PART I

OVERVIEW

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROLIFERATION AND PROFUSION OF ACTORS IN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The social sciences and institutional theory have seen the proliferation of the term actor and the profusion of its meanings. Despite the importance and ubiquity of actor in institutional theory, the term is largely taken-for-granted, which has stunted the development of institutional theories of actors. The authors aspire to spur theorization of actor in institutional theory in the hope of carving out institutional theories of actor in the collective research agenda. The authors first contextualize their interest in actor in institutional theory and discuss the intellectual context within which the authors put this agenda forward. The authors briefly sketch out the main themes that would provide fruitful areas of inquiry in this new agenda and bring together a variety of strands in institutional theory with a clear focus on the relationship between institutions and actors. The authors conclude by discussing the contributions included in the volume.

 Keywords: Actor; institution; institutional theory; social construction; theorization; rationalization

1. INTRODUCTION

The social sciences in the last several decades have seen a spectacular increase in the use of the term actor. From sociology and anthropology to political science

and management, scholars have deployed the term to denote and describe an increasing array of entities from individuals and organizations to national states as well as transnational and supranational organizations. Although scholars have become increasingly comfortable with the term, this phenomenon, surprisingly, has received scant scholarly attention (Hwang & Colyvas, 2013). There has been little discussion about why and how this has happened, and to what consequence. More generally, the observation that actor is a social scientific concept and constitutes a meaningful social phenomenon on its own has escaped these disciplines within which the term's use has proliferated. Institutional theory is no exception to this overall trend.

Institutional theory has become one of the dominant paradigms in the studies of not just organizations, but also other institutional spheres in human societies (economy, politics, education, etc.) across several social science disciplines. While it, too, has seen – if not contributed to – the proliferation of actor in the pages of social science journals, scholars working within this tradition have not paid much attention to or problematized this pervasive phenomenon. Rather, some have even argued that the term has been so taken-for-granted that "it does not need a definition" (Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010, p. 1238). This situation is particularly perplexing given the central importance of the relationship between institutions and actors in institutional theory, whose main contribution has been to reject the unreflective and uncritical acceptance of "rational" actor models in the social sciences and to show the institutional embeddedness and construction of actors (Meyer, 2010).

We hope to address this lacuna in institutional theory and in the social sciences by shedding light on the construct, which, while evoked with an increasing rate of frequency, remains under-studied and under-theorized due to its taken-for-grantedness. This volume takes initial steps toward building theories of actors as an area of inquiry on the collective research agenda in institutional theory, which would examine the emergence, construction, and transformation of actors and their roles in institutional processes. In doing so, we have assembled several studies that address the emergence, construction, and transformation of actors and the work they do in institutional stability and change in a variety of empirical contexts: from the creation of new industries like Islamic banking and organic agriculture in Turkey and scientific winemaking in Australia to the rise of evidence-based medicine in the United States and to the changing actorhood of sherpas in the Everest to the recent rise of "avatars" in cryptocurrency, to mention a few.

Our research agenda starts with the initial concerns that motivated the neo-institutional research tradition and pays close attention to more recent developments in understanding the plethora of roles actors play in institutional stability and change. The intellectual focus in the last few decades shifted from concerns about the construction of actors to the work of actors in institutional processes. The swinging pendulum has rendered actor as a concept more or less taken-for-granted (Suddaby et al., 2010), which has meant that the emergence, constitution, and construction of actors took a back seat in the institutional research agenda, stunting the development of institutional theories of actors. Agentic accounts of

institutional processes, when they are not informed by or couched in the institutional construction of actor, however, run the risk of diminishing what distinguishes institutional theory from other competing paradigms in organization and management theory, namely legitimated actorhood (Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). Moreover, as the performance of actors inhabiting concrete social worlds has become the focus of much institutional theory, it is imperative that we pay attention to how institutional influences construct actors and condition the parameters of their performance in social processes. As actors take part in institutional processes, they do so as agents of their own or others' interests and/or for greater collective causes by enacting or deviating from their legitimated actorhood as broadly defined in institutionalized roles and identities (Meyer, Boli, & Thomas, 1994; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). Thus, theories of actors would bring the early and more recent strands in understanding actors in their institutional contexts into closer alignment.

In this paper, we first contextualize our interest in actor in institutional theory and discuss the intellectual context within which we put this agenda forward. We briefly sketch out the main themes that would provide fruitful areas of inquiry in this new agenda and bring together a variety of strands in institutional theory with a clear focus on the relationship between institutions and actors. We end with some introductory remarks about each contribution to this volume.

