



JULIA ELYACHAR

University of California, Irvine

Phatic labor, infrastructure, and the question of empowerment in Cairo

ABSTRACT

In this article, I draw on ethnographic research in Cairo to analyze outcomes of Egyptian women's practices of sociality. In Cairo, "phatic labor" creates a social infrastructure of communicative channels that are as essential to economy as roads, bridges, or telephone lines. Projects to empower Egyptian women via finance made these communicative channels visible as an economic infrastructure for projects oriented around the pursuit of profit. A social infrastructure that had functioned as a kind of semiotic commons became visible as a resource that could be privatized or formatted as a public good. [Egypt, political economy, empowerment, semiotics, social theory, infrastructure, women]

"I don't like women's talk" [*kalam as-sittat*], said my informant Usta Ahmed more than once during fieldwork I carried out in Cairo in the mid-1990s. I heard the same phrase any number of times from other men who owned and operated small industrial workshops (*wirash*) and who came from poor central neighborhoods of Cairo. Nor did these men want any women (other than customers) in their carpentry, machine tool, or car-body shops. Men who owned microenterprises they had opened up with funding from the state, development agencies, and countless NGOs voiced the same sentiment, although many of them worked in more "women-friendly" fields, like textiles. Toward the end of my fieldwork, I was thus surprised to learn that, in his capacity as president of a local NGO, Usta Ahmed was helping to organize meetings in his neighborhood to promote women's empowerment. He was not alone in this endeavor. A few other men in the NGO were helping as well.

Meanwhile, most of the women I knew in this neighborhood were busy with their daily pursuits, living a life apart from the male world of the workshops. They spent a great deal of time on housework and provisioning their houses with food and other necessities, like women anywhere. Their neighborhood was new and did not have the density of shops, homes, and people on the street characteristic of older parts of Cairo. My informant Hanan once complained to me about how strange it was to go outside specifically to buy bread. All her life she had just bought it on her way somewhere else. Despite such problems, she and her friends were busy and active. They would visit one another, most often in their own block of apartments but in other parts of the neighborhood as well. They visited women they knew from the mosque, friends they had made through other friends, and, sometimes, women they had met at the greengrocer. They also maintained ties to friends and family in other parts of Cairo, and much of their week was taken up with visiting around the city (which, with its population of 18 million, took both time and effort). There was often no obvious purpose to those visits—no goal to accomplish, no occasion to celebrate, no fixed appointment to meet.¹

The notion that poor women's lives could be changed for the better by empowerment through microfinance was extremely popular in the development world in the 1990s. In policy discussions of the Middle East, the need for women's empowerment was usually situated within dominant liberal notions of rights and the failure to achieve those rights for women in the region (Abu-Lughod 2009:84–87). Most academic anthropologists used ethnographic research to critique the notion of "empowerment" (Cheater 1999; Elyachar 2005; Gupta and Sharma 2006; Leve 2007; Weiner 1997; Willigen 2002:72–73). Some critiqued the empowerment of women via microcredit (Karim 2008; Moodie 2008; Rahman 2001; Rankin 2008), NGOs (Hemmet 2007), development (Friedmann 1992; Zellerer and Vyortkin 2004), or better modes of governance (Misra 2008). Some Egyptian anthropologists who worked in development organizations on women's empowerment had studied all the critiques of anthropology and development while getting Ph.D.s from elite Western universities, published ethnographies with top academic presses, and also founded NGOs to channel microfinance to poor women in Cairo (Bibars 2001; el-Kholy 2003).

By 2005, when I returned to Cairo after a long absence, microfinance had gone mainstream. Conversations about women and microfinance continued, but they were just as likely to be conducted in a Microsoft or Intel company office that could be anywhere in the world as they were to take place at a development conference sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or in the context of doctoral research. Telecom companies investing in the booming cell-phone business in Egypt (and elsewhere) studied the social networks of poor women and men to better design their products and marketing plans. Vodaphone, Visa, PayPlus, MasterCard, and Intel worked to understand networks created by poor women in Egypt and elsewhere in efforts to benefit from the "payments space" those poor people had helped create (Maurer n.d.).

Amid the endless talk of women's empowerment and the movement of women's empowerment from development circles into the corporate world, it is certainly possible to think about the absence of women in economic enterprises in Usta Ahmed's community as an instance of failure. One could conclude that programs to empower women in Egypt had failed to accomplish their goals. Explanations for such failure lie easily at hand. Things often seem to fail in the Middle East. Or perhaps empowerment failed because it was a form of development, which is itself a failure with its own generative effects (Escobar 1994; Ferguson 1990). Empowerment may also have failed because of trickery. The Egyptian people, the popular classes in particular, are skilled in deploying weapons of the weak (Scott 1987). So perhaps they just pretended to support empowerment of women to get access to the resources provided for this purpose. Or perhaps empowerment failed because of the

cultural specificities of Muslim societies and their concerns about preserving women's honor by keeping their bodies out of view in male-gendered space.² Any of these explanations might be true. But none is satisfying. Equally dissatisfying is a story of triumph: the triumph of neoliberalism in the movement of empowerment money (Elyachar 2005) into the private sector.

In this article, I bypass talk about failure or success and go in a different direction altogether. With the gift of hindsight, I argue that the era of empowerment via finance was not primarily about changing women's lives at all. Looking back at the Egyptian context, at least, and despite clear instances of microfinance making a real difference for specific groups of women, I have concluded that transforming women's lives was not the point of empowerment finance. From the standpoint of the present, it seems to me, specific outcomes of women's social practices were empowered, instead.

Anthropological writing on microenterprise, empowerment, and finance usually draws on theories of political economy, finance, and development. My analysis is equally grounded in those bodies of literature, but I draw on linguistics, semiotics, and information theory as well. As a starting point for my analysis of the outcomes of women's social practices, I turn to Bronislaw Malinowski's (1936) concept of "phatic communion."³ With this concept, Malinowski shows how language such as gossip and chatting can be a means of establishing ties for their own sake, rather than for the purpose of conveying any information in particular. In the spirit of other projects that bring together semiotics and linguistics with political economy (Keane 2008; Kockelman 2006, 2007; Pedersen 2008), I bring together Malinowski with Karl Marx to introduce the concept of "phatic labor." I argue that this labor produces communicative channels that can potentially transmit not only language but also all kinds of semiotic meaning and economic value. The period of empowerment finance, as I show below, made communicative channels created through phatic labor visible as a social infrastructure on which other projects oriented around the pursuit of profit could be constructed. My argument is grounded in ethnographic research that I and others carried out in Cairo. I rely heavily in my account on the tales of three women I came to know during my long-term fieldwork there in the mid-1990s.

