Into the Clearing: Back to the future of constitutive institutional analysis

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Abstract
In the wake of recent scholarly disquiet regarding organizational institutionalism, we argue for a more focused constitutive approach to institutional analysis that concentrates attention on the socio-cultural sources of actors and their behavior. To do so, we suggest that complementarities between world society institutionalism and the institutional logics perspective provide an opportunity to develop a richer, more critical approach to contemporary transformations in economy and society. Building upon nascent empirical directions in world society scholarship, we argue that bridging these theoretical research programs can seed a generative research agenda on the variegated challenges to the established world society order that underpins the liberal capitalist-democracy model. We argue that this should include research on the multiplicity of logics that undergird liberal as well as illiberal beliefs and practices. Foregrounding issues of power and inequality that are grounded in disparate configurations of logics, we suggest that new analytical tools related to the new structuralism and multimodal analysis can help advance the constitutive institutional project for which we advocate.

Keywords
civil society, culture, domination, economic sociology, institutional theory, non-profit organizations, power, resistance

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While organizational institutionalism is one of the most robust and generative scholarly domains in organization studies (Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence, & Meyer, 2017; Lounsbury & Beckman, 2015; Scott, 2014), there has been growing disquiet about its ever-growing theoretical prominence. Recent critics have vigorously voiced complaints about the elasticity of institutionalist concepts and theory, as well as the inattentiveness of institutional scholars to issues related to criticality, power, and inequality (e.g., Alvesson, Hallett, & Spicer, 2019; Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Reed & Burrell, 2019; Willmott, 2015). While key aspects of these critiques seem to reflect a profound misunderstanding of the institutional literature (e.g., Amis, Munir, & Mair, 2019; Cornelissen, 2019; Drori, 2019; Friedland & Arjaliès, 2019; Svejenova, 2019), we are sympathetic to concerns that the broad tent of institutionalism has perhaps been stretched too far, diminishing the critical edge that enabled it to become a progressive research program (Rowan, 2010). While Scott (2014) usefully highlighted some key ontological differences between different institutionalisms—most starkly observed between social constructivist, sociological approaches, and rational choice variants in economics and political science—the growing variance (or perhaps ambiguity) of ontological commitments within organizational institutionalism over the past three decades has argued led to some degree of categorical incoherence.

One of the developments that has fostered this ambiguity has been the push towards fleshing out microfoundations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015; Haack, Sieweke & Wessel, 2019; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & Rerup, 2017). While there is nothing inherently problematic about institutional microfoundations (Steele, 2019), this conceptual effort has gone hand-in-hand with the rise of a cottage industry of empirical studies that center on the behavior of actors of all sorts (Hwang & Colyvas, forthcoming). This commenced with research on institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988; Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009), that when critiqued for its overly-heroic depiction of actors yielded to research streams on institutional logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012), the social movement dynamics of institutions (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2017), cultural entrepreneurship (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019), institutional work (Lawrence, Leca, & Zipper, 2013), inhabited institutions (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), and practice-driven institutionalism (Smets, Aristidou, & Whittington, 2017) that are forging productive efforts to more richly theorize the effortful, as well as mundane, actions of a wider group of variably disconnected actors.

Even though this focalization of actors helped to address some of the complaints associated with the early neo-institutional project—namely, its emphasis on mimetic isomorphism and lack of attention to institutional construction and transformation (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999)—along the way, this shift from studying actors as explanandum to explanans had the unfortunate side-effect of diminishing attention to the core “macrofounding” commitments that animated that initial project (Hwang & Colyvas, forthcoming; Meyer, forthcoming; Steele et al., forthcoming). Instead of problematizing the nature of actors and elucidating the socio-cultural sources of their behavior (Dobbin, 1992; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000), some have been murmuring that institutional accounts seem to have increasingly relied on more reified and realist approaches to actors and their interests. It is important to emphasize that much of the generativity and initial allure of neoinstitutional scholarship stemmed from its hostility to rational actor approaches, as well as its embrace of social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), new approaches to the
conceptualization and analysis of culture (Bonnell & Hunt, 1999; Friedland & Mohr, 2004; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019), and contemporary social theory (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986; Foucault, 1969; Giddens, 1984). It is this constitutive tradition that has the potential to provide critical reflexivity and address important issues related to grand challenges, power, and inequality (Drori, 2019).

In this paper, we highlight new opportunities to develop a broader constitutive institutional research program at the interface of the world society literature (Meyer et al., 1997; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000) and the institutional logics perspective (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). While we have strong theoretical ambitions, the research agenda we advocate is motivated by the need to illuminate current transformations in economy and society. It seems that the liberal ideals underpinning world society are under assault with the rise of populism, authoritarianism, and extremism of varied sorts, undergirded by growing inequality and social problems such as those related to immigration (Guillen, 2018). Recent scholarship has begun to document how such “illiberal” challenges to the liberal world order can be identified in the spread of new laws that inhibit the influence of international nongovernmental organizations (Bromley, Longhofer, & Schofer, forthcoming) as well as challenges to the importance of universities as a liberal institution (Schofer, Lerch, & Meyer, 2019).

While the world society research program provides a robust theoretical orientation towards understanding the construction and spread of the liberal capitalist-democracy model around the globe, its theoretical toolkit is less developed in uncovering the variety of liberal and illiberal challenges that have taken root and are emerging to offer alternative ideas and practices related to the social organization of society and economy. However, in advocating for research on world society challenger movements, we wish to avoid overly actor-centric analyses, and encourage scholarship that focuses instead on how these challenges are being constituted (see also Meyer & Vaara, forthcoming). The institutional logics perspective provides a fruitful complement to world society theory in emphasizing the constitutive processes associated with heterogeneous, often competing configurations of beliefs and practices that animate economy and society. These theoretical research programs are not only united by hostility towards rational actor and functionalist approaches, but they both embrace a phenomenologically inspired approach to institutional analysis that enables a critically reflexive understanding of the social.

While phenomenology (e.g., Heidegger, 1962 [1927], 1971[1935]; Husserl, 1989; Merleau-Ponty, 1964) has inspired much research in organization studies, especially process-oriented studies that privilege subjective human experience in the world (Langley & Tsoukas, 2016), phenomenologically oriented institutional scholars have historically focused more on broader socio-cultural developments that profoundly structure conscious experience and lay out the conditions of possibility for intentional action. As Meyer and Jepperson (2000, p. 100) opined, their project has focused on how the “modern. . .cultural system constructs the modern actor as an authorized agent for various interests.”