2. THE PROLIFERATION OF ACTOR AND THE PROFUSION OF ITS MEANINGS

Fig. 1 reports the proportion of articles that contain the word actor(s) in top journals in four social science disciplines (the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Anthropologist*, *American Political Science Review*, and *Academy of Management Review*). Although the journals and disciplines vary in the exact timing of the rapid increase in the use of the term and the proportion of the articles deploying the term, the overall trend is clear: for a long period in the twentieth century, few articles contain the term, but the takeoff began in the early 1970s and all journals saw a rapid growth into the 1980s and through the 2000s.

Fig. 1 represents a real scholarly phenomenon, and yet defies an easy interpretation as several factors might be in play. Setting aside what scholars mean by the term actor, one interpretation could be that the proliferation of actor in social science journals reflects changes in the real world over the last several decades. Social scientific accounts of the contemporary globalizing world, indeed, argue that globalization has fundamentally reshaped the social landscape of contemporary societies. Literally, globalization means the opening up and expansion of new space for organization and organizing beyond the national horizon (Bromley & Meyer, 2016; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006; Meyer & Bromley, 2013) shifting the gravitational balance between the state and non-state actors. At the same time, globalization has also involved both the scientization and rationalization of global and other environments as well as the legitimation of the human person and their rights and capacity to
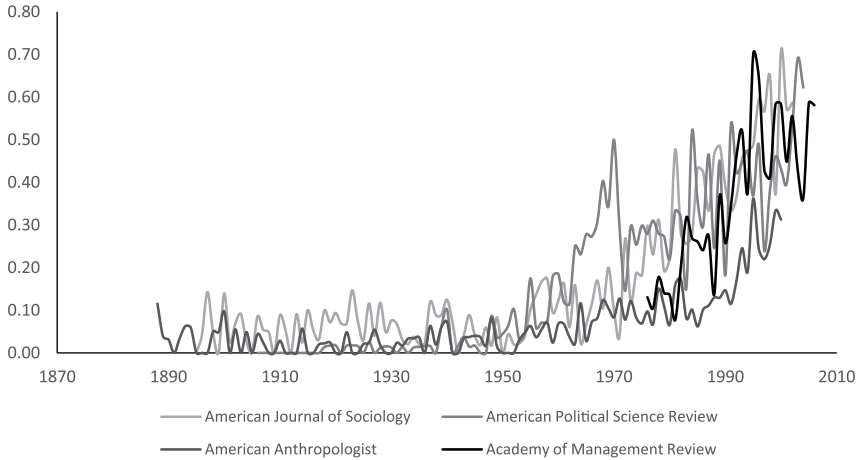
Fig. 1.   The Rise of Actors in the Social Sciences.

organize and mobilize. The rapid advancement of natural and social sciences has rendered the world more knowable, and, therefore, safe and ripe for human intervention. The empowerment of the human person, at the same time, has pushed the locus of action and organization out of the state to the rest of the polity and to civil society and markets. At the turn of the millennia, Slaughter (2002, pp. 12–13) identified the central phenomenon in the preceding decades in which globalization accelerated: "the proliferation of actors in the international system above, below, beside and within the state."

The rapidly expanding transnational realm has seen the emergence and expansion of international and supranational organizations including non-governmental organizations in a variety of spheres from science to humanitarian aid to the environment and to sports, to name a few (Boli & Thomas, 1999; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). The proliferation of actors under globalization, however, has not been limited to the transnational space and has occurred across all levels of society, involving the changing status of the state as the primary actor and the rise of the rest (Drori et al., 2006; Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2009). Although no longer the central actor that it once was and much tamed and diminished from the heyday of the nation-state system, the state continues to be a relevant, if not vital, actor (Evans, 1997; Mann, 1993). Sharing the stage, at the same time, are other actors. Within bureaucracy, state power and authority have devolved to lower level governments (to provincial to local governments) and state agencies and administrative units have become much more autonomous and empowered organizations, particularly under new public management (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). Outside state bureaucracy, the formal organization has penetrated into hitherto informal domains and rationalized and transformed informal groups into organized actors at a phenomenal pace in a broad array of social, economic, and political spheres (Drori et al., 2006, 2009; Meyer & Bromley,

2013). Multinationals extend their ubiquitous presence to every corner of the world in search of profits and productivity and have expanded the global market. Nonprofits and voluntary associations from local neighborhoods to global (and virtual) communities enact good citizenship and (re)produce civil society (Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005). In this worldwide organizational revolution, the human person is celebrated and apotheosized as the primary actor driving much of organization and organizing (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).

