations, including intimate relations, operate, including a normative theory? My own goals were more modest in writing this book; I wanted to clarify how intersections between intimacy and economic activity actually work. But my arguments certainly have more general implications for understanding interpersonal relations. There is no way to deal with the interplay of intimacy and economic life without thinking more generally about how social relations operate.

My book offers a relational account of social processes instead of the individualist accounts we often find in the social sciences. On the other hand, as the book shows in detail, so much variation occurs from one relation or setting to another, that simply getting them right requires a big step down from general propositions about how social relations work. In general, I chose the more modest approach to get my cases right in pursuit of a better understanding of the book's general problem, the connection between intimacy and economic life.

Let me turn to some particular questions that each of the critics raise. Julia Adams questions my definition of intimacy. As I said earlier, *POI* did not set out to provide a balanced intellectual history of thinking about the concept of intimacy but instead sought to clarify current misguided understandings. As a result, it became very important to provide a relational definition of intimacy. The definition had to exclude common and attractive but ultimately misleading conceptions.

As Adams points out, I try hard to separate conceptions of intimacy from essentialist warm, fuzzy-feeling accounts as well as from its close association with authenticity. Surely, as I repeatedly point out throughout the book, intimacies vary from child/mother connections to the relationship between psychiatrist and patient. Yet I claim that all cases incorporate a combination of risky information sharing with trust. The combination of the two tells us that the relation is intimate.

Adams also questions my take on modernity. Does *POI* reject standard accounts of differentiation and struggles over that differentiation as the hallmark of modernity? In this book, as I noted earlier, I turned away from the historicized accounts of change that my three previous books offered. But although I do not provide a historical account of separate spheres and hostile worlds arguments,

I am skeptical about the standard notion of increasing differentiation of spheres in modern life. I find people constantly connecting lives across what analysis frequently think of unbridgeable boundaries. Like my old friend Albert Hirschman, I see economic activity not as an unstoppable destroyer but as a frequent creator and sustainer of social relations.

With no claim about general trends, differentiation appears in the book crucially, but on a small scale. Indeed one of the POI's observations is that people invoke separate spheres and hostile worlds notions as they mark boundaries among relations they are trying to keep separate from each other. Yet it never reflects or becomes a master process of increasingly rationalized differentiation into clearly marked spheres. People are constantly negotiating new connections, and many of them cut across previously existing boundaries.

Nancy Folbre's main response to POI is "Yes, but." She agrees with my critique of hostile worlds, but suggests the persistence of competing worlds, which in the long run threaten the world of intimacy. On the average, Folbre argues, marketization of important relations has not only increased but tended to expand the place of injustice and exploitation. My book refrains from so broad a judgment, contending that the extent of exploitation and injustice varies considerably depending on the kinds of economic activity in question.

When we untangle these complicated issues, it turns out that Folbre and I mostly agree on facts, trends, and even causes, but differ in our emphases. We agree that over the last few centuries an increasing range of goods and services has entered the market, that the entry of goods and services into various markets usually affects both producers and consumers unequally, that injustice and oppression often result from capitalists' pursuit of their narrow advantage, and that many a combination of intimacy with economic activity produces unfairness, exploitation, and unhappiness.

For instance, we agree on the assessment of paid care as a crucial site, in which precisely the separate spheres doctrines my book attacks justify unfair treatment of caregivers, especially women. But Folbre then goes on to claim that market expansion reduces the salience and consequentiality of intimate relations. Having looked hard at intimacy in capitalist firms and other economic organizations, I tend to disagree.

Folbre goes even farther. She offers a global judgment that the encroachment of market relations into the sphere of intimacy increases the range of exploitation and justice. More cautiously, I say it could be true but we need far more evidence before we can arrive at so global a judgment. In any case, Folbre's position and mine converge in implying that analysts should worry less about the pernicious effects of mixing markets with intimacy, and instead

concentrate on identifying the processes that generate unfairness and exploitation.

Nancy Folbre seems to be aiming at a general theory of the conditions under which economic relations produce injustice. She dares to hope for a calculus to match that theory: a way of estimating changes in the overall level of injustice. In POI and elsewhere, I have been pursuing the much more modest aim of explaining how people integrate economic activity into the wider range of their social relations, and with what consequences for those social relations. So far as I can see, our two inquiries are different, but complementary, not contradictory.

As for Mitchell Stevens' generally enthusiastic comments, I agree with the goal of broadening the book's agenda to how people create small scale social relations in general. It would, however, have been a mistake to pursue that broad agenda in POI. So broad a search would have actually handicapped the close descriptions and comparisons that make the book work. Other people should, I agree, be looking at the parallel relations and expanding the program of research and theory into these issues.