Um Muhammed and the "Grand Central Coffeehouse"

I conducted part of my fieldwork in a neighborhood constructed at the beginning of the 1990s to house industrial and service workshops relocated from other areas of northern Cairo that planners had decided were unsuitable for them. The new neighborhood was missing many things when residents first arrived. Streetlights were few, streets

were unpaved, and many workshops were without the water they needed to open for business. Workshop masters quickly organized themselves into an association to voice their interests directly and vigorously to the government. They went on strike to force the municipality to finish the provision of essential infrastructure for their work: lighting, electricity, and paved roads. Workshop masters did not strike for a coffeehouse. Yet the coffeehouse was also part of that essential infrastructure.

In workshop neighborhoods of Cairo, the coffeehouse is a place where deals are made, information exchanged, workers located, and opportunities pursued. The coffeehouse is a beehive of sociality, where men from workshops chat and gossip over instruments of conviviality such as coffee, tea, and water pipes (*shisha*). Workshop masters come to the coffeehouse to settle disputes, arrange deals, and learn about new customers, supplies from new sources, and whether workers with skills they need are available for hire. Workers share information about possible jobs and gossip about their current employers. The coffeehouse has been called an “informal institution” of the Egyptian labor market (Assaad 1993). More broadly, it is a place where channels of communication in the public economic space of workshop communities come together and become visible, like train tracks come together in Grand Central Station in New York City.

Um Muhammed contributed to the maintenance of that infrastructure. Her apartment was above the coffeehouse. Her furniture was simple but colorful, and the walls of her apartment were dotted with pictures of family members, framed posters of Alpine scenery, and framed *surah* from the Quran. Among the photos was one of Um Muhammed with her husband, Abu Muhammed, at their marriage, one of the couple with their two young children together with Um Muhammed’s mother, and one of Muhammed, the couple’s son, when he was young. In one corner was a television and video player tucked away behind piles of videocassettes, which Abu Muhammed brought home each day from the coffeehouse, where he showed them to children and adolescents who worked until late at night. Children came and went to and from the coffeehouse: One might carry a flat of 24 eggs up the stairs to the apartment while another carried down plates of sweets for the coffeehouse or hot food that Muhammed sold from the pushcart in front of the coffeehouse.

Abu Muhammed’s family had been in the craft of sweets making for many generations in their original home in a neighborhood of central Cairo. From the proceeds of the sweets she made, Um Muhammed took out money to cover the costs of running the household, giving the rest to Muhammed to put toward his marriage expenses. Unlike many of her neighbors, Um Muhammed kept pretty much to herself. She stayed out of the back and forth of communication and exchanges that marked neighborly re-

lations in this community. Other women I knew would always go to a neighbor if they needed something, but not Um Muhammed:

If I needed something like sugar I would never go to a neighbor. That wouldn’t look good! The wife of a coffeehouse owner, he’s got all that sugar in his shop, and she’s going around asking for sugar from her neighbors! No, that wouldn’t be good. If I need something, I go and buy it. I have little to do with my neighbors, I know them from the balcony, but we don’t go into each other’s houses.

Um Muhammed moved around much less than her neighbors: She generally moved only from her apartment to her husband’s coffeehouse to the homes of her immediate relatives and back again. Her limited mobility may have been due in part to a slight limp. But if so, the contours of her social world had become shaped around those limitations to quite productive ends. Her life was oriented around her nuclear family and her time was spent inside the home, but Um Muhammed was not a housewife. Nor did she spend her day reproducing labor power to be sold on the market for a wage. As a loving wife and mother, Um Muhammed’s affective labor and skills were crucial in creating the possibilities for her son to become a fully social man who could marry and head an economic enterprise and for her husband to enjoy his reputation as a man of honor who had the resources and the temperament to help others in their times of need. But she did more as well. In popular communities of Cairo, the coffeehouse is a place where practices of sociality integral to male productive work are prominently on display. It is a communicative hub of phatic labor, as my more detailed discussion of this concept below makes clear. Um Muhammed was a maintenance worker on essential infrastructure of economic life in Cairo.

Wasta, networks, and infrastructure

The notion that practices of sociality have outcomes, and that those outcomes are essential to the political economy of life in Cairo, has resonance in Egyptian native concepts and in ethnographies of Cairo. One example can be found in Homa Hoodfar’s (1997) ethnography of poor Cairene families. When Hoodfar’s informant, Um Hani, needed to get her family’s apartment connected to the water line, she went about this task in classic Cairene fashion. She went on visits. She visited each of her neighbors in turn until she found someone who knew someone in the right office to take care of this matter. “If I go not knowing anybody,” Um Hani told Hoodfar, “they will not deal with me and send me from one office to the next and will ask me to return day after day. But if I know someone who knows the rules and knows the people, the whole thing may not take more than a few hours. Here nobody helps you if you do not have connections”

(1997:230). In this case, Um Hani's visits were interested. But Um Hani also visited back and forth with her neighbors many times with no goal in mind. Most of the time, she and her neighbors were just being sociable. The disinterested nature of their visits did not contradict their statements about the importance of the connections that sociality forged. Such is the nature of phatic labor.

When talking about connections and their importance, Cairenes often use the words *'alaqat* (relations) or *wasta* (intermediaries). The concept of "wasta" is pervasive in Egypt and many other Middle Eastern societies. Cultivating *wasta* entails great investments of time and energy. It is not a phenomenon of the poor alone: *Wasta* is central to life among elites as well (Inhorn 2004).⁴ A concept similar to "wasta" is found in other cultures: The native concepts of "guanxi" in China (Hutchings and Weir 2005; Kipnis 1997) and "nepotism" in the United States (Bellow 2004) both refer to the importance of cultivating networks of personal connections to get things done. *Wasta* is sometimes glossed as corruption or patronage and is an object of concern for those studying the conduct of business in the Middle East (Hutchings and Weir 2005; Loewe et al. 2008). Anthropologists often gloss this phenomenon in terms of networks. Some have used spatial metaphors to denote different kinds of networks: There are both "horizontal networks" and "vertical networks" (Hoodfar 1997:229–230; Singerman 1995). *Wasta* can denote a vertical network that reaches into state or other powerful bureaucracies. The notion that networks created by poor women of Cairo are at the core of Egyptian political life has been argued by political scientist Diane Singerman (1995). In Singerman's view, informal networks "organize, coordinate, and direct individual actions . . . they aggregate the interests of the *sha'ab* [the people]" (1995: 133).

