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Note from the editor

Towards a Comparative Economic Sociology

In the last three decades, the focus of economic sociology, in Europe as well as in the U.S., has been the micro-level of market interactions and their embeddedness in institutional and political structures and cultural contexts. The field and network approaches were among the most prominent competing sociological paradigms promising a better understanding of the logic of economic action. They were complemented by approaches that tackled the cognitive and/or cultural dimension of markets, stressing aspects of valuation, justification, and the performativity of economic action. The focal point for many of those strands of economic-sociological thought was the growing rivalry between economic theory and sociology for the interpretation of modern market societies. However, the benefit of raising the level of doubt in regard to rationalist market analysis came at the cost of sharing a common research focus with economists: markets and market interaction on the micro-level as the primary level of analysis, either in a universally theoretical sense or as embedded in its local social or political context. In his seminal article on the embeddedness of markets, Granovetter described the economic sociology perspective as a third way beyond methodological individualism and structural functionalism, claiming that the primary level of analysis should be between individual action and its immediate, "ongoing" social relations (Granovetter 1985: 487). The embeddedness paradigm set economic sociology in Europe and the U.S. on different paths. In Europe, major strands of research concentrated on the cultural and cognitive aspects of markets, turning towards the role of calculation techniques (Caliskan and Callon 2010; Knoll 2015), valuation (Beckert and Aspers 2011b; Aspers 2009; Velthuis 2002; Beunza and Stark 2004), the singularization of products (Karpik 2010), imaginations of the future (Beckert 2016; Deutschmann 2011), as well as economic theory itself (Garcia-Parpet 2007; MacKenzie 2006). In the U.S., foci lay on the interplay between markets and networks (White 2002; White 1993; Burt 1983; Granovetter 1973; White 1981) as well as on the changing organizational structures of firms in reaction to changing national and trans-national market environments (Fligstein 2002; Fligstein 1990; Bartley 2007; Soener 2015). In their empirical work, however, a great deal of these studies focused on single markets or firms, treated as paradigmatic or crucial cases for universal conceptual aspects or focused on certain firms and markets from a longitudinal perspective. Only very rarely do we see empirical work in which *comparative* perspectives on markets or firms or sectors in different countries are opened up (though there are important exceptions: Dobbin 1994; Biernacki 1995). At the same time, there is a vast number of comparative studies in the field of political economy that tackle national differences between firms and markets, but those perspectives only rarely take up the issue of the social or cultural embeddedness of market interaction with its focus on personal relations and cognitions (see important exception: Blyth 2002).

In this issue, which is the final issue of my time as guest editor, I want to hint at potential pathways towards a renewed effort for comparison within the paradigm of New Economic Sociology. This means a re-discovery of or re-connection to classical works in economic sociology and political economy that had looked at firms and market from a comparative point of view. The growing distance between comparative political economy and economic sociology in the last decades is a recent phenomenon that could – and should – be countered in the future.

The roots of comparative economic sociology

Ever since Marx made his claim that the case of England and Great Britain defined an ideal model for all capitalist societies, the issue of different possible pathways to capitalism has been taken up by many macro-oriented sociologists and political economists. Gerschenkron's seminal comparison between economically "backward" countries like Germany and Russia and his claim that backwardness can, under certain social and political circumstances, be a developmental advantage planted the topic at the heart of economic history and analyses of capitalism (1962). Polanyi compared the United Kingdom and continental Europe in their different organizational patterns and historical experience of the working class (1944: 145ff.). The second major root beyond Marx are the comparative works of Max Weber in Economy and Society, whose major emphasis was on the role of cultural and religious structures in bringing about distinct economic orders. Following his interest in the interplay between ideas and economic structures, Bendix described different management ideologies in their interplay with state-market relations in different countries (1956). With the regulationist turn in comparative political economy since the 1970s, however, comparative perspectives to an increasing extent have grown from a more *institutionalist* point of view, with the looming question of which institutional settings are more successful in creating growth, stability, social equality, and progress in an increasingly international environment (Streeck 1992; Aglietta 1987; Gourevitch 1992). At the same time, the debate headed towards a growing recognition of the importance of political science perspectives that stressed material interests, formal rules, collective interest organizations, and (to a lesser degree) parties as primary explanatory factors. Moreover, the primary level of analysis was taken for granted as being the nation state and its distinct political and economic institutional settings. This analytical perspective lingered on even where nation states were seen as struggling and increasingly challenged by trans- and international forms of economic cooperation and competition. In the debate about different "varieties of capitalism," still growing to this day, strongly debated questions have concerned the actor model (rationalist vs. historically multi-dimensional) and the degree of functionalism that should be acceptable for institutional analysis. Much less attention has been paid to the *social and informal structures and regulations* as well as to the *patterns of self-organization within markets* as potential starting points for comparative analysis. Comparative analyses of capitalism did not take up the idea that a comparison of different forms of social self-regulation could complement a comparative analysis of political regulation and governance of capitalist market orders (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995).

Potential research perspectives for a renewed Comparative Economic Sociology

There are three aspects that I would like to stress to outline some potential orientation points for more comparative research in economic sociology. First, market sociology shows that there are potential units of comparison *below* the level of the nation state and its political and formal institutional setting that may be worth comparing. These are different network structures, market orders, and fields that may be compared within or across national economies. Second, interesting paths for research open up if we broaden the concept of *institution* that lies at the heart of comparative political economy towards a more sociological understanding in which an institution may provide action orientation and cognitive and normative patterns *beyond* its formal rule status and juridical validity. Third, if we take seriously the increasing formation of *transnational* firms and organizations, we have to look out for a comparison involving new and larger units of comparison that bridge or employ more than one institutional environment into their activities.

1 Networks, fields, and cultural tool-kits as units of comparison

There are two sociological images of the market that lead to different comparative questions. First, if we follow the network approach, different market structures can be compared according to the density and shape of their inner network structures. Different sectors or even full national economies could be compared with regard to the centrality of their business links, as well as the degree of closure among different groups of employees that may transcend socio-demographic lines. Moreover, the degree of business-state elite contact may be compared across countries (Stark and Vedres 2012; Granovetter 1994). Using White's network approach, it is also possible to compare different markets according to their stability or instability over time, depending on the successful building of stable product niches that avoid deadly competition (White 1981). It should therefore be possible to map the largest markets in one country according to their stability in order to get a better perspective on growth and crisis potentials. Recent research in labor market sociology has shown the dynamics of flexible labor markets in which winner-takes-all effects lead to the centralized accumulation of rent chances and employment opportunities (Lutter 2013; Lutter 2015). Depending on the age of certain markets and the degree of flexibilization of labor in different countries, it should be possible to compare the extent to which these imbalances have developed beyond formal redistribution efforts by the state. This would add a *second layer of social redistribution* that has its origins in the strengthening of social closure and networking efforts that may even become more important if competition is more and more de-regulated.

The field approach in economic sociology (Bourdieu 2005; Fligstein 1996; Fligstein and McAdam 2012) is the closest to the comparative political economy perspective because it very much stresses political coalition-building, institutional rules, and the influence of the state on the structure of different markets or sectors. However, both Bourdieu and Fligstein have a second footing in cultural sociology. They stress the inevitable co-occurrence and intermingling of material and symbolic struggles as well as symbolic forms of power, which are defined in a field-specific way ("illusion"). If we take this into account, it will be possible to compare the same market or sector in different countries as fields that have a nationally specific power resource structure, but also a historically-specific symbolic structure that shapes potential and likely firm strategies as much as their material resources. Especially if we see large global corporations engaging in such different local field contexts, it will be possible to compare the impact of field history between cases and develop ideal-typical classifications of field structures. These classifications would then help us to systematically compare and classify the distinct effects of certain symbolic orders – beyond formal rules and economic resources – on patterns of economic interaction (Malets 2011).

In the last decade, many scholars have worked on the problem of economic value, valuation, and price formation as well as the attribution of "worthiness" to different forms of economic behavior (Beckert and Aspers 2011a; Stark and Beunza 2009; Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). Markets are culturally embedded in valuation, and new or morally problematic products depend on their successful social legitimation (Lamont and Thévenot 2013; Münnich 2016; Zelizer 1992; Zelizer 1994). Of course, this opens space for a cultural-comparative perspective of economic phenomena, for example as nation-specific "cultural repertoires" (Lamont and Thévenot 2013: 8) of justification and valuation. In different national contexts there will often be specific cultural "tool-kits" (Swidler 1986) that are more likely to be used by some groups of economic actors than others, in order to define prices and legitimate economic practices and strategies. Therefore, the many studies on the pricing process for individual products, which have often concentrated on doubting the universal applicability of the economic model of fixed preferences and price-building in markets, could be complemented by more comparative studies. In the field of special products, such as wine, art, football players, and financial products, these studies could map out the particular structure of frames, experts, and institutions that define worth in one sector or economy in comparison to others. A *variety of price formation regimes* with national dominant valuation patterns across different markets could be defined for different capitalist market economies. Similarly, comparative economic sociology could examine the different cultural and discursive mechanisms by which distinct imaginations of the future are created for processes of investment or innovation in different cultural contexts (Beckert 2016; Deutschmann 2011).

In all three cases, comparing networks, fields, or cultural tool-kits of valuation, a comparative perspective would model and systematically compare social structures or interaction patterns *beyond* the institutional order of a market economy as the unit of analysis. This may be done within a country or across countries – and perhaps a combination of both approaches would be the most interesting perspective. Eventually, it would also be possible to compare the *formal* institutional structure of different varieties of production and distribution regimes to the more *informal* social-structural, symbolic, and discursive forms of market regulation, as well as looking for interdependencies between network, fields, and rule structures.

2 Institutions as patterns of action orientation beyond formal rules

The varieties-of-capitalism debate has been strongly driven by the on-going debate between historical and rational choice institutionalists (Thelen and Mahoney 2015; Thelen 1999). Even though the two paradigms disagree about the role of functionality for sociological explanations and follow different concepts of causality, most of the time both approaches equally treat institutions as formal or informal rules imposed upon economic action in different markets or fields by the state or other formal organizations. However, especially scholars with a background in organizational sociology and sociological neo-institutionalism have repeatedly pointed towards the normative and cognitive patterns by which the institutions of market regulation shape action *beyond* rule setting and sanctions (Dobbin 1994; Fligstein 1990; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). State-market relations of the past shape how new entrepreneurial and administrative behavior in new economic fields will be structured in the present. Institutions such as property rights or contract law will be augmented by symbolic aspects, for example informal understandings of legitimate forms of exchange, labor organization, or profit seeking (Salais 2011; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Münnich 2011). Institutions contribute to the legitimation and power of certain economic and political ideas (Hall 1989) and provide certain worldviews with a higher degree of cognitive and normative influence on future institutional pathways. Therefore, it will be necessary to go beyond the classical "rules and function" perspective of VoC and ask about the cultural dimension of production regimes and different national modes of accumulation (Sum and Jessop 2014; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

There are some important comparative studies that are concerned with the cultural dimension of economic institutions, such as labor regulation and organization (Biernacki 1995) or the cultural-normative aspects of inheritance law (Beckert 2007). Still, there is a great potential for interesting *comparative* studies on the cultural side of contracts, exchange rules, and firm structures. A promising perspective could be gained here by bringing together institutional analysis with the French *économie des conventions* and their sociology of justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Instead of plotting different empirical patterns of justification on the map of *universal* worlds of justification, a comparative perspective would stress the role of historically evolving institutions in different countries or sectors in the justification efforts of the actors involved. In this way, a cultural-comparative institutional analysis could be reached that adds the sociological aspect of institutions as cognitive and normative patterns without losing the perspective that institutions are subject to constant struggle and reform effort by interest-seeking actors, which leads to different (economic-)political cultures in different markets or market economies. Mark Blyth has argued that another open door for the cultural side of institutions can be found in the insight that economic outcomes and dynamics are uncertain (Blyth 2002: 32). Ideas help define the situation for economic action as well as for institution-building or reform efforts in market regulation. Therefore, institutional change must be shaped by national or sectoral "political" cultures, a comparison of which could be helpful in understanding why in a certain country or sector, specific institutional market rules and organizational structures take hold much more easily than others, or have a higher degree of legitimation or plausibility to market actors than others (Dobbin 1994: 228). These maps of typical "economic understanding or plausibility" or clusters of economic ideas within one production regime could be distinguished and compared as symbolic patterns surrounding institutional regimes.