Actor as a concept has come to denote an array of entities across levels of society in part due to the changes in the empirical world. The term has also acquired varied meanings and found both theoretical and methodological uses. For instance, exchange theory, according to Molm (2001, pp. 260–261), is a general theory that applies to both micro- and macro-levels. Actor denoting entities from micro to macro levels allows the theory to be flexible:

> Participants in exchange are called actors. Actors can be either individual persons or corporate groups, and either specific entities (a particular friend) or interchangeable occupants of structural positions (the president of IBM). This flexibility allows exchange theorists to move from micro-level analyses to interpersonal exchanges to macro-level analyses of relations among organizations.

The minimal membership requirement for belonging in this broad category is participating or being able to participate in exchange, but members are as varied as a friend or the president of IBM or corporate groups.

In their seminal work on social network analysis, similarly, Wasserman and Faust (1994, p. 17) illustrate the term's use in the methodological literature:

> Social network analysis is concerned with understanding the linkages among social entities and the implications of these linkages. The social entities are referred to as actors. Actors are discrete individual, corporate, or collective social units. Examples of actors are people in a group, department within a corporation, public service agencies in a city, or nation-states in the world system. Our use of the term "actor" does not imply that these entities necessarily have volition of the ability to "act."

In exchange theory and social network analysis, actor is no more than a blank placeholder for any social units or entities that (can) engage in social exchange and/or are found in "networks," regardless of the level of society at which they reside or whether, as Wasserman and Faust carefully note, they have intention or the ability to act.

While the above examples hint at the flexibility afforded by the term's broad applicability, other uses are quite specific – albeit implicit – about the term's connotation. For example, in some studies, actors are purposive and muscular entities endowed with clear agenda and coercive capacity. Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett (2008, pp. 10–12) argue that coercion is one of the core mechanisms of diffusion and assert that liberalization policies diffuse when "actors" with coercive power promote liberalization policies. Coercive power is exercised by "a range of actors: governments, international organizations, and even non-governmental actors", but is differentially distributed among social entities in a social system. The capacity to exercise power is a defining feature of real actors; thus, national

states without such capacity are non-actors. Indeed, "weaker parties simply expect that they will receive some benefits by making the policy change favored by the more powerful actor." This example illustrates that actor as a concept distinguishes social entities based on differences in some core features such as power, status, resources, skills, technology, etc. Therefore, even within the same identity or role category, actor works to distinguish members based on certain theoretically important features.

Fig. 1, therefore, represents a complex phenomenon in which the diversity of social entities denoted with the term actor has accompanied the profusion of the term's varied, connoted meanings and roles. The term's taken-for-grantedness hides the term's protean quality, which allows scholars to talk about the entities denoted and connoted as such without much elaboration or reflection. This situation is both a challenge and an opportunity, particularly for institutional theory, whose main *problematique* has been the relationship between institutions and actors – that is, how institutions give rise to and constitute actors, who, in turn, participate, in their specific manifestations, in the reproduction of and changes in institutional conditions.

3. RELATING TO AND EXPLAINING THE REAL WORLD

The proliferation of actors, spanning levels of society and geographical horizons, involves complex processes: from redefinition and disaggregation of the state; devolution of state power, sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority to lower and higher level entities; and to the transformation of informal and/or corporate groups into newly empowered, organized entities with clearer purposes. These developments in the real world fundamentally alter the social, economic, and political landscape around the world, and are simultaneously reinforced by profound shifts in the institutional environment (e.g., Coleman, 1974, 1982, 1990; Pedersen & Dobbin, 1997; Perrow, 1991). The emergence of new (categories of) actors and the changing status of actors and relations among them often represent significant institutional change, such as the birth of a new industry or transformative episodes in an institutional field in which the role of challenger and incumbent changes hands (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Moreover, the roles and functions actors are authorized to perform define their behavioral parameters and expectations (Meyer et al., 1994). Conformity to and deviation from such institutionalized roles and functions speaks to the extent of institutionalization and/or the capacity of actors to take meaningful action in disrupting or resisting institutional demands (Jepperson, 1991). The institutional construction of actors and their roles in institutional processes, in other words, are at the core of institutional theory's paradigmatic agenda. In this sense, institutional theory is well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the changes in the real world.