Renate Meyer (2008) traced in some depth the relationship between neoinstitutional theory and phenomenology, arguing that institutional analysis could greatly benefit by renewing and deepening ties to the phenomenological sociology of knowledge (Berger & Kellner, 1984; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schütz, 1967; Schütz & Luckmann, 1973) as well as European traditions such as Scandinavian institutionalism (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). She anchored her analysis on the Schützian tradition (e.g., 1967) which maintains that individuals are born into a socio-historical a priori (Luckmann, 1983) that provides “institutionalized typifications, frames of interpretation, actor positions, patterns of action, etc., and thus delineates the boundaries and the ‘horizon’ within which people can meaningfully act—and beyond which it is impossible to see or understand” (Meyer, 2008, p. 519). While embracing more interpretivist
approaches to meaning and institutions (e.g., Zilber, 2002, 2006), Meyer emphasized opportunities to unpack the importance of social stocks of knowledge to the constitution of actors and meaning, highlighting analytic approaches to phenomenology that seek to reconcile structuralist and interactionist positions (e.g., Reichertz, 1999; Soeffner, 1989, 2004).

We highlight institutional research that has made progress in this direction, emphasizing the fruitfulness of recent analytical developments for the broadening of a constitutively oriented institutional research program. Finding inspiration in the work of Bourdieu and related contemporary social theory, the new structuralism and multimodal analysis are being productively used to uncover structural aspects of symbolic systems and practices that shape constitutive processes (e.g., Hannigan et al., 2019; Höllerer, Daudigeos, & Jancsary, 2018; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Mohr, 1998). While some may view the research program we envision as exclusionary in some regards, we believe that it should be of broad interest to institutionalists as well as phenomenologically oriented scholars who are interested in practice, discourse, power, and critical analysis. However, in our effort to construct a more synthetic and generative constitutive institutional research program, we believe that there is value in leaving behind conversation-stopping antinomies such as objective/subjective and process/variance, and eschewing those who seek to deride either qualitative or quantitative forms of evidence in service of their claims (Kaplan & Vakili, 2015; Lounsbury & Kagan, 2001 Steele, Toubiana, & Greenwood, 2020). With the aforementioned caveats, we invite fellow travelers to join us in shaping the constitutive clearing that we contemplate.

The neoinstitutional project emerged amidst developments in sociology that reflected a growing hostility towards functional and rationalist analyses of behavior. In the mid-twentieth century, structural-functionalist was the coin of the realm in American sociology. From this perspective, culture tended to be conceptualized as generalized value systems that constrained behavior by being internalized into one’s personality via socialization (Parsons, 1937). This process of value infusion, in turn, was theorized to provide a key foundation for the maintenance of social order. In the 1960s, social unrest related to the Vietnam War, and social problems related to race, class, gender, and sex strained extant functional approaches to social theory, enabling more dynamic conceptualizations of society featuring social construction, interaction, conflict, and social movements to become ascendant. As part of these developments, phenomenological, symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological research programs emerged, emphasizing human experience and meaning-making as central.

While neoinstitutionalism did not really take off as a more systematic program of research until the 1990s (Rowan, 2010), early writings that seeded this literature reflected these broader shifts in sociology. Meyer and Rowan (1977) made a nod to Goffman’s (1967) work on interaction ritual; Zucker (1977) embraced ethnomethodology (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967) and related social constructivist and phenomenological approaches (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schütz, 1962, 1967); and DiMaggio and Powell (1991) consolidated these linkages to phenomenology and ethnomethodology in their beachhead statement, while also arguing for stronger foundational linkages to the social theories of Giddens (e.g., 1984) and Bourdieu (e.g., 1977). While Powell and DiMaggio’s (1991) so-called “orange book” contained a wide diversity of contributions, they argued that a distinctive aspect of the new institutionalism was its focus on the constitutive aspects of embeddedness, including how classifications, routines, scripts, and schemas shape cognition and behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 13).

The constitutive turn has been most strongly visible in the phenomenologically inspired neoinstitutional approach of John Meyer and colleagues, often referred to as world society theory (e.g., Bromley & Meyer, 2016; Dobbin, 1992; Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, & Scott, 1993; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Meyer et al., 1997; Scott
This was evident in Meyer’s earliest statements—for example, the emphasis on how rationalized institutional rules operate as myths that facilitate isomorphism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Focusing on explaining formal organizational structure and its decoupling from work practice, Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 341) argued that “institutionalized rules are classifications built into society as reciprocated typifications or interpretations (Berger & Luckmann 1967, p. 54). . .Institutions inevitably involve normative obligations but often enter into social life primarily as facts which must be taken into account by actors.” Commending the phenomenological heritage embedded in the scholarly corpus of world society research (e.g., Meyer & Jepperson, 2000; Meyer, Boli, & Thomas, 1987), Renate Meyer argued that

the reciprocity of the typified, scripted action and the type of actor who is expected to perform the script is central to the notion that institutions are constitutive for social actors and actorhood and for organizational institutionalism’s claim against rational choice models that actors’ preferences and interests are tied to and do not precede the institutional order they belong to. (Meyer, 2008, p. 520)

The world society project evolved to focus more broadly on how modern actors are ongoing cultural constructions emanating from the secularization of religion and the embrace of broad Enlightenment ideas related to progress, justice, and individualism that underpin the liberal capitalist-democracy model (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). This program of research has traced how the development of modern global institutions entailed the construction of world cultural scripts and templates around democracy, human rights, science, education, and environmentalism that have profoundly shaped the structure and behavior of nation-states, organizations, and individuals across the globe (Schofer, Hironaka, Frank, & Longhofer, 2012). This literature argues that these trends have become particularly prominent in the post-World War II era with the creation of the United Nations and other prominent international governance bodies and associated infrastructure—enabling the rise and spread of a Western ontology and the liberal international order.

For instance, Boli and Thomas (1999) documented the rise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from 1875 to 1973, showing how this organizational form contributed to the rise of a world society cultural model, solidifying the spread of liberal principles such as universalism, individualism, voluntaristic authority, rational progress, and world citizenship as central elements of world culture. The vast majority of NGOs promote the values and ideas underpinning Western capitalist-democracy, and as the international NGO sector began to expand markedly in the 1990s, they became key carriers and disseminators of neoliberal ideology and practice (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000; Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012). As a result of the work of NGOs and other institutional developments at the center of world society construction, this line of scholarship has shown how seemingly disparate nation-states exhibit a remarkable degree of structural similarity in their constitutions (Boli, 1987), censuses (Ventresca, 1995) education systems (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Schofer & Meyer, 2005), and in policies for environmental protection (Frank, Hironaka, & Schofer, 2000) and the promotion of science (Drori, Meyer, Ramirez, & Schofer, 2003).