Given the frequency of my informants' talk about connections and relationships, not surprisingly, I began to analyze my findings in terms of "networks" during the course of my research. In this article, I take a different approach. I do not look at the network as an interlocking web of individuals, as a coordinator of individual interests, or as a framework for action. Instead, I analyze communicative channels that I maintain are an outcome of practices of sociality on their own terms, as distinct objects of inquiry.

A number of clues within and around anthropology suggest how such an approach might look. One can, for example, think of channels in much the way Pierre Bourdieu writes about practical reason, in terms of "beaten tracks" or "pathways that are really maintained and used" (1990:35). If one takes an approach common in linguistics since Roman Jakobson (1990), then one can think of channels as existing wherever physical proximity and psychological contact between a speaker and addressee allow them to send and receive messages. One could also take an approach com-

mon in communications theory, in which a channel usually refers to the medium used to convey information or to transmit a signal of some kind to a receiver (Shannon 1948). More recent work in network theory refers to channels without the concept of a fixed transmitter or receiver and builds, instead, on a random-network model constructed with theories from statistical physics (Franceschetti and Meester 2007:1–2).

By recognizing that channels can rest on social convention as much as on a specific, one-to-one physical or psychological connection, one can understand a channel as anything that relates a signer to an interpreter "such that a sign expressed by the former may be interpreted by the latter" (Kockelman n.d.:3). Understood in this way, communicative channels can be analyzed as a collective resource for all kinds of semiotic communication in addition to language per se (Elyachar in press; Kockelman n.d.). And once the analytical focus shifts away from humans brought together in networks to channels themselves as a relatively stable outcome of human practices, then different kinds of metaphors come to mind as to what this might imply. Specifically, one can think of sets of channels as infrastructure.

Infrastructure is something people tend to think about when it breaks down—when bridges collapse, when roads have potholes, when telephones do not work. A new body of work on infrastructure influenced by the perspective of science and technology studies, loosely conceived, has shown this to be the case in varying ways (Barry 2005, 2006; Mitchell 2009; Otter 2002, 2004). The near collapse of the financial system in the United States in 2008 helped bring the question of financial infrastructures into public debate; ongoing crises in public finance have helped keep it there. Infrastructure is a classic "public good," a set of resources available to all and whose use does not decrease its availability to others (Samuelson 1954; Stiglitz 1999). The "smell of infrastructure is the smell of the public" (Robbins 2007:26).

Economies cannot function without infrastructure. This is a commonplace in all kinds of economic theory. In volume two of *Capital* (1956), for example, Marx shows the centrality of infrastructure to the circulation and realization of value: The creation and maintenance of infrastructure is not itself directly productive of value and yet is essential to the capitalist system of production. Nor, from the standpoint of a neoclassical theory of value, does infrastructure create price. But if you cannot link a product to the market, then that product will spoil and become worthless. If you cannot link a buyer to a seller, then a market cannot function. Linking buyers and sellers entails more than physical transportation of goods. Infrastructure—roads, airports, ports, and bridges—allows producers to realize the potential economic value of a product as well.

A madam of infrastructure and the potentiality of labor

To further develop my point, I now turn back to ethnography and introduce Khadija, a madam and hashish dealer in Cairo whose story I first heard from one of my informants (who was himself a master storyteller). Although I never was able to independently verify everything that he told my colleague Essam Fawzi and me, his account of Khadija's story was both entirely plausible and denied by no one. The story of her role in the establishment of workshops in the neighborhood where I conducted fieldwork gave me a new perspective on my research there and on how outcomes of women's practices of sociality become essential infrastructure in the political economy of Cairo.

Khadija's main trade was in women's bodies; she also sold hashish to her male clients.⁵ She invested her profits in productive workshops in a neighborhood on the outskirts of another, middle-class, neighborhood built in the early 20th century. Two of my informants were workshop owners whose livelihood and social standing in their community Khadija had made possible. Her name, like the source of her investment capital in these male workshops, remained veiled. Nothing indicated that the original investor in the men's workshops had been a madam rather than a bank or an NGO.

Khadija's professional life as madam, drug dealer, and investor was at its height in the 1970s, the period of Anwar el-Sadat's *infitah*, or economic opening. The word *entrepreneur* was barely heard at that time. Sadat opened up Egypt to a tidal wave of consumer goods imported from abroad. The flood of consumer goods was accompanied by a rapid change of life situation for those who latched onto the large or petty trade in these goods and the associated paraphernalia of the high life. The economic opening also meant the opening of the labor market and the possibility of migrating for higher wage labor in the Gulf states, which Egyptians did in droves. Wages at home for skilled workers in the construction and craft trades shot up as well, and lots of cash flowed. Business for people like Khadija took off.

As Khadija's business grew, she needed lookout boys to watch out for the police. So she brought in youths (*shabab*) from the neighborhood. One of the boys she brought in was a nephew who would become my informant in the 1990s. Khadija needed to do something with her profits. She also needed to buy the silence of those who knew too much about her and could sell her out to the police. Khadija accomplished both objectives by turning her preadolescent lookout boys into fictive kin. She did for them what any mother would do for her sons. Just like Um Muhammed, she created material possibilities for her "sons" to become fully social men. This meant buying them workshops and homes in which they could be masters and providing them

with wives. She arranged marriages for them—to her relatives and to the girls in her prostitution ring.

In time, Khadija controlled 14 workshops. When those workshops were closed down in 1991 for urban renewal, some were moved to a new neighborhood and gained legal status. I met Khadija's nephew in that new neighborhood. He was by then a man well into his forties, of full body and large smile, who liked to dress in black button-down shirts. He was known as a generous man. He was not always the first to comply with the letter of the law or to follow instructions from the local NGO about community development. He preferred to watch out for poor people in and around the neighborhood who needed his help. He also worked on infrastructure maintenance of a very practical kind: When women I knew had their electricity cut off because of non-payment of their bills, he would help them reconnect the wires to bypass the cutoff. He helped maintain an alternative infrastructure of garbage collection as well, by staying loyal to a young Bedouin girl whose family had been evicted from their home and who now survived by collecting and recycling garbage. He resisted pressure from the local associations to switch over to the formalized fee-based garbage collection system that they organized with the municipality.

He was, in short, a man of honor: He was *gada'*, a man who looked out for others in his neighborhood and protected those who needed help. To be *gada'* also meant that he protected the collective goods and infrastructure of his community. The resources his aunt had afforded him through the mobilization of women's bodies had created the possibility for his generosity and ability to maintain community resources. Khadija had put to work the women's bodies she controlled, captured the surpluses, and invested those surpluses in workshops interlinked by kin, fictive kin, wives, secrets traded, and money transferred. Khadija translated the most physical of links into essential infrastructure for the male productive world, which her nephew helped maintain.