Although the relationship between institutions and actors is a central theoretical issue, theorization of actor remains a relatively barren territory in institutional theory. One reason for this is that institutional theory entertains varying,

if not conflicting, perspectives on the relationship between institutions and actors. Early insights in institutional theory showed that the rationalization of environments in a variety of social domains facilitates the emergence and construction of individual and collective actors. The expansion of science has enormously broadened and deepened the collective understanding and knowledge of the natural and social world whose organization and workings are portrayed to follow discoverable and predictable natural laws, and, therefore, can be understood by persons (Drori & Meyer, 2006; Drori, Meyer, Ramirez, & Schofer, 2002; Pedersen & Dobbin, 1997).

At the societal/system level, with the rise and institutionalization of the nation-state system, especially in the post-war period of de-colonization, the state became a legitimate collective actor pursuing public goods – development and welfare (Hwang, 2006; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997; Strang, 1990). The expansion of modern individualism and the rise of human rights have apotheosized the individual person as the main protagonist of the modern, global world and as the fundamental unit of action from which different forms of collective actors are constructed (Meyer, 2000; Tsutsui & Wotipka, 2004). In stark contrast to the image of entrepreneurs as strangers (e.g., Barth, 1963; Swedberg, 2000) in anthropological studies of traditional societies, for instance, entrepreneurship has become a celebrated virtue that can be taught and learned in modern societies. The formal organization in the cast of a human person ceases to be a metaphor, but a description of individual agency and actorhood (Cornelissen, 2013). Consequently, organizations of various sorts flourish as legitimate solutions to local and global problems, and in pursuit of private and public interests, as "the building blocks for organizations come to be littered around the societal landscape; it takes only a little entrepreneurial energy to assemble them into a structure" (Bromley & Meyer, 2016; Drori et al., 2006; Meyer & Bromley 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 345). The formal organization, some have argued, has come to dominate and even absorb society (Davis, 2009; Perrow, 1991). In short, this perspective views agency as a modern form of authority derived from cultural and cognitive understandings that bestow individual and collective actors with roles and behavioral scripts (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). Enactment becomes the causal link between institutions and actors (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & Rerup, 2017).

Reacting to this early, more phenomenological line of thought, subsequent developments have accentuated actor-driven institutional change, focusing on how actors creatively engage in recombination and transposition of existing materials to generate novel practices, meanings, and structures, and even change institutions themselves. The focus on the role of actors in institutional change, however, reverses the causal structure of institutional theory, as actors become the main driver of change. The most representative case of this movement is the popularity of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009: DiMaggio, 1988, 1991; Hampel, Lawrence, & Tracey, 2017; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Hwang & Powell, 2005; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). In these agentic approaches to institutional persistence and change, "New institutions arise when organized actors

with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly" (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 14). Oliver (1991, pp. 145–146) similarly emphasized strategic dimensions in organizational responses to institutional pressures and brought in "interest-seeking, active organizational behavior" to overcome institutional theory's "lack of attention to the role of organizational self-interests and active agency." Inhabited institutionalism has reminded us that institutions are "populated with people" and provided the impetus for articulating institutionalism's "people problem," helping introduce actor to the center stage of institutional analyses (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) and Lawrence et al. (2009), building on DiMaggio and Oliver, charted a similar direction by coining an umbrella concept, institutional work, to highlight "the important influence of actors on institutions – purposefully creating, maintaining and disrupting them" (p. 246). These streams represent "a growing awareness of institutions as products of human action and reaction, motivated by both idiosyncratic personal interests and agendas for institutional change or preservation" (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 6; see also Hallett, 2010).

Inspired by the broad agentic turn in institutional theory, scholars have accumulated a vast array of studies of institutional maintenance and change (see Hampel et al., 2017 for a comprehensive review). These studies collectively document how different types of actors and their strategies and activities help maintain and transform a myriad of institutions throughout society. This growing literature complements the earlier studies that analyze the proliferation of actors in the contemporary social world and studies what actors do in their concrete habitats and how they reproduce and change the institutions in which they are embedded. The institutional work agenda has done much to elaborate on this "actors-as-an-independent-variable" agenda, envisioning and highlighting more diverse, active, and prominent roles for actors in institutional processes. In doing so, institutional scholars have uncovered the many faces of actors and their activities in a diversity of contexts.