Thus, the construction of world society entailed the development of models of what an appropriate capitalist-democracy should look like. In addition to the theorizing and interventionist efforts of major international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as a plethora of international NGOs acting as Johnny Appleseeds, the practices and identities of many nation-states around the globe were (re)constituted. As part of these developments, citizens and personhood also became concomitantly reconstituted around neoliberal ideology—conceptualized as empowered, rational actors (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).
Of course, this emphasis on isomorphism and the cultural construction of socio-economic life was central to neoinstitutional research more generally in the 1980s and 1990s—from DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) statement on organizational fields to the broad array of studies in the 1980s and 1990s on the institutional diffusion of innovations (Strang & Soule, 1998). While diffusion studies enabled neoinstitutionalism to gain broad appeal by focusing on the mechanisms underlying waves of adoption and de-adoption of practices such as poison pills (Davis, 1991), the multidivisional form (Fligstein, 1985; Palmer, Jennings, & Zhou, 1993), and the construction of internal labor markets (Dobbin et al., 1993), there was a growing sense of unease from within.

Part of this unease had to do with the perception that research on institutional diffusion, driven by new event history methods, shifted neoinstitutional research away from more constitutive, process-based analyses, and towards more mechanistic forms of analysis and inference. Some European scholars tried to redress this perceived problem by shifting their attention from outcomes back towards the processes of institutionalization (e.g., Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996, 2005; Djelic, 2001; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006; Meyer, Sahlin, Ventresca, & Walgenbach, 2009; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002). While influenced by the work of John Meyer, what became referred to as Scandinavian Institutionalism embraced contemporary theorists such as Latour and Callon to develop an approach to the study of how ideas travel. Focusing on the process of translation, much research emphasized how sometimes profound reconfigurations occurred as ideas and objects moved from one context to another. Emphasizing socio-political dynamics in particular contexts, this research challenged research on institutional diffusion that tended to neglect such contextualized processes in favor of research that valorized more mechanistic analyses of isomorphic adoption.

In addition, research on isomorphism was criticized for its tendency to downplay conflict, politics, and practice variation. While the existence of such dynamics is not denied in constitutive institutional analysis (e.g., world society theory), the explanatory emphasis typically focuses on how entities come to resemble each other as a result of adopting similar policies and structures—tracing the processes of constitution. This has led some to ponder the scope of potential resistance to the inexorable top-down pressures related to institutional forces such as world society (Oliver, 1992). In demarcating differences between what they labeled the new and old institutionalisms, DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p. 27) noted that they “suspect that something has been lost in the shift” and explicitly argued that power and interests should be put on the institutional agenda. In line with this call, some explored opportunities to bridge the old and new institutionalisms (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Stinchcombe, 1997), and to uncover the role of actors in institutional creation, maintenance, and change (e.g., Battilana et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2013). Along the way, as the institutional tent continued to expand (e.g., Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, & Sahlin-Andersson, 2008; Greenwood et al., 2017), institutional research became increasingly actor-centric, and attention to the constitution of actors and behavior was eschewed (Hwang & Colyvas, forthcoming; Hwang, Colyvas, & Drori, 2019). Meyer and Jepperson (2000, p. 101) complained that even institutional researchers who claim to attend to culture and meaning “often underplay the highly constructed, scripted, and legitimated character of modern actorhood.”

While institutional analysis is fruitful for a wide variety of phenomena, there is value in distinguishing institutional approaches that embrace a constitutive approach to actors and their behavior from actor-centered approaches that are less concerned with the social construction of authorized actors and their interests. It is this kind of constitutive institutionalism that is most likely to avoid pitfalls associated with various kinds of functionalisms and contribute to critical reflexivity (Drori, 2019). But how
might we bring forth a constitutive institutional approach that can shed light on socio-economic dynamics that involve conflict, political struggle, and practice variation without devolving into a narrower actor-centric analysis?

We believe the institutional logics perspective provides a useful complement to the world society tradition in this regard. Before we discuss the theoretical complementarities between these research programs, we set the stage by highlighting an empirical research agenda that provides an opportune starting point to forge integration. This agenda has begun to be forged by world society scholars, and is motivated by an effort to grapple with dramatic contemporary changes in society and economy that challenge and have begun to reform core aspects of discourse and practice associated with the post-World War II rise of world society. Theorizing the sources of such challenges and the role of actors in promulgating alternatives to world society solutions provides a rich empirical focal point to illustrate the fruitfulness of conjoining the theoretical research programs on world society and institutional logics in an effort to provide a constitutive institutional approach that more mindfully seeks to address political struggle and contestation.

A Brave New World: A New Empirical Agenda on the Decline of World Society

World society is under siege—this is prominently evident with Trumpism in the United States and Boris Johnson and Brexit in the United Kingdom. Such populist (and authoritarian) expressions of economic nationalism involve explicit attacks on the globalism associated with world society. For instance, Steve Bannon, Trump’s former political strategist, proudly proclaimed, “I’m a nationalist. I’m an economic nationalist. The globalists gutted the American working class and created a middle class in Asia” (Cassidy, 2017). In discussing these trends, Guillen (2018) argued that neoliberal “free markets” have shifted from protagonist to antagonist, providing a focal point for blame with regard to growing inequality, uncontrollable immigration, and destabilized political systems.

These undeniable trends have led some world society scholars to begin to explore contemporary challenges to core aspects of world society and the dominant liberal model of capitalist-democracy. For instance, Bromley and colleagues (forthcoming) highlighted how international NGOs, key diffusers of world society ideas and practices (Boli & Thomas, 1999), are facing new restrictions as countries seek to buffer themselves from world society influence. They showed how over 60 countries have implemented laws limiting foreign funding to NGOs, and that much of this resistance to world society is connected to illiberal or anti-Western organizations and discourses.

Similarly, Schofer and colleagues (2019) showed how universities, one of the main expressions of the post-World War II liberal international order, have now come under attack with enrollments declining in countries outside the core of world society. They noted that higher education has been challenged in the wake of recent coups in Egypt, Thailand, and Turkey; how Hungary and Russia have sought to close liberally oriented international universities; and that terrorist attacks on universities are growing in Nigeria, Kenya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. Of course, universities are also under attack in North America and Europe, facing cutbacks and reformations to focus more intently on instrumental training and contributions to economic growth and development (Berman & Paradeise, 2016).

