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# 11 Finance

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Anthropological interest in finance has been growing since the 1980s, when speculative stock markets and the financialisation of the world economy occupied headlines and imaginations. Finance also took on new urgency because of the debt crises, currency devaluations and financial collapses that beset many traditional sites of anthropological fieldwork. While anthropologists were accustomed to documenting the effects of the global financial architecture, from institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to multinational corporations and extractive industries, finance itself – its mechanics, the entities that make it up, even its very definition – remained somewhat obscure. Few anthropologists had the training or inclination to get into the nuts and bolts of finance, and fewer still had any clear understanding of the field apart from their own personal experience with credit cards, mortgages and retirement accounts. When Arjun Appadurai issued the call to study 'financescapes', those 'complex fiscal and investment flows' of the 'global grid of currency speculation and capital transfer' (1990: 8) that have seemingly transformed older demarcations of region and place, few heeded it.

That is beginning to change. The work surveyed in this chapter represents what may constitute a nascent subfield, the anthropology of finance. Drawing inspiration from work in other fields with a longer history of research on the topic, anthropologists are bringing the hallmark method of participant-observation and the theoretical tools of the discipline to bear on such diverse financial phenomena as stock markets, derivative contracts, mortgages and other debt instruments, the mathematical and legal apparatus of finance, and trading floors. While this work sometimes harks back to earlier research in economic anthropology and especially the anthropology of money (see Hart chap. 10 supra), much of it strikes out on its own. To some anthropologists, the new objects of finance themselves resist conventional anthropological modes of understanding things 'from the native's point of view' (Geertz 1973), not least because those objects create their own contexts: things financial actively produce the social, cultural and material milieu in which they have currency and make sense, without always being mediated by human actors. Or, to put it another way, a mathematical formula cannot be interviewed; its makers and users can, but the results it produces can have effects unintended by and outside the control of those human agents.

Accordingly, anthropologists of finance have turned to social studies of science that emphasise the interaction and mutual constitution of human and non-human actors.

The present account is necessarily partial, and it is written at a time just prior to the expected publication of a number of anthropological monographs that deal specifically with finance. It will not review the debates in the social sciences about the beginnings of 'global finance' and its relationship to state sovereignty. Signposts for picking one's way through that history include the stock market crash of 1929, which signalled an end to the nineteenth-century financial system, the Bretton Woods agreements, which established the mid-twentieth-century international financial architecture, and the demise of Bretton Woods in the 1970s, when the US dollar was untethered from gold, and the securitisation of international debts bolstered the power of investment houses over banks and other financial institutions. Legal changes in the 1980s quickened the field of finance, as did the increasing power of neoliberal ideologies that promoted 'free' markets and sought to privatise many state functions (including financing of public works and social services). In 1986, the London stock exchange became open to foreign traders and investment companies; additionally, the positions of broker and dealer were allowed to be folded into one and to negotiate their commissions. This so-called 'Big Bang' radically reshaped the character of stock trading in the City by breaking the hold of entrenched banking institutions (and, it should be noted, aristocratic elites who had previously dominated trading) and creating a global financial market operating in real time (Helleiner 1994; Leyshon and Thrift 1997). New information technologies went hand in glove with these financial changes, becoming both their method and object. Liberalised regulations permitting one-stop financial shopping, with investing, consumer banking and insurance all allowed to operate under one roof, also increased the pace, scale, scope and, arguably, risk of finance.

This chapter will leave to one side work in the anthropology of money that speaks to many of the same issues as would an anthropology of finance.[1] Because of the newness of anthropological engagement with finance, it is difficult to draw the kind of clear boundaries around it that one could expect for other sub-fields of the discipline. In addition, anthropologists working on financial topics are in dialogue with scholars in a wide variety of other fields, including sociology, geography, political science, economics, history, literature and science studies. Their interlocutors in those other fields sometimes draw on the same sources of theoretical or methodological inspiration as they do. Of particular note is the emphasis in sociological studies of finance on the ethnographic method. Of the two full-length ethnographic monographs of financial markets currently in print, Mitchell Abolafia's (1996) *Making markets* and Ellen Hertz's (1998) *The trading* *crowd*, one is by a sociologist (Abolafia). In short, interdisciplinary conversations characterise the anthropology of finance. Although it is difficult to specify a uniquely anthropological contribution to these conversations, I make the effort below.