3 Trans-national organizations as new regulatory "regimes"

A third perspective for comparative economic sociology is, again, centered on a changed unit of comparative analysis. Trans-national corporations and economic organizations dominate a good deal of economic life in our globalized capitalist world. While for classical comparative research on firm structures from Powell to Bendix the nation-state was a typical background dimension of comparison, this cannot be assumed as easily today anymore. Therefore, it would be interesting to see a systematic comparison of global corporations or economic organizations that exceed one nation-state or, as they very often do, bridging different national institutional settings in their actions. Here we could look for typical organizational structures, patterns of division of labor, or managerial strategies that differ between different ideal-typical *groups* of global corporations. They may sometimes follow sectoral lines, but they may sometimes also be shaped by "home" institutions that linger on as corporate cultures even after the firm has left the formal sphere of those home institutions (Heijltjes and Quack 2012). Such landscapes of "recombined national varieties" (154) could provide a promising field for comparison on a supra-national level. They may also be discussed together with international trade agreements, arbitrary courts, and clashing law cultures, because contemporary trans-national institution building is not a political question in the classical sense. Market regulation here is very often legislative action by *lawyers and managers* who could be subject to comparative theorizing beyond classical elite sociology. Moreover, a closer encounter between economic sociologists and international political economists could also help us to detect institutional patterns and recurring types of *international value chain organization* between different firms that very often are also shaped by shared standards of valuation and (often soft) mutual institutional regulation.

New apples and oranges in Economic Sociology

In a nutshell, the conceptual insights that New Economic Sociology has provided about market interaction, firm structures, field logics, networks, and cultural embeddedness call for more systematic comparison beyond institutional rules in two ways. First, it approaches comparative political economy and varieties-of-capitalism analyses with systematic differences on the most relevant levels of economic organization. Market and firm types, typical field structures, and clustered repertoires of cognition and valuation can be units of analysis for a comparative economic sociology. They may be compared within one nation, across nations, or as trans-national entities themselves. Second, we could follow up on what many economic sociologist have shown in their work, which is that institutional rules have a deeper meaning for economic action and interaction in markets that goes beyond sanctioning power and regulation. If we do this we will be able to develop a cultural-comparative economic sociology that treats economic actors as rationally oriented but at the same time oriented along the cognitive and normative lines shaped by historically grown institutions. This would open up a perspective that puts emphasis on the idea that markets have *two layers of structuration* that too often are separated in different research strands that concentrate either on "regulation" (formal state rules and collective organizations) or on "embeddedness" (informal social relations and shared patterns of knowledge and valuation). Both structural traits of markets could be subjected to systematic and methodologically sophisticated comparison. This is nothing new in economic sociology, for in classical historical-comparative works on economic development these two sides were naturally integrated. We could re-connect more to this tradition in contemporary economic sociology while we today know so much more about market structures and interaction dynamics on the micro level than those classic studies could.

The two contributions in this issue stress the importance of comparison in economic sociological research. *Martin Bühler and Bettina Heintz* remind us that the instrument of comparison is not only a scientific method but also, in and of itself, a pre-condition for the functioning of modern markets. Describing the standardization and categorization of different sorts and qualities of grain is described as an important aspect of establishing markets that span different localities and make a system of prices and trade possible. They describe comparison as a process of constituting both a common principle for the goods or services compared and a definition of relevant and measurable differences. Beyond its empirical and theoretical value, the article also reminds us how thoroughly the establishment of categories and typification for comparison are the pre-condition for inter-weaving hitherto unlinked concepts. In the second article, *Sebastian Kohl, Alexander Dobeson, and Barbara Brandl* present a historical-comparative institutionalist perspective on different regimes of agrarian capitalism, exemplified in a comparison of the historical and present agrarian industries in Germany and the U.S. Their argument expands the VoC debate into a sector that is under-researched both by contemporary political economy and by economic sociology. However, they do not simply apply the comparative political economy framework, but rather broaden their perspective in two ways. (1) They put emphasis on the importance of longitudinal perspectives and long waves of institutionalization and (2) they analyze agrarian structures in their relationship with other institutional fields, especially financial markets and distinct systems of knowledge transfer. The two contributions in this issue round out my guest editorship of the EESN, in which the focus was on capitalism, globalization, and comparison. I very much hope that these three issues, which I have been honored to oversee as a guest editor, have provided a small contribution to the larger quest of intensifying the "re-embedding" of market sociology into the wider context of macro-sociological debates and concepts.

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Seen But Not Noticed. The Role of Comparisons in Economic Sociology

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1 Introduction

Comparisons are an essential operation of market activity: every market exchange is based on a comparative evaluation of goods and runs into problems when goods are considered as incomparable or singular.**1** To sell a product, producers must distinguish it from other comparable products, and to decide on buying it, consumers have to be able to assess its quality in relation to other goods.**2** Only when the product properties are considered as characteristics that exist independently from the judgment of the participants, will market exchanges run smoothly. Yet as Callon et al. (2002) and others have shown, the assumed objectivity is not naturally given but the result of a process of social construction that is no longer recognized as such. If such objectified comparative criteria are lacking, assessing the quality of goods becomes problematic (for an overview, see Beckert and Aspers 2011; Beckert and Musselin 2013a).

We assume that quality uncertainty is above all a problem of failed comparisons. It arises when the comparative criteria are ambiguous or controversial or when there are no procedures and techniques for applying the criteria to the individual case. We distinguish five constellations that may lead to quality uncertainty: 1. *The problem of classification*: Quality uncertainty may emerge when it is difficult to decide whether a product falls into an established category or when categories are fuzzy (e.g., Hsu, Hannan, and Koçak 2009). 2. *The problem of novelty*: Similar problems arise when comparative criteria are not yet available because the product has only recently been introduced in the market (e.g., Rao 1994). 3. *The problem of singularity*: The same applies to products whose value is difficult to ascertain because they are considered to be unique or "singular" (e.g., Karpik 2010). 4. *Experience goods*: Quality uncertainty may also occur when the value of a good or a service can be assessed only by using or consuming it (e.g., Kovács and Sharkey 2014). 5. *Social goods*: Finally, quality uncertainties arise when the worth of a good depends largely on the value it has for other consumers (e.g., Zuckerman 1999). In all other cases – in what are referred to as "standard markets" – the problem of quality uncertainty is at least temporarily solved.

Although market processes are essentially comparative processes, the term "comparison" is only incidentally used and even less clearly defined. More frequently employed is the concept of "commensuration": "Commensuration is the expression or measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric.... Commensuration transforms *qualities into quantities*, difference into magnitude" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 315-316, authors' emphasis). Yet the concept of commensuration is too narrow to capture the meaning of comparisons. Every evaluation presupposes that the objects to be evaluated are seen as comparable, but not every comparison can be equated with quantification. To identify the quality of different wines, no measurement is needed but it is nevertheless possible to rank wine according to certain evaluative criteria. "Comparison" is, in other words, more general than "commensuration." It enables us to understand quantification as a special case in the broader process of making things comparable. For this reason, we propose that evaluation processes be considered primarily as comparative processes and to ask only in a second step whether the comparison is based on measurement.

In the following, we develop this argument in more detail. In section 2, we propose a definition of comparison and illustrate its suitability by referring to studies on the introduction of new product categories and on the evaluation of goods. In the third section, we test the productivity of this perspective using the example of grain markets which are considered the epitome of a standard market. We demonstrate that the standardization and the subsequent globalization of the grain market in the nineteenth century depended on the solution of the comparative problems that earlier grain markets were confronted with. Finally, we summarize our arguments and draw some conclusions.

2 What are comparisons?

Comparisons are a constitutive element of social order. Markets are based on a comparative evaluation of the quality of goods and run into problems when products or services are deemed incomparable or unique. Similarly, comparisons are also essential for stratification. Actors define their position in the social space in comparison to the positions occupied by other actors and make their positions visible through practices of cultural distinction (Bourdieu 1984). Even globalization rests on comparative practices. Globalization is usually defined as an increase in structural ties (see, e.g., Guillen 2001) but it is also caused by worldwide comparisons that link units formerly not considered as being connected (Heintz and Werron 2011). International university rankings are a well-known example for this globalization from comparisons.

Today, comparisons are a ubiquitous phenomenon. States are compared according to their debt ratio, employees with respect to their performance, and products and services in terms of their quality and price. Whether buying a car or selecting a wine, choosing a university or granting a loan, all these decisions presuppose comparisons and require comparative information. But, despite the ubiquity of comparisons in everyday life, they have rarely been focused on. Certainly, comparisons are widely discussed in sociology, but mostly as a *scientific method*, not as a social phenomenon in *its own right*.**3**

What are comparisons? What do we do when we compare laptops, politicians, or holiday destinations? Comparisons are, generally speaking, cognitive tools that enable us to observe entities and performances according to their differences or similarities (Heintz 2016). Typical comparative statements are, for instance, "she is taller than her brother", or "candidate A and candidate B are equally well suited to our firm". To make such a statement two operations are needed.

First, to compare entities we have to conceive them as comparable, i.e., as belonging to the same *category*. To take the example above, the entities have to be seen as an element of the category "sibling" or "applicant." Whether or not different entities are regarded as being categorically equal, is not based on their inherent characteristics but is historically contingent. Phenomena that historically have been considered as lacking any commonality may later be judged as belonging to the same category.

Second, comparing requires *comparative criteria*, procedures, and techniques to enable us to observe the differences or similarities between the units regarded as comparable. For example, to compare and rank universities you need comparative criteria such as scientific reputation, external funding, or student to faculty ratio, as well as measurement methods to determine the academic excellence of each university.

However, comparisons are not only a technique for observing differences, they also create *"cultural linkages"* (Strang and Meyer 1993) between the units compared. By observing entities according to a common comparative criterion, comparisons establish connections between entities that may not previously have been considered as related. The history of the grain market is a good example of this relational quality of comparisons (see in more detail section 3). In the eighteenth century, grain markets were still a strictly local affair. As the comparative criteria and measures varied from place to place, every local market had its own way of assessing the quality of grain. For merchants abroad, it was not feasible to compare offers across different marketplaces.**4** Only with the development of standardized criteria and measuring techniques did it became possible to link the offers from various marketplaces and to evaluate them against each other. This development, together with the invention of the telegraph in the 1850s allowing rapid transmission of information, led to globally interrelated marketplaces.

Thus, comparing includes two steps that are empirically interwoven but should be distinguished analytically. First, entities, whether physical objects, goods, services, or social actors, have to be considered as comparable, that is, as belonging to the same category. Only then does it make sense to observe them according to their differences or similarities. This requires, second, a comparative criterion – a *tertium comparationis* – to observe the differences or similarities between the units regarded as comparable. The operation of comparison establishes linkages between the units compared that may beforehand not have been perceived.

The usefulness of a precise definition of comparison can be illustrated with two research areas in market sociology: the emergence of new product categories and the valuation of goods. Both are particularly well suited to illustrating the interplay between the two processes we have distinguished.

Making up goods. The problems firms face when they introduce a new product or product category illustrate that every comparison presupposes a prior categorization. A new product is usually categorically ambiguous and lacks a clear identity. To become successful in the market, it must acquire a distinctive meaning that separates it from adjacent products: the similarities between its elements must be deemed more significant than the differences. In his seminal article on categorization, Eviatar Zerubavel (1996) called these two sides of categorization "splitting" and "lumping". "Whereas lumping involves overlooking differences within mental clusters, splitting entails widening the perceived gap between them. Thus, while playing down intracluster mental differences, we also exaggerate intercluster ones" (Zerubavel 1996, 424).

If this process of sensemaking and distinction fails, comparisons, and therefore evaluations, become difficult or even impossible. The connection between categorization or classification and evaluation is highlighted by a number of studies investigating the problems of introducing new products and the strategies adopted to solve those problems. Examples are the invention of the "automobile" at the end of the nineteenth century (Rao 1994), the introduction of the "minivan" in the 1980s (Rosa et al. 1999), the creation of "light cigarettes" (Hsu and Grodal 2015), or the emergence of "satellite radio" (Navis and Glenn 2010) as new product categories. How can we evaluate a product that does not easily fit into established categories? And how to make sense of a good that has properties nobody has known before?

The microwave is a case in point (Ormrod 1994). Originally, it was launched as a "toy for the boy" and sold in electronics departments as a "brown good." This kind of marketing entailed uncertainties for consumers: what were they to make of a device that was sold in the electronics department and looked like an amplifier but was advertised as a new kind of oven? Only after the microwave was launched as "white good" and presented in the home appliance departments did it acquire a fixed identity and become a market success. This example illustrates what Zuckerman (1999) referred to as "categorical imperative." To compare and evaluate the quality of goods they first have to be categorized. If the categorization fails, the goods violate the "categorical imperative" and risk not being competitive in the market.