Khadija's labor seems the opposite of that carried out by Um Muhammed. Um Muhammed was the consummate family woman, whereas Khadija was a hashish dealer and madam. But I argue that they had a great deal in common. Through phatic labor, both produced and maintained sets of communicative channels in the male economic space of the workshop. Um Muhammed did so via her husband and son in the coffeehouse. Khadija did so by establishing a set of new workshops interlinked through fictive kinship, run by men who helped maintain the collective goods of their community. Unlike the kind of pathways referred to by Bourdieu in writing about practical reason or the channels modeled by C. E. Shannon for information systems, the channels Khadija helped construct left no marks on the ground or algorithms for engineers to reproduce. Traces of these channels might have been documented in the "women's talk" of which Usta Ahmed was so leery. But,

until the appearance of empowerment finance and new actors who took an interest in mapping out those channels, they remained an invisible infrastructure in the political economy of Cairo.

Labor, *potentia*, and the phatic function

How can one characterize labor that produces outcomes such as these? It does not make sense to see Um Muhammed only as a housewife carrying out unpaid women's labor in the home. Nor does it suffice to say that Khadija reveals only the import of prostitution in economic life and power structures in the Middle East and Asia (Dunne n.d.; Wilson 2004). Scholars need a different way to think about the outcomes of these two women's practices and how they relate to political economy. The same is true of the visiting, gossiping, and traveling around Cairo that took up so much of my women informants' time and that I claim is related to the endless talk about empowerment and the absence of women in the workshops during my fieldwork.

Unlike housework or prostitution, visiting, moving around a megacity, chatting, and consolidating friendship have not been conceptualized as labor in Western social theory. Such practices are not a form of metabolism between people and nature through which "men produce the vital necessities that must be fed into the life process of the human body" (Arendt 2000:172). Nor are they work in Hannah Arendt's sense, as that which "fabricates the sheer unending variety of things" (2000:173),⁶ or the actualization of labor power, that reified human capacity to labor, whose use by its purchaser, in capitalism, produces surplus value. Also inappropriate to capture what is at stake here is the concept of "unpaid labor" in the sense analyzed in the "value of labor power" debate of the 1970s and 1980s in feminist political economy (Agger 1998:111–113; Brodtkin 2006:135–136; Jagger 1994:97–99). Nor were any of these social practices that took up so much of my women informants' time understood by anyone I knew in banks, NGOs, or development organizations as having anything to do with empowerment.

The "affective turn" in social sciences (Clough 2007; Hardt 2007) opens another way to think about social practices carried out by these women, which are motivated by affect and Egyptian "family ethos" (Wiken 1996) as much as by economic interest, strictly speaking. Political economy has always been linked with affect—a point that was clear in the moral philosophy from which it emerged (Hirschman 1997; Mandeville 1988; Smith 1984) but which got lost in its offspring of economics. The literature on affect also points, via the influence of Baruch Spinoza and Marx, to the importance of the category of "potentia" in Western political theory in a way relevant to my ethnographic material. Um Muhammed, Khadija, and their neighbors were not car-

rying out any specific act of exchange, transfer of goods, or metabolic process between humans and nature in their practices of sociality. Rather, they created, maintained, and extended channels through which all kinds of resources could potentially flow. Can social practices creating potentia be considered labor?

I see grounds for thinking so. The category of "potentia" was central to Marx's theorization of the human capacity of labor power and how it produced surplus value under capitalism. Economics originally focused only on male productive labor but has long been expanding the scope of what it studies, to the extent that some accuse the field of "economics imperialism" (Fine 2000). But by calling practices of sociality "labor," I do not mean to say that the friendliness and sociality of the Egyptian people constitute a kind of opportunistic functionalism. Cairene women are not pursuing instrumentally rational behavior when they go to visit friends on a public-sector bus. At the same time, the outcome of that work of forging connections is economically vital. That kind of labor is necessary for the preservation of privilege among the upper classes. It is necessary for the preservation of life itself among the poor of Cairo, for whom it is both time-consuming and fragile in its outcomes. Just as poor people have to contend with fragmented physical infrastructure in all aspects of their lives (Larkin 2008), they have to invest more time in the maintenance of infrastructure of communicative channels as well.

In an essay on primitive language published in 1923, Malinowski provides some hints about what this kind of labor might involve. When a "number of people aimlessly gossip together," says Malinowski, a situation is created that consists "in just this atmosphere of sociability and in the fact of the personal communion of these people" (Malinowski 1936). "Each utterance is an act," he goes on to say, that serves the aim of "binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other . . . language appears to us in this function not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action" (Malinowski 1936:464). Malinowski's data for his brief discussion of phatic communion concerns his informants' engagement in face-to-face conversation in a small island community. Malinowski makes clear that what is at stake here is not "just talk." Phatic communion, he asserts, is a form of social action.⁷ Other forms of communication could be brought under the rubric of this kind of social action as well. Phatic communion in Cairo also takes place, for example, through collective "locomotory practices" in urban space that normally remain in the background of perception but through which the collective identity of the poor masses is both expressed and reproduced (Elyachar in press). Such regularized if relatively unstudied forms of bodily practice and gesture are immediately recognized by others who are part of the same "semiotic community" (Kockelman 2005:261–262); they help maintain and reproduce communicative channels in Cairo.



Malinowski is more famous for his analysis of another form of social action: interisland kula trade carried out by elite Trobriand men, whose success required bravery, linguistic mastery, and collective memory. Trobriand men created value and fame by effecting the circulation of *vaygu'a*, or kula shells, over time across a chain of islands (Malinowski 1999; Munn 1986). At numerous points in his ethnography, Malinowski maintains that his analysis of kula is relevant for Victorian England. Most famous, perhaps, in this regard, is his offhand comment that the *vaygu'a* coveted and traded among men in the Trobriand Islands were much like the crown jewels in Great Britain: "Ugly, useless, ungainly, even tawdry" and yet worshipped as essential to collective identity (Malinowski 1999:68).

Malinowski's concept of "phatic communion" has been relatively overlooked, outside of its influence on linguistics via Jakobson (Kockelman n.d.). Jakobson (1990) adopted Malinowski's concept of "phatic communion" to identify the "phatic function" of the speech act. The phatic function is one of the six functions of the speech event he identifies. The expressive function focuses on the speaker; the conative focuses on the addressee; the metalinguistic focuses on code; the poetic focuses on sign; the referential focuses on the object, or referent, of a speech act; and the phatic function focuses on the channel through which speech is conveyed. Despite the wide range of these functions, linguistics has generally focused on the referential function of the speech event alone (Kockelman 2005:260–261, n.d.). It might be time for anthropology to return to Malinowski's formulation of phatic communion as a way to think through a number of theoretical dilemmas confronting critical social analysis today.

