

Readers are frequently exposed to earlier concepts that are explained as if for the first time.

Shortcomings aside, however, *The Ecological Rift* is an overall triumph, which deserves wide attention from anyone who believes in a sustainable world. The authors successfully reveal the dire seriousness of our social and environmental problems. Readers will always be rewarded with some fascinating new discussion that makes the book hard to put down. This is an important work, and offers a strong counterargument to those who believe Marxism is a strictly social theory without application to ecology.

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Economic Sociology: A Systematic Inquiry, by Alejandro Portes. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010. \$28.95. Pp. 320.

The purpose of this book by Alejandro Portes, a prominent sociologist at Princeton, is to systematically examine and proscribe the boundaries of economic sociology as a field of research. Contemporary economic sociology examines how economic interactions are always embedded within social systems and relationships of power, and highlights how the supposed “rationality” of these interactions often produces unintended consequences. The problem, as Portes observes, is that economic sociology today lacks disciplinary clarity. Too often researchers deploy the three analytic categories of this field — meta-theoretical principles, explanatory mechanisms, and strategic sites of inquiry — in a mixed manner, resulting in confusion in both concepts and research programs. To remedy this, Portes seeks to articulate a revised foundation for economic sociology based on formal theoretical consistency, terminological clarity, and the use of an inductive method in which generalizations are drawn from particular examples.

Portes’ approach is fundamentally Weberian, and so is in line with the positivist tradition dominant in mainstream social science. He argues against the search for an all-encompassing theoretical framework, seeing terms like “social systems” as too broad and lacking in empirical reference to be useful. Furthermore, in emphasizing the importance of theoretical rigor and empirical measurement he analytically separates meta-theoretical concepts like power and social structure from empirically observable ones like social

status and organizations. Thus, most of Portes' attention is devoted to mid-level explanatory concepts situated between overarching meta-theoretical frameworks and particular ideographic examples.

Individual chapters dedicated to the discussion of three such explanatory concepts or mechanisms — social capital, institutions, and social class — comprise the key parts of the book. Here Portes relies on Weber's notion of ideal types — mental constructs drawn from past experience that are “neither too specific and tied to a particular time and place nor so general that they cannot be compared properly to any concrete process or event” (4). These mid-range concepts are not meant to be building blocks toward a general theory, but rather exist as self-sufficient and modifiable categories for empirical analysis.

Drawing on Weber and Karl Polanyi, Portes rightly criticizes the rational choice approach and formal abstraction of mainstream economics. While he agrees that actors are rational, in that they pursue deliberately selected goals, economic sociology seeks to study the ways in which rationality is bounded by the social environment. This resembles Polanyi's research on the embeddedness of the economy. However, whereas for Polanyi the market rationality of capitalist industrialization eventually eroded the traditional social relations in which economic relationships were embedded, Portes argues that markets to this day remain social entities and that all economic life continues to be influenced by social factors. In his words: “The different cultural expectations in which economic actors are socialized, the need for sociability and the quest for approval, the webs of reciprocity expectations created by repeated interaction are all factors that affect not only the social framework within which economic transactions occur, but also the very nature of the latter” (18).

The value of this work lies in the rigor and clarity with which it approaches the relationship between economic and social interactions. The individual chapters dedicated to discussions of social capital, institutions, and social class are thorough and theoretically rich. Portes convincingly argues that all three of these explanatory mechanisms are crucial for understanding how economic relations are dependent upon social context. As a whole, the book doubtlessly will prove useful to scholars working specifically in economic sociology, but it is also an important contribution not just to sociology but also to all social science fields.