Yet even when a product has acquired a clear identity there may still be the problem of assessing whether it fits into a specific category. For instance, fair trade coffee is indisputably "coffee" but how can we be sure that it is traded according to fair trade standards and therefore belongs to the category of fairly traded coffee (Gourevitch 2011)? That means, a distinctive identity is not enough. Additionally, transparent indicators must be available to help the consumer decide whether the products at hand belong to a common category or not.

Valuing goods. Categorization is only the first step. Once products are considered to be part of a common category it is possible to compare and evaluate them (for a similar distinction, see Phillips and Zuckerman 2001, 383; Beckert and Musselin 2013b, 2-4). To assess quality differences, you need comparative criteria as well as procedures and techniques to determine the specific quality of an individual product. To compare the suitability of job applicants it has to be specified what "qualification" means for the advertised position and how to judge whether an applicant matches the criteria (Rivera 2015). In standard cases the evaluation is easily made. Problems arise when the comparative criteria are vague or not generally accepted or when no clear-cut practices exist to make these criteria operational and applicable to the singular case. Well-known examples are the decision-making problems faced by assessment committees in architectural competitions (Kreiner 2012) or the problems that arise when a previously unknown product enters the market (Rao 1994). It is important to note that these uncertainty problems are not caused by the specific properties of the product but stem from the lack of precise comparative criteria and procedures (see next section for more detail).

Hence, in order to overcome the problem of quality uncertainty, shared comparative criteria and evaluation techniques are needed. Third parties – critics, public authorities, specialized journals, and popular media – play a decisive role in this regard: they are the ones who specify the evaluative criteria and also often carry out the evaluations and make them publicly available (see Bühler and Werron 2014).**5** Today, rankings, ratings, reviews, test reports, quality labels and certifications, are the most prominent forms of "judgment devices" (Karpik 2010, chap. 5). They offer either comparative judgments (rankings and ratings, see Heintz 2018) or set a standard that a product has to meet to qualify for "high quality" (quality labels and certifications).

In the next section, we will expand on our considerations on the significance of comparisons using the history of the grain market as an example. We will show that the concept of comparison helps us to understand how the grain market changed from local markets of singularities in the eighteenth century to a global standard market during the nineteenth century.

3 From singularities to standards: grain markets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

The contemporary grain market is a classic case of a standard market. Buyers and sellers use standardized evaluative criteria and measures to assess the quality of grain. The properties that the quality assessments "detect" are deemed to be inherent characteristics that exist irrespective of the market participants' judgments (Aspers 2009, 114-116). There appears to be no quality uncertainty at all. However, as Callon et al. (2002) have shown, quality uncertainty is intrinsic to all markets, even to typical standard markets like grain or cotton markets (Beckert 2014, 207-212). Standard and singular goods do not differ according to their inherent characteristics as Karpik (2010) seems to assume but with regard to their taken-for-grantedness. For Callon et al. (2002), the seemingly objective properties of a product are established in a collective process of social construction through which qualities are attributed and (temporarily) stabilized. That a car, for instance, is evaluated with regard to its environmental impact, its fuel consumption, and its motor power is not naturally given but the outcome of a social and often highly controversial process that fixes the (selective) attributes a high-quality car has to have. Which attributes are established as defining characteristics and whether they are seen as self-evident attributes depends largely on the procedures available for assessing the quality of goods.

The market for grain is a particularly good example to show how this process of objectivation works (for more detail, see Bühler 2017). At the end of eighteenth century, grain still exhibited all the properties that Karpik (2010, 10-13) attributes to singular goods: multidimensionality, quality uncertainty, and incommensurability. However, by the end of the nineteenth century this had fundamentally changed. Grain had become a standard product with supposedly objective properties. On the following pages, we describe how this transformation took place and what obstacles had to be overcome. We will show that one of the main problems was the lack of widely shared evaluative criteria and procedures to assess the quality of grain.

In 1834, a parliamentary enquiry into the *Sale of Corn* in England arrived at four aspects that were required to reliably determine and compare grain offers: quality, quantity, condition, and current prices (House of Commons 1834, viii–ix). Yet this neat list underestimates the practical problems faced by market participants when comparing different offers. The list was the outcome of a meticulous interrogation of different market actors and rather a request for future policies than a description of current practices.

Even in the 1830s, there were still neither evaluative criteria that transcended the local marketplace nor shared procedures to measure the properties of grain "objectively." Indicators for assessing quality were multidimensional and the quality and condition of grain had to be examined personally by the buyer, relying largely on his sensual experience of the grain at hand.

In view of this situation, how was quality assessed? For buyers, high quality was primarily indicated by dryness, weight and color. Generally, the drier, heavier and lighter the grain was, the more and the better flour it would supposedly yield. However, these properties did not provide information about the condition of the grain. A wet and dirty sack of wheat was heavier than a dry and clean one, and damp grain clogged the millstones. Therefore, buyers used additional criteria, particularly cleanliness and purity, to assess the quality of grain. High-quality grain should be free from other kinds of grain and contaminants such as stones or dirt and also devoid of defects such as mold or insect damage. An observer of grain markets at the time reports that the highest qualities were "light yellow or grayish with an almost translucent appearance, slightly convex with a shallow groove, and thin-shelled but hard, weighty, and dry," whereas lower quality wheat "seemed dirty, was somewhat speckled, lacked vivacity, and was longer, thinner, lighter, and burdened with an extremely thick seedcoat that indicated a superabundance of bran" (cit. Kaplan 1984, 52).

But how are vivacity, dampness, or cleanliness reliably determined? An experienced corn merchant told the members of the parliamentary enquiry that one evaluated grain "[b]y looking at it, by smelling it, and by handling it" (House of Commons 1834, 118). In the absence of unambiguous indicators and uniform procedures to identify different wheat qualities, market participants had to use their senses and bodily knowledge to examine and compare grain offers. Prospective buyers weighed a handful of grains in their hands, tasted and chewed them, and listened to the "ring" as they tossed them back into the sack. A "fruity taste" which "charmed the tongue" and an "agreeable odor" hinted at good qualities and the absence of insect infestation or diseases (Kaplan 1984, 52). The procedures to evaluate the quality of grain were by no means neatly divisible, but were rather intermingled. By handling and tasting, buyers simultaneously observed "vivacity" and "convexity" as well as dampness. Each market participant had his own techniques for assessing the quality and condition of grain and the quality of his judgment depended essentially on his personal experience and practical knowledge.

The only seemingly objective criterion was density, indicated by the weight per given volume, or what was referred to as "natural weight" (Kaplan 1984, 52; Velkar 2012, 75, 201-208). For assessing the natural weight, the grain was poured into a measuring vessel, for example a "bushel," and weighed with a set of scales. The higher the weight of the bushel, the higher the quality of the grain was expected to be. Yet the use of natural weight was problematic in at least two regards: not all marketplaces used natural weight measurements. Generally, only one measure was used, either volume or weight. It was therefore only possible to specify the quantity of the grain, but not its quality. Further, and even more importantly, the measures were not yet standardized. Although the authorities repeatedly tried to homogenize measures, local practices still persisted (Sheldon 1996). Arthur Young, an observer of grain markets in England and on the continent, reports in the late 1780s that "[t]he infinite perplexity of the measures exceeds all comprehension…. They differ not only in every province, but in every district, and almost in every town" (cit. Kaplan 1984, 87). Therefore, market participants could only capture the relative quality of local offers but could not compare them across different marketplaces.

In sum, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, grain markets were geographically limited and still very local affairs. To buy and sell grain market participants had to be physically present at the same place and the same time. As they could not yet draw on objectified evaluative criteria and delocalized measurement techniques, they had to assess the quality of grain by tasting and handling it and by relying on their eyes and ears. The comparative criteria and measures they used neither spanned different marketplaces nor were they shared among all market participants. Instead, each market actor had to draw his own conclusions based on his sensory examinations of the products at hand. This is the main reason why grain markets of the late eighteenth century were more similar to a market of singularities than to the standard market they became during the nineteenth century. Grain was not a "singular good" because of its specific properties but because translocal and shared devices to assess grain qualities were not yet available.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the *Board of Trade of Chicago*, today one of the major futures and options markets, but originally an association to promote business in Chicago, issued quality classes for grain that were permitted in the city. Wheat, for example, was divided into three classes: "white winter wheat," "red winter wheat," and "spring." Soon, these classes proved to be insufficient because they did not distinguish between dirty or sprouting grain and cleaned and dry grain. Accordingly, the board refined the initial quality classes. The quality class "spring," for example, was subdivided into "No. 1 Spring," "No. 2 Spring," and "rejected spring" (Cronon 1990, 116-118). To be classed as "No. 1 Spring," the highest quality spring wheat, "[t]he berry [had] to be plump, well cleaned, free from other grains, and to weigh not less than 59 lbs. to the measured bushel." The next quality, "No. 2 Spring," had "[t]o be sound, but not clean enough for No. 1, and to weigh not less than 56 lbs. to the measured bushel." The last quality, "rejected spring," encompassed "[a]ll unsound, unmerchantable Spring Wheat, and [had] to weigh not less than 45 lbs. to the measured bushel" (Chicago Board of Trade 1860, 13). The establishment of quality classes was a departure from earlier ways of evaluating grain. While, in the eighteenth century, the evaluation relied on personal experience, since the mid-nineteenth century, grain merchants have been able to use conventionalized criteria and unambiguous indicators to describe the quality of wheat offers. Personal evaluation was relegated to expert grain inspectors, and corn trade associations appointed standardizing committees which both utilized technical devices and "objective" procedures to grade grain. This development enabled absent merchants to compare various offers from foreign places and to choose the one that suited them and their customers best. In the course of this process, grain transformed from a "singular good" to a homogeneous product divided into different quality classes.

With the invention of quality classes based on common comparative criteria and distinctive indicators, market actors, especially in the United States but also in the United Kingdom, responded to problems arising from cheaper modes of transportation, new grain storage facilities, and the influx of increasing amounts of grain. In the United States, the invention of quality classes was a reaction to railway transport and steam-powered silos, known as "grain elevators" (for an account of the U.S. case, see Cronon 1991, 97–147; Hill 1990; Velkar 2012, 171-217). To utilize all available storage space in the elevators and to shorten the time needed to haul grain into the freight cars, grain from different farmers was poured into single elevator bins. This practice was highly problematic because, by mixing grain from different producers, individual characteristics were lost. Farmers were afraid of lower returns, millers of decreasing quality, and merchants of losing reputation and profit. As a reaction, the *Board of Trade of Chicago* issued standardized criteria to evaluate grain, particularly wheat, and specified indicators.

At first glance, the criteria to evaluate grain seem quite similar to the ones used in the eighteenth century: time of sowing, color, cleanliness, purity, and weight-per-volume requirements. So how did they differ from earlier evaluations of grain quality? First, only a limited number of evaluative criteria were specified and they were published on behalf of all interested parties. Quality evaluation was no longer left to the multidimensional sensual evaluation of buyers but became partially standardized. Second, the Board of Trade of Chicago fixed a set of distinctive indicators to make the criteria operational. Buyers no longer had to ponder whether the grain was "translucent," "light yellow," or "grayish." Just "white" or "red" and the time of sowing –"winter" or "spring" – was sufficient. Vague criteria such as "vividness," "convexity," or "shallowness of groove" were not included in the definitions.

The difference between the United States and England was primarily in the determination and usage of grain categories. While, in the United States, the criteria were fixed in advance and without checking the seasonal harvest beforehand, in England the grain was evaluated after delivery. This was done by using what were known as "standard samples" (for an account of the English case, see Fuchs 1890; Velkar 2012, 171-217). Special committees compiled these samples and measured them. The resulting samples and the corresponding weights were valid for a certain period of time, e.g., a few weeks or until the next harvest. At the turn of the century, the London *Corn Trade Association* assembled samples for all grain delivered to Great Britain and the continent (Forrester 1931, 202).

Nevertheless, in London as well as in Chicago, certain criteria still depended on personal evaluation. "Plumpness" and "cleanliness," for instance, were still not measurable but had to be determined by sensory evaluation. Now, however, potential buyers did not evaluate the grain offers themselves. Elected members of corn trade associations defined the quality of "standard samples" and grain inspectors graded grain into the quality classes when it was delivered to the elevators.**6** Both were certified, the one through election, the other through training and official certification (Cronon 1991, 118-119). Because they were seen as disinterested experts, led by an "ethic of personal renunciation" (Porter 1995, 85), their judgments were considered objective.

