
ACCOUNTS

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear section,

One goal for the section this year, aside from keeping this ship afloat, was to foster exchanges across our ranks. It was a great moment to see senior and junior scholars reflect on their research and writing processes together in this past spring's Economic Sociology Section Awards Showcase, two zoom events with panels of last year's award winners and committee members. Mitchel Abolafia (Viviana Zelizer Best Book Award, Honorable Mention) reflected on the years it took for an idea that caught his ear on NPR to turn into a book. Dan Hirschman (Granovetter Award for Best Article) talked about the many versions of an article that eventually makes its way to publication. Seniors scholars and PhD students alike tuned in to hear about the processes of crafting and evaluating scholarship.

Hats off to Jeff Sheng who took the lead in orga-



nizing with PhD students Zhuofan Li, Qi Song, and Jack Thornton.

It was especially inspiring to hear from last year's committee members. The work of a committee is serious business with each member reading a sizable load of books or papers, analyzing their empirical and theoretical contributions and originality. Each committee has its own process, often informed by past chairs who share their insights. It is hard work, and good news: committee members reflected on it with enthusiasm (at least *post hoc*) that was contagious. Near the end of the second panel, Dali Ma, Chair of the Best Student Paper in Economic Sociology and Entrepreneurship by the Kauffman Foundation, spoke about the paper they awarded (by Jun Zhou, "The Work-family Circuit: Doing and Undoing Gender through Monetary Flows in Immigrant Women Entrepreneurship"). Dali explained that among the papers, they were looking for something that stood out as bold and creative; something that took a big risk in its originality. His remarks stayed with me as inspiration to keep at it.

In that spirit, it's a pleasure to announce in this newsletter our 2022 Economic Sociology Award winners, and to thank our committed volunteers who do the valuable work of recognition.

The Zelizer Award for Best Book (co-winners)

Elizabeth Korver-Glenn. 2021. *Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America*. Oxford University Press.

Elizabeth Popp Berman. 2022. *Thinking Like an Economist: How Efficiency Replaced Equality in US Public Policy*. Princeton University Press.

The Granovetter Award for Best Article:

Livne, Roi. 2021. "Toward a Sociology of Finitude: Life, Death, and the Question of Limits." *Theory and Society* 50(6):891–934.

Honorable Mentions:

Feldberg, Alexandra C. 2022. "The Task Bind:

Explaining Gender Differences in Managerial Tasks and Performance." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 67(4):1049–92.

Mallard, Grégoire, and Jin Sun. 2022. "Viral Governance: How Unilateral U.S. Sanctions Changed the Rules of Financial Capitalism." *American Journal of Sociology* 128(1):144–88.

Burt Best Student Paper Award

Winner: Mira Vale (University of Michigan) for the paper "Algorithmic Affordances: The Relational Construction of the Electronic Health Record"

Honorable mention: Faith Deckard (UT-Austin) for the paper "Punishment By and Through Association: An Examination of Commercial Bail and Its Incorporation of Families"

And a nod one more time to our valuable committee members:

The Zelizer Award for Best Book:

Josh Pacewicz, Chair, Brown University; Angèle Christin, Stanford University; Rebecca Elliot, LSE; Armando Lara-Millan, UC Berkeley

The Granovetter Award for Best Article:

Dan Hirschman, Chair, Cornell University; Robert Manduca, U of Michigan; Minjae Kim, Rice; Laura Adler, Yale

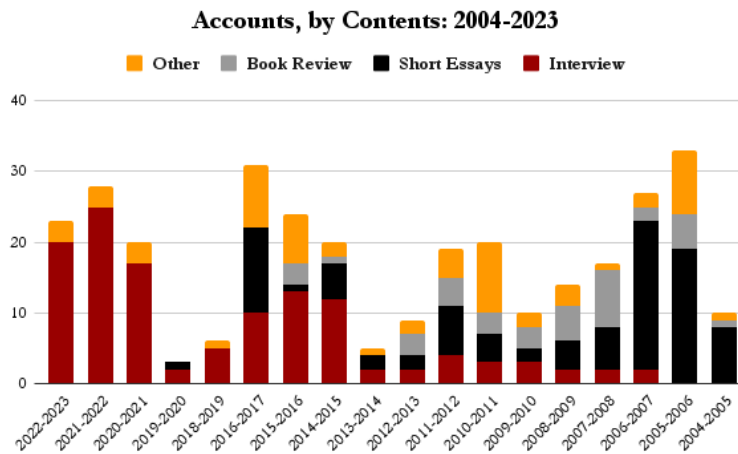
Burt Best Student Paper Award:

Davon Norris, Chair, U of Michigan; Kathleen Griesbach, UT Austin; Guillermina Altomonte, NYU

Ashley Mears ■

50TH ISSUE OF ACCOUNTS

Introducing Issue 50 of Accounts! With unwavering dedication and only brief periods of stagnation since the autumn of 2004, Accounts has reached this momentous milestone. A multitude of social scientists, academics, researchers, and doctoral students from the field of economic sociology and related disciplines deserve our deepest gratitude for their invaluable contributions to this remarkable journey. We extend a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of them. Below, you will find a glimpse of the content published throughout the past 50 issues, as well as a list of all contributors who have played an integral role in Accounts' journey.



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ON FAIRWORK: AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK GRAHAM

[Mark Graham](#) is Professor of Internet Geography at the Oxford Internet Institute. He is an economic geographer with an interest in how digital technologies and digitally-mediated practices affect economic and social inequalities. He leads a range of research projects spanning topics between digital labor, the gig economy, internet geographies, and ICTs and development. His recent books include *The Digital Continent: Placing Africa in Planetary Networks of Work*, *Geographies of Digital Exclusion: Data and Inequality*, *The Gig Economy*, *Society and the Internet*, and *Digital Economies at Global Margins*.

Ladin Bayurgil, postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven and also a member of the Fairwork Belgium team, talked to Mark Graham about the [Fairwork](#) project, which evaluates digital labor platforms against measures of fairness with the aim of highlighting the best and worst examples and shaping a future of work with fairer jobs.

Ladin Bayurgil: *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Could you please tell us what the Fairwork project is and how it emerged?*

Mark Graham: The Fairwork project is a research project that aims to both understand working conditions experienced by platform workers and to tangibly improve those conditions.

It emerged from many years of research that I conducted with platform workers in Africa and Asia. After speaking to hundreds of workers in many countries, I understood that many of those workers really valued these new opportunities and needed the income that these jobs provided. However, I also observed that the power of platforms was largely unchecked. Back then, there were almost no large trade unions organizing workers: allowing platforms to unilaterally impose conditions onto workers. Governments were also largely missing in action. Platforms deliberately occupied legal grey zones and thus attempted to operate in a way unfettered by regulation.

As a geographer, I was particularly interested in how a lot of the power of platforms emerged from what you might think of as their strategic deployment of “conjunctural geographies” — a way of being simultaneously embedded and dis-



embedded from the space-times they mediate. They can form an essential component of urban infrastructure and then disappear into thin air when workers or regulators seem to tame their power.

However, I also speculated that the conjunctural nature of platforms’ spatiality comes at a cost to them. Platforms only really exist as an urban infrastructure if users use them. This makes them particularly attentive to public perception.

The Fairwork project was designed with this assumption at the heart of its theory of change. We developed [five principles of fair work](#) and score each large platform in [38 countries](#) around the

Table 1 Fairwork: Scoring System

 Principle 1: Fair Pay	 Ensures workers earn at least the local minimum wage after costs	 Ensures workers earn at least a local living wage after costs	 2
 Principle 2: Fair Conditions	 Mitigates task-specific risks	 Provides a safety net	 2
 Principle 3: Fair Contracts	 Provides clear and transparent terms and conditions	 Ensures that no unfair contract terms are imposed	 2
 Principle 4: Fair Management	 Provides due process for decisions affecting workers	 Provides equity in the management process	 2
 Principle 5: Fair Representation	 Assures freedom of association and the expression of collective worker voice	 Supports democratic governance	 2

Maximum possible Fairwork Score  **10** / 10

world against those principles. Most importantly, we compare the scores of all those platforms on a league table—a bit like a sports league table—which allows us to highlight the best and worst in class.

This approach allows us to show that decent, or fair, work isn't unachievable for platform work. We take actually existing policies and practices at some companies and highlight them for others, asking, "Why can't you also adopt a policy like this?" By presenting the Fairwork scores in a competitive way, we try to encourage all of the companies we interact with to make positive pro-worker changes. To date, our interactions with companies have resulted in 145 changes to policies and practices. We've gotten a few platforms to pay at least a local living wage, and one global cloud platform to make sure that workers can't earn below their local minimum wages. We've had success working with companies to get them to audit and monitor work-

ing conditions and to introduce sickness insurance schemes that function as a safety net for workers. We've gotten companies to translate contracts into local languages, change contracts to be governed by local law, and provide workers advance notice for changes. We've worked with 8 platforms to formalize or improve an appeals process, and many more platforms to implement antidiscrimination policies. And we've worked with some platforms to publicly signal their willingness to negotiate with a union or association once one gets formed, and worked with one company to develop a system in which a worker representative can be elected to negotiate with management.

L. B.: *What are the principles of fair work and what does the process of collaboratively developing these principles look like? In what ways are the principles reshaped as a result of the constantly chang-*

ing world of platforms and regulations that are trying to catch up?

M. G.: The Fairwork principles were initially developed at a tripartite workshop that we held at the International Labour Organisation in Geneva. We brought together a diverse range of stakeholders and asked them to describe what fair platform work looks like and, conversely, what unfair platform work looks like.

After we developed those initial principles, we took them to workshops in India and South Africa. These were also tripartite workshops, but, this time, involved a much larger contingent of actual platform workers (rather than the worker representatives who were present in the Geneva workshop). We discussed actual risks, harms, concerns, and, from there, moved to thinking about the inverse: what fair work looks like.