In this nascent research, scholars argue that these contemporary challenges to international NGOs and universities are driven by a growing anti-world society movement. Bromley and colleagues (forthcoming) and Schofer and colleagues (2019) highlighted that at the core of this movement is a small but growing number of international organizations espousing illiberal discourses and ideologies. For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, created in 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, seeks to
construct a collective resistance against the spread of global democracy (Ambrosio, 2008). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, created in 1969, has grown its membership from 30 founding countries to 57, and seeks to collectively resist liberal policies and forms of governance across the Muslim world.

While these initial studies are provocative, they suggest the need to develop a wider scholarly agenda on the variegated challenges to world society. A focus on illiberal discourse and practice rooted in the aforementioned anti-world society movement organizations just begins to scratch the surface on the fracturing of world society. For instance, the 2008–2009 global financial crisis highlighted key divides in the US (Lounsbury & Hirsch, 2010) as well as in the heart of Europe, as austerity measures imposed on countries such as Greece gave rise to new forms of anti-neoliberal activism (Karyotis & Gerodimos, 2015). We have also seen the rise of various right-wing populist movements throughout the West, such as the AfD in Germany, the National Rally in France, and the League in Italy, providing fresh energy for anti-immigration discourse and white nationalism.

In addition, we need to understand better how China offers an alternative organizing logic for global capitalism that is more authoritarian. The so-called China Model, or Beijing Consensus (as opposed to the Washington Consensus), despite being criticized by some as repressive, has become a viable alternative to many developing countries. By using pragmatic experimentation to achieve high-speed economic growth, China became the second largest economy during the global financial crisis, thereby legitimizing “the notion of particularity as opposed to the universality of a Washington model” (Elen, 2016). By seeking to export an alternative to liberal capitalism to the world through cultural and economic expansion projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China unavoidably agitates the US and other liberal regimes.

The escalating trade war between the US and China undoubtedly echoes with the Huntington prophecy that a “clash of civilizations” appears imminent and omnipresent (Huntington, 1996). As world society leaders grapple with the challenges and implications of this liberal-illiberal impasse, there is a widespread belief that multilateral cooperation is necessary to address grand challenges such as poverty and climate change. Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg, who “will never forgive,” has become a symbol of those seeking to maintain the liberal world society order.

These contemporary struggles open up a wide variety of important questions. For instance, we need more penetrating studies that unpack the similarities and differences across illiberal movements, the variegated pathways by which they have become constituted, and how they may be coming together or drifting apart in efforts to provide alternative meta-narratives that rival world society. In addition, we need detailed investigations of how various kinds of liberal alternatives to world society may be emerging within the liberal core. While world society theory has been generative for mapping out how the world society “consensus” spread across the globe, it is not as well situated to address its fracturing and the complex challenges from within and outside liberalism. We argue that the institutional logics perspective provides a complementary constitutive theoretical apparatus that can guide a generative research agenda on the cultural-political dynamics of how world society is being challenged and reconstituted.

**Broadening World Society Scholarship: The Value of the Institutional Logics Perspective**

Given contemporary challenges to world society and the liberal model of capitalist-democracy, we believe there is a fruitful opportunity to bridge world society and institutional logics research in service of a constitutive institutional approach to contemporary societal and economic transformations. Over the past couple of decades, the institutional logics perspective has become one of the most generative theoretical
approaches in organizational institutionalism (Greenwood et al., 2017; Lounsbury & Beckman, 2015; Ocasio, Thornton, & Lounsbury, 2017). One of the reasons for its suppleness is that it provides a meta-theoretical orientation that relies on connections to other theories to explain the sources and consequences of logics (Thornton et al., 2012). Institutional logics are relatively enduring configurations of symbolic meanings and material practices that have been theorized as instantiations of more widely understood institutional orders such as community, corporate bureaucracy, state, professions, religion, market, and family (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012).

Because these orders are conceptualized as abstract ideal types, they can manifest quite differently across time and space, as the sociology of markets literature suggests is the case for market logics (Carruthers & Babb, 2012). In addition, the list of ideal typical institutional orders is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but is best understood as a meta-theoretical starting point. It is important to emphasize that not everything is a logic, and the institutional logics perspective is not a grand theory that seeks to explain all of social life, thereby squeezing out other concepts and conceptual approaches. Nonetheless, we believe that it has proven useful in illuminating a variety of middle range processes and mechanisms related to the constitution of actors and socioeconomic fields and, as such, provides a valuable complement to contemporary developments in world society research.

Although empirical research on institutional logics has been diverse, the emphasis on their constitutive nature has been central. For example, Thornton and Ocasio (1999) showed how a shift from a professional to a market logic in higher education publishing shaped changes in corporate governance practices and meanings in firms. Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003) similarly highlighted how the rise of a nouvelle cuisine logic in France enabled chefs to alter their practices at the interface of haute and nouvelle cuisine, and to redefine what it means to be a French chef. Other research has perhaps focused less directly on the constitutive aspects of logics—for instance, McPherson and Sauder (2013) showed how drug court participants with different institutional and professional backgrounds were able to draw on diverse logics to influence decision making. Even though they emphasized culture in action (Swidler, 1986), they highlighted how participants with different backgrounds and roles were able to access and draw upon a variety of logics in the context of drug court deliberations. Given the relative durability of logics, the extent to which individuals and organizations can distance themselves from, or access and use, various logics requires much more scholarly attention (Toubiana, forthcoming).

Although the institutional logics perspective has the potential to advance a constitutive institutional approach, it also extends prior work in important new directions. For example, world society research has been focused on one core institutional shift related to the rise of modernity and the liberal world order, but the institutional logics perspective, in a sense, pushes back on a more totalizing understanding of modernity, instead emphasizing more heterogeneous, contradictory, and interdependent institutional configurations that comprise contemporary society. In so doing, the institutional logics perspective echoes Weber’s (e.g., 1958) discussion of heterogeneous value spheres (Friedland, 2013). In addition, world society scholars have emphasized a master shift in cultural rules associated with modernity, but institutional logics scholars have focused attention on how cultural aspects of institutions are grounded and interwoven with material practices. Yet these research programs are not antagonistic, as many scholars in both camps share certain ontological commitments and engagement with key ideas in cultural sociology and social theory.