For my own part, I have begun looking at intimacy in economic organizations, on organizational efforts to ban or limit intimacy, and at a wide range of sometimes intimate relations both inside and outside of economic organizations that crystallize into other forms than hierarchies, markets, or simple networks. If these efforts do lead to a more general account of interpersonal relations, as Stevens notes, that account will draw even more directly on the sort of relational analysis that Charles Tilly has been promoting for some time.

What about other powerful influences beside the law? Stevens is absolutely right about how we should think about the law. Why did I focus on the law when there are in fact other equally powerful influences? As said earlier, I chose to contrast everyday practices and the law because the stylization of human relations within the law is both striking and consequential. But, yes, I could have done the same kind of comparison with religious institutions, educational institutions, political institutions, or public intellectual life. In each of these arises a distinctive approach to intimacy and its intersections with economic life. I certainly agree and hope that scholars should follow up the comparisons that Stevens has so rightly called to our attention.

For all these reasons and more, our discussion gives me hope that other scholars – and not just economic sociologists – will join the quest for better understanding of how small scale interpersonal relations work, and how they connect with economic life in general.

Research Reports



**An Economic Sociologist Abroad:
Observations from China and India**

Brooke Harrington
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Writing anything about China and India within a 2,000-word article format is a bit like being a contestant on Monty Python’s game show skit, the “All-England Summarize Proust Competition,” in which players get “a maximum of fifteen seconds to sum up *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*.” In a word: doomed. So, dear readers, I crave your indulgence as I attempt to make a few observations about my recent travels.

Since statistics and commentary on India and China are already available to interested readers, I will limit myself to sociological observations about economic behavior in those countries as I experienced them as a traveler. My only qualification is as an economic sociologist who recently made a somewhat-more-than-superficial visit to each country. Rather than being a definitive statement or a set of conclusions, I hope my observations will catalyze new conversations among sociologists about economy and society in developing countries.

Last June, I spent three weeks in China, traveling with an American woman raised in Beijing, who grew up speaking Mandarin. With her, I saw Beijing and Shanghai, along with Hongzhou and Suzhou—capitals of the silk trade visited by Marco Polo—and rural villages of Anhui Province, where farmers tilled their rice paddies with wooden plows drawn by water buffalo. In October, I joined a trip organized by family friends who had spent part of their childhoods in India; they planned a journey down the entire Western part of the subcontinent, from the deserts of Western Rajasthan, to the tropics of Kerala. I mention these circumstances because being able to travel with people who knew the country, and were fluent in the local languages and cultural norms, gave me unusual access to private homes, hospitals, elementary schools, farms, and untouristed rural areas, as well as the big cities that most foreign visitors see.

Weber on China and India

If you own a copy of Gerth and Mills’ anthology *From Max Weber*—and if you’re reading this article, you almost certainly do—you may have noticed that the last two sections of the edited volume concern India and China. The essays are remarkably prescient in their analyses of the cultural, historical and religious basis for capitalist development in each country. To simplify his argument, Weber proposed that the bureaucratic regime developed under the literati provided a basis for the emergence of capitalism

in China, while the caste system fragmented Indian society so profoundly that capitalism would be unlikely to develop independently there. Despite all that China and India have in common—ancient civilizations, and cultures that place a high value on family, duty, and education—this variance in status attainment models struck Weber as making a significant difference in the shape economic life would take in each country. His analysis has special resonance now, as bankers and politicians claim that China and India are in a neck-and-neck race to lead world economic development.

Having read up on Chinese and Indian history before and during the trip, the patterns of behavior I observed there were strikingly consistent with Weber’s models. In particular, I was struck by the forms of consumption I saw in both countries—consumption being a mode of economic activity readily-available to the foreign traveler. To illustrate—and simplify—my own experience, I will focus on one observation that exemplified what was distinctive for me about each country. In China, it was the omnipresence of Starbucks and other Western luxury brands; in India, it was the nearly complete absence of such brands, and the captivating individuality of the *pallu*—the ornately-decorated endpiece found on bolts of sari fabric.

Frappuccino in the Forbidden City

Would it surprise you to know that there are over 250 Starbucks coffee shops in mainland China, distributed across 20 cities? It surprised me. I didn’t realize the inroads Starbucks had made there until—after trekking through Beijing’s Forbidden City in the punishing summer heat—people started walking out of a building in the center of the ancient imperial residence carrying paper cups bearing the familiar green-and-white logo. Part of me was stricken with horror, much as I would have felt if I had discovered a Starbucks nestled at the base of Mount Rushmore; on the other hand, the part of me that was hot, thirsty and exhausted was thrilled to be clutching a Frappuccino.