**Definitions, biases and colonial legacies**

The broadest definition of finance would include all aspects of the management of money or other assets, and, in particular, the management of debt and equity as a means of raising capital: making money with money. The ethnographic record is full of examples of debt and equity schemes that stand apart from the modern institutions of banking and finance, such as rotating credit and savings associations, indigenous forms of insurance, debt peonage, pawning and so forth. It also contains rich data on the interpretation of artefacts like interest-bearing capital in various cosmological systems. Michael Taussig's famous ethnography of South American peasants and proletarians (which follows Nash 1972) documented how interest had come to be understood in terms of contractual arrangements with the devil: only the devil can contravene the natural order and make inert matter reproduce. Taussig also recorded the practice of surreptitiously causing a banknote to be blessed with holy water during the baptism of a child, in the belief that a baptised bill will return with interest to its owner (and simultaneously sap the wealth of those with whom he deals) (Taussig 1980: 126). Taussig explained such practices in terms of an indigenous critical discourse on capitalism, an echo of Aristotle's condemnation of interest and praise of money's use in facilitating trade, and a commentary on the social relationships behind economic transactions. Even though a supernatural force makes money fecund, the fact that that power has to be invoked by a human being – the baptiser of the bill, the other party to the devil's contract – shows that the peasants were not mystified by the fetishism of commodities but rather by the 'precapitalist fetishism' that views relationships among humans, not relationships among things, as primary (1980: 129–30).

Anthropologists and historians have also had to deal with the entrenched bias, mainly from the realms of policy and development but also the discipline of economics, that so-called primitive peoples simply did not have financial institutions or credit and debt systems prior to European contact and conquest. Thus, modernisation theorists in the mid-twentieth century sought to counter 'informal' (and, by implication, untrustworthy or unstable) quasi-financial institutions with the 'formal' mechanisms of modern banking and lending. In the late twentieth century, with the ideological dominance of entrepreneurial models of development, development planners often presumed that in attempting to provide people with access to credit they had to begin from whole cloth and introduce a wholly novel set of procedures and beliefs. Some prominent writers have even suggested that underdevelopment stems directly from a lack of the legal architecture of securitisation, or the abstracting of partible shares from material goods and property in order to turn property into capital (de Soto 2000). While finance played a role in the colonial project through the formation of cooperative societies and rural banks (for example, Furnivall 1939: 357) and the securitisation of property in land through cadastral surveys and titling schemes (Guha 1981; Maurer 1997; Mitchell 2002), and while the denial of access to finance also served to limit the economic and political power of colonised peoples, colonised peoples in many cases possessed their own forms of currency, credit, debt, insurance and so on. Historians, especially of Africa and often in collaboration with anthropologists, have documented these kinds of financial institutions and their interactions with those of the colonisers in ways that paint a more complex picture than the straightforward supplanting of one system by another. Imposed systems were rarely any more stable than those they sought to replace, and local systems were often quite durable and capable of sustaining long-distance and long-lasting financial relationships (see the contributions to Guyer 1995 and Stiansen and Guyer 1999).

Because European systems of finance, debt and credit went along with colonial governance and missionisation, they were often interpreted in terms of political authority (via, for example, the tax and tariff regimes of the bureaucratic state) and morality, ethics and religion (via, for example, the Abrahamic religions' emphasis on divine judgement as an accounts-settling, or the prohibition of interest in Islam and debates over usury or 'excessive' interest in both Christianity and Judaism). In both the political and religious domains, colonial and post-colonial efforts to 'teach' finance as a means of (self-) development often rested on assumptions about time: teaching finance meant teaching self-restraint and the time-horizon of long-term investment, the amortisation of debts and the future benefit of savings (Stiansen and Guyer 1999: 10). In the nineteenth century, people accustomed to systems of obligation to chiefly nobles found themselves hard pressed to understand why the repayment of monetary debts would be in their best interest: wealth in people and wealth and cash were hard to reconcile, leading colonial merchants and traders to complain that 'you have to give credit to the Blacks here and they pay late or never' or 'The greatest caution is requisite in giving credit to the natives … [because] once [you] allow them to exceed a certain sum … they cease to pay anything further' (quoted in Law 1999: 19). It is a small step from this colonial raciology of debt to twentieth-century development discourse and its depictions of people as poor because they cannot manage money, do not possess an entrepreneurial spirit, or are incapable of the abstract thought that finance seemingly requires (see Blim chap. 19 infra). Hence, the