Although the world society focus on the sources and consequences of modern rationalization has provided a powerfully parsimonious approach to understanding why a remarkable amount of isomorphism exists around the globe, the literature has been critiqued for a lack of
attention to practice variation (Lounsbury, 2001) and the “guts of institutions” (Stinchcombe, 1997). In seeding the development of the institutional logics perspective, Friedland and Alford (1991) worried that neoinstitutional analysis was not making a radical enough departure from a focus on market exchange and instrumental rationality. Emphasizing the need to consider the role of society in a more central way, they critiqued the extant focus on isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and neglect of politics and sources of institutional content, which they argued require new theoretical tools (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Of course, institutional analysis has often been critiqued for its lack of explicit attention to issues of power (e.g., Willmott, 2015). While it is true that more can be done to expose and understand political struggle, oppression and the like, it has not been entirely absent. As Friedland and Arjaliès (2019, p. 11) argued:

The institutional logical approach was a non-materialist outworking of a post-Marxist understanding of the capitalist state. It was intended to get at the content of power, not to erase it. There is nothing in an institutional logical perspective that precludes study of the contradictory logics of capitalism, the ways in which these conditions are shaped by the forms of class struggle, the ways in which capitalists and workers draw on different logics that inform their political programme, their tactical repertoire, and their capacity to politically challenge the hegemony of private property, profit maximization, financialization and the model of the efficient market. Indeed, the variety of systemic powers, their configurations, locate points and languages of leverage to challenge the hegemony of capital.

Given this emphasis on systemic power, it is useful to note the conventional distinction made in organization theory between episodic and systemic forms of power (e.g., Clegg, 1989; Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Schildt, Mantere, & Cornelissen, 2019). Episodic power, exemplified by exchange-based conceptualizations of power (Emerson, 1962; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003 [1978]), generally refers to instrumental efforts to take advantage of others. In contradistinction, systemic power refers to how broader institutionalized understandings profoundly shape perceptions and action, reinforcing systems of domination and inequalities, often without deliberation and contestation (Lukes, 1974). We believe that a focus on the decline of world society requires attention to both episodic and systemic forms of power.

In sketching out what an institutional logics approach might be, Friedland and Alford (1991) not only tried to develop a theoretical approach to account for a multiplicity of institutional content, but also provided a somewhat veiled critique of the world society literature for sidelining the importance of religion. As Meyer and Jepperson (2000, p. 102) emphasized in their discussion of modernity, referred to as the Western cultural framework, the world society literature “reflects the development, expansion, and secularization of the principally religious models of Western Christendom.” However, it seems that religious difference has become even more important in recent decades, underpinning nationalism, acts of terror, discrimination, and hate across the globe (e.g., Friedland, 2002). As Friedland and Arjaliès (2019, p. 2) argued, “we believe that current conditions—the crisis of democratic institutions, the return of God in the public sphere, and the life-threatening unfolding of the Anthropocene—point to the advantages of an institutional logical approach.”

For Friedland (e.g., 2002, 2017, 2019), religion is central, not only as a potential source of institutional logics, but as a metaphor for understanding all logics. In reflecting on prior work (Friedland & Alford, 1991), Friedland (2013, p. 28) noted that their thinking about institutional logics was motivated by the conviction that all institutions had metaphysical foundation beyond sense and reason. It implied that a trans-institutional understanding of instrumental rationality was likely a misspecification and that we had to make preferences endogenous in institutional theory. It implied that subject formation and object formation are co-implicated.
And it intimated that every institution is religious, that we are the secular priesthood of modernity outing modernity’s fetishisms on a selective basis.

This accords, for instance, with research that has emphasized the religious fervor underlying neoliberal ideas and movements, rooted in the Chicago school of economics, that has wreaked havoc across the globe (Block, 1990; Martínez & Díaz, 1996). While the constitutive question of how actors become variably committed to logics has not been fully worked out, contemplating the role of religion and values in organizational life is of great theoretical and practical importance (Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013; Tracey, 2012; Tracey, Phillips, & Lounsbury, 2014).

Nonetheless, some concern has been expressed about the overly stable, substantive and reified depictions of logics that exist in the literature (e.g., Ocasio, Mauskapf, & Steele, 2016; Quattrone, 2015). To address this problem and more deeply theorize constitutive processes, some institutional scholars have begun to engage more with process-based practice theories (see e.g., Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015a; Smets et al., 2017; Smets, Anderson, & Lounsbury, forthcoming). Of course, institutional logics are not free-floating ideas, but always grounded in practice; this has been a core aspect of the institutional logics perspective from the beginning (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

Quattrone (2015) emphasized the importance of practice in a detailed account of Jesuit accounting by focusing on the ongoing co-production of means and ends—that is, how rationality and the Jesuit approach to moral improvement continually unfold in tandem. Quattrone (2015, p. 3) argued that “rationality and institutional logics, and the commensurate numerical and scientific representations, such as accounting and economic calculations, are never a priori, complete, and objective. They are always subject to continuous power struggles and translations.” This approach to logics is consistent with more process-based institutional analyses that comprise Scandinavian institutionalism, as well as related concepts and approaches such as the German institutionalist notion of Leitideen, which emphasizes how guiding orientations and practices are always in flux (e.g., Lepsius, 1996; Meyer, Jancsary, & Höllerer, forthcoming; Rehberg, 1997). Such analytical (and ontological) commitments provide resources for further elaboration of the constitutive nature of logic dynamics.

Research at the interface of practice theory and institutional logics provides an exciting new direction that is bringing together diverse scholars who are grappling with how to best study the broader socio-cultural flows and contexts within which practices are performed and performativity occurs (Garud & Gehman, 2019; Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spec., 2015b; Whittington, 2006, 2011). Schatzki (2002) referred to these broader contextual influences by invoking notions such as teleo-affective structures, general understandings, and the practice plenum, but there is no widely shared agreement on how to conceptualize and study practices and institutions. Some research in this direction embraces flatter ontologies that eschew macro-micro divides. This is exemplified by research that imagines practices as extended bundles that stretch horizontally over time and space (e.g., Gehman et al., 2013; Latour, 2005; Schatzki, 2002, 2012). These approaches tend to embrace process-oriented theorizing where there is a strong commitment to very detailed accounts of the subjective experiences of actors and activities (Langley & Tsoukas, 2016; Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001).