Dacin, Munir, and Tracey (2010) in their insightful study of the Cambridge high table dining, showed how the repeated enactment of institutionalized roles in highly ritualized events contributes to the reproduction of the class system and inequality in the British society. If Dacin et al. showed the importance of actors' enactment of routines in institutional maintenance, Creed, Hudson, Okhuysen, and Smith-Crowe (2014, p. 285) pointed to the role played by "institutional guardians" or "shamers," who "have cognitive, emotional, and/or moral commitments to existing prescriptions and patterns of social relations" and "police the boundaries of acceptable behavior" by engaging episodic and strategic uses of shaming. Moreover, scholars have used the "paradox of embedded agency" as the main theoretical framework to contextualize the agentic capacity of actors within institutional constraints (Seo & Creed, 2002). While acknowledging the institutional embeddedness of actors, this framework zooms in on the characteristics of actors and institutions that enable a (set of) actor(s) to engage in activities for institutional change or disruption. The capabilities, resources, and other features of actors identified as essential in the performance of institutional work

vary across institutional settings and organizational fields. These features may be part of the scripts associated with institutionalized roles and identities or may be unique or idiosyncratic to a subset of occupants of certain roles in a particular organizational field and only loosely associated with institutionalized scripts.

The proliferation of actors also coincides with a call for clarifying the micro-foundations of institutional theory (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). The discussions on the microfoundations of institutional theory, addressing the one-sided emphasis on macrolevel structures by earlier institutional analyses, pay closer attention to behaviors of (groups of) actors in their efforts to enact, sustain, and change institutions in their day-to-day situations (Chandler & Hwang, 2015; Powell & Rerup, 2017). In this sense, actor is clearly central to the collective pursuit of the microfoundations of institutional theory, which, in turn, involves clarifying the underlying theorization of actors and their relationship to their institutional environment.

This diversity in institutional theory is intellectually significant, but until recently has not been acknowledged explicitly. In the context of the taken-for-granted use of actor, the resultant lack of clarity has contributed to the current underdevelopment of institutional theories of actors and has hindered a systematic understanding of the relationship between institutions and actors. The goal of this volume is to assemble a discussion on the place of actor in institutional theory. We follow a promising lead seeded by Padgett and Powell (2012, pp. 2–3) in *The Emergence of Organizations and Markets*, bringing together diverging strands in institutional theory: "In the short run, actors create relations, and in the long run, relations create actors." This dialectical view highlights the historical emergence of actors, while reminding us not to take actors as given. At the same time, the "relations" that create actors vary across time and space, generating a variety of constellations of actors in a given social space. In doing so, we bring together the studies informed by the concerns that motivated earlier institutional research (emergence and construction) and the studies that are extending the more recent developments in institutional theory highlighting what actors do in institutional processes.

4. THEORETICAL THEMES IN THE VOLUME

The present volume consists of 4 parts: this introduction, two substantive parts, and John Meyer's "Afterword" that reflects on the contributions in the volume. While all contributions touch on both the construction of actors and their effects, we divided the contributions into two sections based on each paper's relative thematic emphasis. The first substantive section entitled, "Construction of Actors," showcases six papers that examine and reflect on the meanings, construction, and emergence of actors. The second section entitled, "Work of Actors" features five empirical studies that follow the work of actors in episodes of institutional change and stability.

Some contributions reflect on what constitutes actors theoretically (Hasse, 2019; Meyer, 2019; O'Tierney, Kavanagh, & Scally, 2019) and how the

methodological decisions about research design lead to the (mis-)specification about actors (Casasnovas & Ventresca, 2019). Several studies document the emergence of (new) actors (Çetrez, 2019; Dokko, Nigam, & Chung, 2019; O'Tierney et al., 2019; Semper, 2019), while others analyze the transformation of existing actors (Lenglet & Rozin, 2019) and the legitimation of actors into new settings (Seidenschnur & Krücken, 2019). Still others examine the variation within the same category of institutionalized identities (Hwang & Suarez, 2019; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2019). Cutting across the variation on the theme of actor construction are several observations about: the multiplicity and division of labor among actors in institutional processes (Dokko et al., 2019; Migdal-Picker & Zilber, 2019; Semper, 2019; Seidenschnur & Krücken, 2019); the heterogeneity and internal diversity in actor categories (Hwang & Suarez, 2019; Lenglet & Rozin, 2019; Mizrahi-Shtelman, 2019); and the embeddedness of actors in changing (institutional) environments (Çetrez, 2019; Dokko et al., 2019; Migdal-Picker & Zilber, 2019; Semper, 2019). Motivating these themes are the following questions: What are the processes and mechanisms through which actors emerge and evolve? What are the institutional conditions giving rise to different categories of actors? and How does institutional embeddedness in multiple institutional logics create heterogeneity within a category of actors? Under institutional complexity, how is the constitution of actors influenced by conflicts and contradictions among co-existing and contending models?