World Bank reports that unsophisticated lenders in some 'transitioning' or 'developing' economies are reluctant to accept certain kinds of collateral from potential borrowers, specifically movable property held by the prospective borrower such as factory machinery or inventories. 'Rather', the Bank writes, 'lenders require that the moveable property be placed under their direct control – as if they were valuables in a bank vault or goods in a bonded warehouse' (World Bank 1996: 89). The Bank then asks, incredulously, 'Why is real estate or merchandise in a vault acceptable as collateral, but not livestock, machinery, and inventories?' (1996: 89). The Bank thus proposes the development of legal regimes that permit the 'creation of security interests for any person over any thing' (1996: 89; on the cultural logic of securitisation, see Maurer 1999).

Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry's (1989) refocusing of anthropological discussions of money away from its meanings and toward its role in mediating short-term individual decisions and long-term socio-cosmological reproduction provides a useful rubric for situating recent anthropological work on finance. The mediation of short-term individual interest and long-term reproduction can be seen as both an analytic device and an ethnographic observation of the way many peoples of the circum-Mediterranean, broadly defined, have constructed and then worried about finance. The prohibition of gain without risk in Islam and of usury in medieval Christianity both have to do with concerns that those who make money with money sacrifice the long term to their own short-term desires, and manipulate time by converting it into money. The Abrahamic texts, of course, are replete with accounting and financial metaphors. The irony for the apocalyptic religions is that while the final reckoning is prophesied it is also always an endlessly receding horizon. So, too, with finance. The promise of a long-term settlement of accounts is what animates the lending of money – you do not lend unless you are guaranteed a return in the future – and yet a final settling of accounts, were it to arrive, would render living and reproductive capital dead again, and present no future possibilities for monetary gain. Hence, the long term is both the precondition for and the animating fiction of Western finance. Western economists before the econometric revolution recognised this, most famously John Maynard Keynes, who rejected long-term economic planning with his quip that, 'In the long run, we are all dead' (Keynes 1923: 65). Joan Robinson, too, in criticising the theory that prices tend towards the equilibrium of supply and demand, noted that the idea of equilibrium depended on a spatial metaphor to explain a temporal process and denied any real role to time (Robinson 1960). Keynes and Robinson both provided criticisms of equilibrium theory, itself a core component of the efficient markets hypothesis upon which contemporary financial architecture rests and which some new scholarship in anthropology revisits.

**Finance and fiction: appearances can be deceiving**

Much anthropological reflection on finance has tended to examine the metaphysics of financial temporality rather than delve into its infrastructure. Drawing on Karl Marx's classic account of 'fictitious capital' in *Capital*, volume 3, which contrasts the fiction of credit with the 'real' capital of fixed assets (the 'produced means of production', de Brunhoff 1992: 22) and 'money-capital' paid directly in wages and for goods, anthropologists have lingered over the 'fictions' of contemporary finance. Anthropologists informed by the geographer David Harvey's (1989) *The condition of postmodernity*, attend to the cultural formations co-occurring with finance capital and find artifice, illusion, mystification and the occult. When ethnographers and their subjects alike discover the 'there's nothing there' of contemporary finance, the ethnographers often turn to denunciatory forms of Marxism, reasserting the 'real' material ground of production against credit. The subjects often turn to discourses of magic, enchantment and the occult (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). In this, both echo seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans who explored the metaphorical and metaphysical associations binding credit with faith, fiction, gender and literary genre.

The literary historian Catherine Ingrassia (1998), for instance, has demonstrated how finance and the literary genre of fiction served as analogues for one another in eighteenth-century England. The South Sea Bubble scandal led to depictions of stock-jobbers as feminine, willing to believe any (false) story, at a time when women were becoming avid consumers of story books as well as participants in fantastic investment schemes. Anna Tsing revisits the South Sea Bubble in the context of a similarly fantastic investment scheme involving a non-existent gold mine in Indonesia in order to argue that when 'investors are looking for the *appearance* of success', 'economic performance is conjured dramatically' (Tsing 2000: 141–2; original emphasis). The conjuring act depends on a spatial and scalar imagination, the delimiting of 'global' and 'local' contingently and haltingly, and continually made and re-made, exactly as a 'dramatic performance' on a stage (2000: 118).