We boiled down all of these discussions into five core principles: Fair Pay, Fair Conditions, Fair Contracts, Fair Management, and Fair Representation. Each of those principles is operationalized through two thresholds: a basic one and a more advanced one. For instance, in Fair Pay, the basic threshold stipulates that all workers, irrespective of contract type, should earn at least the local minimum wage for all active hours on the platform. The advanced threshold stipulates that all workers should earn at least the local living wage. This “five principle; two threshold” model allows us to give a score of up to 10/10 to each platform.

Since those initial workshops, we now hold periodic discussions about the principles in each of the countries in which we work. Most of the countries in our network are low- or middle-income contexts. However, we try to ensure that the principles are truly universal. They represent minimum standards that all workers, irrespective of where they live, or what they are doing, should benefit from.

Our principles are also not static. We have an internal mechanism within the project to change them. Any team can propose changes, and each team gets one vote. This allows us to stay on top

of the constantly changing world of platforms and be attentive to what workers, unions, platforms, and regulators are telling us around the world.

L. B.: *Considering that the project is run across five continents, could you elaborate a bit more on differences in platform labor conditions observed across regions, particularly in the Global North versus the Global South?*

M. G.: It is difficult to make general statements about “Global North” vs. “Global South” within our research—as I’m not sure we see clear distinctions at that scale. However, we do see that there are examples of workers everywhere: in high-, middle-, and low-income contexts who suffer from a lack of protections against low pay and harmful conditions. We have never yet encountered a 10/10 platform, anywhere. This tells us that regulation is not yet doing its job anywhere. Until that happens, we’re going to keep scoring platforms and trying to pressure both them and regulators to raise the bar.

L. B.: *What are some of the methodological challenges you have faced while developing a global project that examines how various platforms in different regulatory settings measure up against fair work principles?*

M. G.: One of the things that we pay special attention to is the development of our principles as universal standards. We need to take things that we hear in particular places, grounded in particular societies, economies, and political systems, and turn them into minimum standards that make sense everywhere. We believe that this is difficult, but not impossible.

A critique that we hear from some quarters—especially from platform managers—is “things are just really different here” and “your principles don’t apply to us.” As a geographer, I’m under no illusions that context, and geography, matters. However, I think that argument is a bit of a red herring. We never claim that context doesn’t matter. We rather claim that it is possible to envision a set of universal minimum standards that all workers, everywhere, should benefit from. The “things are different here” argument tends to collapse once we

ask what, specifically, in our principles shouldn't apply to workers locally.

L. B.: *What is next for you and the Fairwork project? Could you tell us a little about your future research plans?*

M. G.: Only a few years ago, I would have never dreamed that we would have assembled a team of over 200 people in 38 countries, or that we would have instigated 145 pro-worker changes on

platforms, affecting millions of workers. So I'm wary of predicting what might come next.

One key thing that I want to do is make sure all of our 38 teams know that they have a voice in shaping what comes next. This project has been built by all of us, therefore I want to ensure that its future is shaped by all of us. We are all convening for our annual summit in June, and a key part of our agenda is thinking through a short-, medium-, and potentially long-term future for Fairwork. ■

POVERTY GOVERNANCE AND HOUSING: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN MCCABE

Brian J. McCabe is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Georgetown University. He is interested in understanding social inequality in American cities, with a specific focus on low-income housing programs, municipal campaign finance, and neighborhood change and historic preservation. His research work has been published in a diverse range of journals, including *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Sociological Science*, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, *City & Community*, *the Journal of Urban Economics*, *Housing Policy Debate*, and *the Journal of the American Planning Association*. Notably, his expertise extends beyond academia to policies. He is currently on leave from Georgetown University to serve as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Ya-Ching Huang, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Dr. Brian J. McCabe about his latest article, "Ready to Rent: Administrative Decisions and Poverty Governance in the Housing Choice Voucher Program," published this year in *American Sociological Review*.

Ya-Ching Huang: *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Could you tell us the backstory of your latest article published in *American Sociological Review*? How did you start studying poverty governance through the lens of public housing agencies?*

Brian McCabe: Throughout my career studying housing, I've always been interested in the way rental assistance is distributed. Housers talk about rental assistance as a "lottery"—and in many ways, it is. Local housing authorities often use lotteries to create waitlists for housing vouchers, but the process of getting access to a voucher—and into a unit—is much more complicated. So, I started to interview agency directors to really understand this process of crafting waitlists and lotteries. In doing so, I came to understand a much

larger role of these agencies in governing poverty and shaping the experiences of people awaiting rental assistance.

Y.-C. H.: *In what ways does the Housing Choice Voucher program exemplify the logic of neoliberalism? How is the powerful trope of individual responsibility tied to the affordable housing policy in the United States?*

B. M.: When I met with local housing agencies, I was immediately surprised by the language used for people in the Housing Choice Voucher program. Households with vouchers are often referred to as clients. Those with a voucher looking for an apartment are called shoppers. We've adopted this language of the market to describe households

seeking affordable housing. It quickly became clear that tenants were often on their own to find a suitable rental apartment on the private market. We have decades of research about all the obstacles that low-income renters—and particularly, renters of color—face on the rental market, including source-of-income discrimination, discrimination by family size, a lack of affordable rental units, issues of housing quality, etc. And yet, the voucher program basically requires tenants to search and find units on their own in these difficult market conditions. Some local housing agencies do have search assistance and mobility counseling programs, but these are the exception, rather than the rule. When households fail to find a unit with their voucher, the local housing agency claws the voucher back and gives it to someone else on the waiting list. It's one of the perverse parts of having endlessly long lists for rental assistance—if a household with a voucher “fails” to find a unit on the market, the voucher can always be given to someone else awaiting assistance.

Y.-C. H.: *You describe a tripartite process—selection, market formation, and nudges—of how public housing agencies evaluate, modify, and discipline residentially insecure populations in accordance with the expectations of the rental market. Could you tell us a bit more about your findings?*

B. M.: Housing agencies have a variety of incentives to ensure that households selected into the program are able to find housing on the private market. Most importantly, the administrative fees the agency receives from HUD are based on the number of households actually leasing. So, if you pull 100 households from the waitlist, ready them for the program, and then only 10 of them find housing, you'll only get paid administrative fees for those 10 households, despite the work you've done preparing all hundred households for the program. (And administrative fees cover staff salaries, office space, etc., so agencies have good incentives to select households that are likely to succeed and make sure they do!) The selection process involves picking households for the pro-



gram who demonstrate the ability to navigate the market independently. Often, this simply means responding to requests from the housing agency or keeping appointments with the agency—tasks that would be replicated when the household found a landlord willing to rent to them. Formation means teaching low-income households how to behave like market renters. I was surprised by much of what I heard. Local housing agency officials reminded people how to dress, what to bring to the interview, how to behave, what to say (or not say). They were reminding clients of the way renters are supposed to behave on the private market. And nudges are the times when local housing agencies intervene, often on behalf of a landlord, to play a disciplinary role when assisted households are not living up to the expectations of market renters. Although agencies often said that the tenant–landlord relationship was a private one after a voucher holder found a household, it was the case that they often intervened to assure landlords of their disciplinary power over tenants.

Y.-C. H.: *You argued that the discretionary decisions made by these local agencies also create new categories of deservingness for public assistance. Could you talk more about who deserves the housing voucher in*

your case? What characteristics are considered by public housing agencies?

B. M.: Any time when there is a public good available, but only a fraction of eligible households receive that good, it is worth asking why some people get it, and some people get left behind. In rental assistance programs, like public housing, there is a long history of assistance going to some types of poor households and being withheld from others. For example, the earliest public housing typically went to the working poor and was withheld from those without children. As time went on, we invested more of our housing resources for elderly and disabled households, underscoring notions of deservingness for those categories of renters. In this paper, I argue that the voucher program privileges households with the ability to navigate the private market independently. There are all sorts of ways that people demonstrate their skills as private market actors as they wind through the selection process for the voucher, and I work to show that market readiness becomes increasingly synonymous with deservingness in a program that relies on the private market to provide affordable housing. This, too, is a strand of research that I'm particularly interested in following because it points to ways that deservingness is being reshaped under the contours of neoliberal social policy.

Y.-C. H.: *Your article contributes to the scholarship on how and why the state governs the poor. I'm curious about your thoughts on why public housing agencies are motivated to exert tacit control over assisted renters.*

B. M.: For local housing agencies, funding comes almost exclusively from the federal government. They receive an allocation of money to pay people's rents, and administrative fees to cover operating costs, that are largely based on the number of people they're able to house. As a result, there is an incentive to make sure that people selected into the program are able to successfully lease-up an apartment—and, of course, the most "market ready" households will often be the most successful on the rental market. So,

largely, I see this as a set of incentives baked into this type of system where resources are scarce, the need for affordable housing is overwhelming, and local agencies rely on the federal government for their funding. It's important to remember how central *scarcity* is to this process too. If local agencies had enough resources to provide housing for everyone, I think they would be able to move beyond poverty governance and really focus on the needs of the poor. But as the program is currently structured, that's not the case.

Y.-C. H.: *In what ways do you think your analytical framework—a tripartite process—could be useful in other contexts beyond the case of rental assistance?*

B. M.: One of the things that the reviewers really pushed in this article was to think beyond housing. I'm a housing scholar, and I've spent a lot of time inside local housing agencies. I really started writing this story as a story about housing. But as I got deeper into the housing angle, I realized that much of what I was thinking about—about scarcity in government assistance, federalism, neoliberalism, the relationship between the state and the poor—was broadly applicable beyond housing programs. While the voucher program is unique in its reliance on lotteries and waitlists, other government programs ration assistance. They create categories of deservingness too. So, I do think the framework is applicable to other state agencies and government programs. But more broadly, I hope the research underscores the sociological importance of really getting into the weeds to understand how programs operate. This all started because housers claim that vouchers are distributed by lottery and I wanted to know what those lotteries looked like.