While the analyses of actor as a dependent variable constitute one thematic thrust of the volume, another strand involves how actors participate and influence institutional change. The most overlooked in institutional theory, as we pointed out earlier and John Meyer underscores in his reflections, is the observation that the emergence and transformation of actors constitute significant institutional change. The new industries, fields and social space are populated by new actors (Çetrez, 2019; Dokko et al., 2019; O'Tierney et al., 2019; Semper 2019), and the changes in the environment often reconstruct existing actors (Hwang & Suarez, 2019; Lenglet & Rozin, 2019) and attract new actors (Seidenschnur & Krücken, 2019). At the same time, actors mobilize over a long stretch of time to catalyze a new field (Dokko et al., 2019) or actively engage in institutional work to shape the development of new markets and industries (Çetrez, 2019; Semper, 2019) or to legitimate and give meaning to new categories of identities (Migdal-Picker & Zilber, 2019). In doing so, the contributions ask: How do actors actively participate in institutional maintenance or change? What is the nature of institutions that are targets of agentic activities? How and why do the performative aspects of maintenance (from routine enactment to active policing and sanctioning) vary across institutional settings? What role do actors play in institutional changes across temporal and spatial contexts?

5. CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE VOLUME

In the parlance of institutional theory and in the social sciences, actors reside in highly institutionalized levels: societal, organizational, and individual levels.

Raimund Hasse (2019) shows that although states, organizations, and individuals are social constructions and derivatives of their institutional environment, these entities are assumed and treated as if they are actors in the first place, not just in the social scientific account of social realities, but also in the media and law. However, Hasse cautions that the taken-for-grantedness of actors hides the fact that states, organizations, and individuals as actors need to be reproduced in social practices and depend heavily on various forms of "institutional support" provided by "helping professions" – or what John Meyer (this volume; Meyer, 1996) has called "others" – to maintain their actorhood, especially when these actors are failing to live up to institutionally prescribed norms and expectations. Consequently, when individuals lack emotional competence, they can seek help from psychiatrists in the same way that states turn to international consultants to reform failing economies. Even as institutionally defined actors, states, organizations, and individuals differ significantly, theorizing the dominant features associated with these different types of actors would be an interesting avenue for further research. Hasse seeds a way forward for institutional theories of actors.

School principalship is an institutionalized actor type that exists in a highly structured setting. In Mizrahi-Shtelman's (2019) portrayal, school principals are "agents" caught in the cross-currents of conflicting demands and pressures. These principals vary in their perceptions of their agency and embeddedness. This variation in the subjective understanding of their role affects how they practice "embedded agency" – that is, in what areas of their work and to what extent school principals feel agentic and/or constrained. While expressing their "sense of agency" in "policy, agenda, pedagogy categories, curriculum, and administration," school principals identified a handful of areas – or what the author terms "categories of embeddedness" – in which they are constrained or obligated by their professional role *vis-à-vis* core curriculum, administration, assessment and evaluation, inspection, community, and teachers. School principals differ in the extent to which they feel constrained or empowered to exercise discretion in different domains of their work. In this sense, Mizrahi-Shtelman develops a view of embedded agency as a matter of orientation among individuals performing the role of school principals.

The topic of legal personhood is not new to institutional theory, but the distinction between natural persons and legal persons is often overlooked. O'Tierney et al. (2019), drawing on insights from the games literature, clearly articulate the nature of ontological separation between living persons and their legal representations. In doing so, they develop a useful analytical framework – perhaps vocabulary. They use the metaphors of players and avatars to illustrate a fundamental point: unless living persons or "players" are initiated or articulated into a game (or a Matrix) in the form of "avatars," they do not have presence in that game. In this way, it is easy to see that not all human persons are actors in all games and that they become actors as a result of institutional construction or "acquisition of actorial identity." Using this framework, the authors illustrate Apple's puzzling, if not ingenious, organizational structure made up of avatars (subsidiaries) and the avatars of avatars stretching over several legal jurisdictions, which

in turn enables the company's tax strategies. But the highlight of the paper is the case of Bitcoin. Creating actors or, in O'Tierney, Kavanaugh, and Scally's term, "avatars", in the Bitcoin ecosystem is easy, costless, and almost instantaneous. However, unlike the example of Apple Inc. and its subsidiaries in different legal jurisdictions, the relationship between Bitcoin avatars and the players outside the system that are creating these avatars is often tenuous if not loosely coupled. The Bitcoin ecosystem is a Matrix (or framework) and not an actor, and, therefore, is not associated with any particular actor and sits outside and above the boundaries of any legal Matrix or jurisdiction. Consequently, the legal status and treatment of Bitcoin avatars and the disputes among them present novel and complex issues both practically and theoretically.