**Finance and neoliberal development**

Recent anthropological work on finance has been less content to linger over its fictions and more interested in its objects, both in the sense of its ends and its technique and apparatus. Anthropologists writing ethnographies of neoliberal states often discuss the financialisation of the state and the efforts of multilateral institutions like the World Bank to produce 'investable' jurisdictions. Legal guarantees of property and security interests in land and other immovables are often central to such efforts. Anthropologists and other social scientists who have studied the 'offshore' financial centres on

Caribbean, Pacific and Channel islands have studied these legal transformations and their concomitant effects. Most discuss notions of nationality and sovereignty (for example, Amit 2001; Donaghy 2002; Hampton and Christensen 1999; Hudson 1998; Maingot 1995; Maurer 1997; Palan 1998; Rawlings 2002; Roberts 1994), focusing especially on the 'differentiated levels of intensity by which states … apply their regulation' (Palan 1998: 625) and the imagination of space and territory that those levels of intensity promote. That is, these authors view the very definition of some places as 'offshore' to others as a political process and explore the cultural demarcation of region compelled by the regulation of the international state system. They also document the intertwining of the social construction of place and trust, since attracting international finance depends on hiding from view money laundering or other illicit activities that can occur offshore, and drawing a clear line between the often structurally identical practices of sound asset protection and tax evasion. Amit (2001) and Maurer (1997) discuss the impact of offshore finance on citizenship and belonging in the Caribbean, noting that financial flows have generated economic mobility for citizens while bolstering rigid distinctions between citizens and non-citizen immigrants. Marshall shows how Caribbean offshore finance can be understood in terms of the conflict between different sectors of elites, the dominance since the 1980s of the islands' merchant class and the 'hegemony of circulation over production' that has characterised the Caribbean since its plantation and slavery days (Marshall 1996: 209).

Other ethnographic studies of neoliberalism discuss the cultural work necessary to produce and stabilise the economic domain as separate from the political, in order then to subordinate the latter to the former (for example, Williamson 2002). Some attend to the role of 'culture' in neoliberal development strategies. Julia Elyachar (2002) shows how multilateral institutions' sponsorship of microlending projects in Egypt leads into discourses of the national debt and leads people to new understandings of the benefits of being caught up in creditor–debtor relationships with richer others, though not in a manner those powerful others may have intended. She shows how development agencies' discourse of empowerment through debt is based on harnessing people's already-existing 'microinformality', their on-the-ground, 'real life' practices and social networks. Objectifying microinformality and turning it into a resource is a response to older development discourses that viewed local cultures as hindrances. A key assumption is that credit is a human right, a premise fostered by institutions like the World Bank once they realised that their efforts to discipline Third-World states through structural adjustment programmes that rolled back state financing for social services were having a detrimental effect on the poor. Elyachar shows how the new emphasis on microinformality was devised by international organisations to solve the safety-net problem without restoring power to the state. Of course, it leads to new forms of discipline as well, since borrowers can be imprisoned for failure to repay. Since such imprisonment derives from the laws of contract, it represents a new form of governance through self-discipline, rather than the heavy hand of the state. This discipline demands a reflexivity about anthropological concepts: when the cultural practices of poor people are transformed by development planners into 'social capital', then anthropological concepts of culture themselves can no longer be taken for granted as (mere) analytical tools (Elyachar 2002: 511). Anthropology, Elyachar (2002: 499) notes, 'played more than a midwife's role' in the birth of the very idea of informality. Culture here becomes a 'new type of discipline that circumvents the state by way of finance and NGOs' (2002: 511).

In a related vein, Erica Bornstein's *The spirit of development* (2003), which may be the first ethnographic monograph on faith-based non-governmental organisations, documents the role of ideas about charity in the massive and understudied financial flows of child sponsorship programmes and religious aid. She is particularly attentive to the manner in which development discourse, which appears secular, is shot through with Christian and millennial assumptions, and sketches the interface between Christian missionisation and the mission of economic development. Her ethnography stands as a singular example of the documentation of a financescape perhaps not anticipated by Appadurai but of growing importance.