Y.-C. H.: *What are you working on now, and what is next for you?*

B. M.: Well, I've been working on a book manuscript from this project that I'm really excited about, but I'm currently on a two-year break from research (and academia) to serve in government. I'm at HUD serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Development in the agency's Office of Policy Development and Research. ■

SPOTLIGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA WARD

Patricia Ward is a postdoctoral research associate in the Center for Integration Studies at TU-Dresden. She received her Ph.D. in sociology from Boston University. Her research aims to understand the factors that generate global social inequalities within and across societies. She is particularly interested in how social hierarchies, rooted in colonial and imperial imaginaries and articulated as Global North–Global South relations, inform, condition, and structure policies and practices related to humanitarian aid and development, the global division of labor, and migration/mobility. Her research thus far has focused on these questions within the Middle East context.

Elif Birced, Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Boston University, talked to Dr. Ward about her recent article, [The Worth of Their Work: The \(In\)visible Value of Refugee Volunteers in the Transnational Humanitarian Aid Sector](#), and her suggestions for Ph.D. students and candidates on the job market.

Elif Birced: *In your recent article, “The Worth of Their Work: The (In)visible Value of Refugee Volunteers in the Transnational Humanitarian Aid Sector,” you demonstrate how framing work as aid renders the value of refugee volunteers’ labor invisible and “noneconomic.” Which processes render volunteer work invisible?*

Patricia Ward: So, like broader studies related to the concept of invisible work, or the ways in which labor is devalued and obfuscated in practice and framed as noneconomic, I was looking at how Syrian refugee volunteers’ work for humanitarian aid organizations—entities like Care or Oxfam International—was rendered invisible. I argue in this article that this is because their work is framed as aid. “Work” is something they received and consumed as “a benefit” from aid organizations. In other words, aid was the vehicle through which their labor was devalued and rendered invisible because it framed work, the opportunity of work, as something they received as an aid package from aid organizations because of their status as beneficiaries.

In the literature, the invisibility of volunteer work is often explained in terms of processes that frame work as acts of love, service, forms of training, educational opportunities, etc. However, we also know the scope of what has been considered volunteer work is quite vast (everything from church and military service to some forms of unpaid internships), and that volunteering might

even be compulsory in some cases depending on the sociolegal context (here I am thinking of welfare-to-work programs). So, we know that there are varieties of mechanisms that economically devalue work through cultural, legal, and spatial means within and beyond the scope of volunteer work specifically.

Now, what struck me in the case of Syrian refugee volunteers were two things. First, was that their labor was hypervisible, and it was considered “work” in some ways and times but not in others. Second, I was struck by how volunteers explained their feelings of precarity and insecurity about work, stemming not solely from their legal status as refugees in Jordan, which is the explanation we usually see in literature for this geographical context, but also from their ambiguous relationship with aid organizations. This was because on the one hand, they were “workers” for aid organizations in these cash-for-work and incentive-based volunteering schemes, in ways that suggested an employer–employee relationship. On the other hand, they were also beneficiaries, understood as receiving benefits from the aid organizations premised on notions of their vulnerability and need. In fact, it was their ambiguous worker–beneficiary position and the fluctuation it produced in terms of how their labor was recognized and delineated as work in some instances and not others that led me to explore aid as a vehicle that renders work invisible.

So the paper looks at this juxtaposition of being a worker–beneficiary to identify the various ways in which their work is rendered invisible through aid. To give an example, I will start with how their labor was organized and compensated by skill level. Volunteers were recruited and classified based on their “skill” level, which was classified as low, middle or high. This ranking related to their previous education and work experiences. Compensation (their stipend amount) was then determined based on their skill level. All of this suggested and made it feel like an employer–employee relationship. At the same time, these positions were temporary. Each volunteer could only hold a position for a few months before they had to “rotate out.” The explanation behind this rotation was that aid organizations were “spreading work opportunities” to more beneficiaries. So here we see their beneficiary role coming in.

The paper also looks at the various forms of other (invisible) labor that volunteers perform because of this ambiguity and their blatant awareness and recognition of it as well, ranging from how they negotiate and maximize this constant cycle of temporary work to the physical and emotional labor they perform to show how work as a form of aid “benefited” them. They would have to share this information in meetings with donors, on evaluations, and in other forms of data collection they were required (both formally but also informally) to comply with to stay in the program. In so doing, the paper brings attention to how aid as a vehicle that renders work invisible is informed by both sociocultural assumptions and sociolegal mechanisms that construct Syrian volunteers labor as noneconomic aid they “need” and “receive” as refugee beneficiaries.

E. B.: *How can future studies on valuation build on your work? What important insights does your research provide to economic sociologists?*

P. W.: I would like to say two main things, and I should note that I will answer this question in the context of the paper we just discussed. Perhaps generally, this research reiterates the need for rigorous empirical investigations to contextualize and account for the processes that shape the rela-



tionship between work and social worth in society. Constantly testing the applicability of our theories to explain relations in various contexts and over time might help us to simultaneously broaden and refine our conceptual tools to account for the processes that organize, hierarchize, and also contest and challenge constructions of social worth. I might just add, and as this article points to, there is a related need to consider how our concepts and theories of work and labor relations might also be premised upon particular assumptions that are rooted in geo-specific legal contexts and phenomena situated in North America or continental Europe, for example. In some of my reviews, I received a lot of feedback asking me how this was not just another welfare-to-work program, which made me think a lot about how assumptions of citizenship, or at least particular articulations of it, might be embedded in our explanations and framings of the relationship between invisible labor and volunteering. In this case of Syrians in Jordan, these volunteers were not considered citizens in the Jordanian context and were “working” for international aid organizations permitted to operate in the country by Jordanian authorities. Plus, Jordan is an authoritarian context, so I thought exploring this case might be fruitful for extending our understandings

of processes that produce invisible labor within, but perhaps also beyond, the scope of volunteering.

Second, I think this research also encourages further and perhaps even new thinking about the relationship between work and symbolic capital. How framings of work as a form of aid, a desirable form of consumption and benefit, relates to symbolic capital might provide important insights into the processes that create conditions of vulnerability and compliance among populations and workforces, and how this organizes the global economy accordingly. In the case of refugees, for example, we can see how framings of refugees as “hardworkers” and “contributors to society” are leveraged by some policymakers to counteract antirefugee discourse and address labor force shortages, but are simultaneously imbued with particular sociocultural assumptions about who belongs where and how within social hierarchies of worth too. The fact that we see more and more how state are working with non-state and aid actors to facilitate migration management programs and recruit and select workers for temporary work schemes further suggests that we should think more expansively about the relations and processes defining boundaries of work, for what purposes, and their effects. Considering the latter might reveal new, refashioned, or even unanticipated connections and relations between work, exploitation, and precarity broadly construed.

E. B.: *As a junior scholar, what lessons do you think that you have learned might be valuable for those who are doctoral students on the job market?*

P. W.: I thought about three main things when you asked me this question. First, I would say really think about and figure out why you are doing what you are doing and what motivates you. Why did you decide to do a Ph.D. in the first place? I think keeping these explanations in mind are important, especially in moments when you feel frustrated, stressed, or uncertain in the process. Working on a dissertation and being on the job market has its ups and downs. It can be

exciting, but also daunting. So, keeping in mind why you are doing what you are doing is important. Revisiting the articles and authors or talks and lectures that inspire you, connecting with the folks that keep you curious and excited about what you are doing... I think all of this is helpful in this regard.

Second, I would say always remember and understand that your project and your work are not yours alone. They are products of a process comprised of multiple relations, inputs, and efforts of so many individuals. Recognizing this, being sincere and kind to those around you, and expressing appreciation during this process—and of course in general—is more important than you may initially anticipate, and may surprise you. Plus, recognizing and appreciating these relations will make you a better scholar, since you will be able to reflect on how you and your work are also social products like the relations and phenomena you study. (I know this sounds obvious, but it always surprises me when I encounter disconnects in this regard.) To follow up with this previous point, make time and embrace spontaneous conversations and talks over coffee about your project, your ideas, and everything in-between. I have found that it is in these informal spaces and through these exchanges that I have been able to really formulate thoughts that have shaped my work in significant ways.

The last thing is more technical. I think the issue of writing is challenging, and something I have struggled with as well. What I have learned and what I would share with others is first, to remember that writing is part of this gig. Make it routine and normalize it as part of the daily work. Second, and relatedly, writing takes many forms and is a process. It does not mean you necessarily have to type X number of words or type on your laptop for an hour every day. You can jot your ideas down on your phone while walking, handwrite them on a paper, or even audio record your ideas. Even writing an email, a cover letter for a job, or a research proposal are important forms of writing that will contribute and strengthen your writing in the context of an article or a dissertation chapter. The idea is to get used to transforming your thoughts into words on paper in an articulate manner. At

the end of the day, writing is about having a conversation... The goal should be to convey an idea to your intended audience (which you should perhaps have in mind from the start) to spark discussion on a particular theme, topic, or phenomenon.

E. B.: *What is next for you research-wise? Could you tell us a little about your on-going or future research project(s)?*

P. W.: So, I should just mention that my dissertation research looked at the effects of localization shifts in the aid sector on local humanitarian aid workers in the context of Jordan. The article we discussed earlier was an offshoot of that project. Now, my new project, which is set to start in May through funding from a three-year grant from the German Research Foundation designed to support young investigators, looks at an important area of global supply chain management: hu-

manitarian logistics. Building on my dissertation project, this project considers how humanitarian logistics as a practice and a concept delineate and construct what constitutes social problems in society. So, it is basically a study of logistics from a sociological perspective. I will be looking more closely at what we actually mean by humanitarian logistics and how it orders relations and resources in society in particular ways. I want to focus on the effects of these practices and how they contribute to and construct particular ideas of social value and worth. To consider these questions, significant phases of the project focus on the role of “humanitarian hubs” that are part of the U.N. Humanitarian Response Depot Network. I will study two hubs as cases. First is the largest humanitarian hub in the world, referred to as a “humanitarian free-zone authority” in Dubai and called “International Humanitarian City.” Then I’ll look at one in Brindisi, Italy, considered the oldest humanitarian hub. ■

SPOTLIGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH MUSTAFA YAVAŞ

Mustafa Yavaş is a postdoctoral associate at New York University Abu Dhabi, specializing in economic and political sociology. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Yale University. His research focuses on a wide range of topics, including inequality, work and occupations, immigration, social movements, and theory. He uses qualitative, comparative-historical, and computational methods, including in-depth interviews, social network analysis, computational text analysis, and agent-based modeling. His previous research focuses on various boundary processes in social, economic, and political settings, including status homophily in social networks, residential segregation by income, collective identity formation in social movements, and political polarization in social media. Currently, he is completing his book manuscript, *White-Collar Blues: The Making of the Transnational Turkish Middle Class* (under contract with Columbia University Press), which examines the rise of a new Turkish upper-middle class in the age of globalization and its discontent with work.