As signaled by Smets et al. (2017), we believe that a particularly exciting way to develop the institutional logics and world society perspectives is to encourage and establish conversations among institutional and practice scholars who share an interest in the constitution of actors, mirroring efforts in phenomenology to find common ground between interactionist and structuralist approaches (e.g., Meyer, 2008; Reichertz, 1999; Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Soeffner, 1989, 2004).
Inspired by the work of Bourdieu (e.g., 1977, 1990), key strands of institutional scholarship embrace a relational ontology aimed at understanding the dynamics of social systems (e.g., institutional fields) that shape the unfolding of practice (see also Giddens, 1984), albeit in a way that is somewhat abstracted from the buzzing confusion of moment-to-moment human activity and experience. A key difference from more conventional approaches to institutional analysis (e.g., Scott, 2014) is that a relational ontology aims to endogenize institutions such as logics in the sayings and doings of actors (Lounsbury & Boxenbaum, 2013). Parallel to Bourdieu’s notions of logic and habitus, this phenomenological approach conceptualizes logics as real and operable only to the extent that they are embedded in the minds, hearts, words, and deeds of humans (Friedland, 2018).

In accounting for institutional processes, practice-driven approaches require researchers to consider the extent to which they need (and can afford) to zoom in on the details of individuals’ lived experiences (Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001). Given the empirical focus mapped out earlier on the decline of world society, we believe that there are pragmatic limits to the fruitfulness of delving too deeply into the subjective aspects of practice.

The more macro-phenomenological approach to practice and institutional logics we endorse assumes that actors do not have any real essence, but instead must be understood as constituted by the broader contextual arrangements within which they are embedded. Such commitments go to the heart of the kind of constitutive institutionalism for which we advocate. For Bourdieu, the concept of field helps to provide a systematic approach to the employment of these theoretical commitments.

The notion of field reminds us that the true object of social science is not the individual, even though one cannot construct a field if not through individuals, since the information necessary for statistical analysis is generally attached to individuals or institutions. It is the field which is primary and must be the focus of the research operations. This does not imply that individuals are mere “illusions,” that they do not exist: they exist as agents—and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects—who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. And it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their point of view or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 107)

Even though there are many critiques of Bourdieu, including his effort to make an exchange logic central to his theoretical apparatus, one can take inspiration from his writings without fully adopting his approach. Since Friedland and Alford (1991) levied a trenchant critique of the organization field concept, recent writings on fields have become more open—especially with respect to their boundaries (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Furnari, 2014; Hinings, Logue, & Zietsma, 2017; Zietsma, Groenewegen, Logue, & Hinings, 2017)—thereby enabling more scope for theoretical integration with other concepts and theories such as institutional logics. While exploring the potential of this interface is beyond the scope of this article, our approach to fields is empirical—as a way to provisionally bound aspects of social life for scholarly investigation.

The research process would involve not only a deep investigation of the historically situated social dynamics within a field, but would also critically explore the boundaries of such a field, assessing flows across boundaries and changes in the nature of boundaries over time (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Langley et. al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). From the institutional logics perspective, it would be essential to understand how wider sources of beliefs and practices are accessed and congeal in substantive formations of institutional logics within and across different societies. Also critical will be to study the interrelationships between and among a multiplicity of logics in different settings, focusing on how, for instance, institutional
voids emerge and become bridged in ways that enable new practices and organizational forms to become instantiated (Mair, Martí, & Ventresca, 2012). From this approach, all settings are constituted by ongoing interactions and concerns rooted in institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Micelotta, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2017).

Analytically, Bourdieu’s analyses of fields, in books such as Distinction (1984), reveal how new methodologies, referred to as the new structuralism (Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Mohr, 1998), might be employed to advance interpretivist understandings of practices and institutions. New structuralists have drawn on a wide variety of relational methods such as multidimensional scaling, network analysis, and correspondence analysis to study the evolving relationship of practices and institutions in fields (Mohr, 1998). In the next section, we further elaborate on how such analytical methods, including recent developments in topic modeling and growing interest in multimodal analysis, can further advance a constitutive institutional analysis.

Analytical Tools: The New Structuralism and Multimodality

Over the past several decades, a rich sociological tradition has developed around the development of methods to analyze practices and cultural meaning systems. This “new structuralism” initially drew on varied forms of network analysis and related techniques (e.g., correspondence analysis) to measure and track multidimensional field dynamics in a way that is attentive to how behavior is constituted by logics and broader forms of cultural classification (e.g., Breiger & Mohr, 2004; Höllerer, Meyer, & Lounsbury, 2017; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Mohr, 1998; Mohr & White, 2008; Pachucki & Breiger, 2010). These approaches were cultivated and advanced by a working group of scholars interested in the “measurement of meaning” in the cultural sociology section of the American Sociology Association in the early to mid-1990s (DiMaggio, 1994), as well as several “cultural turn” conferences organized at the University of California at Santa Barbara by John Mohr and Roger Friedland between 1997 and 2003 (Friedland & Mohr, 2004). In working out these approaches, mindful attention was paid to how “meaning-centric approaches (in the more traditional, humanistic and interpretive sense of that term) mix with more formalized (measurement based) styles of looking and knowing and understanding cultural forms” (Mohr & Ghaziani, 2014, p. 229). These methodological approaches to culture have been influential in the study of institutional logics and cultural entrepreneurship (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019), and may be usefully deployed in service of constitutive institutional scholarship.

These developments were inspired by the kind of relational theorizing and analysis advocated by Bourdieu. For example, in his masterpiece, Distinction, Bourdieu (1984) relied on correspondence analysis to map out the social fields within French society to demonstrate the spatial relationships between social position (e.g., class) and cultural disposition or “taste” (e.g., aesthetics). Instead of hypothesizing causal relationships between specific independent variables and a corresponding dependent variable, he distinguished distinct systems of habitus and practices by analyzing the dynamic correspondence between two fields: the production of goods and that of taste.

There are several exemplar studies that highlight the fruitfulness of the new structuralism for the study of institutional processes. Mohr and Guerra-Pearson (2010), for instance, used a multidimensional scaling analysis of social welfare discourse about social problems and recipients to study how social welfare practices were reorganized at the turn of the twentieth century in New York City in response to a shift in institutional logics driven by processes of professionalization and bureaucratization (see also Mohr & Duquenne, 1997). While such analyses at one point in time provide a structural snapshot of how practices relate to actors and each other,
shifts over time in these structural arrangements can be usefully combined with historical analysis to provide a deeper institutional analysis of field transformation that centers on how and why practices change over time. The documented process of logic change involves a fundamental reconstitution of who can provide and receive welfare services.