Portes' research — in particular his discussion of class — also raises questions of special importance for Marxian theory, questions that reveal the differing approaches of the Marxian and Weberian frameworks for social scientific research. With regard to social class, Portes asserts that a return to this previously marginalized concept can help clarify the deep causes of economic processes, anticipate the behavior of economic actors, and detect

long-term trends in economic interaction. Portes' understanding of class can be summarized in three points: individuals need not have developed a particular class-consciousness to be considered members of a class (*i.e.*, need not form a class-*for-itself*); without class analysis as a tool, society would otherwise appear as an aggregate of individuals or a web of networks; and class analysis must adapt itself to changing social realities (such as the emergence of a new class of redundant workers who are repeatedly expelled from regular employment) instead of depending on Marx's 19th-century typologies of bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Portes' appeal to class as a heuristic thus involves significant methodological differences from similar arguments found in Marxian social theory, which he criticizes for making "contemporary realities fit into a predefined framework" (84) and for its "needless teleological dimension" (86). In his model class is one among a number of analytical tools, rather than being the primary category through which other aspects of social structure are manifested and studied. Furthermore, class analyses in sociological research must ultimately be "neutral with respect to their final outcome" (74) — that is, irrespective of whether a particular class becomes a class-*for-itself* and successfully transforms the social order. The argument about whether a class-*in-itself* is a sufficient analytic category can be traced back to Marx's ambiguous characterization of the French peasantry in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as a class in some respects but not in others. Such a "structural" reading of class relations may indeed have significant merit. Unfortunately, Portes does not engage the literature in this important debate (including contributions by G. A. Cohen, Theotonio Dos Santos, Nicos Poulantzas, and Adam Przeworski) in sufficient detail; this would have strengthened his critique of the notion of a class-*for-itself*.

More generally, Portes' indebtedness to a Weberian framework, especially in the analytical separation of meta-theory, ideal type, and empirical referent, leaves little to suggest how these distinct categories may be brought together under a specific paradigm of social scientific research. Indeed, his focus is strictly on how research in economic sociology can attain a satisfactory level of analytical clarity. The emphasis on mid-level analysis and ideal types is at odds with the comprehensive and dialectical conception of social science developed in the Marxian tradition. Therefore, while the book provides researchers with important conceptual tools meant to be flexible enough to be applied in different contexts, it does not seek to offer a systematic theory or critique of economy–society relations under the conditions of contemporary late capitalism.

Nevertheless, *Economic Sociology* represents a positive step away from the assumptions about formal rationality and maximizing of subjective utility dominant in certain social science areas influenced by mainstream

economics, and widens the scope for future research on the interaction between social forces and economic processes.

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Who Killed Che? How the CIA Got Away With Murder, by Michael Ratner and Michael Steven Smith. New York: ORBooks, 2011. Paper, \$16.00. Pp. 195.

The authors, senior members of the Center for Constitutional Rights (New York, USA), published a book on Che Guevara and the FBI in 1997, having acquired documents under the Freedom of Information Act. This book is the result of the release of a second batch of White House, Defense Department and CIA papers, as well as of a study of the wider literature on the subject of Che's death. Their conclusion, stated in the book's opening paragraph, rejects the conventional wisdom that the Bolivian military ordered Che's assassination against U. S. wishes, and insists that "the U. S. government, particularly its Central Intelligence Agency, had Che murdered, having secured the participation of its client Bolivian State" (25).

Among the 110 pages of newly released documents there is not, of course, one that explicitly orders the murder of Che. Nor, however, as the authors point out, has there ever been any verifiable evidence that the United States wanted to keep Che alive, as some have claimed. So the task the book takes on is to unpick the inconsistencies of official and allied versions of the story, and to assemble a formidable case that the CIA had the motivation to murder Che in 1967, having indeed previously attempted to do so. The authors remind the reader of the CIA's conversion into an agency of dirty war in 1948, and of the consequential necessity to maintain "plausible deniability" of such activities for legal and diplomatic reasons. They then use the newly available documents to construct the case that defeating the threat of successful guerrilla war against U. S. puppets and allies in Latin America was a central aim of the U. S. government at the time. The CIA's view, recorded here, was thus that the Bolivia struggle was their "pilot program for possible duplication in other Latin American countries faced with the problem of guerrilla warfare" (132). And killing Che, the most active advocate of the revolutionary guerrilla strategy, was to be the crowning tactical achievement