The idea of being able to objectively determine grain quality was reinforced by the invention of standardized measuring instruments in the second half of the nineteenth century. While, in the eighteenth century, the measured weight varied depending on whether grain was poured into the vessels from shoulder- or hip-height or whether the measure was shaken or "heaped" (see Kula 1986, 44-49; Velkar 2012, 203), in the nineteenth century, this problem was solved by the introduction of technical instruments. The weighing process was automated and the elevator operator had simply to read the scales, open the chute, and let the grain flow into the appropriate bin (Cronon 1990, 111). Since the late nineteenth century, additional instruments and measuring methods have been invented, e.g., the "grain trier" and the "Boerner divider" to draw standardized samples, the "Emerson wild oat kicker" to assess the purity of wheat, or the "Brown-Duvel moisture tester" and the "Tag-Heppenstall meter" to determine dampness. The "Tag" measured the flow of electricity through the tested grain and, using conversion charts, the measurements were interpreted as moisture content (Hill 1990, 229-235). These technical instruments represent a paradigmatic case of producing "mechanical objectivity" and they even worked as "inscription devices" (Latour 1988) aimed at the elimination of personal judgment and the inescapable subjectivity of human observation (Daston and Galison 1992; Porter 1995, 47-48). The goal was a measurement that was completely decoupled from any personal intervention.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of whether standardized categories and technical instruments were appropriate to evaluate grain, was settled. The challenge was now how to make them more accurate and more suited to the different needs of the heterogeneous actors in the grain market (Hill 1990, 136-7, 185-250; Velkar 2012, 210-215). Merchants preferred fewer criteria and broader quality ranges so that various grains fitted into the classes. For quality-sensitive buyers such as millers or bakers, on the other hand, the narrower the classes, the better it suited their purpose. Sometimes the controversies could be settled rapidly but sometimes they endured for a considerable time. Even today, there are no globally standardized quality classes, and regulations for evaluating grain quality differ from region to region. Yet due to the standardization of the evaluation process, regional criteria and techniques are convertible, enabling the comparison of various grain offers from different origins.

Although scientists and UN organizations tried to agree upon internationally homogeneous quality classes, this has not been accomplished to this day. There are still different quality categories in use and the regulations for evaluating grain quality differ from region to region (Hill 1990, 97-98, 185-250, 272-275; Velkar 2012, 194-215). Yet, since the nineteenth century, merchants' handbooks such as, for example, Rudolf Sonndorfers ([1880] 1882) *Usancen und Paritäten des Getreidehandels im Weltverkehre* have listed the different criteria and indicators and explained how to convert them. These conversion tables enabled prospective buyers to translate different quality measures and to compare them against each other.

To sum up, the standardization of evaluative criteria and their interconvertibility were crucial prerequisites for global grain markets. Yet the solution of the comparative problems the early grain markets faced was of course not the only reason for the emergence of a globalized grain market. Cheaper and more reliable transport and swifter communication due to the electric telegraph and the laying of submarine cables were additional preconditions (Bühler 2017, chap. 6). Moreover, and driven by these transformations, market participants' interpretation of their situation changed fundamentally. The market was now seen as an anonymous affair where potential competitors – "real or imaginary" (Rothstein 1960, 408) – could be located anywhere on the planet. For submitting or evaluating offers, the market participants could now turn to the latest information from globally observed "world marketplaces" such as Chicago or New York. The fluctuations on these marketplaces indicated the existence of a global and anonymous market public that had to be taken into account before making the decision about the price at which one should offer or buy grain.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to demonstrate that a precisely defined concept of comparison is a *sine qua non* for the sociology of markets. In the first section, we proposed a definition of comparison and illustrated its explanatory power using two well-known examples from economic sociology. In the second section, we turned to the history of the grain market. We showed that the solution to the comparative problems faced by the traders and sellers of grain in the eighteenth century was an indispensable prerequisite for the globalization of those markets. These problems principally stemmed from the absence of comparative criteria and measurement techniques that could be used across different marketplaces. To evaluate the quality of grain, the prospective buyers had to personally examine the grain offered by tasting, smelling, and handling it and the few measurement instruments available at that time, primarily scales and standardized vessels, varied from place to place. Only with the standardization of the evaluative criteria, the homogenization of measures, and the invention of new measurement techniques did it become possible to overcome the quality uncertainties of the early grain markets.

The endemic quality uncertainty of the early grain markets is the reason why we argued that these markets were more similar to a market of singularities than to the standard market it became later. This thesis is in accordance with the perspective of Callon et al. (2002) but differs from Karpik's (2010, 30) view that singular goods are "an irreducible reality," a separate kind of product. Yet, the "naturalness" of ascribing quality to certain products, and of denying it to others, has nothing to do with a difference in their intrinsic characteristics but is a result of a consensus that was reached after long controversies and instabilities. Today, we are no longer concerned with the quality uncertainty of milk or oats, for example, but in the past, milk or oats may have been "singular goods" whose characteristics were far from taken-for-granted and where it had not yet been decided which properties were the most relevant quality indicators.

Our assumption that comparisons are a decisive factor in understanding market dynamics seems trivial. However, if we examine the plethora of studies that deal with market uncertainties, it appears less so. Although the significance of comparisons is often implicitly assumed, "comparison" is only rarely used as a theoretical term. Comparing seems to be so common and self-evident that nobody cares to think about what comparisons are and how to define them. If one makes the effort to think about comparisons in a more analytical way, however, one quickly realizes that comparing is a very complex process, and certainly more complex than categorization or compiling a list (Heintz 2016, 308-309). Comparing involves two steps that are interlocked. First, to compare, the entities have to be considered as belonging to the same category. The "lumping" of objects into the same category is far from natural. It is not at all self-evident neither for business nor biological contexts to subsume wheat, barley, oats, or quinoa under the same category of "grains". Yet categorization is not enough. In a second step, comparing requires comparative criteria to assess the differences or similarities. These two operations are involved in every market exchange but are generally not analytically distinguished. Research that addresses the classification of products focuses on the first element, while studies that examine the evaluation of goods bring the second step to the fore. If one considers these steps as two sides of the same comparative process, the two research areas can be empirically linked more easily and, at the same time, can be analytically distinguished in a more precise manner.

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Endnotes

1We focus on the comparative evaluation of qualities, not prices. For the difference between "valuation" and "pricing," see Aspers and Beckert (2011, 27-32).

2We use the terms "product" and "good" (or "services") interchangeably. For a differentiation, see Callon et al. (2002, 197-198).

3There are only a handful of studies analyzing comparisons as a ubiquitous social practice (see Epple and Erhard 2015; Heintz 2010, 2016; Luhmann 1995; Steinmetz 2018).

4This did not prevent long-distance trading (see Pelizzon 1994; van Tielhof 2002) but it explains why trading was not an anonymous affair but relied on trustworthy persons, family members, or personal acquaintances who settled the transactions on-site, see, for example, Gestrich (2011).

5Blank (2007) distinguishes between two types of evaluation by third parties: connoisseurial reviews and procedural reviews. In connoisseurial reviews the evaluation is based on a personal evaluation, exemplified by book reviews, articles, or reports by restaurant critics, while procedural evaluations employ standardized measuring and testing procedures.

6In disputes, particularly when the delivered grain did not match the quality expectations, corn trade associations provided arbitration. On this, see Petersson (2009, 217-229).

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Varieties of Agrarian Capitalism. Towards a Comparative Analysis of Rural Economies

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Agrarian topics are notably absent from both economic sociology and the comparative political economy (CPE) literature. While the former typically deals with markets of durable consumption goods and (financial) services, the latter has its traditional focus in the manufacturing economy and its encompassing institutions.**1** So far, there is no established study of agrarian Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) in spite of the large subdiscipline of rural sociology.**2** A reason for this general neglect certainly lies in the origin of the social sciences as disciplines that studied the incipient industrialization processes in the late nineteenth century and social problems located in cities. What is more, the importance of agriculture in terms of employment and GDP share has been in decline ever since. But while academic interest in agrarian capitalism is rather low, it still makes the agenda of daily press and politics and sparks ethical debates around ownership rights, overproduction, environmental pollution and animal welfare.

This review article explores the hidden potential that lies in the comparative study of agrarian capitalism by systematically surveying classical and contemporary works in sociology and CPE that (even if implicitly) have addressed the question of what an agrarian VoC would look like. It shows that the agrarian question was of primary interest for many classical authors in sociology, whose writings contain a number of comparative dimensions (Section 1). Drawing on works in historical sociology (Section 2), we argue that even if agriculture has lost relative importance in GDP terms today, agricultural institutions – which predated industrial institutions in state formation – still have a number of path-dependent impacts on current economic and political outcomes. Finally, we show that important comparative angles can be found even in more contemporary literature, if one looks beyond the core of sociology and CPE (Section 3). This introduction, in turn, will provide some arguments for why the study of agrarian phenomena is worthwhile, countering the narrative of its overall decline.

First, even if agriculture makes up less than 3 percent of employment and GDP in industrialized countries today, more than two-thirds of the global population still lives in agricultural conditions, and the absolute number has been rising (Roser 2016). But even within industrializing countries, agriculture has been rising continuously in terms of absolute production. Though its labor productivity is lower than the industrial counterpart, as already Kuznet observed, the productivity increases since 1950 exceeded those in all parts of the economy (Federico 2005: 2). Moreover, trade in agricultural products has grown even faster than agricultural output itself (Federico 2005: 28). Food alone still makes up between 5 and 20 percent of industrial countries' exports (although this number is declining) and amounts to more than 50 percent of exports in many developing countries (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2016). Despite a certain convergence in these tendencies, countries have still differed considerably in the level and trajectories of their agrarian economy, as Figure 1 reveals.

See Appendix, Figure 1: Share of agricultural workforce over time

A second motivation is the long historical shadow that agriculture still casts over contemporary societies, due to the fact that state formation is tied to the agricultural sector in most countries. Moreover, the agricultural revolution often preceded the industrial one, so that state agricultural institutions, actors and laws were often already in place when the industrial ones had to be set up. Whether the agricultural and industrial revolution were complementary or competing with each other, whether agricultural development was hindering or promoting economic growth, is still subject to historical debates (Lains and Pinilla 2008).

Thirdly, agriculture, due to its land-based nature, can offer an important case for more regionally informed comparative frameworks, mimicking research on industrial regions (Storper 1997). Echoing critiques of methodological nationalism, many countries consist of economically and politically conflicting agricultural zones to be studied in their own right. Agriculture is also a case of sectoral research for which links to the VoC framework have recently been suggested (Schröder and Voelzkow 2016). Finally, agriculture is one of the key political areas. Historically, it made up more than 70 percent of the EU budget (EU-Commission 2013). In the EU and the US, subsidies amounted to 0.5 and 0.7 percent of GDP, respectively, in 2015 and have historically been much higher; in terms of producer receipts they made up 18.6 and 9.4 percent, respectively (OECD, Agricultural support). In all party manifestos covered by the Manifesto Project since 1945, agricultural policy has a permanent place: on average, parties attributed 2.2 percent of manifesto space to this policy domain (Volkens et al. 2011: 2015a).

1 Classical comparisons of agrarian societies

Despite their neglect in contemporary economic sociology, agrarian topics were crucial for the founding fathers of the social sciences, who saw themselves confronted with the "agrarian question" and the future of the peasant class at the dawn of an increasingly modernizing industrial capitalist economy. Instead of simply assuming that industrial production and increasing urbanization would soon outdate rural life, many Classics in sociology were more concerned with the long-term impact and transformation of agrarian institutions in modern society. Hence, the early *enquête sociale* research tradition of Frédéric Le Play, or reform organizations such as the *Verein für Socialpolitik* in Germany not only focused on the urban poor, but also on bad rural living, housing or usury conditions. Until the nineteenth century, intra-rural and urban-rural conflicts were the dominant cleavage line: wheat prices strongly correlated with food protests and were a reflection of how urban-rural conflicts were solved in the "moral economy" (Thompson 1971).

Moreover, agrarian relations – and land reforms in particular – have often been highlighted as the defining factor that spurred the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. Marx already saw the enclosures of land from common to private property as the defining moment that set free the dynamics of "primitive accumulation" through agricultural modernization, which pushed the remaining peasant class to the urban centers, where the "double free" wage laborer was forced to sell his labor.3 In a similar vein, Polanyi ([1944] 2001) saw the commodification of common land as the defining moment for the emergence of the market economy. He, however, not only saw the origins of modern class conflict emerging from this development: for him, land ownership formed the foundation of different institutionalized forms of social order per se. Hence, land was not only "the pivotal element in the feudal order," but "the basis of the military, judicial, administrative, and political system" (ibid. 72-73). From this perspective, the question for Polanyi was not to what extent the "dark satanic mills" of industry have replaced agrarianism, since he regarded the commodification of land as a crucial factor that drives the transformation from feudal to market economy. Thus, for a market economy to come about, land must be treated *as if* it were produced for a market, among other "fictitious commodities." As Polanyi writes: "labor, land and money are essential elements of industry; they also must be organized in markets; in fact, these markets form an absolutely vital part of the economic system" (ibid. 75). Thus, the difference between the feudal order and the market economy is based in the different ways in which land as a factor of production is institutionalized. In fact, as late as the 1950s, more than 40 percent of the world's agrarian production was not for markets (Schüttauf 1956).