Hwang and Suarez (2019) address an important puzzle in the shifting locus of collective civic action from individuals to organizations in US civil society. They put forth a view of service-providing charities as institutionally embedded organizational actors. While charities contribute to the public good by delivering essential services and products to the public, they also promote civic engagement and social change. However, there is much variation among nonprofit organizations in juggling these two important roles. Hwang and Suarez show that what pushes organizations one way or another is a function of various institutional influences. They find that goal-oriented organizations embedded in cross-sector networks tend to have a more enlarged view of their role in civil society and, therefore, are likely to engage in advocacy, while professionalization and engagement in market transactions for revenues tend to dampen nonprofit advocacy. Here we can see the antecedents to different degrees of engagement in actorhood as some flex their muscles in service to change more than other.

Consultants are ubiquitous in today's organizational landscape and have been expanding their professional reach in recent decades. However, when consultants enter a new social domain, they need to be accepted as legitimate actors. Seidenschnur and Krücken (2019) analyze the construction of external consultants as actors by examining the processes by which different types of consultants (IT and strategy) are legitimated in German universities. The rationalization of universities has meant that universities have become much more open to what Hasse (2019) called "helping professionals" or consultants. Although external consultants are increasingly seen as part of good management, the internal complexity of universities presents a daunting challenge for consultants. Universities house multiple intra-organizational communities embedded in different institutional logics such as academic, administrative, and market logics. Consequently, depending on the nature of work for which consultancy is sought, different intra-organizational communities and their associated organizational routines and evaluative expectations may be in play. Seidenschnur and Krücken show that in IT consulting, it is the internal university clients and their administrative logic that shape the legitimation process of consultants. In strategy consulting, it is the academics whose sensibilities are shaped by academic culture and logics that provide the criteria for the legitimacy of consultants.

Casasnovas and Ventresca's (2019) panoramic overview of the ways in which research design has shifted over time in the institutional logics literature identifies two striking trends. The main empirical strategy has shifted from field-level studies to organization-specific contexts where conflicts are the dominant theme. Another shift involves changing conceptions of "logic transitions": while earlier studies emphasized a movement from one dominant logic to another, later studies tend to emphasize co-existence or logic blending. These two trends have paralleled the agentic turn in the broader institutional literature that highlights "individual and organizational responses to multiple institutional logics" (p. 153). The important insight of Casasnovas and Ventresca's (p. 153) work is that "*what we see* is highly dependent on *where we look*":

> The focus on the structures and strategies of specific organizations, which is distinct from previous interest in the characteristics and context of organizational forms, may result in mis-specified findings: Reading as organization-specific processes (strategies, responses, mechanisms) what are actually outcomes shaped by broader, field-level processes or action vocabularies.

Dokko et al. (2019), in their qualitative case study of the emergence of evidence-based medicine in American healthcare, track the historical development of a particular intellectual school and the role of mentoring in developing a community of scholars. These scholars collectively, over generations, advanced and promoted a new intellectual paradigm concerned with improving the quality of the American healthcare system. The authors employ the concept of meso-structure to connect the activities and interactions of (groups of) individuals to macro institutional change. The intellectual school of evidence-based medicine serves as a meso-structure enrolling and cultivating the movement's membership that over time collectively transformed the American healthcare field. The intellectual school is a collective actor, which is also a creation of activities, resource mobilization, and deployment of a group of committed mentors. Bridging the activities and interactions of individual actors and macroinstitutional change, the intellectual movement as a mesostructure is at once an outcome of ongoing institutional work of individual actors and an actor in its own right. The analytical narrative reduces the causal distance between individual actors and institutional change via the mesostructure while demonstrating how individual and collective actors influence institutional processes.