Coupling historical analysis with a large-scale dataset on healthcare discourse, Ruef (2000) used mapping and multidimensional scaling techniques to show how changes in the healthcare field discourse reconstituted the organization and practice of healthcare. At the core of his analysis is a shift from a healthcare logic emphasizing accessibility and quality to one valorizing clinical and functional efficiency. Similarly, Meyer and Höllerer (2010) combined historical analysis of text, including a correspondence analysis of actors and frames, to uncover how competing logics undergirded and shaped the field of corporate governance practices in Austria. They documented how conflict between Continental European and Anglo-American corporate governance logics helped constitute different identity positions for actors (e.g., politicians, trade unions, consultants, non-listed companies, listed corporations, securities analysts, investors).

Such methodologies continue to advance and shed light on the multidimensional nature of human experience and ways of knowing. For instance, drawing on novel multiple correspondence analysis techniques, Friedland, Mohr, Roose, and Gardinali (2014) exploited survey data to identify distinctive logics of love (romantic versus marriage-oriented morality) that organize sexual practices and experiences, highlighting the fruitfulness of expanding new structural methods to analyze institutional logics as the ordering of practices, codes, and emotions. While emotion and affect remain largely unaccounted for in institutional analysis (Voronov & Vince, 2012; Zietsma, Toubiana, Voronov, & Roberts, 2019), a constitutive institutional analysis along the lines of Friedland et al. (2014) suggests that different kinds of emotions might be best understood as part (registers) of different kinds of practice-meaning bundles that comprise logics (see also Friedland, 2018). In addition, Friedland et al. (2014) importantly suggested a break from the formality of the institutional orders framework (market, community, family, religion, state, profession, corporation), encouraging a more empirically oriented approach to uncover the existence of logics.

Building on these relational field studies, recent efforts to harness “big data” and tools emanating from computer scientists and computational linguistics have opened up new analytical possibilities for the study of institutional processes (e.g., Bail, 2014; DiMaggio, Nag, & Blei, 2013; Hannigan, 2015). For instance, embracing a relational approach to meaning, topic modeling offers a more fine-grained method than conventional content analysis for disentangling polysemy and uncovering latent structures, frames, and networks of actors behind the text (Hannigan et al., 2019). Such new analytical methods have already stimulated novel scholarship on topics such as category emergence, social movements, and cultural change (e.g., Fligstein, Stuart Brundage, & Schultz, 2017; Kaplan & Vakili, 2015).

For example, in their analysis of an emerging organizational form, charter schools, Jha and Beckman (2017) used topic modeling to capture how various charter school founders constructed a durable “patchwork of identities” under conditions of ambiguity and institutional complexity. Because meaning structures in a field often are ambiguous and evolving, Croidieu and Kim (2018) adopted latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic models to analyze historical texts from multiple sources that represent various perceptions of key field actors, revealing how amateur radio operators became legitimated in a highly professionalized field. While we see much promise in such cultural analytic approaches, it is important to understand textual analysis of a single corpus as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, more comprehensive contextual analysis of various types of data (e.g., observational, archival, interview) that reveal practices and dynamics of social interaction.
To wit, recent developments around multi-modal analysis provide exciting opportunities to expand constitutive institutional analysis to appreciate other realms of experience and ways of studying the world (Höllerer et al., 2018, 2019). Unsatisfied with the pervasive emphasis on discursive data in institutional analysis, scholars who embrace multimodality argue that discursive, material, visual, spatial, and emotional modes are co-constitutive, and that combining various types of data across these modes will enable new, richer insights (Zilber, 2018). For instance, Meyer, Jancsary, Höllerer, and Boxenbaum (2018) persuasively argued that our understanding of the emergence, rise, establishment, and consolidation of institutions can be greatly enhanced by studying multiple semiotic modes of communication (e.g., visual and verbal), whose constitutive features enable and constrain action and meaning construction in different ways throughout the institutionalization process. To appreciate various modes of meaning, we need to explore and develop new methods (e.g., video analysis) which requires reaching out to different disciplines to enhance our analytical toolkits.

While multimodal scholarship is in its early stages, it is already yielding insights that should attract widespread attention, especially from scholars interested in constitutive processes at the interface of practices and institutions. For instance, Pershina and Soppe (2018) provided a rich analysis of gaming—exploring how game design decisions related to aesthetics, story, and gameplay are influenced by multiple logics of production. Their multimodal analysis of organizational artifacts (games) relying on various kinds of human (e.g., interviews) and non-human (e.g., game analysis) data shows how different ways of coping with institutional complexity can enhance innovative capabilities. In her analysis of the personal computer industry, Eisenman (2018) relied on content analysis of personal computer images and reviews, as well as industry interviews, to show how aesthetic innovation became a core dimension of strategic practice and competitive differentiation in the 1990s. Likewise, Bullinger (2018) drew on verbal and visual analyses of job advertisements in the German fashion industry to highlight how the communicative practices of firms related to the shifting nature of organizational identity and perceptions of legitimacy.

Although practice research in management tends to be associated with ethnographic methods, our emphasis on constitutive institutional analysis aims to encourage the development of scholarship at the interface of practices and institutions that, like the bridging of structural and interactionist approaches to phenomenology (Meyer, 2008), seeks to bring together various interpretivist methods and ways of knowing. Pace Bourdieu, we aim to dispense with unhelpful dichotomies including those of subjective/objective and qualitative/quantitative that often hinder more generative discussion in the organization studies field. As Höllerer et al. (2019) argued in the context of building a wider research community around multimodal research, this would entail finding ways to combine archaeological, strategic, dialogical, and practice research designs. With respect to constitutive institutional analysis, we do not seek to glorify methods for methods’ sake, but to encourage the use of methods that will enable us to cultivate a richer approach to experience in the world, and to more profoundly understand how such experience is constituted by institutional processes that link co-presence to historical and spatial flows of ideas and practices, often bundled into institutional logics.

Forging a Constitutive Institutional Approach to the Decline of World Society

We believe that linking world society and institutional logics scholars, as well as other culturally and institutionally oriented fellow travelers who seek to draw upon on our expanding toolkit of methods that can help illuminate cultural processes, we can shed important light on major contemporary transformations in society and economy. In these unsettled times, we expect institutional logics and world society discourses
to take on characteristics more akin to ideology than taken-for-granted institutions, with discourse, stories, and justifications becoming more consciously and deliberately constructed and deployed (Swidler, 1986). Under such circumstances, we expect that projective agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) will be more visible as future-oriented claims vie for attention (Beckert, 2016; Hemenover, Mair, & Metz, forthcoming; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2019; Mische, 2009, 2014). Nonetheless, attention to the theoretical research programs associated with world society and institutional logics research points to the need to uncover the subterranean drivers of what Swidler referred to as ideology, including deep analyses of the historical groundings for ideological claims and the actors authorized to do so (see R. Meyer et al., 2009).