With regard to the importance of agrarian relations for the emergence of the modern market economy, it is of little surprise that Max Weber's first encounter with capitalism is also to be found in his agrarian sociology (Mommsen 2005). While Marx and Polanyi put emphasis on land ownership as a factor of production, Weber's comparative cultural analysis shifts attention to the question of to what extent different ideal-typical agrarian constitutions have nurtured or hindered the development of "rational" modern capitalism as developed in the West. Accordingly, the different paths between occidental and oriental cultures were manifested early on and are to be found in the different ways that land was appropriated and used: "[I]n Europe the transition to fixed settlement meant a change from the dominance of cattle breeding (especially for milk) to an economy dominated by agriculture, with cattle breeding continuing as a secondary element; in Asia, on the contrary, there was a shift from extensive, and hence nomadic, agriculture to horticulture without milk-cattle breeding" (Weber 1919/ 2013: 59). As a consequence of these very different patterns of land use, the private appropriation of land to individuals or groups as "commons" or "mark" never developed in Asia, nor did "the 'individualism' connected with ownership of herds, with all its consequences" (Weber 1919/ 2013: 60). Moreover, the permanent settlement and extensive workforce required for agriculture stripped rulers of their military force, making ancient Greek and Roman civilizations more similar to medieval European ones; part of the reason for a professional army in Rome lay in the decreasing number of the former farmer-soldiers, who in turn were not suitable for more than just seasonal wars (Weber [1896] 1922). The ideal distinctions between different agrarian constitutions and ways in which labor is institutionalized on farms remain central throughout Weber's comparative analysis. Accordingly, the modern agrarian constitution is based on wage labor and organized production. On the other hand, there is the family-based farm of the Roman Republic, without wage labor and often restricted to non-market production, a form of farming that also inspired the "inner colonialization" of eastern territories by family farmers (Bergmann 1970). Although the economic system of the Roman Empire showed many features of a capitalist economy, such as "free" unskilled farm laborers, its specific agrarian constitutions – particularly its strong dependence on slaves – impeded the development of a rationally calculating conduct of life which Weber considers central for modern capitalism, and eventually led to the decline of the Roman Empire.

A later macrosociological development of Weber's idea, linking agrarian structure to political structure and opposing West and East, is found in the not uncontested works of Karl Wittfogel. In his opus magnum *Oriental Despotism* (Wittfogel 1957), he claims that large-scale irrigation systems in agriculture like those present in the Orient go along with despotic rule. Water shortages and the central hydraulic administration set up to overcome them are tools of domination which can be historically traced up to the totalitarian aspects of communistic rule in China in the 1950s.

Another classical approach can be found in the works of Weber's contemporary, Werner Sombart. In his *Modern Capitalism*, Sombart characterizes agriculture with the help of diachronic ideal types, not only when describing the transition from early to mature capitalism, but also within varieties of mature capitalism. Accordingly, land ownership can be organized in commons or privatized – in direct ownership or rent; the farm can be organized capitalistically or patriarchally, with differing and often complex distributions of mutual rights and obligations between owners and laborers; the agrarian economy can grow by colonializing extension or land-use intensity, with a corresponding increase in land rents and prices; the economic spirit can be one of subsistence farming or of profit-orientation (Sombart [1927] 1969: 93ff). From this perspective, a crucial feature of mature capitalism was the extension of mortgage credit in agriculture to meet the growing capital demands in agriculture (ibid. 100ff).

The organization of this capital can vary across time and space and is needed for land acquisition or the melioration and coverage of variable costs (seeds, labor). Capital intensity has grown over time, and particularly agriculture in the "New World" was marked by heavy initial capital investments at a time when Europe and China were largely settled (Federico 2005: 56). The long amortization periods and unpredictable rates of return within agriculture, however, have made it an unattractive borrower of short-term capital – but attractive for long-term investments in durable assets. This is not to say, however, that all agrarian mortgage regimes shared similar paths. In most European countries, agrarian credit turned into a form of specialized banking, while Anglo-Saxon countries rather tended to rely on personal finance for agrarian credit. Moreover, European countries differed with regard to the organized credit institutions that addressed agriculture (Meinhold 1956): mortgage associations of noblemen (Landschaften) dominated in Prussia and Austria; agrarian cooperatives dominated much of Scandinavia, centralized cooperatives and deposit banks in France, private banks in England, and state banks in Southern Europe and Russia (Blackwell and Kohl 2017). Public and private mortgage banks as well as savings and insurance banks existed in most European countries.

Pioneered by the major Canadian institutionalist Harold Innes and his "staples thesis," other explanations for the development of distinct geographical types of agrarian capitalism focus on the type of resources that build the backbone of an economy's infrastructure. Hence, Innes explains the entire political economy of Canada through its reliance on staple products. Starting with fish and especially beaver fur in the seventeenth century, and changing to wood and wheat in the nineteenth century, these products require a central organization of trade, often in monopoly form, and heavy collective investment in transport. The geography of this transport and trade determined the historical boundaries of Canada, and its specialization has been the international complement to industrializing Europe and the American Northeast (Innis 1956).

While this section has underscored the importance of agrarian topics for the Classics, it at the same time already points to the impact of different agrarian regimes on the institutional development of contemporary capitalist societies. This will be further elaborated in the following section.

2 The long shadow of agrarian history on industrial societies

Looking back to the Classics, it is clear that agrarian relations have been a crucial factor for the development of civilizations and societies across the globe. But what about the long-term impact of agrarian relations on contemporary market economies? Albert O. Hirschman ([1982] 1986) famously noted that a nation's agrarian legacy either builds *feudal shackles* or *feudal blessings* for the development of modern market economies: feudal institutions from agricultural economies can thus either hinder industrial growth and social order from rising, or they can be one of its enabling conditions. Whatever the direction of influence, history bears strong evidence for a long shadow of agrarian history on the local and national organization of different types of contemporary capitalism.

One of the first works to more systematically acknowledge the long-term impact of agrarian history on contemporary society was Alexander Gerschenkron's *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (1943). According to Gerschenkron, large German farmers known as Junkers built an important political pressure group that enjoyed privileges and protection from the Prussian state. With increasing international competition by the end of the 1870s, domestic grain markets were therefore protected by the state through a new system of tariffs. This marked the starting point of a long era of protectionism and top-down solutions to crises in German agriculture – a situation that eventually spurred a wide-ranging aversion for free market competition and democratic institutions among the Junkers.

In this light, Barrington Moore's seminal comparative analysis further systematized the hypothesis that the agrarian social structure – and in particular the inequality it produced – was the crucial determinant for the evolution of different political regimes in the interwar period (Luebbert 1991; Moore [1966] 1969) as well as different revolutionary dynamics (Skocpol 1979). The focal point of Moore's post-Marxian analysis is the "peasant problem" – i.e., the growing class conflict between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie during the transformation from agrarian to capitalist industrial society. Thus, equal nineteenth-century land distribution with bourgeois revolutions tended to lead to democratic states in the twentieth century (England, United States and southwestern Germany); unequal distribution in urbanized countries with reforms from above, towards fascist states (East Elbian Germany and Japan); and backward agrarian states with central bureaucracy, towards communism (Russia and China). But also, intra-country struggles – between the Rhineland and Prussia or the American South and West – are mainly seen as being driven by agrarian economic conditions of land distribution.4 The grand thesis of big landowners being systematically opposed to democratic development, however, has been contested in recent years. Albertus (2017) finds empirical support for large labor-dependent landowners supporting authoritarian regimes in a search for the protection of private property. However, labor-dependent landowners in countries such as El Salvador and South Africa turned away from the uncertainties of autocratic rule in support of democratic institutions and the rule of law during the Third Wave of democracy in the 1970s (ibid.).

In addition to this, Macfarlane (1998: 117) explains the absence of the "peasant problem" in England (and to a certain degree in Japan) as a "sheer accident of islandhood" shaping land distribution. In line with Weber, Macfarlane argues that due to the island state's insulated position in the world economy, the threat of an invasion from outside remained rather weak, and therefore interest on the part of the crown in protecting the peasant class for military purposes was low. As a consequence, England maintained a rather feudal and abstract conception of land as "indivisible" under Common law with its private and flexible conception of property that protected landowners from the state, thus facilitating the development of early capitalism on the British Isles. By contrast, emerging nations on the Continent – such as France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy – saw a constant threat from the outside and retained a strong interest in protecting the peasant class, which resulted in a revival of Roman law with its concrete, divisible conception of land that enabled inheritance among a number of family members, leading to fragmentation and consolidation of absolutist control (Macfarlane 1998: 114).

Finally, several authors have also made reference to agrarian structures in the nineteenth century to explain twentieth-century Central American regimes: commodities such as coffee require a plantation form of exploitation, which in turn created more unequal social and eventually political structures than banana-based economies, whose larger middle class prevented twentieth-century dictatorships from arising (Mahoney 2001; Woodward 1976).

While these works emphasize agrarian effects on the polity, others focused more on politics and policy effects. Historical and electoral geography have thus linked agrarian production regimes with the political orientations of regions. As a classic, André Siegfried "believed that the explanation of western French voting differences was to be found at the level of the village. He hypothesized that such structural factors as the type of soil and vegetation, the degree of population concentration, the mode of land tenure, and the ratio of large, medium, and small farms combined to determine the extent of peasant dependence on the church and nobility" (Brustein 1988: 20). Building on Siegfried, Brustein identifies three agrarian production regimes according to land tenure, settlement type, farm size, and class composition. While applied specifically to France, the three regimes broadly cover the historical geography of Europe, with a "Mediterranean mode […] typified by market-oriented economic activity, small-owner cultivation or salaried agricultural labor, agglomerated settlement, intense town-countryside ties, a heterogeneous and relatively democratic class structure, and a high proportion of landlord absenteeism" (ibid. 35). By contrast, northeastern France, but also the Rhineland and southern Italy, display commercial activity, cash tenancy, compact settlements and a differentiated class structure; while the Western coast was more subsistent, with sharecropping or tenancy, dispersed settlements and a bipolar class structure. The proposed link to policy orientation in the regions is made as follows:

"The more a region is marked by these elements – subsistence economic activity; medium- to large-scale tenancy, sharecropping, or owner cultivation; a dispersed population; low town-countryside association; and the presence of social elites – the greater should be the tendency for cultivators in that region to oppose state subsidization, defense of small farms, church-state separation, progressive taxation, land redistribution, curtailment of monopolistic practices, and rural democracy" (ibid. 104-5).

Next to policy orientation, interest group formation is an important part of politics. Puhle (1975) traces the general origins of state interventionism back to the agrarian movements of the nineteenth century in Germany and the United States. Whereas from early on, large German farmers were established as a political pressure group in favor of protectionist policies in the Prussian state that eventually lead to the support of authoritarian solutions, American farmers showed a rather weak degree of collective organization, leading to a much stronger degree of market orientation and democratic values. Despite these differences, agrarian history also makes clear that with the increasing industrialization of agriculture, even the most liberal and democratic states eventually developed toward one or another form of *organized capitalism* (ibid.15; also see (Berding et al. 1974)) – i.e., a consolidated market economy in which agriculture and different sectors of the economy are increasingly entrenched with the regulating authority of the state, as the New Deal in the US or the late establishment of the Milk Marketing Board in England have shown (Medick 1974; Winter 1984).

However, the idea that large farmers such as the German Junkers are the driving force behind agricultural support must be treated with caution, as Koning (1994) has argued. While it is certainly true that large farmers called for agricultural support as production costs outstripped profits, their political influence was rather weak. Thus, only in coalition with the re-emerging class of more cost-efficient family farmers – who were also suffering from overproduction and low prices – and other non-agrarian interest groups such as industrial capitalists who feared domestic market instability, was support strong enough to convince policy-makers of the need for agricultural support. Moreover, the degree and endurance of state support over time depends greatly on the presence or absence of agrarian parties in parliament (Arter 2001). Historically, this tended to be the case in party systems without a religious cleavage line next to the standard work-capital cleavage line – for example, in Northern and Eastern European countries. In the former, they have also been cited as the harbinger of the comprehensive welfare states, as small peasants and social democracy could align to pass all-embracing welfare laws starting in the 1920s and 30s.