Gökhan Mülayim, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Mustafa Yavaş about his research, career trajectory, and experiences with sociology as a vocation.

Gökhan Mülayim: *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Could you tell us a bit about your story of becoming a sociologist?*

Mustafa Yavaş: Looking back, I realize I have always been interested in sociology without

knowing what it was. I was good at math and science, but I was also the only one actively listening to the teacher in the philosophy class in high school. (He was very excited when teaching Hobbes and Marx, and so was I). As a first-generation college student, being good at math and science meant that my horizon was limited to becoming

ing an engineer or a medical doctor (apparently a common trope not only in Turkey but in most developing countries for my generation) to get a well-paying job upon graduation. Being an academic did not occur to me as a possibility until much later. So, I decided to study engineering and chose industrial engineering in particular, thinking that it was the most “social” of engineering majors, whatever that may mean. (I now realize that’s because industrial engineering problems focus on production and often involve human beings, in one form or another, whereas other engineering problems, less so). Engineering curricula were very intensive, and there was little opportunity to venture out: You could only take three non-engineering electives—mine were jazz, modern Japanese history, and macroeconomics.

Nevertheless, the watershed moment for me was an engineering elective, the Systems Theory class, in which Yaman Barlas brilliantly taught nonlinear dynamics, simulation modeling, and the philosophy of science. His examples were drawn both from socioeconomic problems as well as production systems. Because I really enjoyed simulation modeling and engaging with explanatory research on inequality, I decided to stay in industrial engineering and pursue a master’s focusing on systems theory and modeling. However, the idea of seeking a PhD in sociology dawned upon me with the commencement speech of Filiz Garip, an industrial engineering graduate of my alma mater who became a professor of sociology. Through her example, I realized that my engineering background did not necessarily disallow me to become a sociologist, and here I am.

G. M.: *Before sociology, you were trained in industrial engineering. What was the transition like? Could you tell us a bit about whether and how you have benefited from having a foot on these two different worlds?*

M. Y.: The transition was wild at times, to be honest. I had a naïve, almost romantic expectation that, as a sociologist, I would mostly do close readings. However, it was disheartening to realize that it is simply impossible to read everything closely with the volume of literature today, and the publish or



perish system does not really help. I also remember that I often found myself unclear on the definitions of our sociological concepts. It took me a while to realize that the definitions were actually one of the things at stake in our debates. I loved theorizing and still do very much.

In fact, the primary benefit of having an engineering background is my tendency to prize analytical clarity. In addition to establishing well-defined objects of analysis, I was aware of how important it is to spell out key assumptions and to define the scope conditions in formal modeling (not to mention checking the robustness of findings). I tried to put these insights to work with qualitative modes of analysis as well. How well I fared is another subject. Similarly, the emphasis on causal thinking in engineering also endowed me with a taste for ethnography and comparative-historical methodology. As surprising as it may sound, engineering made me a bit hesitant to appreciate mainstream quantitative sociology that often uses cross-sectional data and has unwarranted general linearity assumptions. I often thought of an industrial engineer as a handy person with a toolbox containing statistical analysis, optimization, simulation modeling, and the like, who chooses the right tool depending on the problem. This mentality, alongside my fascination with polymaths, encouraged me to work

with diverse methods.

G. M.: *Your dissertation research, which is the basis of your forthcoming book tentatively titled *White-Collar Blues examines the making of the transnational Turkish middle class. What sparked your interest in studying this topic?**

M. Y.: I was increasingly struck by the mismatch between business professionals' discouraging accounts of their lives—which have become prevalent in popular culture with burnout and opt-out stories—and the rosy views of both conventional wisdom and sociological literature, especially on stratification and social class. This disconnect is partly due to an increasingly economic way of thinking in our everyday lives, which these literatures have an inherent tendency to magnify, and partly due to a relatively low volume of in-depth empirical research on business professionals. Indeed, there's a consistent trend in the sociological study of inequality to study manual labor, service work, and rising precarity, in contrast to the other, more affluent side of inequality. So, I wanted to “study up” (though not up to the top, like C-level executives or the ruling elite), by focusing on professional-managerial jobs at sought-after global firms, which are arguably the “best” jobs in the labor market. My engineering background helped me here as well, allowing me to dip my toes in the white-collar world of work upon graduation: I briefly worked at the American multinational Procter & Gamble and later at a Turkish startup. Hence, I had some familiarity with the allures and challenges of corporate workplaces, though I had my fair share of an epistemological break, to use a Bourdieusian term, as I focused squarely on social movements during the initial three years of my Ph.D. This social proximity to business professionals made my dissertation fieldwork more fruitful in terms of both accessing my respondents and building rapport with them, allowing me to explore the Turkish white-collar world with breadth and depth.

I was also a bit surprised at how methodological nationalism has been alive and kicking despite

decades of globalization. For example, we still tend to think of class formation—by which, I mean the emergence of a shared life experience—within nation-state boundaries, a problematic assumption, especially for upper-middle classes of the Global South, whose upward mobility trajectories have been increasingly passing through the Global North. I wanted to explore how transnationalism operates in the Global South beyond its cultural moments, such as English becoming the *lingua franca* or converging consumption patterns (especially of cultural goods), by focusing on transnational corporations and how they provide middle classes across the globe with similar workplaces and quality of work-life experiences.

G. M.: *Could you please describe your research and the main implications of your book project?*

M. Y.: In *White-Collar Blues*, I examine how globalization and middle-class formation intertwine in the Global South, focusing on the Turkish case. With Turkey's tighter integration into the global economy, the post-1980s neoliberal era witnessed the emergence of new hegemonic symbols of success: professional-managerial employees of world-renowned transnational corporations, which increasingly populated the Global South with their branch offices. Focusing on these business professionals' quality of work-life narratives through more than 100 in-depth interviews held in Istanbul and New York City, I follow them through the employment life course: their selection into, survival within, and resignation from corporate careers. Despite their upward social mobility, the narratives of many elite workers (not *the elites*, but the elite *of workers*) resonate with what I call white-collar blues: Burnout and disappointment with their demanding yet unfulfilling careers. Extending from the Turkish case, I develop a theory of middle-class alienation that accounts for how middle-class investments in education lead to high hopes, which then clash with poor work-life balance, low intrinsic satisfaction, and a lack of meaning from labor. *White-Collar Blues* reveals the hidden costs of sacrificing these work-life essentials for higher pay and status.

My book makes two key contributions. First, it expands upon globalization and class formation scholarship by engaging with middling forms of transnationalism. This helps us go beyond the binary focus of the scholarship on the transnational capitalist class and immigrant working poor. Adopting an organizational approach to studying inequality, I reconstruct consumption-centered middle-class analyses by “bringing employment back in” (to use that formulaic phrase) to the center of class formation. This lens helps me reveal the historical role of transnational corporations in bifurcating the middle class in Turkey and many other countries in the Global South since the 1980s, where domestic employers (both public and private) similarly faced intense competition with global capital. Second, my book provides a novel critique of global capitalism by detailing how even the most privileged workers have failed to lead fulfilling lives due to alienation from their labor. Focusing on the celebrated winners of neoliberal globalization in the Global South, the business professionals employed at transitional corporations, my book complicates the “Good Jobs, Bad Jobs” debate at a global scale by highlighting the consequential importance of work beyond its financial aspects. Demonstrating the human cost of overwork—even when work is secure and well-paying, I suggest broadening labor’s agenda of demanding a higher minimum wage and increased job security with an overall work-time reduction, such as the 4-day workweek initiatives.

G. M.: *As a junior scholar in the field of economic sociology, could you share some lessons that may be valuable for those who are doctoral students, on the job market, or at earlier stages of their careers?*

M. Y.: Whatever I can share is probably common knowledge these days, so I just want to emphasize that I join many others in suggesting that we should not forget to project our sociological imagination upon the workings of the academic job market (and publishing as well). Perhaps a curious side effect of having some autonomy over our labor, as academics, we tend to develop an inflated sense of agency. Yet, we are seeking jobs

in a buyer’s market where there is only so much we can do about it. So, it is imperative to be realistic about what is within our power to change, avoid narrow definitions of success and failure, and remember that our lives are greater than our work. Easier said than done, I know very well, especially when our livelihoods depend on securing a job, but those are my two pennies.

G. M.: *What is on the horizon? Could you tell us about your future research plans?*

M. Y.: The bulk of my future research centers on combining historical and computational inquiries, focusing on two pressing issues: The ongoing decay in middle-class quality of (work)life and the erosion of democracy across the globe.

Extending from my book, the first project traces historical trends in the American corporate work culture and quality of work–life in the last century by focusing on influential management journals such as *Harvard Business Review* and *McKinsey Quarterly*. Using computational text analysis on this corpus, I assess how expert management perceptions of and practices in critical issues around job quality, such as control over labor, employment relations, and democracy in workplaces has changed over time. I also plan to examine how the “greedy work” culture spread to and interacted with the rest of the world via transnational corporations.

