

BOOK REVIEW

Jane I. Guyer. *Legacies, Logics, Logistics: Essays in the Anthropology of the Platform Economy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016. xii + 312 pp. \$30.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780226326870.

Legacies, Logics, Logistics: Essays in the Anthropology of the Platform Economy by Jane Guyer is a timely and important contribution to economic anthropology and Africanist historiography. It arrives at a poignant moment when financial and communicative technologies are reshaping economies, re-introducing in a novel way the human dimension to scholarly discussions of political economy and finance. The book is a result of a lifetime of rich and productive academic research, but it also lays analytical and methodological groundwork for future ethnographic and historical investigations of the global political economy. Through its comparative focus that includes African as well as Western economies, it provides background for a systematic analysis of the platform economies in the developing world.

To preserve the ethnographic imperative in the study of current capitalism and to avoid temporally and socially disembedded depictions of the economic condition, Guyer suggests “platform economy” as a novel framing device that brings the “entanglements” of local logics and logistics together with a broader, historically situated analysis. It emerges as a lens into the composite architectures of a global economy that features differential control and access points—advancing the notion of platform as an infrastructural framework for diverse applications, but also as “a stage for amplification of some voices and presences over others; a focus of close collective access and attention; a way of enabling specific owners and engineers to reorient it for new purposes; and a place for announcing originality” (4). The analytical lens of platforms seems especially topical with the recent rise of the “sharing economy,” with its novel patterns of re-intermediation and participatory value creation (Parker, Van Alstyne & Choudary 2016) and the growing importance of digital money management infrastructures (Maurer 2015).

Guyer views the compositional dynamics of the global platform economy as mobilized through three kinds of engagements—legacies, logics, and logistics—highlighting the complex histories and processes of “livelihood and wealth making.” Legacies refer to components or repertoires with

origin and import in the past, while logics denote “stabilized compositions” expressed in formal terms. Logistics point at disjunctures at the compositional meeting points (36–38). As a “biography of intellectual life,” the book traces the author’s scholarly journey before and after the 2008 financial crisis, from the rationing regime of her childhood in post-war Britain, to the 1980s neoliberal “free market” in the United States, and the first applications of open markets in West Africa. Guyer’s concern with lived economic practice is reflected in her critical and constructive engagement with a vast variety of scholarly literatures, including processual anthropology, pragmatist philosophy, actor-network-theory economics, and others. Seeking to address the challenge of a historical-ethnographic study of emerging global economies, Guyer highlights the contributions of the post-structural focus on assemblages that foreground the heterogeneity of economic architectures while revealing the relationality of its components. While the social analysis of such constructs helps circumvent the binarisms of modernity, she also argues for a more historically grounded “forensic analysis” of the “elements” in these layered assemblages.

The book builds on the author’s longitudinal examination of Nigerian public economic culture, exploring the relationship between economic models and ideologies and their realization. The chapters in Part II examine the framing and contestation of “economic intelligibility” in Nigeria under structural adjustment policies and emerging open markets, through interactions between government rhetoric and public “craving for plausibility” (17). Chapter 2 presents a study of the multiplicity of modes of governance and their selective mobilization through the history of food regulation in Nigeria, which was shaped by administrative legacies from colonial-era Britain. Guyer contends that the history of food control in Nigeria illuminates the systematic role of such “historical derivations” in the evolution of bureaucratic models. The recurrent concept of “toiling ingenuity”—as repetitive, high-stakes work (11)—highlights the tenuous political negotiation that builds on regulatory templates from different eras and re-composes economic governance assemblages. Exploring the friction between the monetarist theory and popular experience in Nigeria in the 1980s, Chapter 3 reveals how structural adjustment programs led to cycles of “public speech of economic indeterminacy” (74) that entailed performative rhetoric by military-political elites as well as grounded debate mediated by a public “craving for intelligibility.” Parallels are also drawn to the public negotiation of new market ideologies in the West. Chapter 5 explores the Nigerian petrol “market” as consisting of a number of interacting and frequently clashing platform components, expressed through entanglements of differential exchange rates, contradictory regulatory norms, and predatory behaviors. The moving parts of this platform produce new opportunities for performativity—“opportunities” as metaphorically mediated by software apps that emerge as generative points at specific historical junctures (116–18).

Part III studies cultures of ranking and calculation in Africa and the West, drawing attention to the social and symbolic mediation of ordinally defined processes. Ethnographic examples highlight the historical and social shaping of “public cultures of numeracy.” The concern with the intelligibilities of the formal sector continues in Part IV, where the “intricacies and impasses” of global capitalism are seen as mediated through inventive manipulation of local scales of value at Nigerian petrol pumps. These chapters suggest applying a historical perspective to the study of indexing people to money, while exploring the popular rhetoric and social processes of price formation. Part V discusses popular monetary practices under the impact of new financial technologies that diversify platforms and value conversions. These chapters raise important questions for the study of digital technologies—such as e-money—that introduce new temporal and value thresholds in the economic practices of the populace.

This book suggests deeper attention to the historical dynamics and logistical challenges of economic life as representations of the “real” in economy—as “historically crafted forms within which people find resources to come to ‘terms’ ... with life as they see it” (257). The mechanisms for achieving intelligibility and mobilizing skills from the realm of familiarity—in a broader sense of “toiling ingenuity”—are central in that “intellectual craftsmanship.” To accomplish this, the book advances a call for closer mutual engagement in economic anthropology to bring together the “diverging, but also conjoining logics of bricolage, assemblage, model building and realization, with respect to situations where livelihood and wealth are at stake” (253).

Legacies, Logics, Logistics presents a much-needed and timely manifesto for the study of the architectures of the current platform economies, outlining a methodology for locating history and power in the study of the global political economy. It carries broader interdisciplinary relevance, constituting an important resource for the studies of international political economy, history, finance, and science and technology. The book comprises work from different time periods, which may introduce a certain degree of unevenness in the presentation of data and arguments. This longitudinal perspective, however, also serves as its central asset, by making evident the multi-locational trajectories of its principal arguments. *Legacies, Logics, Logistics* could serve as a textbook at the graduate level, while the format of self-contained chapters enables their use as separate resources in researching and teaching the current global economy. It will certainly serve as an inspirational platform for generating new collaborative scholarly “opportunities” and for building mutual intelligibility within and among disciplines.

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For more reading on this subject, see:

Dolan, Catherine, and Kate Roll. 2013. "ASR FORUM: ENGAGING WITH AFRICAN INFORMAL ECONOMIES: Capital's New Frontier: From 'Unusable' Economies to Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Markets in Africa." *African Studies Review* 56 (3): 123–46. doi:10.1017/asr.2013.82.

Ndikumana, Léonce. 2015. "Integrated Yet Marginalized: Implications of Globalization for African Development." *African Studies Review* 58 (2): 7–28. doi:10.1017/asr.2015.35.