If anyone had told me they wanted to mass-market coffee to a 5,000 year old tea culture, I would have thought they were barking mad. And even though I saw it—repeatedly—with my own eyes, I could hardly believe how successful Starbucks was. Not only were Chinese consuming its coffee (as well as the chain’s teas, sandwiches and pastries), but they were paying the equivalent of US prices! That is, in a country where average per capita income is US \$ 1,740, people were still lining up to buy \$3.00 drinks.

The proliferation of Starbucks in China reflects the remarkable degree to which the country has adopted Western modes of consumption and status signalling—practices which manifest themselves to the



Banner on the facade of the Silk Market, one of Beijing's largest shopping centers

casual observer from many different directions. It's not only that one sees luxury brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Chanel—whether real or counterfeit—everywhere in the big cities and small towns, on both women and men. The Chinese are also increasing their consumption of that very Western luxury good, cosmetic surgery: specifically, surgeries designed to create eyes and noses that look Caucasian. Demand for such procedures in China is growing at 25%/year, though the costs often amount to several times the average annual salary.

This is not just a matter of vanity: anecdotal evidence suggests that Chinese with Caucasian facial features and light skin have access to higher-status marriage partners and higher salaries as a result. In some cases, these status norms have been formalized: e.g. many public and private sector jobs, as well as law and other professional schools, refuse to consider applicants below a minimum height (usually 5'3" for women and 5'5" for men).

All of these practices suggest a model of status attainment based on conformity to an ideal type, which is the very pattern Weber proposed in his study of the Chinese literati. It is crucial to understand, he added, that competition and mobility are built into this system: that is, one can rise within the status order. One wonders if Weber would regard China's infamous "Miss Plastic Surgery" competition—in which contestants vie to be judged most successful at attaining a Caucasian appearance through cosmetic procedures—as the 21st century instantiation of the literati examinations.

My Sari, Myself

While there must be someone, somewhere in India wearing Calvin Klein jeans or Gucci sunglasses, I managed not to see any of them in three weeks. What I *did* find in abundance, however, was a riot of the most gorgeous fabrics I have ever seen. The effect was so compelling that I followed a middle-aged Indian woman around one of the palaces of Rajasthan—oblivious to its marble walls inlaid with precious gems—just to let my gaze linger on the tiny elephants woven into the fabric of her sari.

Unlike in many Western countries, wearing beautiful clothes is not a privilege limited to a wealthy elite. Even when I ventured into remote hamlets in Karnataka (one of India's poorer states), people who seemed to have very little by way of material goods still wore bright, even ornate fabrics. While I didn't peek into anyone's closet, I noticed that women who appeared to be less well-off (based on location, as well as jewelry and shoes) wore cot-



Sari-clad women selling flowers & vegetables in a rural Gujarati street market

tons, while wealthier-looking women wore silks. All of them wore one of two basic outfits—the dress-like sari and the tunic-and-trousers set called the salwar kameez—within which there appeared to be limitless variety. Still, I never saw two women dressed alike in India.

And that was the point, as I learned from spending hours in a gigantic, four-storey textile emporium in Kerala. As a trio of sari saleswomen explained to me, Indian women of all social groups sought to make each of their dresses one of a kind. So even though two fabrics might look superficially similar—having the same base color or the same print—the *pallu* would always be unique. To ensure that the uniqueness of the *pallu* is not lost on the observer, the fabric is draped diagonally across the chest with the end hanging over one shoulder, so the pattern is prominently displayed from both the back and the front.

The *pallu* exemplifies the many ways in which India permits and even thrives on a kind of diversity suppressed throughout much of China. In sharp contrast to China's embrace of Western brands, there is widespread skepticism about those brands in India. As one reporter recently noted, Kerala's government has "been trying for years to ban Coke and Pepsi. It claims they're awash in pesticides, but...everyone I talked to thinks it's just a ruse to expel two icons of American economic hegemony."¹ The phenomenon is not limited to Communist Kerala; aside from one McDonald's franchise in New Delhi, I saw not a single fast food franchise—Western or otherwise—anywhere in India. Instead, there are many small food stands and *tiffin-wallahs*, who deliver thousands of fresh-cooked meals from workers' homes to their offices every day.

Politically, China has been a united empire for millennia; in contrast, India was long an assortment of principalities, many of which retained their independence throughout the British colonial period. India never had a Mao, or a Red Guard that roamed the countryside wiping out markers of cultural, linguistic and status differences. Rather, India is a democracy composed of a range of political parties and factions almost as diverse as its textiles.