The Australian wine industry, originally regarded as a marginal and unprofessional laggard in the global wine industry, emerged in the last half of the twentieth century as the leader in scientific and industrial winemaking and a global hub of oenological innovation. Daniel Semper's (2019) historical case study tells this success story in three acts and distils it in a process model in which different forms of agency become salient in the transition from the traditional to scientific approach to winemaking or the professionalization of scientific winemaking. The early state of the new profession required the different innovations and breakthroughs of disparate individuals. The profession laid the foundation of modern scientific technique, which later formalized into organized, professional training, and culminated in the development of collective interests. Each of these phases

required, Semper's process model shows, different types of agency: distributed, coordinated, and orchestrated.

Özgür Rahşan Çetrez's (2019) comparative study follows the emergence of two nascent industries in Turkey. Examining the incorporation of Islamic banking and organic agriculture within the legal system in Turkey, Çetrez shows that the formation of a new industry is a contested process involving different state and non-state actors. These actors' interests, preferences, and strategies were embedded and shaped by changing institutional and political contexts. The case of Islamic banking is particularly illuminating. The state, while important, was not a unified actor and was divided into secular and religious factions. For the military elite and secular segments of state bureaucracy, Islamic banking represented Political Islam's aspiration to redesign socioeconomic institutions according to Islamic principles, while the Islamist government saw it differently. Islamic scholars and bankers provided a lot of input in the process, but their positions shifted as the political and institutional contexts changed. In contrast, the development of organic farming was more straightforward partly because the whole sector was embedded in the European Union and its regulation, which, in turn, buffered the nascent industry from the push and pull of domestic political contestations.

Marc Lenglet and Philip Rozin's (2019) fascinating case study on the evolution of sherpa actorhood focuses on a pivotal event high up in the mountain or what became known as the "Everest brawl." The event provided a window into the changing institutional context precipitated by the commodification of high-altitude mountaineering and the tensions that had been building up in the industry, representing a turning point in the evolution of sherpa actorhood. The breakdown of micro institutions (in this case, the rope fixing ritual which reflected the respect for the work of sherpas) led to a violent encounter between sherpas and western climbers. Sherpas have been an indispensable part of the high mountaineering industry and the Nepalese economy and have long been recognized for their climbing skills. And yet, the institutionalized role of sherpas has been that of the porter. In the aftermath of the brawl, a younger generation of sherpas have engaged in what Leglet and Rozin called "institutional co-appropriate work" and strived to be recognized as climbers. In doing so, they are emancipating sherpas from their subaltern position and redefining sherpa actorhood.

Merav Migdal-Picker and Tammar Zilber's (2019) case study on the struggle for legitimacy of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community in Israel features a multiplicity of actors working with(in) multiple institutional logics across several discursive spaces. Institutional complexity means not only the multiplicity of actors and institutional logics but also the multiplicity of institutional work and the discursive spaces within which institutional work takes place. The authors show that participants engaged in the struggle as either proponents or opponents of LGBT rights. The LGBT community and other members of the Israeli community and polity, such as the representatives of Orthodox Jews in the parliament, left-wing politicians, members of the judiciary, etc., shifted between broad and narrow frames to construct their intention and their actorhood. Actors, moreover, deploy multiple logics to mobilize and enroll other actors in promoting their agenda and engage in discursive institutional work in accordance

with the rules governing a particular discursive space within which they operate. Given these dynamics, Migdal-Picker and Zilber conclude that actorhood is not a precondition or outcome of institutionalization, but an "integral part of the institutional processes," constructed by the institutional work of actors.

Finally, John Meyer's (2019) characteristically majestic essay provides both a bird's-eye view of the contributions and an insight that is overlooked by the authors themselves. The bird's-eye view shows that despite the differences in emphasis on actor as an independent variable or dependent variable, the studies in this volume are all part of the same phenomenon: "the expansion of environmental rationalization." And, a crucial, but often overlooked insight is that the authors also become part of the same phenomenon when they "take the perspectives of the local participants they study … make sense of the situations analyzed" (p. 283). The implication of this oversight is significant: scholars tend to see rationality and action rather than rationalized account and enactment, often failing to see or often even underestimating decoupling, that is, actorhood is a model whose approximations may be a variable, which, in turn, gives rise to or finds a mirror image in "otherhood" (Meyer, 1997) or what Hasse (2019) calls helping professionals whose job it is to save actors from their failures or, in a more agentic language, to help actors find themselves.

The contributions in the volume, we hope, will facilitate deeper theorization of actors among organizational and institutional scholars. Institutional theory is well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities spurred by the proliferation of actors and to reflect deeply on the ever-changing world inhabited by actors.

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