## Sociology and anthropology of financial markets

Anthropologists and sociologists have produced pioneering ethnographies of financial markets, often involving participant-observation on the trading floor as well as in corporate offices. It is interesting, however, that despite the common methodologies, disciplinary concerns have inflected the character of these studies. So, where Abolafia (1996) discovers the importance of social networks and the role of the tension between self-interest and self-restraint in the maintenance of such networks, Ellen Hertz (1998) discovers the importance of a dialectic between two 'behavioral/ideational systems' (after Gates 1996: 7). For Abolafia, the task is to understand individual action in webs of social relationships, for the most part abstracted from any structuring system besides the playing-out of individual interests. The social construction of markets is a specifically *social* construction, worked out in the give and take of everyday human interaction. The surprise in Abolafia's ethnography is that despite the rhetoric of the free market and competition, traders at the heart of contemporary capitalism find themselves suspended in webs of relationships that exercise control and restraint over the most aggressive players even as it allows them to 'win' (for example, Abolafia 1996: 79).

Hertz, while providing the same kind of nuanced data on social networks of traders, particularly the opposition between 'big players' and 'dispersed players', lends more emphasis to the webs of significance than to sociality and to the durable, longer-term cultural–historical and political–economic structures in which traders find themselves. For Hertz, the 'stock fever' that gripped Shanghai in 1992 can be explained in terms of a tension between a centrifugal petty commodity mode of production and a centripetal tributary mode of production that, she argues, has characterised much of Chinese cultural history. The state, acting like a tributary overlord, sought literally to capitalise on its citizens' savings, an in-gathering of wealth to fuel China's transitioning economy. Citizens' own petty commodity activity and its associated ethos burgeoned into a mass movement, a 'fever', in opposition to the state but, at the same time, ultimately fulfilling the state's interests, although not without its dangers for the state. The contest is a political one between the power of the masses and the power of the state. Hence, the 'interpretative framework through which Shanghainese read their stock market is firstly political, and secondly, if at all, "economic"' (Hertz 1998: 23).

Similar contrasts of emphasis can be found in other ethnographies of stock markets. Sociologists Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger (2000, 2002; see also Baker 1984) outline the 'global microstructures' that characterise trading markets, specifically currency markets. These are structures that are generalised 'globally' and with global impacts, but are microsocial interactional processes at the level of traders' intersubjective action and understanding. Paying close attention to the communicative practices of traders – their telegraphic, tightly parsed electronic text messages to one another, as well as their informal conversations while trading and on the telephone – these sociologists stress the analytical 'structural equivalence' of the 'interaction order' and 'macrosocial phenomena' (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002: 907, after Goffman 1983). In other words, they deny the macrosocial any determining power over the micro, and instead look at the mutual constitution of these two orders. They subtly rework and critique the 'embeddedness' rubric proposed by economic sociologists like Mark Granovetter (1985), which has analogues in economic anthropology influenced by Karl Polanyi (1957; see Isaac chap. 1 supra).

There are echoes here of the formalist–substantivist debate in that sub-field: the more interaction-focused sociologists tend to sound like formalists who believe individuals act to maximise satisfactions, while those proposing attention to the embeddedness of action in wider social forms or structures tend to sound like substantivists. The difficulty for Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, however, is that the embeddedness framework tends to presuppose that actions are embedded in a distance-near setting ('the local'), while the traders they studied instead seemed embedded in something a little more distant and dispersed, and based on back-and-forth calls and responses rather than deep interaction. They term this context 'response presence' as contrasted to 'embodied presence' (2002: 909). It becomes important, too, for their realisation that at least some of the entities with whom traders are engaged in response-presence relationships are not human or necessarily humanly directed, and that these 'common objects' around which humans structure their activity themselves deserve their own sociology. In their paper on traders' conceptions of the market (2000), they term these 'postsocial' relations, and argue that an understanding of post-social relations demands attention to the objects with whom humans have more lasting and perhaps even fulfilling relationships than they do with other humans. 'The market' for traders is an entity that they massage, move, listen to, feel and manipulate, but one that also pushes back on them, feels them, changes them and either offers or withdraws its love. These authors document the rich and often visceral vocabulary traders have for discussing their objects, and compare trading to other post-social cultural forms, like sky-diving and shopping, that challenge the centrality of human-to-human relationships. Here (but not in Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002!), they draw inspiration from object-relations theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well as more conventional sociological sources to put forward the importance of studying objects of knowledge as generating their own forms of desire.