Jakobson's concept of "channels" created by the phatic function depends on both physical proximity and psychological contact of the sort discussed by Malinowski in the case of the Trobriands. In Cairo, a city with a huge population, phatic connectivity does not rely on direct physical proximity or immediate one-to-one psychological contact. As the ethnographic material I present in this article makes clear, Cairenes have a more generalized disposition to create, maintain, and extend communicative channels than a one-to-one model of contact would allow. To make sense of this ethnographic material in Cairo, one needs to see the channels created by phatic labor in a more expansive sense—as relating signers to interpreters so that signs of all kinds (and not just language) expressed by the former can be immediately (even if not consciously) interpreted by the latter (Kockelman n.d.).

In Cairo, the potential economic import of the outcomes of phatic communion and phatic labor are more visible than in the Trobriands as well. That potential became clearer in the 1970s and 1980s during the vast waves of circular migration of millions of Egyptian men to the Gulf states.⁸ Communicative channels originally created on

the streets of Cairo extended into the Gulf region together with migrants and were maintained through flows of affect, money, information, and faith. Those channels were used by migrants and their families to transfer money, emotion, and news and materialized in forms as simple as a neighbor carrying an envelope and news, a friend carrying a cassette, or a fellow worshipper carrying cash. Some of those channels were formalized in institutions like the Islamic investment companies that channeled a large portion of Egyptian migrants' savings during this period and grew to play a key role in the political economy of the Middle East in the 1980s (until they were crushed by the Egyptian state when they were felt to be a threat to it). These channels were conceptualized as well in terms of the "informal economy" that became so important in the development world of the 1980s and 1990s.

Payments space and the story of a phatic pimp

Communicative channels created through phatic labor are being studied and mobilized in new contexts. Malinowski's model of the kula has already been adopted as a business model by Vodafone, and talk of the kula is important in "viral marketing" (Knight 2004). It has served as a concept in alternative economic projects as well (Narotzky 2008). Perhaps it was just a matter of time until other aspects of Malinowski's research, such as his concept of "phatic communion" would also be mobilized for economic projects.

Communicative channels are being mobilized as infrastructure in numerous projects currently underway to understand, format, and build on payments space (Maurer n.d.). Throughout areas of the global South, in which the vast majority of the population have never been able to access collapsing and underbuilt infrastructure, a myriad of actors are busy creating systems to support new modalities of banking and financial services to millions of poor people and members of their extended families overseas (Maurer n.d.). The notion of "payments space" is a native one in this world of corporate, philanthropic, and academic actors. Systems being constructed in payments space are transforming channels created by poor working people who have migrated overseas and send money home and who have developed all kinds of ingenious ways of transferring this money, as well as information and affect, that anthropologists and development organizations have studied and supported as the informal economy. Whereas microfinance focused on supporting the individual actors within that informal economy, this new systemic focus places much greater emphasis on uncovering, developing, and mobilizing existing forms of infrastructure created by the bottom of the pyramid, the world's poorest, and building on them to create new kinds of financial and information services for a profit.

Visa, Vodafone, Mastercard, and Intel are all active in this space, introducing mobile payments systems, Internet banking, and electronic banking using cell phones (Maurer n.d.). A mix of corporate, philanthropic, and academic actors is involved in these projects for the creation of formalized, for-profit systems of transferring information, affect, and money across time and space. As anthropologists, we need adequate conceptual tools to make sense of what is going on here, beyond condemning the practices involved as neoliberal or embracing them as an example of empowerment.

We need to ask how payments space relates to phatic labor. Phatic labor has long produced outcomes that can be compared with the laying of cables or fiber-optic lines or the building of railroads. It has allowed for goods and use values of various kinds to flow—if quite different use values than those analyzed in classical political economy or Marxist thought. The outcomes of phatic labor—communicative channels—have allowed for the flow of reputation, information, and emotion. They have allowed for the transfer of finance and the creation of new kinds of equivalences. They have been a necessary if not a sufficient condition for the realization of other, more classic forms of economic value as well. Increasingly, they are being recognized as having use value, and intrinsic value, in themselves. But the process of making those channels recognizable as supporting the creation of economic value, and as economically valuable in themselves, does not happen on its own. The story of my informant Huda, one of many global players in this process, is instructive in this context.

Huda came of age in quite a different moment than Khadija and Um Muhammed, who had been children during Gamal Abdul-Nasser's rule. Huda came of age when Hosni Mubarak was president. The public sector created under Abdul-Nasser was then being privatized. Disinvestment in state-owned infrastructure had become the norm. Huda grew up in public-sector housing built by Abdul-Nasser and named after him, graduated from high school, and went to work as a secretary. Her brother was a car mechanic who had run his business on the street until he was shut down by the municipality, after which he relocated to a new neighborhood. The municipality gave him a workshop in the new neighborhood, along with an apartment, which he sold to his sister. Huda was at home among the workshop families, given that her brother was a workshop master and she was from a *baladi* ("popular," i.e., local indigenous urban-class) family. But because of her employment as a secretary for a consultant, she felt herself to be not only more educated but also better than her neighbors.

Huda was the only woman I knew in the neighborhood who held down a regular waged job. She commuted to work every day, catching a ride with one of the masters she knew through her brother or waiting on the dusty road half a mile from her apartment for the minibus to make a stop on its

way to points south, which, not long ago, had lain on the northern reaches of Cairo. Her employer had given years of his life to leftist oppositional politics and, like others who had paid a high price for their politics with their bodies and years in jail, had made a new life for himself in the 1990s on the fringes of the development world. He was one of many former activists to work in consultancies and NGOs they themselves created to catch the wave of NGO development funding. All this was in line with the old Egyptian "family ethos" of watching out for the future of the next generation (Wikan 1996) and of providing children with the necessities of middle-class life, which were increasingly monetized by the 1980s.

Huda sometimes worked at home. She would bring home the manual typewriter from her workplace on the weekends or when her young son was sick. Part of her job was to supply her boss with local color about *baladi* women she knew for reports he authored for various funding agencies. During the hot summer months, she sometimes left the doors and windows of her apartment open. When a troublesome male neighbor chose to understand the open windows as meaning that Huda was open to an approach, rather than as a concession to the heat, he walked in to test his interpretation. Huda kicked him out. Her brother and other male relatives immediately confronted the man to make clear to him and others that she was not, as she told me later, just from a family of "some clerk" (*muwazaf*), all alone in the world with no one to defend her and her reputation.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, Huda began to search for women that her boss could call "empowered" in his reports to development funders. Like Usta Ahmed, she took advantage of the ethnographers in her midst to seek out more names than she would have been able to uncover on her own. Who did we know in the neighborhood? Where were these women? Could we introduce her to any of our informants? The information she and Usta Ahmed gathered and the reports they helped write were then incorporated into other reports. I suggest that Huda was part of a vast global process in which individual agents and agencies mapped out apparently random data about who knew whom, who helped whom, who trusted whom, and who funded whom. This activity might all seem to be about social networks once again, but I argue that something else was under way.