Furthermore in a comparative case study of the United States, Japan, and France, Sheingate (2003) shows that the rise of "agrarian welfare states" in support of protectionist policies was highly contingent on how agrarian interest groups could lobby for their interests depending on the specific political institutional environment. Thus, while farmers in Japan and France managed to establish themselves as resilient political pressure groups in the conservative parties, the development of European-style corporatism was hindered in the United States from the beginning due to pluralist integration of different interest groups across political parties and comparatively strong government institutions that later facilitated retrenchment from agricultural support. By contrast, agrarian interest groups still enjoy strong political representation in Japan and France, making retrenchment of support difficult for political parties. Instead, agrarian interest groups remain powerful and shape states' positions on international trade agreements. This is also true for the European Union and Germany, where agrarian unions build powerful political coalitions that pressure political parties to support protectionism on domestic and supranational levels (Rieger 1994).

The agrarian roots of state interventionism have not only lead to country-specific forms of economic organization in agriculture, but they have also strongly influenced the general development of economic organization – in particular, the development of welfare regimes. Since agriculture still played an important role in most industrializing economies, the development of modern welfare states was highly contingent on "left-green coalitions" between rural farmers and urban wage laborers: "Thus, the origins of the Keynesian full-employment commitment and the social democratic welfare-state edifice have been traced to the capacity of (variably) strong working-class movements to forge a political alliance with farmer organizations; additionally, it is arguable that sustained social democracy has come to depend on the formation of a new-working-class-white-collar coalition" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 24). Farmers' parties are a particularity of the Nordic party systems, but have also been prominent in Eastern Europe. By contrast, in countries such as Italy and Germany, a high demand for a rural workforce remained, making farmers more likely to endure long-lasting relations with conservative forces in favor of corporatist arrangements. In the United States, a similar left-green coalition led to the New Deal, although further developments towards a Nordic style welfare state were blocked by the Southern states, which were highly dependent on the rural workforce (Esping-Andersen 1990: 36).

In this light, Monica Prasad (2012) has shown how agrarian movements have hindered the development of a European-style welfare state in the United States. Accordingly, farmers were key actors in shaping US tax law as a reaction to the problem of overproduction resulting from an increasingly productive American agricultural sector. While European farmers were pressuring policy-makers toward protectionist policies against American dominance, American farmers were not only culturally in favor of market competition, agricultural industrialization and economies of scale, but they were also supportive of demand-side policies such as progressive taxation to stimulate domestic consumption of agricultural goods. As a consequence of this demand-side lobbying by farmers' unions, the United States is the only developed capitalist nation without a national sales tax (Prasad 2012: 99-147). Thus, Prasad's historical analysis not only does away with the common conception of anti-state interventionism in the US, but it also explains why the US never developed a European-style welfare state based on regressive taxation and redistribution. Agrarian interventions thus took place in one of the key liberal market economies, which leaves the impression that an agrarian comparison of capitalisms is less one of liberal versus coordinated economies, but one of different intervention styles, as the next section will make clear.

3 Varieties of contemporary agrarian capitalism

Though written in a context in which the importance of agriculture is strongly declining, there is still some more contemporary literature – often single-case studies of specific agricultural regimes – with at least implicit comparative angles. Thus, approaches organize comparisons around (i) the vision of agriculture, (ii) the type of actors that dominate the agricultural policy, and (iii) the research and innovation system in agriculture.

The first dimension of comparison extracted from the literature is the cultural vision of agriculture: the general ideal towards which agricultural policy is oriented (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2006). In the US, this ideal is very well characterized by the title of a book by the MIT historian Debora Fitzgerald (2003): *Every Farm a Factory*. Although the industrialization of agriculture was much more difficult than the industrialization of handicrafts or housework (whole generations of rural sociologists dealt with this problem (Mann and Dickinson 1978; Murdoch 1994)), the ideal of an efficient and large-scale agriculture dominated agricultural policy for decades (see also Striffler 2005). In the US context, the industrialization of agriculture always meant increasing labor productivity (Wright 2012) rather than the European drive for increasing land productivity. This is true because agricultural production in the US was traditionally characterized by a shortage of labor, but land existed in abundance. As a reaction to this shortage, the major innovations in US agriculture, such as hybrid seed, were labor-saving innovations (Rhoten and Powell 2010).

In Central Europe, the leading vision of agriculture has been very different. In the last few years the term "multifunctional agriculture" has emerged to describe this different orientation (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2006). Agriculture is not only seen as a producer of food; it is also seen as responsible for the protection of the environment, as a factor for tourism, as a protector of the *Kulturlandschaft*. Especially in the last 30 years, the transformation of agriculture into a more sustainable endeavor has become an important political project. However, the different perspective on agriculture that exists in the EU is not based only on cultural reasons. The challenge in the EU has always been to increase, but also to secure, land productivity. While in the US, farmers came from a tradition in which problems with land productivity were solved by going west, in the EU there was no spare land which the farmers could cultivate. Therefore, the major challenge in the EU has been to increase and secure land productivity.

This difference is very well illustrated by the following numbers. The monetary total of agricultural production in the EU and the US is almost the same. In the EU, the total production (farm gate value) is 190 billion US$; in the US, the produced value is only slightly higher, at around 197 billion US$ (Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2006). However, the way agricultural production is managed differs fundamentally. The EU only has one-third of the amount of farmland found in the US. The size of the average farm in the US is 207 hectares, while in the EU it is only 18 hectares. Correspondingly, in the US, agricultural production is managed by 2 million farms, while in the EU, over 7 million farms produce almost the same output (ibid.)

A second line of comparison is among the types of actors who dominate agricultural policy. While in Germany the important transformations in agriculture, such as industrialization, were mainly driven by consensus-oriented private organizations, the American industrialization of agriculture was much more centrally organized and planned. Its strongly centralized political management of agriculture originates in the political reaction to the challenges of the Great Depression – the New Deal. Its interventions replaced the federal agricultural subsidies and other political measurements by the federal states and resulted in a centralized agricultural policy with the state as the dominate player (Puhle 1975). The political goal of these interventions was, first and foremost, domestic food security. In the context of the Cold War, however, another goal was added: to become the "bread basket of the world." Both aims were achieved quite successfully: after 1940, the US became by far the biggest wheat exporter, and a large range of countries (including the Soviet Union) became dependent on US wheat imports (Perkins 1997; Abel 1967). This goal was achieved by the radical industrialization and rationalization of agricultural production. In line with the dismantling of the public sector in the context of neoliberal reforms (Slaughter and Rhoades 1996), the meaning of great political visions gave way to a the political enforcement of market intuitions. However, the orientation of production towards global commodity markets remained.

The agricultural policy in Germany, on the other hand, was shaped by private, consensus-oriented actors and entailed a more "gentle" and decentralized version of agricultural modernization. One of the key actors in German agricultural policy was and still is the *Bauernverband* (farmers' union) (Heinze and Mayntz 1992). In line with other consensus-oriented institutions in coordinated economies, the Bauernverband is characterized by an ongoing but never fully resolved conflict between opposing interests. Historically the Bauernverband was an advocacy group of the Junkers, which entailed that the political orientation of the Bauernverband was deeply shaped by the interests of the large and wealthy farmers from the northeast. The interests of the peasants and smallholders in southern Germany, on the other hand, were systematically neglected. As a consequence, the Bauernverband never enforced a strong version of industrialization. The protection of the unity of all farmers and the prevention of rural unrest were much more important goals (Uekötter 2012). Today, 90 percent of all farmers are members of the Bauernverband, and the agricultural policy on many levels is strongly influenced by this organization (Heinze et al. 2003).

The third dimension of comparison, we suggest, is the system of agricultural innovations. Due to the special role of food supply for domestic security, the field of agricultural research is traditionally characterized by strong public institutions (Barlösius 2010; Lundgreen, Horn, and Krohn 1986). The design of these institutions, however, varies in the different nation-states. In the US, the central institutions of the agricultural innovation system are the land-grant colleges. These colleges and their agricultural extension services were pivotal for the industrialization of agriculture as well as for technology development in the Green Revolution and in later decades (Perkins 1997). Traditionally, these colleges did research in important but commercially unattractive fields and supported the local farmers through technology and knowledge transfer. Influenced by the neoliberal agenda, however, the purpose of these colleges changed dramatically. Now the goal of the land-grant system was no longer to supply innovations for the local farmers, but to engage in global knowledge competition (Glenna, Shortall, and Brandl 2015; Rhoten and Powell 2010). Despite the fundamental reshaping of the land-grant system, the general orientation towards radical or science-based innovations (e.g. transgenic plants) persisted.

While in the US, the establishment of research institutions in the field of agriculture was driven by state actors, the scientification of agriculture in Germany was strongly promoted by private actors, and only later by the public sector (Wieland 2004). As a result, the German agricultural innovation system is characterized by the long-term collaboration of scientists from the private and the public sectors as well as the collaboration of medium-sized companies. In contrast to the

American case, the collaboration of private and public actors does not result in the domination of one sector over the other. This institutional setting allows for a very different type of innovation – namely, innovations which are more strongly based on implicit knowledge. This type of innovation is supported by the corporative institutions of the German economy (Brandl and Glenna 2016).

Next to these comparative approaches, which are applied only to the industrialized world, there is a broad range of theoretical concepts and empirical studies that address the historical progression of different food regimes and also include the Global South, for which agricultural economies are even more important.5 The concept of food regimes is one of the earliest and best-known theoretical approaches to linking agriculture and the development of capitalism. The term "food regimes" originates in the work of the historical sociologists Harriet Friedman and Phil McMichael (1989), whose intention was to explore "the role of agriculture in the development of the capitalist world economy, and its trajectory in the state system" (ibid. 93). This objective emerged in the context of dramatic upheavals in the late 1980s, globalization, the end of the Cold War, as well as the beginning process of deregulation in the agricultural sector. Driven by the insecurities that arose from these transformations, the goal of many sociological scholars was to understand and classify these upheavals in a broader political-economic perspective.

The concept of food regimes was inspired by two theoretical perspectives: the world system approach of Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and the concepts of the French Regulation School (Aglietta 2000). In line with the findings of the regulation approach, the scholars of food regimes identified three regime types: first, the British-centered regime (1870s–1930s), which was characterized by the import of tropical commodities from the colonies and basic grains and livestock from the settler states (USA, Canada, Australia). In the second regime, the US-centered food regime (1950s–1970s), food became a strategic factor in foreign policy. This was especially true for the US, which used food exports as a "weapon" in the Cold War and as an instrument to maintain hegemonic status. The basis for expansive food production in this regime was the Fordist restructuring of agriculture – in other words, the establishment of an industrial-agricultural complex. The third regime, the corporate food regime (1980s–2000s), is characterized by the transnationalization of food production, a global division of labor, and the decline of national agricultural regulations (McMichael 2013).

The rural sociology of the 1990s was deeply shaped by the analytical approach of food regimes. Sociologists applied this framework to describe the Fordist restructuring of agriculture as well as the looming signs of the neoliberal project (Kenney et al. 1989). In the last 30 years, the concept of food regimes was further developed and adapted by rural sociologists as well as political geographers. In the more recent works, food regime analyses deal with topics such as the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture and the political goal of food security in the Global South (McMichael 2006; Patel 2013).

The Global South has not only been treated as a monolithic bloc, but has been differentiated according to class relations, agrarian revolutions, and international trade in Marx-inspired studies in the 1970s. In his general analysis of rural class relations and property regimes, Arthur Stinchcombe thus divides countries into manorial systems, plantation systems, those predominated by family-sized tenure, smallholders, and capitalist ranches with wage labor. Building on Stinchcombe, Paige distinguished different agrarian regimes for developing countries' export regimes (tobacco, sugar, coffee): plantation systems with exploitative labor relations and smallholdings, both associated with reform-like modes of change, versus the sharecropping and migrant labor system and the traditional hacienda system, associated with revolt or revolutionary modes of change (Paige 1978).

Conclusion: toward a comparative understanding of agrarian capitalism

There is no established typology for studying the varieties of agrarian capitalism (VoAC), but as our cursory review since the Classics' time has shown, agricultural dimensions have been far from absent in comparative approaches within sociology and political economy. We nevertheless believe that a more systematic comparative approach is needed in order to illuminate the historical origins and path-dependencies of different agrarian regimes in different domains of modern society. In addition, this would result in a better understanding of the institutional context of conflicts and coping strategies in rural economies when confronted with the uncertainties of increasingly globalized and financialized markets for agrarian goods, technoscientific development, overproduction, and environmental pollution. Based on our collection of comparative approaches to agriculture, we therefore conclude by sketching some of the lines along which comparative typologies could be constructed as guiding tools for a new a comparative analysis of agrarian capitalism.