There is something a little unsatisfying from an anthropological point of view, however, when Knorr Cetina and Bruegger discover that global microstructures often function through norms of reciprocity. In other words, the anonymous and competitive market is revealed not to be a contest of individual interests so much as a series of dyads governed by the expectation of the return gift. Discovering that markets are not so individualistic and competitive as they have been made out to be in neoclassical economic theory, or that they rely on quasi-clientage relationships, is old news to anthropology (for example, Geertz 1978). At the same time, the creative uses of ethnographic methods in trading rooms and the theoretical sophistication brought by these sociologists to core concepts in the sub-field of economic sociology have helped shape anthropological work on finance. The difference, I think, is that the anthropologists tend to work from the ethnography out to questions of cosmology, or in to questions of technique, and then query the inside–outside (or local–global) distinction itself, while the sociologists, in spite of their moves toward the post-social, still seem wedded to some conception of sociality narrowly defined as immediate human–human interaction.

Two recent anthropological studies stand out. Karen Ho's *Liquefying corporations and communities* (2003) uses ethnography among Wall Street investment banks to understand changing conceptions of the role of finance in American society. She is interested in how what she calls 'stock market values' came to occupy a pre-eminent position in late-twentieth-century discussions over the role of 'the economy' and its relationship to social welfare. The emphasis is not on a hegemonic 'market culture' so much as contests over economic worldviews among investment elites and workers in the world of investment. She tracks the shift in notions of corporate value, from the expectation of returns in the form of dividends, to mere stock price, and concomitant shifts in political discourse around notions of 'shareholder democracy'. Where the corporation had once functioned as a total social institution, it has now been 'liquidated', turned into living capital able to flow, dissolve and reconstitute at a moment's notice. Like Hertz, Ho is interested in mass involvement in financial markets, and the impact of that mass involvement on other domains (like 'democracy'). Intriguingly, Ho also conducted fieldwork among unemployed investment bankers and looked at how people understand their own experiences of 'liquidation'.

Caitlin Zaloom (2003) conducted fieldwork in the London and Chicago financial futures markets. The two markets operate with different sets of technologies: in Chicago, traders mingle and jostle in an open-outcry pit; in London, traders work in front of computer screens trading on-line. Zaloom finds that these different technological regimes inflect traders' understandings not just of the market or their own activity, but of the most basic unit of finance itself: numbers. She characterises traders' work with numbers as 'interpretation rather than exacting calculation' (2003: 259), yet finds subtle differences between the interpretative activity of pit traders and on-line traders. While both operate with numbers as indexes of 'informational transparency' (2003: 260), the supposed key to efficient markets, in practice traders have very little information about what they are trading and very little understanding of the underlying economies or economic fundamentals that produce them. Instead, trading is an immediate, corporeal activity, where numbers become embodied dispositions more than transparent reflections of some market reality. Numbers come to 'have particular personalities', and for traders, numbers 'are themselves agents' (2003: 262). Pit traders have a visceral engagement with these numbers, signifying them with hand gestures and making them hum with pitch and tone. The pit is an arena of physicality and the voice, hand and ear its chief organs and interpretative instruments. Traders report that stopping to calculate and assess risks rationally and mathematically is actually a 'hindrance to their job', and that 'the first step' of becoming a successful trader 'is learning *not* to calculate' (2003: 264; original emphasis). For on-line traders, the screen mediates their activities and the market is rendered an apparently straightforward collection of numbers. While on-line trading technologies were designed to give traders total information, in fact, Zaloom finds, they have actually reduced information available to traders: gone are the corporeal and sensory clues of the pit (2003: 264). Still, on-line traders generate elaborate interpretative rubrics for the numbers they see moving across their screens, imagine identities for their interlocutors and competitors, and sometimes see shadowy actors behind imagined numeric patterns. Learning to see and talk about these patterns – to engage in 'market chatter', not rational calculation – was key to the development of an interpretative community (2003: 266).