The phatic labor of Huda's neighbors and forebears had created countless nodes of connectivity within the semiotic community of Cairo. Huda facilitated the creation of new kinds of nodes in those channels. Those new nodes incorporated different kinds of receivers for which signs had to be translated and interpreted. The insertion of such nodes into existing communicative channels subtly altered the nature of social infrastructure in Cairo. The process of uncovering channels and translating their meaning to new kinds

of actors was an essential step in making legible and accessible to outsiders the social infrastructure of communication that had been built up over the centuries by the phatic labor of Huda's forebears.

Here it is useful to think for a moment back to Khadija and the men of honor she helped create. As Malinowski showed long ago, honor, fame, and value are created and reproduced through the flow of communicative resources in space-time (Malinowski 1999; Munn 1986). Fame, reputation, information, and value can be rerouted to different end points and undergo material and symbolic transformations in the process. Huda's phatic labor helped effect such transformations. Signals moving through channels that had been instantaneously understood by members of a semiotic community in Cairo were entering into new chains of meaning and equivalencies. Names, reputation, and gossip acquired not only use value but other kinds of value as well. In the process, channels along which signals and signs could travel were themselves being reshaped as a particular kind of sign—as a commodity (cf. Kockelman 2006).

If Khadija was a procurer of women's bodies, Huda might be thought of as a phatic pimp. Khadija prostituted women's bodies. Huda, by contrast, prostituted signs of women's bodies and outcomes of phatic labor. She helped generate and transmit signs of women to new actors in an emerging political economy in which communicative pathways would have strategic economic value. The channels for which she provided nodes of access were empowered by Huda's transformative labor. Through practices recognizable to her peers as sociality but with newly implanted "genetic" content, Huda made subtle but crucial shifts in the infrastructure of communicative channels in Cairo. She applied some of the lessons she learned through her experimental labor to her own family ethos as well and opened up an NGO of her own in 2005.

Empowering phatic labor

In this article, I have argued that empowerment, in the closing decades of the 20th century, was more about empowering the outcomes of women's practices of sociality than about effecting real changes in women's lives. Women empowered in Cairo in the 1990s were like Nikolai Gogol's (1997) dead souls, their names harvested for the value they rendered without reference to the actual women at all. Debates about whether empowerment worked and what it has achieved are, in my view, beside the point. I do not mean to imply here that empowerment efforts failed. Something was empowered by these efforts: a social infrastructure of communicative channels built through historically cultivated practices of sociality in Cairo. The concept of "phatic labor," I have argued, allows scholars to theorize the link between communicative practices of sociality, the creation of infrastructure, and the use of that infrastructure in eco-

omic projects oriented around a variety of goals, such as the extraction of economic surplus or the capturing of communicative resources for collective goals.

"Infrastructure needs to be made visible," Bruce Robbins has said, "in order to see how our present landscape is the product of past projects, past struggles" (2007:32). Robbins's text reveals social struggles hidden in the invisibility of infrastructure. My point is different: Unlike Robbins's social struggles, women's practices of sociality have never been foregrounded as political or meaningful. Nor was it a malfunction that led to awareness of a social infrastructure of communicative pathways, as is often the case with infrastructures—as when sewage systems fail and bridges collapse (Robbins 2007). The creation of new nodes in communicative channels by actors such as Huda was crucial in fostering this awareness. She helped translate that which had been immediately understood by members of a semiotic community in Cairo into more explicit code that could be accessed by those outside that community. In the process, she and other agents of empowerment finance helped illuminate, as it were, communicative channels and make them available for new kinds of economic projects. Those historically constituted channels could begin to serve as infrastructure for new infrastructures, much as existing bridges and roads can be deployed as an infrastructure for sensor area networks (Mehta and El Zarki 2004:401).

Until the era of empowerment, an infrastructure of communicative channels had functioned as a kind of "semiotic commons" (Kockelman 2005:262) in the political economy of Egypt. Communicative channels, talked about through the native concept of "wasta," were essential for the preservation of privilege among privileged Egyptians, among whom they were relatively stable and easy to format and access through rents. Communicative channels were accessed by poor baladi Cairenes through different means—through shared membership in a "semiotic community" (Kockelman 2005:262). Members of a semiotic community shared resources of signs, gesture, and channels. Empowerment finance helped make that semiotic commons visible as a resource that could be put to other uses.

The cultivation of the channels of communication through which resources could potentially flow, I have said, was not economically motivated. Women's practices of sociality operated according to one kind of scale of value and then later were hooked up to a monetary scale of value (Guyer 2004). This began to be clear when global interest in lending circles started to grow with Keith Hart's (n.d.) invention of the concept of the "informal economy." The economic import of keeping channels open so that information could flow through them became increasingly obvious. What initially was of interest as an anomaly or piece of exoticism about a foreign place was revealed as a strategic resource by which poor people survived without reliance on

the state. In the period of empowerment, channels themselves became of direct economic import.

Will the empowerment of communicative channels facilitate their recognition as a public good available to all, as a collective good available to some, or as a privatized infrastructure through which historically produced community resources can more easily be exploited? Once empowered, the potentia of the Cairene–Egyptian popular classes can more easily be captured by the *potestas* of the global political economy–global market. But such an outcome is not inevitable. As I mention above, social infrastructures of communicative channels are being formatted as social ecologies for user-driven telecommunications like mobile phones (Horst and Miller 2006) and as payments space in projects undertaken by corporations like Vodafone, Visa, Mastercard, and Intel in cooperation with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other philanthropic funders (Maurer n.d.). Companies like Intel, Vodafone, and Visa employ ethnographers and integrate Malinowski's theories of the kula into their business models (Banks n.d.; Knight 2004; Madrigal 2008). When corporations institute business models for telecommunications projects in the global South, they find a ready-made infrastructure for their investments.