These differences also hold at the level of religious ideology—that classic Weberian topic. While Confucian rites may have contributed to social solidarity in China, the legacy of Hinduism—practiced by 80 percent of Indians—is more complex. While it creates a rigid social hierarchy through the caste system, it also allows worshippers remarkable freedom. For example, they can choose the objects of their devotions from among some 500 deities, and religious practices are aimed not at ritual conformity but at achieving *darsbar*: a one-on-one communion with the divine. Thus, the ascribed social order that Weber described in India seems—counterintuitively—to produce a efflorescence of individual expression.

¹ Flinn, John. 2007. "India's Idyllic Backwater." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 April.

Looking Forward

It is an irony of history that in many ways the (at least nominally) communist regime in China offers a more hospitable environment for global capitalism than does democratically-governed India. China's highly-centralized authoritarian government may offer little transparency, but it enforces its will very effectively, often in the interests of attracting foreign investment and development. If Weber was correct in arguing that the Chinese literati laid the bureaucratic foundations necessary for capitalism to thrive, that may be one reason the Chinese have proved so effective at mass-producing goods for the world market. To Weber's speculations about production, I can add my street-level observations about the Chinese as consumers. Their adoption of Western status markers, from brand-name products to ideal types of Caucasian beauty, leads me to believe that capitalism—or what the regime has gamely termed “capitalism with Chinese characteristics”—will continue to thrive there.

As for claims that India is “the next China,” I am skeptical. What I saw suggested that, even if their income increased dramatically, Indians would not adopt Western brands and status markers with the enthusiasm of the Chinese. A culture that places so much value on customization and distinctiveness—the positive side of the fragmentation to which Weber alluded—will not readily adjust to the mass scale through which global capitalism operates, even in an era of just-in-time production. My analysis will soon be put to a dramatic test: Starbucks has announced plans to open its first retail stores in India this year.



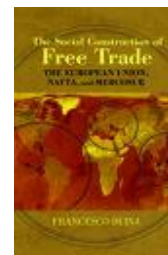
**Selling Genes, Selling Gender:
Egg Agencies, Sperm Banks, and the
Medical Market in Genetic Material**

Rene Almeling
University of California, Los Angeles

Eggs and sperm are parallel human goods in that each contributes half of the reproductive material needed to create life, but these cells are produced by differently sexed bodies, allowing for a comparative analysis of how bodily commodification varies based on the sex and gender of that body. In the 21st century medical market in genetic material, egg agencies and sperm banks recruit young women and men to produce gametes for paying clients who are using reproductive technologies to conceive children. Building on Viviana Zelizer's model of commodification, in which economic, cultural, and structural factors interact to shape market processes, this study incorporates biological factors to construct a model of bodily commodification. Drawing primarily on interviews and observation with staff and donors at six programs in the United States, as well as statistical analyses of donors' website profiles

and interviews with founders of early donation programs, I examine three social processes: the historical development of the market in genetic material; how contemporary egg agencies and sperm banks organize the process of donation (how women and men are recruited, screened, monitored, and compensated); and how variation in the social process of commodifying the reproductive body shapes the experiences of egg and sperm donors. This dissertation will contribute to debates in sociology of gender about the relationship between biological differences among women and men and the cultural norms attributed to these differences, debates in economic sociology about how social and biological factors shape the expansion of the market in human goods, and debates in medical sociology about the intersection of the market and medical practice. An article from this dissertation is forthcoming in the *American Sociological Review* (June 2007).

New Books



Duina, Francesco. 2006. *The Social Construction of Free Trade: The European Union, NAFTA, and Mercosur*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reviewed by Mauro F. Guillén
University of Pennsylvania

Regional trade blocs are one of the most important developments of the last half-century. There are nearly 200 agreements involving at least two countries that qualify as trade blocs. Naturally, many of these blocs overlap with each other, and, as Francesco Duina argues in his excellent new book, they entail very different kinds of commitments.

Trade blocs follow a very simple principle. They come about when two or more countries agree to treat each other in a different way than third countries. It goes without saying that they privilege insiders relative to outsiders. Officially, they are an attempt to increase trade among members. In reality, they trigger a complex set of consequences. Concerning trade itself, blocs create trade, destroy trade, and divert trade, depending on the specific rules adopted. But trade-bloc agreements can also involve many other issues, initially unrelated to trade, including labor standards and mobility, financial flows, environmental regulation, monetary matters, and so on. The European Union (EU), the largest and deepest of all trade blocs goes well beyond “trade.” The NAFTA, by contrast, is a relatively limited, yet organizationally complex, agreement involving trade, capital flows, and some labor and environmental regulations (many of which are not really enforced). Some trade blocs have political dimensions, and they seek to redress imbalances among the member coun-

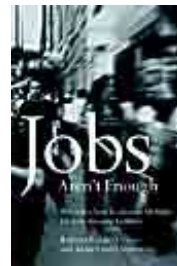
tries. In this respect, the EU stands in sharp contrast to most other trade blocs in the world.