My other major project, already underway, examines the interpenetration of media control and rising authoritarianism. I examine the case of Turkey, one of the earliest examples of a democratic system falling prey to democratic backsliding in the 21st Century. As a first step, I have studied the discursive similarities among columnists in the contested coverage of the Gezi Park Resistance—a large-scale uprising that shook Turkey in 2013. I created a corpus of newspaper columns published in a representative sample of newspapers in Turkey from 2012 to 2018. I am using this dataset to advance a network theory of the political opinion field and its change by examining the social and symbolic fight over public opinion on historical events, what I call “framing struggles.” ■

HOUSING VALUATION AND TEACHING ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY: AN INTERVIEW WITH MAX BESBRIS

Max Besbris is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is interested in economic sociology, urban sociology, demography and ecology, and social stratification. With a focus on housing markets and neighborhoods, his research examines individual decision-making, unraveling the impact of social interactions on these decisions, and the consequential effects of these decisions on racial and socio-spatial inequalities. His work has been published in *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, *Socio-Economic Review*, *City & Communities*, *Sociological Theory*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, *Socius*, *Demography*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Social Psychology Quarterly*. He is the co-author of *Soaking the Middle Class: Suburban Inequality and Recovery from Disaster* (2022) with Anna Rhodes and the author of *Upsold: Real Estate Agents, Price, and Neighborhood Inequality* (2020).

Ya-Ching Huang, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Dr. Max Besbris about his current work and teaching experiences in economic sociology.

Ya-Ching Huang: *Thank you for joining us in this issue. Could you tell us the story of how you entered the field of economic sociology? What inspired you to specialize in economic sociology?*

Max Besbris: I didn't really know what economic sociology was when I started grad school, but a few things happened early on that directed me toward the subfield. I was interested in researching real estate agents, particularly the ways they talked about and marketed different neighborhoods. But I suspected that wasn't going to be enough for a dissertation. I remember discussing it with one of my advisors who told me that a good strategy for developing any research project was to "follow the money." So, I started to think about how value, housing prices, and neighborhood reputations were all connected, and what role agents played in fostering these connections. As I was attempting to shape these thoughts into actual research questions, I took Viviana Zelizer's Economic Sociology graduate seminar, which was incredibly helpful. It gave me the tools to analyze some of the empirical data I had been gathering and really set me on my path.

Y.-C. H.: *What are you currently working on?*

M. B.: I have a few ongoing projects on mobility and segregation, but the one that's probably most of interest to *Accounts'* readers looks at prices in the market for rental housing. With some amazing colleagues—Ariela Schachter and John Kuk—I've been collecting every advertisement for rental housing posted on Craigslist in the 50 largest metro areas since 2017. We're able to geolocate the vast majority of these ads, which means we can look at various local and temporal factors that might affect asking rents. We've published some work on rents during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and we're currently looking at the relationships between crime and rent as well as climate disasters and rent.

I'm also starting to think a lot more about what uncertainty does or does not do to economic actors' plans for the future.

Y.-C. H.: *Could you walk us through your economic sociology syllabus? How do you design your course structure-wise?*

M. B.: Being in a department with multiple great economic sociologists has given me a lot of freedom to create a syllabus that reflects my specific interests within the subfield. The course I most recently taught was a seminar studying markets at the micro level. The course begins with a deep dive

into the literature on embeddedness—its evolution and then emergent critiques in the 1990s and 2000s. It then turns to questions about culture and relational work: Is culture missing entirely from the embeddedness approach? How distinct of a research paradigm is relational work from embeddedness? Does it effectively solve some of the problems critics have highlighted in the embeddedness framework?

The syllabus then moves to empirical pieces on specific market-related topics like valuation, transaction media, and discrimination. We read papers that use network analysis, ethnography, or experiments, and while most of the work can be classified as micro-level, I make sure to ask if anything were reading has implications for understanding broader market trends. In fact, the last week of class is dedicated to reading theoretical work on micro–macro linkages. I think the course gives a good overview of the various theory/methods packages that have come to prominence since the emergence of the “new economic sociology” in the 1980s.

Y.-C. H.: *What topics do you think used to be less discussed or overlooked, but are now essential to incorporate into the course? How would they advance our understanding of economic sociology?*

M. B.: I’m seeing more interest from grad students in using the tools of economic sociology to better understand racial stratification and to more thoroughly theorize how race matters for markets. This is why I’ve started dedicating an entire unit of the course to discrimination. I find that discrimination is a good conduit between research on stratification and economic sociology, since so much of our knowledge about discrimination comes from empirical studies of markets (e.g., labor markets and housing markets). Discrimination is an example of a market mechanism that not only produces inequality but also demonstrates a core tenant of economic sociology. That is, markets aren’t distinct from the rest of society, and they should therefore be subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as any other sphere of social life. More generally, this is why I’m ex-



cited by newer work using theories of racial capitalism since the framework explicitly takes on questions of how race and markets are mutually constitutive.

Y.-C. H.: *Any particular topics or readings that strike a chord with students and stimulate thought-provoking discussion?*

M. B.: One of the pieces we read very early on in the course is Jens Beckert’s 1996 article “What Is Sociological about Economic Sociology.” I’ve been struck by how this piece seems to stay with students throughout the entire semester, structuring a lot of the discussions we have and providing a basic framework to think about many of the other readings. In a nutshell, the article argues that sociologists believe that there really isn’t any uncertainty-free economic action. That is, uncertainty permeates all social life, including markets. As such, economic sociologists should focus on what actors do to deal or cope with this uncertainty. What are the pragmatic tools they have and when do they use them? It’s a very straightforward and extremely productive way of assessing economic action.

I also like assigning “Do Economists Make Bad Citizens?” by Frank, et al. because I think it’s funny.

Y.-C. H.: *What do you enjoy the most when teaching economic sociology?*

M. B.: There's something about analyzing markets that's always pretty exciting for newer sociologists. It's the same thrill that comes from realizing that common sense explanations about how the world works are often wrong or obscure, but it's heightened when studying markets because economic explanations for economic action are so pervasive.

Y.-C. H.: *What are your suggestions for instructors planning to teach economic sociology? Are there some tips or innovations that you find helpful for class facilitation?*

M. B.: In general, I think it's a great idea to have many readings by scholars who were graduate students when they published the assigned articles. These works, I find, often lead to discussions about the practicalities of doing research and hopefully make the whole process of writing an article seem less daunting. ■

BOOKSHELF: AN INTERVIEW WITH LARISSA BUCHHOLZ ON *THE GLOBAL RULES OF ART*

Larissa Buchholz's research centers on dynamics of cultural production and markets within a global context. She has also contributed to the sociology of intellectuals/expertise and general global/transnational theorizing, particularly through advancements in global fields theory. Buchholz is an assistant professor of communication and sociology (by courtesy) at Northwestern University and a faculty fellow at the Critical Realism Network at Yale University. Previously, she was a junior fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows, the first woman elected from sociology. Buchholz's book, *The Global Rules of Art: The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy* (Princeton University Press 2022), examines the emergence of a global (market) field in the visual arts and the diverse ways in which creative producers become valued worldwide. Her next book-length project, *Kaleidoscopic Tastes in a Global Cultural Market* (tentative title), extends her research on valuation by shifting its focus from mediation to consumption. Drawing from her fieldwork in the Middle East, China, and India, the study looks at art buyers as a way to explore dynamics of preference formation and taste cultures in a globalizing market. Buchholz's scholarship has garnered multiple awards, including the Alex Inkeles Prize and Robert K. Merton Award from Columbia University, the Junior Theorist Prize of the International Sociological Association, the Outstanding Dissertation Award and Junior Theorist Award from the American Sociological Association, Harvard University's William F. Milton Fund Award, and Columbia University's Outstanding Recent Alumni Award.

Gökhan Mülayim, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Larissa Buchholz about her new book, *The Global Rules of Art: The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy*.

Gökhan Mülayim: *Let me first congratulate you on the publication of your new book, *The Global Rules of Art: The Emergence and Divisions of a Cultural World Economy*. Could you please tell us a bit about the story of this book? What inspired you to go into this field of research?*

Larissa Buchholz: Thank you, Gökhan. I've been interested in global issues for a very long time. I grew up in East Germany, where traveling was heavily restricted, and after the Berlin Wall fell, my family and I took every opportunity we could to travel around the world. I think that really laid the groundwork for my current interests in how cul-

tures relate and how new cultural configurations take shape. But what turned this early interest into a study that engages with the global art market was the incredible shift that occurred in 2007 when a group of contemporary artists from China rose to the heights of the auction market. Their work was selling for millions of dollars at major auctions and by the end of the year their sales turnover was rivaling those of Western market superstars like Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. This development was striking, because it totally undercut previous research, including my own, that suggested that even with globalization, the market's highest echelons were still overwhelmingly dominated by Western artists, while "the rest of the world" remained highly marginalized. Puzzled by the Chinese artists' surprising success, I began interviewing art dealers and auction house specialists to try to find out how it had happened. This was a starting point for me to understand how much the auction market had become coupled to a financial logic of valuation, which worked very differently from a logic driven by cultural experts. After rethinking my approach, I made it my goal to account for the heterogeneity of the globalizing art market in order to identify the diverse logics and processes that affect valuation across continents. At the time, my initial advisor at Columbia, Harrison White, was skeptical about my pursuing this as a book-length study, suggesting that I'd do better covering "normal markets." So it took some additional time before I fully committed to this project. What followed were years of demanding research, resulting in this book.

G. M.: *What does "global" mean in the contemporary art market? Could you tell us about the relationship between the art market and globalization?*

L. B.: It's a great question. For my study, I had to distinguish between the etic and emic usages in the anthropological sense—that is, the "global" as either an analytically defined category in line with existing scholarship or as a "folk" term used by the people in the specific world I was studying. Sociologists frequently use "global" to refer to processes and structures with a world-



wide reach. The founding document of the ASA Section of Global and Transnational Sociology also defined it that way, in distinction to "transnational." In my book, this etic understanding of the "global" applies to the historical expansion of several key market infrastructures that I examine, as, for example, the worldwide spread and increased interdependencies among international art fairs or auction houses. The creation of comprehensive online price databases that track the commercial sales of artists across all continents fits that etic sense of the "global" too.