But outcomes of such projects are not clear-cut. There is no inexorable march toward the triumph of a capitalist free market (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2005). Increased recognition of a communicative commons and social infrastructure of communicative channels need not be commensurate with enclosure in the sense associated with Karl Polanyi (1957:77–103) or the usual stories of the tragedy of the commons (Peters 1994:1–21). Scholars know far too little about phatic labor and its outcomes to be sure of what will unfold: Much ethnographic and theoretical work remains to be done. In all the places where women have been absent from male productive space but where they have visited back and forth across the reaches of megacities crammed with traffic, gossiped with friends, and sent letters to husbands and sons transported across borders to labor, an infrastructure was being created through phatic labor that is now being turned to different ends through the efforts of our informants, our collaborators, and even ourselves. To just what ends remains to be seen.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I am grateful to the Fulbright Commission, Institutue of International Exchange, Egypt, and the Social Science Research Council and to the MacArthur Foundation Program in International Peace and Security in a Changing World for supporting my research in Egypt 1994–96. I am indebted to Essam Fawzi for his crucial contribution to the research on which this article is based. I wrote an earlier version of this article while a fellow of the International Center of Advanced Studies (ICAS) at New York University,

2006–07. I am grateful to the director of ICAS, Thomas Bender, and to Timothy Mitchell, director of the ICAS project “The Authority of Knowledge in a Global Age,” for their support. I am indebted to Lila Abu-Lughod, Tom Boellstorff, Bill Maurer, Tomaž Mastnak, three anonymous reviewers from *American Ethnologist*, and, especially, Paul Kockelman, for their suggestions and insightful comments. My thanks as well to Linda Forman for her thoughtful copyediting. All remaining errors are my own.

1. Cell phones in Cairo were still extremely rare when I conducted the research on which this article is based. Landlines were also rare among the working poor. By 2005, when I returned to conduct short-term research in Cairo, cell phones had become ubiquitous.

2. The relationship between male honor and women's bodies is addressed by a vast literature in anthropology and related disciplines. For a classic approach to honor, shame, and women's bodies in the Mediterranean area, see Delaney 1987, Gilmore 1987, Peristiany 1966, and Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 2005. For more recent approaches, see Abu-Lughod 2000, Akpınar 2003, Heath 2008, Peirce 1993, and Weidman 2003.

3. I am indebted to my interlocutor Paul Kockelman for suggesting I turn to the concept of “phatic communion” to think about my material in Cairo, for coining the term *phatic labor* in an e-mail exchange about an earlier version of this article, and for stimulating discussion about channels and infrastructure.

4. I am indebted to an anonymous *American Ethnologist* reviewer for reminding me of this point.

5. There is an important body of literature in anthropology on sexuality and prostitution. For a sample, the interested reader can turn to Dunne n.d., Kandiyoti 1994, and Wilson 2004.

6. Those practices do, however, create something of that which “constitutes the human artifice, the world we live in” (Arendt 2000:173), if artifice is understood to include communicative channels.

7. In Max Weber's classic formulation, social action is action in which “the actor's behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others” (1978:23).

8. My Ph.D. dissertation project was originally on the circular migration of Egyptians to the Gulf states and its impacts on the production of urban space in Cairo. I draw from some of my research outcomes in the paragraph that follows in the text (Elyachar 1993, 1995).

References cited

- Abu-Lughod, Lila
2000 *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
2009 *Dialects of Women's Empowerment: The International Circuitry of the Arab Human Development Report 2005*. *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41(1):83–103.
- Agger, Ben
1998 *Critical Social Theories: An Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Akpınar, Aylin
2003 *The Honour/Shame Complex Revisited: Violence against Women in the Migration Context*. *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(5):425–442.
- Arendt, Hannah
2000 *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Peter Baehr, ed. New York: Penguin.
- Assaad, Ragui
1993 *Formal and Informal Institutions in the Labor Market*, with

- Applications to the Construction Sector in Egypt. *World Development* 21(6):925–939.
- Banks, Ken
N.d. Africa's Grassroots Mobile Revolution: A Traveler's Perspective. *Receiver Magazine* 20—Emerging Markets. <http://www.receiver.vodafone.com/20-africas-grassroots>, accessed September 20, 2009.
- Barry, Andrew
2005 The British-Georgian Case: The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. In *Territoires, environnement et nouveaux modes de gestion: La gouvernance en question*. B. Latour and C. Gramaglia, eds. Pp. 105–118. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.
2006 Technological Zones. *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(2):239–253.
- Bellow, Adam
2004 In Praise of Nepotism: A History of Family Enterprise from King David to George W. Bush. New York: Anchor.
- Bibars, Iman
2001 Victims and Heroines: Women, Welfare, and the Egyptian State. New York: Palgrave.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1990 *The Logic of Practice*. Richard Nice, trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Brodkin, Karen
2006 Toward a Unified Theory of Class, Race, and Gender. In *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. Ellen Lewin, ed. Pp. 129–146. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Castells, Manuel
1996 *Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cheater, Angela, ed.
1999 *The Anthropology of Power: Empowerment and Disempowerment in Changing Structures*. ASA Monographs, 36. New York: Routledge.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineto
2007 Introduction. In *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds. Pp. 1–33. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Delaney, Carol
1987 Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame. In *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*. David D. Gilmore, ed. Pp. 35–48. Special Publication, 22. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- Dunne, Bruce
N.d. Power and Sexuality in the Middle East. *MERIP* 206. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer206/bruce.htm>, accessed March 20, 2010.
- Elyachar, Julia
1993 The Impact of Gulf Migration on Egyptian Constructions of Identity and Economy as Seen from the Street in Cairo. Paper presented at the Seventh Annual SSRC-MacArthur Foundation Fellows' Conference, Istanbul, May.
1995 Networks across Borders, Migration, Informality, and the State: An Ethnography of Three Streets in Cairo. Paper presented at the Ninth Annual SSRC-MacArthur Foundation Fellows' Conference: "Facing the Future: New Challenges for Peace and Security," Washington, DC, May.
2005 *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
In press *The Political Economy of Movement and Gesture in Cairo*. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17.
- Escobar, Arturo
1994 *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ferguson, James
1990 *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fine, Ben
2000 Economics Imperialism and Intellectual Progress: The Present as History of Economic Thought? *History of Economics Review* 32:10–36.
- Franceschetti, Massimo, and Ronald Meester
2007 *Random Networks for Communication: From Statistical Physics to Information Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedmann, John
1992 *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K.
1996 *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
2005 Surplus Possibilities: Postdevelopment and Community Economics. *Journal of Tropical Geography* 26(1):4–26.
- Gilmore, David D., ed.
1987 *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*. Special Publication, 22. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- Gogol, Nikolai
1997[1842] *Dead Souls: A Novel*. New York: Vintage.
- Gupta, Akhil, and Aradhana Sharma
2006 Globalization and Postcolonial States. *Current Anthropology* 47(2):277–307.
- Guyer, Jane
2004 *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hardt, Michael
2007 Foreword: What Affects Are Good For. In *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds. Pp. ix–xiii. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hart, Keith
N.d. African Enterprise and the Informal Economy: An Autobiographical Note. <http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/keith/papers/african-enterprise-and-the-informal-economy/>, accessed November 10, 2009.
- Heath, Jennifer, ed.
2008 *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hement, Julie
2007 *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGOs*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hirschman, Albert O.
1997[1977] *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hoodfar, Homa
1997 *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Horst, Heather, and Daniel Miller
2006 *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*. New York: Berg.
- Hutchings, Kate, and David Weir
2005 Guanxi and Wasta: A Comparison. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 48(1):141–156.
- Inhorn, Marcia D.
2004 *Privacy, Privatization, and the Politics of Patronage: Ethnographic Challenges to Penetrating the Secret World of Middle*