Duina debunks three main myths about trade blocs and, by implication, about the so-called “global” economy. First of all, trade blocs are not created equal. In fact, they originate in very specific sociopolitical circumstances, and their design and evolution is the product of political bargaining. Second, the global market is not a homogenous place, in part because trade blocs have created distinctive market areas around the world. And third, neo-liberalism has not triumphed around the world in a homogenous way either. Its principles and policy prescriptions have been variously adopted. Countries have decided to join trade blocs with different degrees of legal regulation and standardization, and this has created a global economy which looks like a quilt consisting of a variety of patches rather than a vast, undifferentiated market area. Moreover, the interaction among powerful actors such as businesses, labor, and governments is behind the specific institutional-organizational arrangements that we call trade blocs.

Duina’s evidence comes from the three great trade blocs of the new millennium, namely, the EU, the NAFTA, and the much smaller Mercosur. He painstakingly demonstrates in the book that they are very different animals indeed. Moreover, they are the result of political compromise more than economic design. His most important contribution is to show that differentiation in the global political economy is not coming from the level of the nation-state, as argued by much of the previous literature, but from the regional level. Thus, Duina argues that nation-states have lost some clout in the global economy precisely because they are increasingly operating as members of regional agreements.

One of Duina’s most important contributions is his analysis of the cognitive categories used by the designers of the three trade blocs to “standardize reality” with a view to facilitating the interaction among actors, market building, and the unfolding of trade. The differences among the three trade blocs could not be sharper in terms of the scope of standardization and the language itself. NAFTA followed a minimalist approach, which has exacerbated imbalances and problems. The EU and Mercosur have emphasized harmonization, although the former to a much greater degree than the latter. Duina attributes the differences to legal traditions (such as common-law versus code-based frameworks). Obviously, this explanation is oversimplified. Politics has also played a role given that in Europe governments (with the notable exception of the U.K.) are committed to building not just a trade bloc but a comprehensive union in a social and institutional as well as an economic sense. Duina, however, makes his case about the importance of legal traditions very well, offering details as to how legal institutions and practices play out in specific policy domains such as the dairy industry, labor rights, and the role of women in the workplace.

The book follows in the great tradition of Polanyi, Fligstein, and others to argue that the market is an abstraction that cannot possibly work without an institutional infrastructure of rules, norms, and roles. Mainstream economics has also begun to move in this direction arguing that institutions are not only the constraints on human behavior but also enabling mechanisms. Duina’s analysis represents yet another step in this direction, firmly rooted in economic sociology and the sociology of law. This book definitely belongs on a narrow shelf of essential texts on the global economy.



Iversen, Roberta Rehner and Armstrong, Annie Laurie. 2006. *Jobs Aren't Enough: Toward a New Economic Mobility for Low-Income Families*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Submitted by Roberta Iversen
University of Pennsylvania

This ethnographic examination of economic mobility among low-income families illuminates the fact that, nationally, more than one in four working parents today is unable to support his or her family through employment, even with a full-time year-round job. *Jobs Aren't Enough* is based on a five-city, five-year, grant-funded study of low-income families who are trying to move up through job training and work. The research cities are Philadelphia, New Orleans, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Seattle. The five-year study period, 1998 through mid-2003, spanned economic boom and bust. The authors argue that prevailing ideas about the roles of opportunity, merit, and “bootstraps” initiative in economic mobility are outdated. They use theory from a strand of economic sociology to move toward new premises, based in part on findings that multiple social institutions (family, education, labor market, and public policy) intersect to influence economic mobility. Moreover, the direction of institutional influence is simultaneously vertical and horizontal. As such, new premises involve the notion of collaboration and mutuality across social institutions, the recognition that mobility is a dynamic process that requires human *and* social capital, and the realization that employment choices, at both individual and firm levels, involve cognitive *and* relationally-embedded decision processes. In their conclusion, the authors argue that it is necessary to revitalize the foundational American “public will,” toward greater equity and productivity for all players in the mobility matrix. Reviewers note the book’s relevance for courses in sociology, urban studies, labor studies, women’s studies, and policy study. Feel free to contact Iversen at: riversen@sp2.upenn.edu for questions about course use.