But in my historical research and fieldwork, I quickly saw that people in the field weren't always using "global" in that way. They used the "global" as a category to critique a West-centric "international" art world/market or to signify the highest level of status among market players, without always denoting six continents. But such emic uses nevertheless had real "field-effects." I have a section in the book that traces the rise and mutations of field-specific "global" discourse as an emic lens for understanding cultural aspects of the global field's emergence. I develop a historical distinction between an international field, which existed from the end of the 19th Century up until the

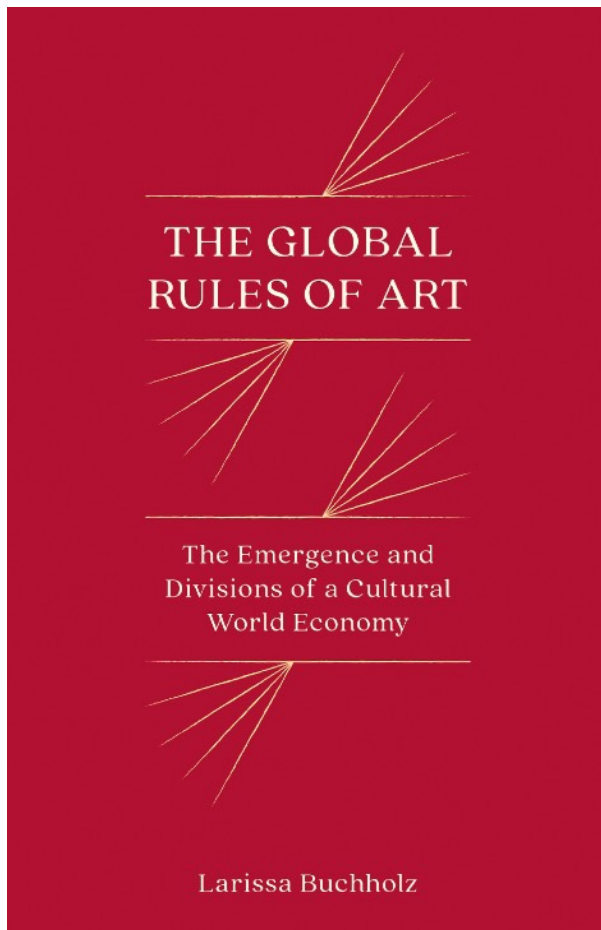
1990s, and a global field, which came into full existence in the new millennium's first decade. The international field was marked by players and institutions that were more heavily entrenched in their national fields. It was also more limited in its extension, involving mainly North America and Western Europe. The global field, however, not only expands with the development of more transcontinental infrastructures but also when participants believe that they are part of a shared "global" space that reaches beyond a Western scope. But often, these meanings don't correspond to the etic notion of six continents, and frequently, they don't mean that all continents or countries are represented equally, which would be yet another way of characterizing the "global."

Thus, it was important for me to decipher the specific ways in which the term has evolved within the social universe. I didn't want to impose

external definitions or periodizations, which would be too reifying. From that perspective, the book's combined etic-emic approach also interrogates alternative historical arguments that see globalization in the art market just as a reaction to changes in world politics and the world economy that have resulted from the spread of neoliberalism since the late eighties. Fields theory reminds us that we have to attend to the specificity (and variety) of meanings in relatively differentiated market settings. And that applies also to the study of bigger processes like "globalization." Maybe even more so!

G. M.: *You use field theory to analyze the art market. Could you tell us about the analytical purchase of the global field approach? Why do we need to field the global art market?*

L. B.: I could write an entire article on that question, or perhaps just ask people to read the book's first chapter and conclusion (laughs). There are, of course, different variants of field theory, and I should clarify that I worked with the Bourdieusian approach, which seemed especially fitting for the study of cultural markets. To begin with, one of the biggest benefits of that framework is how integrative it is. This was particularly helpful when I was trying to account for the complexity of historical global transformations. Compared to alternative global models, the global fields approach the book builds on and advances means we can integrate attention to both power structures and cultural meanings in crossborder processes. But it also means we can relate different levels of analysis—that is, the macro level of hierarchies among countries and their forms of "macro capital," the meso level of field-specific social and cultural relations, and the micro level of the dispositions and practices of market participants "on the ground." Extending Bourdieu's autonomy-heteronomy distinction was also important for the book's comparative approach. It was a great foundation for theorizing the heterogeneity of a globalizing cultural market—those segments that are more oriented around symbolic or monetary value—and for explaining how field-external globalization processes became refracted in each segment differently. In the book I also discuss how global fields operate at multiple



scales that are both relatively independent and interdependent. By realizing that, we can see the specific ways in which market dynamics at different scales interact in valuation processes, or how regionalization and globalization are co-constitutive for crossborder markets. For example, chapter 7, which is a case study of Yue Minjun, a Chinese global market star, shows how his rise to worldwide success was significantly facilitated by promotion strategies and sales at global centers, but his success ultimately depended on how his work was taken up and amplified at both regional and national market levels, which then fueled global-level sales in an interesting type of feedback loop.

As you might guess, it was a really intricate framework to use for empirical research at a worldwide scope. But I didn't want to reduce the complexity of what I was looking at. Another advantage for my book is the way Bourdieu's field theory conceptualizes social relations at a distance, which offered an interesting framework for thinking about the "globality" of markets (cf. chapter 3). Most existing studies on global transformations in the art market have looked at trade patterns or collaboration networks to interrogate the extent of globalization in that sphere. A field approach complements such studies of direct transactions or interactions by also looking at indirect relations that come about because market participants are part of the same "force field." When a globally dominant auction house in New York sells certain artworks, it can now affect mediation strategies of market players not just in London or Cologne but also in Beijing, Dubai, or Sydney. And that can happen without any direct interactions, but through the symbolic forces at work on in a shared space of market pursuit, all of them abiding by a shared belief in the auction house's power to set market trends and values. By looking at field relations at a distance like this, you can capture a kind of phenomenological globality that is underpinned by unequal power relations among market participants and locations. Taken together, the book ends up being less skeptical about the extent of globalization in the art market. But of course, the different conceptions of social relations in fields

theory, and how some of them need to be revised to fit a global context, deserves a much deeper discussion, which I am pursuing in a forthcoming paper.

G. M.: *I am curious about the methodological challenges of studying the global art market. Could you tell us about the challenges you faced in your research?*

L. B.: I faced a number of challenges along the way, and I address several of them in the book's appendix. There were, of course, more conventional challenges, like getting access to the more commercial parts of the art market, which are notoriously secretive, or developing a research design that connected, rather than combined, macro- and micro-level data. But the most unique challenge I encountered was how to examine an emerging global market with a theory that was originally developed in regard to a Western nation-state. That challenge refers more to questions of conceptual methodology and theorizing. I am grateful for the work of Richard Swedberg, who brought this issue to the forefront of sociology, and of Raewyn Connell, Julian Go, and Isaac Reed. Their contributions, among others, have pushed us to think more deeply about theorizing in ways that go beyond West-centric perspectives and epistemologies. I hope that further related debates will gain broader traction after a period in which much of the discussion about transnational theorizing has centered on the critique of methodological nationalism.

My own approach was to use Critical Realism as a metafoundation for strategies of explanation and generalization, which I discuss in a webinar hosted by Phil Gorski's Critical Realism Network at Yale. In an article, I also discuss how Diane Vaughan's method of analogical theorizing offered me a fertile approach for scalar theory extension, which goes beyond Bourdieu's own suggestions and is better suited for avoiding deductive reductionism. As a means to minimizing West-centric bias, I used emic approaches for data collection too. Readers can see this, for example, when I created large-scale samples of "contemporary" artists, which is a category that can vary wildly across different world regions. I also went to great lengths, especially in the book's

historical section, to engage lots of secondary studies to explore multiple angles before I delineated any “global” patterns. The French historian Marc Bloch is known for saying, “years of analysis for a day of synthesis,” and that’s certainly true for my project. The data that made it into the book are just the tip of the iceberg! In any case, I look forward to more debate about how to reduce Western bias and think about a kind of geopolitical positionality in both empirical and conceptual methodologies. I believe this will only become more critical in an age of “big data,” when sources on globalizing market settings are readily available with a mouse click.

G. M.: *What surprised you the most as you were carrying out this research?*

L. B.: One of the things that surprised me most about the art market was how it transformed so radically in just two decades. The book’s historical analyses cover more than a century, but it was really since the dawn of the new millennium that we see the market’s most dynamic shifts, where an international avant-garde market rapidly turned into being a multibillion global industry. As I explain, this significant change was due to the historical confluence of multiple factors. But one I found particularly perplexing was how the introduction of something as seemingly neutral as online price databases—which aggregate auction sales results across multiple continents—could have such a profound impact. For decades, the contemporary art market was notoriously opaque; galleries tended not to post their prices publicly. And although auction houses publicized prices to advertise their sales and successes, before the internet it was difficult to aggregate those figures over time and across large distances. The absence of accessible broader price information made the art market unique among other cultural markets—think, for example, of the ways that people relentlessly talk about box office numbers for Hollywood movies or sales figures for music albums.

When these databases were introduced, it became easy to track the sales results for thousands of artists across multiple world regions. That enabled the globalization of information flows, but it also

meant that investment-oriented buyers and institutions became more interested in the art market. Suddenly, you could compute price fluctuations to estimate or “predict” the value of certain artworks or artists. In looking at this phenomenon, the book builds on the excellent work of Erica Coslor, Olav Velthuis, and Kangsan Lee. And it links this development with other institutional transformations to explain the rise of a global market subfield where power relations and the logic of competition have been redefined to create what participants now call the “global art industry.”

