

Darr, Asaf

Article

Note from the editor: The economy from the minority point of view

economic sociology_the european electronic newsletter

Provided in Cooperation with:

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne

Suggested Citation: Darr, Asaf (2015) : Note from the editor: The economy from the minority point of view, economic sociology_the european electronic newsletter, ISSN 1871-3351, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne, Vol. 16, Iss. 2, pp. 2-3

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/156048>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.

Note from the editor

Introduction: The Economy from the Minority Point of View

The main goal of this issue of the Newsletter is to highlight the body of scholarly work within economic sociology which examines the main stream economy from the viewpoint of the economic periphery. How is the mainstream economy viewed from its margins? What obstacles do deprived-minorities who wish to enter the market face? What strategies are employed by marginal social groups in order to survive in a hostile economic environment and to improve their market position? When do minorities withdraw from the mainstream economy and constitute an economic enclave? Grounded answers to these questions highlight the unique contribution of economic sociology to the empirical investigation of the structuring of markets, and to policy making which integrates all layers of society and their varied images and experiences of *the market*.

Many economic sociologists apply interpretative theories to portray markets and market behavior as a social construction, and provide an image of the economy from multiple viewpoints. Such a non-monolithic perspective focuses on a variety of culturally bound sense-making mechanisms, rather than on a unified form of market rationality. This perspective also portrays an array of legal constraints, faced by different social strata and ethnic-minority groups who wish to engage in economic action. Finally, economic sociologists highlight the agency of deprived minority groups who devise strategies and workarounds to the many constraints they face.

Multiple viewpoints of the market, specifically those "from below", provide in-depth observations into the social fabric of a given society. The marginal economic position of specific ethnic and religious groups is shaped by broader politics and cultural forces, and the obstacles faced by some minorities, give a concrete form to the societies' abstract power grid. In turn, a marginal market position shapes the social identity, the political, and the cultural views of different segments of society. Distinct systems of meaning regarding the mainstream economy also provide the basis for social and political mobilization of members of marginal social groups. The Newsletter will demonstrate the benefits of presenting the multiple viewpoints of marginal social groups by applying this approach to the Israeli economy.

The experiences of members of marginal social groups within Israeli society – such as Palestinians, illegal immigrants from Africa, and the ultra-orthodox Jews – and their frustrating encounters with various state-level agents and programs, present an intricate picture of Israeli society. They portray a radically different image of the economy compared to recent accounts focusing on the local high-tech industry. Israel might be seen as an extreme case, since the deep ethno-national and religious cleavage separating Arabs and Jews periodically erupts into fierce violence. Yet, violent expressions of ethno-religious tensions involving members of diverse groups from the economic periphery are not unfamiliar in Europe, the latest example being the recent events in France and Belgium and the streaming of Extremists from European cities to join ISIS as well as the rise of the extreme political right and various racist movement. Studies which carefully document how the main stream economy in main European countries is viewed and experienced from the economic periphery might provide insight into the detrimental effects of the growing ethno-religious tensions.

For the past decade Israel has experienced an influx of work immigrants from Africa, seeking a safe haven and striving to improve their economic well-being. Raijman and Barak-Bianco present in their article a detailed account of the economic and legal realities which African entrepreneurs face in Tel-Aviv. The article describes the development of an enclave economy focusing on food and entertainment, and on the various strategies African workers devise to survive economically within an unwelcoming, yet thriving, socio-economic environment.

Israel is indeed a deeply divided society, with a large minority of Palestinian citizens within the 1948 borders, composing about 20% of the general population. In view of the centrality of the conflict between Jews and Arabs in the political sphere, its ramified representation in the specialist sociological fields, such as stratification and inequality (Semyonov, 1988; Semyonov/Yuchtman-Yaar, 1992; Yonay/Kraus, 2001), political and historical sociology (Bernstein 1998, 2000; De Vries, 1994; Lockman, 1993; Shalev, 1992), and studies of split labor markets (Lewin-Epstein/Semyonov, 1994; for Israel and occupied territories see Semyonov/Lewin-Epstein, 1985) is to be expected. The article by Sa'ar in this issue is written from a socio-

economic perspective, and focuses on the Jewish-Arab cleavage. The article is critical of the application of the ideas of economic citizenship and workforce diversity, which are part of a broader neo-liberal ideology, to Palestinian-Israeli women. Rather than liberating this minority within a minority, neo-liberal ideology is mobilized to free the state from its economic obligation towards Palestinian-Israeli Women.

Israel has been occupying the West Bank since 1967, and the Palestinian population residing in these territories has suffered severe restriction of personal freedoms, as well as extreme economic difficulties during these years. The article by Leuenberger and El-Atrash examines how economic neo-liberalism is applied in the occupied territories, and argues that this economic ideology, which is mobilized by Israel as well as by foreign-aid institutions, is threatening the development of an independent Palestinian economy and effectively cultivates its continued dependency on Israel. The article further describes how the *Separation Wall* constructed by Israel following the second Intifada (Palestinian uprising) has crippled economic development in Beth-Lethem and its surroundings.

The interview with Asaf Malchi focuses on a different segment of Israeli society: the Ultra-Orthodox Jews who comprise about 11% of the population. Men of this group are expected to dedicate their time to religious studies, while women are supposed to provide for the family. The interview explains how the Israeli economy is viewed by the Ultra-Orthodox Jews and describes ongoing attempts by the state to better integrate them into the mainstream economy. Finally, the section about new areas of studies for economic sociology focuses on socio-economic approaches to sustainability, an area which has attracted increasing research attention. Elliot's essay presents three broad angles from which economic sociologists might peruse research in this area: 1) sustainability *in* markets and economies, 2) sustainability *with* markets and economies, and 3) sustainability *of* markets and economies.

The last short section offers a brief summary of recent dissertation projects in the area of economic sociology.

I wish our readership a pleasant and educating reading.

Asaf Darr

adarr@univ.haifa.ac.il

References

- Bernstein, D.S.**, 2000: *Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- De Vries, D.**, 1994: Proletarianization and National Segregation: Haifa in the 1920s. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* 30(4), 860-882.
- Lewin-Epstein, N./M. Semyonov**, 1994: Sheltered labor markets, Public Sector Employment and Socioeconomic returns to Education of Arabs in Israel. In: *American Journal of Sociology* 100(3), 622-651.
- Lockman, Z.**, 1993: Railway Workers and the Relational History: Arabs and Jews in British-Ruled Palestine. In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35(3), 601-627.
- Semyonov, M.**, 1988: Bi-Ethnic Labor markets, Mono-Ethnic Labor Markets, and Socioeconomic Inequality. In: *American Sociological Review* 53(2), 256-266.
- Semyonov, M./N. Lewin-Epstein**, 1985: *Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water: Noncitizen Arabs in the Israeli Labor Market*. Ithaca and London: ILR Press.
- Semyonov, M./E. Yuchtman-Yaar**, 1992: Ethnicity, Education, and Occupational Inequality: Jews and Arabs in Israel. In: *International Perspectives on Education and Society* 2, 215-224.
- Shalev, M.**, 1992: *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.