For such a comparative analysis to make sense, the precise historical time period needs to be taken into account, as we have seen that agriculture before the 1880s was different from the interwar period – itself being different from the Fordist and post-1970 world "food regime" (Friedman and McMichael 1989). In addition to time, the spatial unit of comparison can also be variable for an agrarian typology: for some crop-growing conditions, local soil and climate are crucial, with countries being split up into opposing regimes. The agrarian historical geography of Europe shows many country-independent boundaries (Pounds 1990). In comparative agriculture in general, institutional approaches are challenged by geographic, climatic, or factor-endowment determinisms. For other matters, in turn, supranational entities such as the EU or trade regimes can be the relevant political units. Another unit of comparison could be sectors within agriculture – for instance, crop vs. livestock-based sectors or comparisons of sectors organized around different commodities. Finally, the comparison can take place on different levels: while most typologies are grouped around an institutional comparison, it can also be ideational, economic-structural, or political (policy, politics).

A first comparative dimension drawn upon since Weber is the actual **organization of the farm**, where ideal-typically, one can distinguish the small subsistence farm from the medium-sized family farm and the large corporative farm – a distinction often correlating with the kind of labor regime: family vs. wage or slave labor. Within the wage labor regime, more or less coordinated forms of wage-setting are possible. The farm size can also be approximated by land, and land inequality itself has often been linked with correspondingly unequal social and political structures, with unequal agrarian regimes being less democratic. On the ideational level, therefore, the family farm has traditionally been linked to an ideal of political order – but also to the individual virtues of good citizens and soldiers – which came to a certain clash with the farm-factory ideal in the postwar period.

A second comparative dimension regards the **trade-openness** of countries: if a country followed a path that let its agriculture compete when world markets created pressure, this brought it into an entirely different country group – in terms of agrarian politics, prices, and economic structure – than if world market production was embraced as solution to internal overproduction. This dimension is closely tied to the form in which arable land was used, with the distinction of mass-produced staple goods such as wheat or soya and the specialized production of dairy. These different politics were, in turn, historically important in shaping a range of features in state formation, from welfare state characteristics to tax regimes. But agriculture, at least historically, was also at the crossroads of two other policy fields that impacted on it – namely, defense and population.

A third dimension, echoing the VoC approach, is **finance**. At least historically, countries differ with regard to the financial institutions through which long-term capital provided (or not) for the expansion of an economizing agriculture. Rough cleavage lines run between countries relying on personal finance, those relying on cooperative deposit finance, and those that rely on either bond sales on capital markets or outright state institutions. The relation of this financial dimension – including the kind of agrarian insurance regime – with other, possibly complementary, institutional spheres is, however, largely unexplored. Similarly, the agrarian vocational training regime has not been put into a comparative perspective.

A fourth dimension regards different **risk management** regimes: agricultural production faces both natural risks of crop shortfall and the human-made risk of unexpectedly low prices after harvest. As most agricultural production functions have a time lag between the decision to invest and the moment of return, there is a risk of not meeting the expected prices. Both types of risk can be addressed by different institutional arrangements of risk management, ranging from village solidarity to farmers' cooperatives to modern insurance and commodity futures trading (Levy 2012).

A fifth dimension regards different **knowledge and innovation** regimes: agrarian capitalism relies heavily on scientific and technological innovations, which are institutionalized and regulated in different country-specific ways. These include the role of the state, farmers' organizations, agricultural schools, the design of intellectual property rights, and their knowledge transfer with entrepreneurs and investors.

Intimately tied to the knowledge and innovation regime is a sixth dimension, the **vocational system**. As in industrial sectors, the vocational system is crucial for recruitment and education and secures the intra-generational materialization of knowledge and innovation regimes within agricultural production. Variations occur in the institutionalization of agricultural education (practice vs. theory; on-farm training vs. school; state-organized vs. farm-organized), work ethos, and degrees of professionalization and specialization, respectively.

While these six dimensions lay out the analytical tools for the study of VoAC, a broader research agenda should investigate the systematic ties between VoAC and the established welfare and CPE typologies. In a cross-sectional perspective, it should ask, for example, whether there are functional complementarities between similar institutional domains across sectors. In longitudinal perspective, it should ask whether they underlie common tendencies such as industrialization or liberalization or whether agriculture follows its own sectoral logics. In historical development, it might have shared common causes with the logic of industrialism, and there were many mutual influences, spillovers, and institutional exchanges. The comparative study of VoAC should not lose sight of possible commonalities and processes of convergence, such as growing productivity, urbanization, and technological change. But below this surface – as this text has tried to lay bare – there is considerable variance in how countries and regions go about institutionalizing a still vital sphere of modern economies.

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Endnotes

1 Ironically, VoC typologized manufacturing economies just at the time of their decline in the West, while theoretical frameworks for service economies are neglected similarly to agrarian ones.

2 By varieties of capitalism, we refer to the broader comparative analysis of capitalist phenomena, not only Hall and Soskice's key approach (Hall and Soskice 2001).

3 For a critical revision of Marx, see Overton (1996), who also highlights the interrelatedness of farming practices, social relations and institutions for agricultural modernization.

4 See modern works showing the long-term impact of early land inequality on growth, human capital and democratic development (Baten and Juif 2014).

5 By contrast, the cited comparative research has rather a bias against the Global South.

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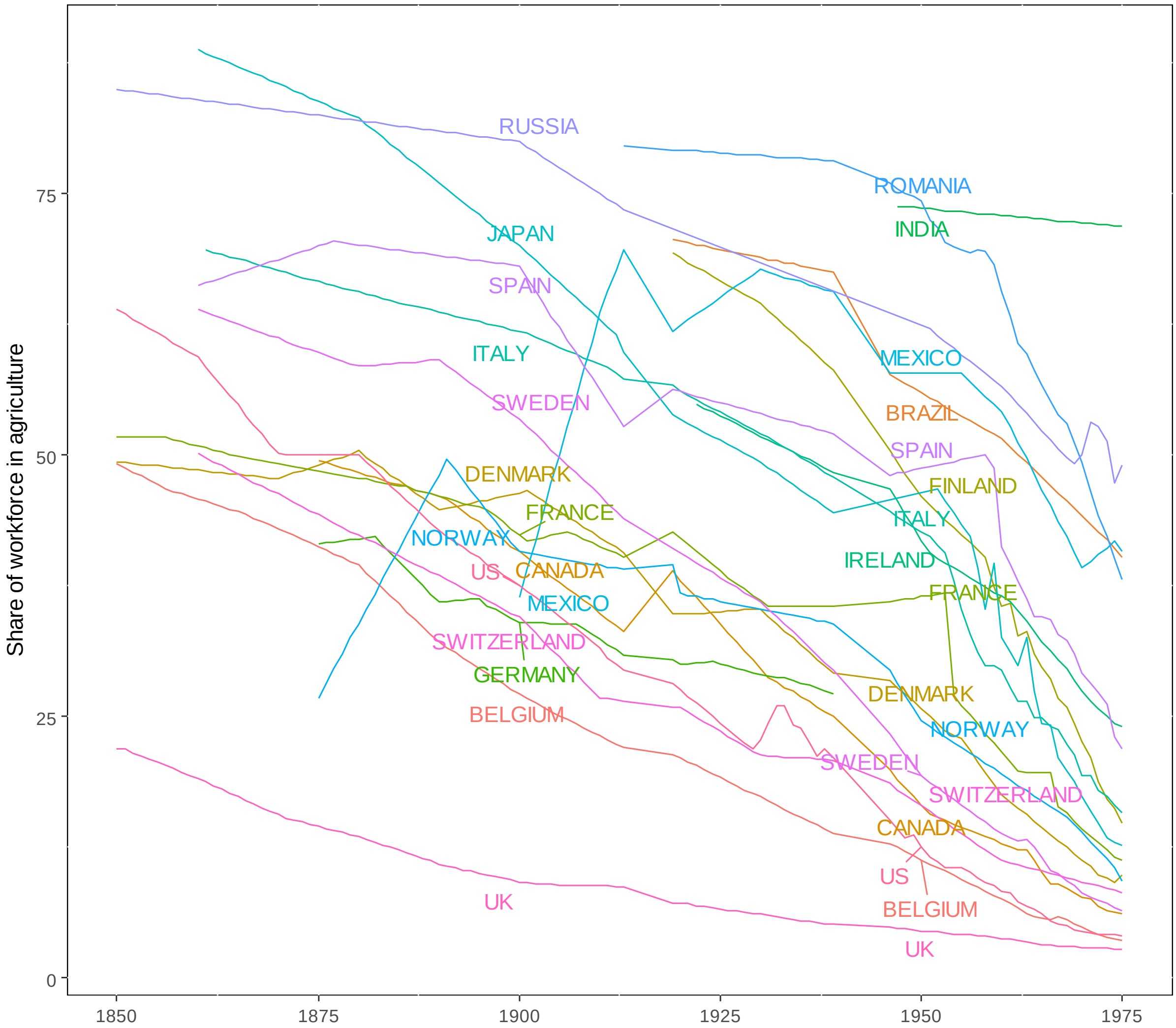
Appendix

Figure 1: Share of agricultural workforce over time



Source: Cross national time series

Book Reviews

Book: Edward F. Fischer (ed.), 2014. Cash on the Table. Markets, Values, and Moral Economies. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Reviewer: Philip Balsiger, Institute of Sociology, University of Neuchâtel, Philip.balsiger@unine.ch

In recent years, economic sociologists have shown increased interest in the moral embeddedness of markets. A growing number of studies and events have tracked markets' moral consequences and the moral struggles they provoke, as well as the moral projects they embody (see, for instance, the theme of 2016's SASE Conference: Moral Economies). *Cash on the Table*, a volume edited by the anthropologist Edward Fischer, constitutes a very original and often thought-provoking contribution to this literature from a different (inter-)disciplinary point of view.

The book is the result of a seminar on markets and moralities organized by Fischer and his colleague Peter Benson in May 2009, in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis. Anthropologists, economists, and business scholars were invited to debate how morality and markets relate, starting form a very general definition of morality as "what matters most to people at a given time and place." The point of departure is intriguing and the exchanges proved to be productive, resulting in a very diverse and yet mostly coherent set of chapters, including a few transcribed dialogues from the seminar and even a cartoon illustrating one of the chapters. The book is divided into three parts, each composed of chapters from scholars belonging to different disciplines (with a total number of 19 chapters). While the underpinning logic of the first part, on markets as contrivances, is difficult to tease out and does not directly speak to the topic of market moralities, the second and third parts of the book contain much more coherent ensembles of contributions.

In the second part (Choices: Values and Rationalities), all contributions address the co-existence of two sets of values within markets. Deirdre N. McCloskey (chapter 8) calls them P values (profit, price, prudence, etc.) and S values (solidarity, sympathy, sentiment, etc.): the former are directed towards the self, the latter towards others. While one tends to associate the former with the economy and the latter with other social spheres, the contributors show that markets always bring into play both sets of values; both are necessary for functioning markets, but one finds tensions and different forms of articulation. In one of the strongest chapters of the volume, James Ferguson (chapter 9) criticizes the view of markets as detrimental to social relations, very common in anthropology. Based on a renewed reading of Mauss' writings on the gift economy, Ferguson argues for a view of markets where money and meaningful social relations are entangled, which he captures through the concept of mutuality. In a very "Zelizerian" vein, he then discusses how cash transactions are used to express social identities and relationships in southern Africa. A few other chapters look at the articulation of values through the lens of choice. In a chapter on neuroeconomics (chapter 11, by Natasha Schüll and Caitlin Zaloom), the authors take the example of choice in time. Empirical research shows that people sharply overvalue immediate rewards relative to future ones – why is that? Neureconomists have suggested that this is due to how the brain is wired, either through the existence of two opposing brain systems that are struggling against each other (system A being fast, affective, emotional, and unconscious, and system B analytic, slow, logical, and conscious), or through an integrated system that produces a specific value signal. This chapter does not directly address the question of morality, but neuroscientists are also trying to explain moral choices as a brain function where morality thus becomes part of idiosyncratic moral preference systems[1].