**Financial instruments: from content to form**

Zaloom's research tracks a theoretical and substantive innovation in the anthropology of finance that has to do with its engagement with science studies. Where both Knorr Cetina and Bruegger on the one hand and Zaloom on the other report on the gendered and sexualised images traders often use to recount their wins or losses, Zaloom spends more time than the sociologists analysing the norms of gender in finance. Compared to the sociologists' work, Ho's and Zaloom's ethnographies are marked by their attention to norms more than networks. And Zaloom's adds to the focus on norms an equally important focus on forms (after Rabinow 1995). It is not just the meanings of numbers that interest her, but their formal properties and the formats in which they are presented.

The turn towards form has occupied several anthropologists of finance, especially those who look at its apparatuses, mechanics and techniques. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this work also engages the anthropology of law and derives inspiration from science studies, since both of those fields have lent themselves to discussions of the distinction between form and content as a fact of social-object worlds rather than as just an analytical device. Anthropologists attending to financial apparatuses also draw on Michel Callon's (1998) argument that economies are 'embedded' in economic theories as much as they are in wider contexts. In other words, for Callon, economic theories 'perform' the economy rather than the economy being apprehended or represented by the theories of economics. Donald MacKenzie (2001), in science studies, explores how options-pricing formulas produce their own contexts; that is, how mathematical formulas shape trading practices in feedback loops such that the presumptions of the model became more and more true over time, even, in part, because the 'activities of those who disbelieve finance theory's efficient market hypothesis' themselves redound into the world the formula creates (MacKenzie 2001: 115; see also MacKenzie 2003; MacKenzie and Millo 2001; and in political science, see De Goede 2003 on the co-production of economic and financial knowledges). To the social-scientific literature emerging on risk and responsibility in finance (Garsten and Hasselström 2003), particularly the 'cultures of risk' associated with futures markets (Green 2000; Pryke and Allen 2000; Tickell 2000), MacKenzie lays the groundwork for questioning how finance produces form.

Lépinay (2004) also looks at the work formulas do, not as the outcome of the interests of elites or manifestations of deeper cultural or social processes outside them, but in their own terms and as their own force. Lépinay, who has also collaborated with Hertz (in research on finance and deception), is interested in how formulas circulate and become social forms. My essay on derivative pricing models (Maurer 2002a) is concerned to unseat numbers as always signs of something else (the things counted, for example) and instead to ask how numbers maintain their power to signify. I provide a genealogy of statistics and the historical separation of mathematical from moral probability. This move is related to my work on the contorted debates over the prohibition of interest in Islamic banking and finance. There, I show how the form of arguments over interest often occupy Islamic bankers more than their content, and the forms themselves are, for participants, actual enactments of virtue in the world, even if people are trucking in something that looks and smells like interest (for example, Maurer 2002b). The structure and motion of the argument is more important than where it goes or what it uses to get there: it is not what the argument 'does', but rather its mere procession that matters. Viewing Islamic banking as casuistry in the original sense of the term, as a form of moral argument from particular cases, I also point out the similarly casuistic moral forms of 'conventional' finance.

In short, the embeddedness framework no longer seems adequate to financial worlds whose entanglements with other domains render inside and outside difficult to ascertain. This has implications, of course, for anthropological knowledge production. Marcus and Holmes (2001) discuss strategies for anthropology when its subjects – in their case, the Federal Reserve Bank of the United States – themselves produce quasi-ethnographic knowledge that both reports on and shapes the distinction between economic knowledge and 'the economy'. Annelise Riles, working with lawyers and regulators, and Hirokazu Miyazaki, working with securities traders, have been writing innovative essays on the Tokyo financial market by keeping social analysis and the knowledge-making activities of their subjects squarely in view at the same time. Just as anthropologists always feel a sense of 'temporal incongruity' with their work – we are always late, conducting salvage operations or else trying desperately to catch up to a world whose transformations outpace us – Japanese securities traders experience analogous forms of temporal incongruity from their engagement with a market operating in real time yet in a global political economy where Japan seems 'behind' the United States (Miyazaki 2003: 255). Miyazaki studies arbitrage, which exploits 'differences in the price of a single asset in two different markets' (2003: 256) and is always, by definition, a self-closing operation: if markets are truly efficient, such differences should disappear as soon as they are noted, arbitrage itself facilitating this disappearance. Traders got caught up in tensions among different temporal imperatives, such as the (time-consuming) imperative to 'refine' trading strategies versus the imperative to instantly 'improvise'. Miyazaki also documents that the multiple and incongruous temporalities with which traders are involved also constitute their life trajectories and define the time of living as the closing-off of arbitrage possibilities in traders' personal lives.