- Eastern, Hospital-Based In Vitro Fertilization. *Social Science and Medicine* 59(10):2095–2108.
- Jagger, Alison M.
1994 *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Jakobson, Roman
1990[1960] The Speech Event and the Function of Language. *In On Language*. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston, eds. Pp. 69–79. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz
1994 The Paradoxes of Masculinity: Some Thoughts on Segregated Societies. *In Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, eds. Pp. 197–213. London: Routledge.
- Karim, Lamia
2008 Demystifying Micro-Credit. *Cultural Dynamics* 20(1):5–29.
- Keane, Webb
2008 Market, Materiality, and Moral Metalanguage. *Anthropological Theory* 8(1):27–42.
- Kholy, Heba el-
2003 *Defiance and Compliance: Negotiating Gender in Low-Income Cairo*. *New Directions in Anthropology*, 15. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Kipnis, Andrew B.
1997 *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, Self, and Subculture in a North China Village*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Knight, Will
2004 Anthropologists to Beat Gadget Rage. *New Scientist*, December. <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6803>, accessed March 20, 2010.
- Kockelman, Paul
2005 The Semiotic Stance. *Semiotica* 157(1–4):233–304.
2006 A Semiotic Ontology of the Commodity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16(1):76–102.
2007 Enclosure and Disclosure. *Public Culture* 19(2):303–305.
N.d. *Enemies, Parasites, and Noise*. Unpublished MS, Department of Anthropology, Barnard College.
- Larkin, Brian
2008 *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Leve, Lauren
2007 Failed Development and Rural Revolution in Nepal: Rethinking Subaltern Consciousness and Women's Empowerment. *Anthropological Quarterly* 80(1):127–172.
- Loewe, Markus, Jonas Blume, and Johanna Speer
2008 How Favoritism Affects the Business Climate: Empirical Evidence from Jordan. *Middle East Journal* 62(2):259–276.
- Madriral, Alexis
2008 Intel Anthropologists Find Keys to Tech Adoption. *Wired Science*. <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2008/06/intel-anthropol/>, accessed October 16, 2009.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw
1936[1923] The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages. *In The Meaning of Meaning*. C. K. Ogden and A. I. Richards, eds. Pp. 296–336. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
1999[1922] *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
- Mandeville, Bernard
1988[1732] *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. With a Commentary Critical, Historical, and Explanatory by F. B. Kaye. 2 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Marx, Karl
1956[1885] *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2. Frederick Engels, ed. I. Lasker, trans. Moscow: Progress.
- Maurer, Bill
N.d. *Retail Electronic Payments Systems for Value Transfers in the Developing World*. Unpublished MS, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Irvine.
- Mehta, Vipin, and Magda El Zarki
2004 A Bluetooth Based Sensor Network for Civil Infrastructure Health Monitoring. *Wireless Networks* 10:401–412.
- Misra, Kavita
2008 Politico-Moral Transactions in Indian AIDS Service: Confidentiality, Rights, and New Modalities of Governance. *In The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, eds. Pp. 433–467. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mitchell, Timothy
2009 Carbon Democracy. *Economy and Society* 38(3):399–432.
- Moodie, Megan
2008 Enter Microcredit: A New Culture of Women's Empowerment in Rajasthan? *American Ethnologist* 35(3):454–465.
- Munn, Nancy
1986 *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Narotzky, Susana
2008 Reply: What's Changed (since 1975)? *Dialectical Anthropology* 32(1–2):9–16.
- Otter, Christopher
2002 Making Liberalism Durable: Vision and Civility in the Late Victorian City. *Social History* 27(1):1–15.
2004 Cleansing and Clarifying: Technology and Perception in Nineteenth Century London. *Journal of British Studies* 43:40–64.
- Pedersen, David
2008 Brief Event: The Value of Getting to Value in the Era of "Globalization." *Anthropological Theory* 8(1):57–77.
- Peirce, Leslie
1993 *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peristiany, J. G., ed.
1966 *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peristiany, J. G., and Julian Pitt-Rivers, eds.
2005 *Honor and Grace in Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters, Pauline
1994 *Dividing the Commons: Politics, Policy, and Culture in Botswana*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Polanyi, Karl
1957[1944] *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. New York: Beacon Press.
- Rahman, Aminur
2001 *Women and Microcredit in Rural Bangladesh: An Anthropological Study of Grameen Bank Lending*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Rankin, Katharine N.
2008 *Manufacturing Rural Finance in Asia: Institutional Assemblages, Market Societies, Entrepreneurial Subjects*. *Geoforum* 39(6):1965–1977.
- Robbins, Bruce
2007 The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive. *Boundary 2* 34(1):25–33.

- Samuelson, Paul A.
1954 The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure. *Review of Economics and Statistics* 36(4):387–389.
- Scott, James C.
1987 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Shannon, C. E.
1948 A Mathematical Theory of Communication. *Bell System Technical Journal* 27:379–423, 623–656.
- Singerman, Diane
1995 *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, Adam
1984[1759] *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E.
1999 Knowledge as a Global Public Good. *In Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*. Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, and Marc A. Stern, eds. Pp. 308–325. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, Max
1978[1956] *Economy and Society*, vol. 1. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weidman, Amanda
2003 Beyond Honor and Shame: Performing Gender in the Mediterranean. *Anthropological Quarterly* 76(3):519–530.
- Weiner, Annette
1992 *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wikan, Uni
1996 *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-Made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Willigen, John Van
2002 *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*. Abingdon, UK: Greenwood.
- Wilson, Ara
2004 *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zellerer, Evelyn, and Dmitriy Vyortkin
2004 Women's Grassroots Struggles for Empowerment. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 11(3):439–464.

accepted December 25, 2009

final version submitted December 9, 2009

Julia Elyachar
Department of Anthropology
Social Science Plaza B
University of California at Irvine
Irvine, CA 92697-5100

elyachar@uci.edu