Two chapters by Fischer speak about moral choices from an anthropological perspective. The first one reports on a game theory experiment held in two contrasting Mayan towns (chapter 12, co-authored by Avery Dickins de Girón). The results show the role of context in the articulation of other- and self-directed values in choices. Market incorporation seems to encourage cooperation, but other sociocultural influences are also at play, including moral values suspicious of inequalities, particular conceptions of what constitutes fair gains, and recent historical events. The second Fischer chapter is a study on German egg consumers (chapter 18), which reveals the contrast between what economists call stated and revealed preferences – the well-known value–action gap. When interviewed on what kind of eggs they buy, all consumers speak of the importance of environmental and animal welfare values, but sales figures reveal that most people continue to buy the cheaper eggs from batteries. Rather than dismissing stated preferences on these grounds, however, Fischer thinks we should take words seriously, not just deeds. What consumers say expresses what they really want: *"this truth reveals much about their ideals and values, the sorts of persons they imagine themselves to be and the sort of world they would like to live in"* (252). Echoing the neuroeconomic studies on temporal discount functions, Fischer argues that people have aspirational values which orient long-term goals, but they often succumb to short-term gratification. However, in this chapter at least, he neglects the social context of these aspirational values: an increasing number of "prescriptions" incite people to take into account ethical aspects such as sustainability and animal welfare when buying everyday products, and the stated preferences expressed are likely to reflect a strong social desirability of such answers in an upper-middle-class neighborhood.

The third part of the book, entitled "Practice: What is and ought to be," gathers contributions that look at moral corporate practices in global markets. This question is mainly addressed in a discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility, through a dialogue (chapter 14) and two chapters by anthropologists Stuart Kirsch on the mining industry (chapter 15) and Peter Benson on tobacco (chapter 16). The contributors agree that CSR has to be understood in the context of a rising critique of corporate practices. But does this mean that they are just a ruse, or do they reflect genuine moral motivations? Kirsch and Benson argue that rather than focusing on the motivations, it is more interesting to look at the strategic use of CSR policies, for instance through the development of what Kirsch calls "corporate oxymorons" such as *clean coal* or sustainable mining, which take up the critique but turn it into something positive.

So, how do moral values inform markets? In his thoughtful introduction, Fischer discusses how different disciplines have studied this and formulates the collective project's premise: "If anthropologists could view markets a bit more ecumenically and if economists could view them a bit more politically, then great value – cash on the table – could be found in bringing these perspectives together" (p. 5). The volume should be read as a conversation, a dialogue between different perspectives. Judged in this light, the book appears to be a promising step in the right direction, and, if it does not add up to a cohesive approach to understanding markets, it succeeds overall by establishing a dialogue, which is not a minor achievement. Indeed, economists and anthropologists are in many ways at opposite ends of an epistemological divide. While economists are specialists of markets, they do not usually speak of morality, yet they generally adhere to a strong implicit moral view of markets as beneficial to societies. Anthropologists, on the other hand, specialize in the study of (alternative) moral economies and are often critical of markets and their effects on communities.

But the volume's contributions end up questioning this dichotomous view of disciplines. The commonality shared by all the authors, regardless of their disciplinary background, is the view that markets are historically specific social constructions, built upon particular legal, political, and social structures. In other words, markets do not occur naturally and in "theoretically pure" states. This suggests that the relation of morality and markets depends on a given market's social and political structure; markets are not moral or immoral as such. The most fundamental *difference* between the disciplines, it appears, is the question of where morality is located. The economists and business scholars gathered in the volume work from a position of methodological individualism and thus look for morality at the level of individuals and the values they pursue – which for some could even be tracked down within peoples' brains. Making markets more moral then requires more ethical behavior on the part of individual market participants. For anthropologists, morality is located at the social level. The question of individual moral choices pales in the context of morality as social facts, commonly held and contested moral views and moral orders. Yet the book also demonstrates that very often, disagreements are just as strong *within* disciplines as between them, reflecting a diversity of paradigmatic approaches, but also of politics. Neither anthropologists nor economists agree among themselves about the morality of markets, a point that would have deserved to be addressed more explicitly.

Endnotes

1 On the "moral brain" and for a critique of such approaches, see Abend (2011).

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Book: Ivan Boldyrev/Ekaterina Svetlova (eds), 2016. Enacting Dismal Science: New Perspectives on the Performativity of Economics, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Two decades have passed since the publication of the edited volume that contained Michel Callon's seminal theoretical statement on the performativity of economics; one decade has passed since the empirical work of Donald MacKenzie and others ushered in a transdisciplinary 'performative turn.' Based on the notion that economics performs economic actors and the economy (by describing them), this turn has generated crucial insights in fields as diverse as economic sociology, political economy, economic geography, and management studies.

'Enacting Dismal Science' aims at bringing together sociologists, philosophers, and economists to give an overview of 'what has happened in performativity research in the last years' (p. 4). Indeed, the volume's strength is in combining theoretical and empirical contributions that give readers a good sense of this fast-growing, cross-disciplinary field, including the various lines of (at times fierce) criticism that has been directed against it.

Readers interested in an overview of the sprawling performativity literature will find a concise and highly competent guide in the editors' introductory chapter. As Ivan Boldyrev and Ekaterina Svetlova note, the question of the early years – does a causal link between theory and practice exist? – has given way to the study of the *performative practices* that establish such links in different theoretical, historical, and geographical contexts. In this vein, they advocate an encompassing definition of performativity as being concerned with the 'entanglement of knowledge, institutions, and practices' (p. 7).

One analysis of such practices that stands out for its empirical detail is Juliane Böhme's chapter on laboratory experiments in economics. Using an ethnomethodological approach, Böhme offers a close description of how experimental economics 'works' – how subjects are recruited and regimented, and how, in the process, experimenters create what Francesco Guala has called a '"hospitable environment" for observing the rational actor' (p. 106). Guala's own contribution contains a fascinating discussion of Thomas Schelling and David Lewis' theory of conventions as equilibria of coordination games. This theory offers a way of 'rationalising' performativity by showing how economic models – such as the Black-Scholes model studied by Donald MacKenzie – act as coordination devices that effectively perform the world encapsulated in the model.

Other chapters offer primarily theoretical reflections. Fabian Muniesa offers a series of thought experiments designed to help one come to terms with the strangely 'naturalistic' self-understanding of economics. He encourages the reader to ask economists simple questions – 'Is your science a social science or a natural science?' Muniesa uses oddities that students of economics are all too familiar with – such as the linguistic contortions that are necessary to accommodate economics and other social sciences in a single sentence – to explore the 'modern forked tongue (claiming naturalism while blatantly performing)' (p. 122).

Hanno Pahl and Jan Sparsam make a highly valuable contribution by delving into the 'still largely uncharted terrain of performativity and macroeconomics' (p. 151). By tracing the development of macroeconomic ideas in the institutional and political context of Germany during the 1960s, they lead the way towards an empirical research programme on the performative potential of macroeconomics (cf. Braun 2017).

The one qualm this reviewer has is with the volume's relative silence on what Boldyrev and Svetlova call the 'politics of performativity' (p. 10) and what others might refer to as the question of power. Politics and power have, of course, been the subject of long-standing (and sometimes fierce) debates in the performativity literature, and it would be unfair to expect this volume to resolve them. However, the book could have given more voice to political economy, which seems particularly relevant in this regard. While buying into the notion of performativity as being concerned with the 'entanglement of knowledge, institutions, and practices' (p. 7), the political economy perspective insists that "power" is key, both in solidifying and in unravelling these entanglements.

To be fair, the editors acknowledge this when, at the end of their introduction, they highlight 'agency' and 'critique' as two outstanding challenges, noting an 'overemphasis on knowledge' in the performativity literature (p. 15). One area of research that offers complementary methods and insights studies the power wielded by professional intermediaries of economic knowledge, at both transnational and domestic levels (Ban 2016; Christensen 2017; Hirschman and Berman 2014; Seabrooke 2014). Looking forward, a more ambitiously interdisciplinary engagement between different research programmes will further strengthen the field of performativity studies.

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Book: Olivier Godechot, 2017: *Wages, Bonuses and Appropriation of Profit in the Financial Industry. The Working Rich. London: Routledge.*

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Why are payments in the financial sector so high? This important question entered public debate in the aftermath of the financial crisis; but while moral outrage over exorbitant payment levels has subsided, extravagant remuneration practices persist, though perhaps with some minor patches. In an updated and translated version of his previous book, *Working Rich* (2007), Olivier Godechot provides us with the means of understanding this phenomenon. Often-heard justifications for the existence of an extravagant "bonus culture" in finance – "It's the results! It's the market! It's the performance! It's the job!" (p. 226) – seem hardly convincing, and, indeed, he spends no more words than strictly necessary to refute them. In their place, Godechot offers the reader an exposition of the social mechanisms that have caused compensation in the financial sector to become harmfully out of sync with what seems reasonable. The key to understanding this phenomenon, he maintains, is to rephrase remuneration practices as a struggle over ownership of a firm's productive assets which enables strategically positioned and hence powerful individuals to lay claim on the profits generated by their use.

To make his argument, Godechot stitches together a vocabulary from a variety of disciplines including sociology ("social capital"), law ("property rights"), and economics ("asset specificity"). This vocabulary remedies the shortcomings of the simplistic but prevalent opposition between wage earners and shareholders, or labour and capital, which, he argues, fails to address the skewed relations that emerge within the wage earning group in finance. Godechot proposes instead to "consider that wage earners are also, in a sense, owners of the firm's assets" (p. 67). A sense of ownership – which is distinct from the capacity to claim ownership – is distributed according to whether legitimate claims on either "first will," "first action," or "first idea" for profit making activities can be justified. The actual capacity depends on whether a firm's assets can be readily "appropriated, detached and transferred" for the benefit of individuals. For instance, while salespeople may threaten to take important clients elsewhere, heads of trading rooms can leverage their structural position to organise a collective move of an entire team – "In the finance industry", in other words, "employees can indeed leave with the cash register" (p. 203). The labour market, therefore, is more than a market for "just personal skills"; it is also a market for appropriated assets. Overall, a picture emerges of a social landscape in which the exploiters of capital are not solely to be found amongst the ranks of the capitalists, but also, and perhaps especially so, among strategically positioned wage-earners; a picture, as Godechot suggests, that may extend well to other economic sectors too, especially to those where assets can relatively easily be seized by strategically positioned individuals (you could think of, for instance, the digital technology sector).

This detailed and thorough analysis of remuneration practices is set against the background of more general debates about the appropriation of profits. Using an impressive collection of statistical data, Godechot shows, for instance, that the problem of excessive bonuses in some parts of contemporary finance is a problem not just in terms of its symbolic dimension, provoking moral outrage fuelled by stereotyped narratives such as the Wolf of Wall Street; but is also a problem that feeds into the more general concerns about inequality as they have surfaced most famously in Piketty's (2013) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. While the share of income of the top 0.1 percent went up from 1.1 percent in 1996 to 1.95 percent in 2007, Godechot estimates roughly half of this increase to be due to rising inequality in the financial sector.

The Working Rich is a monograph that is based on an impressive amount of empirical work (the research on which it is based goes back to Godechot's master's degree in 1997). It is subdivided into three parts, the first of which provides a detailed description of bonus practices and how these relate to issues of inequality. The second part, which is the most theoretical one, lays down the conceptual framework for understanding remuneration practices. The real beef of the book is presented in part three, which provides a thorough analysis of how heads of trading rooms can strategically levy (or fail to levy) their social capital to secure exorbitant rewards. The final part, in other words, provides a convincing explanation for why some individuals manage to take home high rewards, while others, whose contributions seem just as valuable, are left with more modest pay.

Whether the vocabulary developed by Godechot will, however, also help researchers to understand issues of income inequality in other domains of economic life remains to be seen in further studies. Moreover, if anything, the weaknesses of the book are in the things that it does not explicitly bring out (and which, to be fair, are perhaps also beyond its intended sociological scope). For example, while the causes of extravagant remuneration are proficiently exposed, the book has less to say about its consequences. As several French economists have shown (some of whom Godechot also cites), finance has become less efficient when compared with, for instance, the 1950s, despite an impressive rate of innovation in both its technological infrastructure and the type of products being sold (Bazot 2014; Philippon 2015). Do the remuneration practices as described by Godechot contribute to the destruction of value and the inefficiency of finance; and, if so, how?

Nevertheless, the book is an invaluable addition to the libraries of economic sociologists, economists, and indeed anyone else interested in the issue of inequality and/or finance. It addresses an important but academically very challenging topic – challenging due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Perhaps its major strength, therefore, is the breadth of data collection methods that were used (including participant observation, interviews, multiple questionnaire surveys, archival research, and the collection of statistics), which facilitates a continuous zooming between detailed and colourful descriptions of remuneration practices on the one hand, and more general considerations on the other; it provides, in other words, not only a new language but also an ample collection of evidence that can inform the important and lively contemporary debates on income inequality and the value of finance.

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