Riles (n.d.(a), n.d.(b)) looks at legal architects of Japan's financial markets, with respect to the technical procedures of trade settlement and clearance (the process of matching buyers and sellers and settling transactions in continuous, real-time arenas). Her concern is the simultaneous intimacy and estrangement of these men and their objects, and, in particular, the manner in which an almost instantaneous or anticipatory intimacy precluded explicit articulation of knowledge claims. The lawyers spoke of the Bank of Japan, for example, as 'our mother', a caregiver who anticipates before knowledge or need could even be spoken. The shift from a net settlement system (settling accounts at the end of a trading day) to a real-time continuous settlement system represented a shift from the virtues of planning to the vagaries of risk. It also represented what Riles terms an 'unwinding' of systemic thought: the net settlement system was characterised precisely by its status as a system: a format and a set of procedures for mitigating risk. Real-time settlement, in contrast, is intended to foreclose the very possibility of system and instead to be instantly responsive and instantly to record 'the market' as it unfolds in real time. The temporality of real-time continuous settlement, Riles argues, is thus a time of pure need and instinct, like the time of the mother and her anticipatory perfection and, hence, no risk after all. 'With Real Time', Riles writes, 'analysis stopped' and 'anxious self-reflexive critique of [one's] own place in the system would now become superfluous' (n.d.(b): 11). For Riles, taking this seriously poses a real problem for a discipline used to trucking in the exotic or bizarre. Here, anthropology is presented with a milieu that considers itself to be impervious to analysis because there is nothing to analyse: there is just stimulus and automatic response. It presents itself to the anthropologist as utterly banal, flat, a landscape of uninteresting, because intimately familiar, need.

In her paper on legal theory and the over-the-counter derivatives market in Tokyo (n.d.(a)), Riles brings her work more directly to bear on the conventions of anthropological knowledge. Traditionally, anthropologists drew analogies between the knowledge practices of its subjects and its own analytical categories. For example, in the material from South America discussed at the outset of this review, Taussig analysed ideas about the devil (native knowledge) by drawing analogies with critiques of the commodity (theoretical knowledge). Riles claims that this procedure fails when the anthropologist engages knowledge formations that coincide with those of anthropology. Japanese lawyers trying to come up with new regulations for the derivatives market make analogies between traders' practices and ideas on the one hand, and those of social science and social analysis on the other. In many ways, the work Riles might expect to perform here – ferret out the interests behind actions, look for deeper meanings beneath ideologies and then make analogies to knowledge categories in other domains – is precisely the work in which these lawyers are engaged. There is little more for her to add, as her analysis is trumped by their own. There is no distance, and no difference, and the mundane makes the epistemological quandaries to which the discipline is more accustomed beside the point.

Although a nascent field, the anthropology of finance demonstrates that there may be more to anthropological innovation than the extension of its tools to new fields (see Riles n.d.(a): 13). The very concept of innovation itself tracks rather closely the field of finance, which has consciously built itself on and propelled itself by innovation. If finance is about finding ever-new ways to make money by managing credits and debts, anthropology has been about finding ever-new ways to make knowledge by managing our intellectual debts to our subjects and our academic forebears, while extending credit into the future to the new knowledges that will (hopefully) proceed from our own. Given the puzzles explored in this review, it may be that anthropological engagement with finance will involve a kind of amortisation, a reduction to zero of those credits and debts along with the distance between the field and its subjects, subjects who sometimes invoke the same concepts and analytical apparatus as anthropologists do. The task of an anthropology of finance is to come to terms with this quandary, even as its practitioners, its subjects and much of the world may feel utterly estranged from, indeed 'liquidated' by, the financialised time-space of the contemporary moment.

## Note

1. It also does not review works that have discussed financial transactions or debtor–creditor relationships with the dead (see, for example, Cannell 1999; Klima 2002; Morris 2000).

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# A Handbook of Economic Anthropology

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