Somewhat related, I was also surprised and concerned by how unregulated the auction market tends to be. Some people I interviewed called it the most unregulated financial market in the world! While the prices may be public, buyers can remain anonymous, and the market can function as a playground for money laundering, shill bidding, insider trading, and speculation. In the contemporary art field, auction houses—with their relentless drive for higher profits—benefit few and harm many. So, a critical sociology of art markets can help puncture the glamor of auction houses and expose the kinds of practices that wouldn’t be acceptable in any other financial market. In this way, working on art markets is no longer a niche topic, as Harrison White used to tell me—it can even be public sociology!■



BOOKSHELF: AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA A. BANKS ON *BLACK CULTURE, INC.*

[Patricia A. Banks](#) (Harvard University Ph.D. & A.M./Spelman College B.A.) is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Poetics* and professor of sociology at Mount Holyoke College. As a cultural sociologist, her research elucidates how social boundaries, such as race and ethnicity, intersect with consumption and consumption-related processes. Banks is the author of four books, including *Black Culture Inc: How Ethnic Community Support Pays for Corporate America* (Stanford University Press 2022), *Race, Ethnicity, and Consumption: A Sociological View* (Routledge 2020), *Diversity and Philanthropy at African American Museums* (Routledge Research in Museum Studies 2019) and *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class* (Routledge 2010). Banks is Chair-Elect of the Section on the Sociology of Consumers and Consumption at the American Sociological Association and serves on the editorial board of *Cultural Sociology* and the boards of the Black Trustee Alliance and the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum. She has been in residence at Stanford University as a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) and at Harvard University as a Sheila Biddle Ford Foundation Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research.

Meghann Lucy, Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Boston University, talked to Dr. Patricia Banks about diversity capital, her new book *Black Culture, Inc.: How Ethnic Community Support Pays for Corporate America*, and her current projects.

Meghann Lucy: *Thank you for contributing to the Spring issue of Accounts. I attended an excellent author-meets-critics session about your book Black Culture, Inc. at the 2023 Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting with critics Shamus Khan and Marc Lamont Hill. Both “critics” praised your book as being exceptionally well designed. I believe one critic described it as the book he would “hand to graduate students as a model for how to write a book.” How did you think through designing Black Culture, Inc.? What advice would you give someone embarking upon a book project?*

Patricia Banks: The central concept in *Black Culture, Inc.* is “diversity capital.” Each chapter highlights different aspects of this idea. *Black Culture, Inc.* uses case studies of six Black cultural initiatives to illustrate how firms use ethnic community support (i.e., philanthropy and sponsorships related to race and ethnicity) to manage their racial image. Chapters focus on corporate support at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

(NMAAHC), the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM), the Kool Jazz Festival, the Essence Music Festival, the Inspiration Celebration Gospel Tour, and Afropunk. When organizing a book project, thinking early on about the best structure for illustrating key theoretical and conceptual points is helpful. For example, I used a different organizing framework for my books *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class* (Routledge 2010) and *Diversity and Philanthropy at African American Museums* (Routledge 2019). In *Represent*, each chapter examines how African Americans construct different aspects of their racial identity through consuming Black art. Chapters in *Diversity and Philanthropy at African American Museums* examine how different subgroups of patrons define the value of Black cultural institutions.

M. L.: *Black Culture, Inc. describes corporate interest in accumulating “diversity capital.” Could you discuss what diversity capital is and the context in which it developed and became desirable?*

P. B.: I define “diversity capital” as cultural practices and values that allow organizations to solve

problems and leverage opportunities related to race, ethnicity, and other social differences. Donations to ethnoracial minority initiatives, such as giving \$1 million to the NMAAHC or sponsoring the Essence Music Festival serve as diversity capital because they are practices through which firms project an image of valuing equity and inclusion. Ethnic community support is an asset to firms in an environment where there is a growing population of racial and ethnic minorities, more openness among the majority population, and there are legal sanctions for racial discrimination. In these environments, firms have an interest in cultivating an image of valuing equity and inclusion.

M. L.: *Can you share some of the reasons behind why companies are donating to Black cultural institutions? For example, I could imagine companies attempting to “diversity-wash” bad reputations or scandalous events, isomorphism amongst competitors, or anticipated consumer expectations as contributing to corporate philanthropy.*

P. B.: *Black Culture, Inc.* highlights various mechanisms that underlie ethnic philanthropy and sponsorships. One condition that drives companies to give this support is experiencing a “racial image crisis.” For example, Chapter 3, “Racism Rehab,” analyzes a significant gift that Denny’s presented to the NCRM. The NCRM is located in Memphis, TN, at the site where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Denny’s used a seven-figure donation to the museum to help repair its image after being sued for racial discrimination. A desire to appeal to ethnoracial minority consumers also motivates ethnic community support. For instance, Chapter 4, “Cultivating Consumers,” examines Brown & Williamson’s (B&W) sponsorship of the Kool Jazz Festival in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, B&W was one of the biggest tobacco companies in the United States, and they used their sponsorship to cultivate the market for menthol cigarettes in the Black community.

M. L.: *Does the type of industry a corpo-*



ration is in or the assumed political/cultural orientation of their consumers influence whether (or how) corporations donate to Black cultural institutions?

P. B.: Generally, companies with a consumer orientation are more likely to be philanthropic. The specific types of philanthropy that consumer-oriented firms engage in depend partly on the assumed cultural tastes and values of the markets they are pursuing. For example, Chapter 6 in *Black Culture, Inc.*, “Gospel and the Golden Arches,” focuses on the Inspiration Celebration Gospel Tour, a major music event sponsored by McDonald’s. One reason firms trying to appeal to Black consumers engage in community support related to gospel music is because of higher levels of gospel music consumption and religiosity among African Americans.

M. L.: *What factors make particular Black cultural institutions more attractive than others for corporate philanthropy?*

P. B.: Chapter 2 in *Black Culture, Inc.*, “The Racial Return,” investigates corporate giving to the

NMAAHC. Major companies like Walmart, Target, Bank of America, and JPMorgan Chase were founding donors who made seven-figure donations to the museum. The NMAAHC, relative to other Black cultural institutions, is such an appealing organization for companies to support because it is so widely known. If firms seek to project an image to a broad public that they celebrate diversity, a widely known museum, such as the NMAAHC, serves as a more effective signal than a much less known museum, such as a Black museum located in a small town.

M. L.: *I can imagine certain scenarios in which Black cultural institutions might be disincentivized to accept donations from particular corporations. Did you find cases of this in your research? How would you theorize these situations (or lack thereof)?*

P. B.: Just as firms must effectively manage their reputations to survive and thrive, so do cultural institutions and other nonprofits. Accepting gifts from donors viewed as behaving in scandalous ways can compromise the image of nonprofits. Today, this is taking place across the cultural sector as activists protest museums and other organizations that receive donations from individuals and firms in the pharmaceutical, oil and gas, and tobacco industries. Theoretically, we should expect Black cultural nonprofits, like nonprofits more broadly, to weigh the economic benefits of accepting donations from donors in these industries against the reputational costs of taking them. The issue is further complicated for Black nonprofits that have tended to have a smaller donor base than their majority counterparts.

M. L.: *If I remember correctly, your current work explores shifts in Black cultural consumption in the current social context. Could you describe more about what you are working on now and any preliminary findings?*

P. B.: Chapter 6 in *Black Culture, Inc.*, “Branding Diversity,” begins with discussing corporate donations to support Black cultural initiatives in the wake of the 2020 uprisings. One of my current

projects builds on this line of research by investigating social activism and corporate philanthropy. Another new project looks at corporate support of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino (NMAL). In 2020, Congress voted to approve the establishment of NMAL. Estimates are that NMAL will cost \$600 million to build. Companies such as Walmart and Target have already made seven-figure donations towards this effort. Theoretically, I am interested in how these gifts serve as diversity capital for firms. ■



BOOKSHELF: AN INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE CARRUTHERS ON *THE ECONOMY OF PROMISES*

Bruce Carruthers is a professor of sociology at Northwestern University who specializes in historical and comparative sociology, economic sociology, sociology of law, and organizations. Carruthers authored or coauthored *City of Capital: Politics and Markets in the English Financial Revolution* (1996), *Rescuing Business: The Making of Corporate Bankruptcy Law in England and the United States* (1998), *Economy/Society: Markets, Meanings, and Social Structure* (2000), *Bankrupt: Global Lawmaking and Systemic Financial Crisis* (2009), and *Money and Credit: A Sociological Approach* (2010). His latest book, *The Economy of Promises: Trust, Power, and Credit in America*, came out in 2022 from Princeton University Press. He is currently working on several new projects, including a comparative institutional study of long-term decision-making, the adoption of “for-profit” features by U.S. museums, the relationship between CSR and corporate taxes, and the application of artificial intelligence and machine learning to skilled blue-collar work in the machine tool industry. Carruthers’s research has appeared in various journals, including the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Theory and Society*, *European Management Review*, *Socio-Economic Review*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, and *Journal of Comparative Economics*. He has had visiting fellowships at the Russell Sage Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, the Library of Congress, and the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, and received a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.

Gökhan Mülayim, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Boston University, talked to Bruce Carruthers about his new book, *The Economy of Promises: Trust, Power, and Credit in America*.

Gökhan Mülayim: *Let me first congratulate you on the publication of your new book *The Economy of Promises*. Could you please tell us a bit about the story behind this book? What inspired you to go into this field of research?*

Bruce Carruthers: Thanks! I’ve long been interested in financial markets and institutions, which is a bit strange given that neither I nor any of my family ever worked in banking or finance, or had exposure to that sector. My PhD dissertation focused on political conflict in the London stock market in the late-17th Century, and then I moved forward in time and crossed the Atlantic to study credit in the United States. My shift was driven by practical considerations (slogging through 300-year-old Bank of England ledgers is hard work), curiosity about the generality of my findings (how are modern financial markets shaped by social factors?), and also by real-world events (finance became extraordinarily dynamic at the end of the

20th C., and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis reminded sociologists that finance mattered a lot). I had published on some very specific topics, like predatory lending in the early 20th Century, bankruptcy law, money, and the rise of derivatives markets, but realized that only a book-length treatment of credit would allow me to put all the pieces together in one place. I was particularly taken by the fact that so much personal and business credit is now allocated on the basis of standardized ratings and scores; I wondered how such information came to be so important, who created it, and why.

G. M.: *What does it mean to make a promise in the economy of promises?*

B. C.: People give and receive promises. For example, when someone borrows money, or receives credit, they make a promise to their lender to repay. And if they put money into a checking account, they receive from their bank a promise

to repay “on demand.” Similar promises are made by firms, too, and since credit transactions are ubiquitous, virtually all economic actors, individual and corporate, become embedded in webs of promises that they make and accept. As a practical matter, no one accepts or rejects all promises. For example, a bank loan officer who rejected all loan applications would make no loans (and hence earn no profit), but a loan officer who accepted all applications would undoubtedly lose money from all the bad loans they made. So anyone extending credit has to be discerning: lend to the creditworthy, but avoid those who are not creditworthy. The trick is telling the difference between these two groups, and the modern process of evaluating creditworthiness is a deeply social and organizational one. It is also extraordinarily consequential, because who gets access to credit matters. Roscoe Pound once said: “Wealth... is made up largely of promises.” His observation reflects the fact that modern wealth mostly consists of intangible financial assets like stocks, bonds, pension funds, mutual funds, etc. And a financial asset is basically a promise of some future cash flow. Understanding promises is therefore key to understanding patterns of wealth inequality.

G. M.: *The emergence and development of calculative devices, such as credit scores and ratings, and the concomitant transformation of trust from a qualitative notion into a quantitative one occupy a central place in your book. Could you tell us a bit about the role of this transformation in the making of the credit market?*

B. C.: Credit has been around for many centuries, but the roughly two centuries I cover in my book witnessed the rise of a mass credit society in the United States. And mass credit posed a very serious large-scale problem: how to allocate credit to large numbers of geographically dispersed strangers? So long as credit is extended locally, among neighbors or between people linked through mutual social ties, then it is relatively easy to rely on networks and reputations to judge who is, and who is not, trustworthy. But as domestic commerce shifted to a national scale, sellers and lenders were increasingly dealing with borrowers



outside (sometimes far outside) their social networks, people who were largely unknown to them. Scores and ratings provided a new and scalable form of information, applicable to both persons and firms, that offered a crude measure of creditworthiness. It enabled lenders to deal with the uncertainties and information asymmetries that pervade credit markets. Credit ratings were invented to deal with unsecured trade credit, but the idea and method spread to long-term borrowing (bond ratings) and consumer credit (FICO scores), and now they are ubiquitous. Today, the cutting-edge of fintech involves the use of “alternative data” to augment credit scores with information culled from online sources, social media, and other web-based activities. So at the present, credit allocation is governed by a pervasive information infrastructure that (mostly) operates unseen, with very little accountability to anyone, and little regulatory oversight.

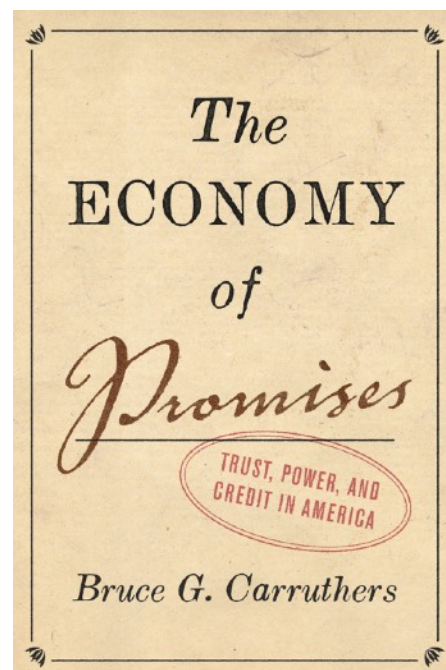
G. M.: *What is the role of failure in the economy of promises? Could you tell us how institutions, regulations, and policies are used to manage the design failures of this economy over the last two centuries?*

B. C.: That is a great question! Failure abounds in a market economy, and it operates at different levels. For fans of capitalism like Milton Friedman, the possibility of failure helps make market economies more efficient because poorly performing firms lose money and eventually go bankrupt and close down. Failure imparts dynamism to capitalism. For both individuals and firms, the inability to repay a loan is one of the most common triggers, so with credit comes insolvency and bankruptcy. But we should never “naturalize” bankruptcy as something akin to simple economic death: It is a deeply conflictual process, shaped by institutional power and producing clear winners and losers. Seniority and security are critical features in this regard. When the federal bankruptcy law was reformed in 2005, for example, credit card companies were big winners because the new law made it much harder for individuals to discharge their credit card debts and get a “fresh start.” Failure arises at higher levels, too, when the existing credit machinery itself fails to measure risk accurately. The global financial crisis of 2008 provided a spectacular example of how private bond-rating agencies systematically overrated subprime mortgage-backed securitizations, giving high AAA ratings to financial securities that were much, much riskier, and which in fact deserved a lower rating. But they weren’t the only ones to fail: Key regulators also blew it. Even Alan Greenspan, the Federal Reserve Chairman and notable Ayn Rand follower, had to admit afterward that he overestimated the ability of self-interested banks to manage their own risks, and that more regulatory oversight was necessary for the financial sector. So following the crisis, the Dodd-Frank Act raised regulatory standards, only to see them weakened again under the Trump administration. Another failure concerns inequitable credit allocation: A credit system that unfairly denies credit to disadvantaged groups is clearly failing to do its job. And, of course, we are still wrestling with that problem today.

G. M.: *How does the economy of promises interact with social and economic inequalities?*

B. C.: There are many such connections. For starters, the basic debtor–creditor relationship is

generally an unequal one: Debtors owe creditors. Debt servitude in the post-bellum South, for example, was a straightforward instrument of domination. The cultural stigma attached to debt stems from the fact and perception that debtors are subordinated to their creditors. But this relationship is dynamic, and sometimes the balance of power flips. Usually lenders decide if they want to lend, but sometimes they lend involuntarily, at the behest of the debtor. If a specific debtor owes a lot to a creditor, such that their default would threaten the solvency of the creditor, then the troubled debtor definitely gains leverage over the creditor. Bankers have long known of this problem (a mini-version of “too big to fail”), and lender handbooks regularly advised not to get in too deep with a single borrower. Another connection concerns unequal access to credit. Credit can be a very useful resource, but not everyone gets it, or on equal terms. The facts of durable racial and gender inequality in credit markets are undeniable. But other disparities have figured prominently in U.S. politics, including region and sector (witness the western agrarian interests that mobilized during the populist era). To view discrimination as chiefly caused by personal animus overlooks the extent to which disparities have been “baked into” the U.S. credit infrastructure. The famous “red-lin-



ing” rating maps that steered insurance and mortgages in real estate markets became part of taken-for-granted organizational paperwork and bureaucratic protocols: They operated regardless of anyone’s feelings. And it means we should be very cautious that fintech’s new algorithmically-based credit platforms will ensure fairness because they don’t involve human decision-makers (how could code be biased?). Such claims should be viewed very skeptically.

G. M.: *I am curious about your thoughts on the future of this economy. Could you tell us a bit about your predictions?*

B. C.: There are several possible futures, but regardless of which one unfolds, the United States will undoubtedly continue to be a credit economy. And I am sure payment systems will continue to use the U.S. dollar (sorry to disappoint the crypto-currency fans out there). One possibility is being explored right now in China with the development of its social credit system. There, the Chinese started with a version of the U.S. FICO-score setup, which uses an individual’s credit record to calculate a single summary credit score, and then they greatly expanded it to incorporate many other types of administrative and market information, and applied the score outside the context of credit (e.g., social credit scores govern access to public transportation, among other things). I remember sitting on a train in China and seeing a sign warning passen-

gers to follow the rules lest their social credit score be lowered. Ultimately, the social credit system is subject to government control and so serves the purposes of the Party in pursuing economic growth and maintaining social control. The full potential for panoptic digital surveillance hasn’t been achieved, but they seem to be pushing in that direction. A parallel but different future is being pursued in the United States, where private fintech firms are busily incorporating “alternative” information (like someone’s online engagement with social media) to develop even more sophisticated credit scoring systems. Frequently they rationalize their activities as a way to achieve more “inclusivity” and to “democratize finance.” Like the Chinese, these firms start with regular credit records, but then they explore (for profit) what happens when other types of “big data” are added. Much of this activity is being pursued ahead of public regulatory agencies, or any type of public accountability, so whether and how private interests should be tempered to protect the public interest remains to be seen. Issues of privacy, cybersecurity, and data ownership also arise. Certainly the reliance on proprietary datasets and algorithms means that few people outside really know what is going on here. Aside from such cutting-edge activity, there are less exotic ways to fashion a better future. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has tried (when it could) to standardize contractual terms so that ordinary consumers can enter into credit transactions without fear of onerous or predatory terms. It would be great to see that work continue. ■

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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 Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey.



Dr. Ladin Bayurgil is a postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven's Center for Sociological Research working on a European Research Council supported project that focuses on platform work across three sectors, gig, care, and creative, and across eight European countries, with a focus on precarity at the continuum between paid and unpaid work. Ladin's work spans urban and economic sociology, sociology of work and occupations, and particularly asks questions around urban precarious labor. Before her position at the KU Leuven, Ladin has received her PhD in Sociology from Boston University.



Meghann Lucy is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. Her interests are in inequality, consumption, economic sociology, cultural sociology, and medical sociology. A recent project examines the roles of overconsumption and divestment in discourses of the self, class, and gender through a case study of "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo." Other research investigates the medicalization of overconsumption or overaccumulation, that is, of hoarding disorder. In this work she evaluates the extent to which socioeconomic status of individuals and neighborhoods influences how cities define, detect, and either treat or punish hoarding behaviors amongst residents.



Ya-Ching Huang is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. Her research interests include economic sociology, cultural sociology, morality, and global health. She received her B.A. in the Interdisciplinary Program of Humanities and Social Sciences from National Tsing Hua University, and her M.A. in Sociology from National Taiwan University. Her previous research focused on Taiwanese pigeon racing, encompassing both the races and illegal gambling on them. She currently studies the production and distribution of cloth masks amid the coronavirus pandemic.



Elif Birced is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Boston University. Her research interests center on economic sociology, sociology of work and occupations, and cultural sociology. In her dissertation, she analyzes how expertise is constructed in platform economies with a particular focus on Youtubers. Using qualitative methods, she seeks to explore how jurisdictional boundaries are determined in the Youtube ecosystem in Turkey. In her previous work, she analyzed economic and political precariousness of academic labor with a particular focus on social scientists at foundation universities in Turkey.