While some published research on institutional logics may seem a bit sanitized (and managerial) to some, lacking attention to Politics with a capital “P,” theoretical weakness is not the underlying reason. Constitutive institutional analysis provides a way to address important societal and global problems and the issues of power that pervade them, while avoiding the pitfalls of actor-centered approaches to “power” that emerged in the wake of DiMaggio’s (1988) call to action. In highlighting analytical orientations and tools that can be drawn upon in service of elaborating a constitutive institutionalism, we have sought to encourage a more substantive approach to power that attends to the constitution of actors and their interests by locating conflict, struggle, and opportunity at the interstices of institutional logics (Friedland & Arjaliès, 2019).

A useful focal point for a constitutive institutional approach to the decline of world society is the sources of conflict between world society globalists and various liberal and illiberal logics. The relational methods associated with the new structuralism are particularly appropriate and useful because they provide ways to uncover the deeper structures of practices and discourses that underlie key fracture lines such as those we seek to illuminate. While world society scholars have begun to highlight key sources and consequences of an anti-world society movement (Bromley et al., forthcoming; Schofer et al., 2019), we encourage research that seeks to uncover a wider variety of liberal and illiberal challenges to world society.

Schneiberg’s work (e.g., Schneiberg, 1999, 2002, 2013; Schneiberg & Bartley, 2001; Schneiberg & Soule, 2005) on the role of community logics in affording and enabling anticorporate movements and the creation of the development of cooperatives in the early twentieth century is instructive. He documented how activists associated with the Grange, Farmers Alliance and other groups who mobilized in response to “trusts” and “combines” directly opposed “corporate liberal” logics that valorized for-profit corporations, national markets, and unregulated industry. Instead, they sought to promulgate ideas and practices related to “producer republican” community logics that envisioned American capitalism as a regionally decentralized and cooperatively organized economy of independent producers, farmers, and self-governing towns.

Such cooperative movements are central to many contemporary challenges to world society and neoliberal approaches to society and economy, and more detailed scrutiny on the sources and consequences of cooperative creation is merited (Slade Shantz, Kistruck, Pacheco, & Webb, forthcoming). For example, Ometto (2019) showed how the Solidarity Economy movement in Brazil promoted the establishment of cooperatives to address poverty and income inequality. While this movement was successful to some degree in challenging dominant neoliberal ideas and practices, and providing alternatives to traditional capitalism, Ometto documented consequential variation in the success of the movement related to religious politics. She showed that while liberation theology underpinned a progressive Catholic Church logic that facilitated community engagement and cooperative creation in impoverished areas, the rise of evangelical churches weakened the influence of that progressive logic, necessitating more intense activism to catalyze cooperative creation. This points to the fruitfulness of more in-depth, contextualized studies that can
uncover the roots and pathways of resistance to world society ideas and practices.

A mass of related research has now been cultivated around a focus on anti-corporate politics, focusing on changes in the dynamics of mobilization and institutional logics where logics provide resources for activists to reform or alter capitalist practices (Bartley, 2007; Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Hiatt, Grandy, & Lee, 2015; King & Pearce, 2010; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015; McDonnell & King, 2013; Pacheco, York, & Hargrave, 2014; Vasi & King, 2012; Vasi, Walker, Johnson, & Tan, 2015). In the context of a constitutive institutionalism, it is important for researchers to understand where activists come from, how alternative ideas and practices emerge and gain support, and how battles between logics play out, constituting new actors and reconstituting incumbents. A focus on institutional logics directs us not towards minor issues of episodic, exchange-based politics between challengers and incumbents, but towards major issues of systemic power and social organization related to the nature of capitalism and democracy, as well as problems related to poverty, religious and geopolitical conflict, rising populism and fascism, dehumanization, racism, and environmental destruction.

We believe that the research we are advocating focused on the decline of world society is sympathetic to recent calls for more attention to grand challenges (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; Reinecke & Ansari, 2016). For example, the fair trade movement, an attempt to help producers in developing countries achieve better exchange conditions, relies on complex efforts to construct moral markets as neoliberal alternatives (Anteby, 2010; Aspers, 2011; Beckert, 2012; Fourcade & Healy, 2007; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015; Reinecke, Manning, & von Hagen, 2012). In a sense, a focus on the decline of world society opens up a host of questions about the sources and consequences of different forms of morality. For instance, the recent scandal of China’s genetically edited babies, which has been largely denounced among most Western academics, has received support from Russian scientists (Cyranoski, 2019a, 2019b), highlighting the possibility that new kinds of Sino-Russian alliances could be emerging to reshape important aspects of society and economy. Here, a careful comparative analytical approach to institutional logics can help us elucidate sources of practice variation as well as the shifting trajectories of global capitalism and geopolitical alliances.

The rise of moral markets and re-emerging salience of religion challenges core neoliberal conceptions about “free markets” (and world society). As Schiller-Merkens and Balsiger (forthcoming, p. 1) argued:

One cannot think about markets without also touching upon questions of morality. Should cannabis be legally exchanged on markets? Should elderly care be organized by public authorities or left to the invisible hand of market exchange? Is it fair to allow anyone with a car and a driver’s license to compete with licensed taxi drivers simply by signing up on a digital platform? Should animal husbandry in the meat industry be regulated or should meat be affordable for anyone at low prices? What is a fair price for coffee? Such questions point at the appropriateness of markets for the exchange of specific goods, at valuation in markets, at the legitimacy of certain market practices, and at the formal and informal rules guiding market exchange. To answer them presupposes thinking about what is good or bad, right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate in a market arena. It often involves heated debates in which actors struggle over what is considered moral in a certain market context, and contest each other’s underlying values, beliefs and worldviews.

Of course, different constellations of logics in and across different societies shape the ways in which different communities, regions, and nation-states tackle such issues related to moral markets (e.g., Amis et al., 2018; Jennings & Hoffman, 2017). For instance, in the context of microfinance organizations, a kind of social venture that aims to address poverty in developing nations, Zhao and Lounsbury (2016) showed how different constellations of market and religious logics in a country shaped the amount of commercial and public capital acquired by microfinance organizations serving that country.
Although there is a growing literature on the role of social enterprises in mitigating social issues and how they simultaneously survive market competition, much less is known about how and why social enterprises thrive in certain locales but not in others, and how local institutions shape their preferences and social-oriented practices.

Environmental destruction also demands our attention. For instance, more research is needed to unpack the processes and boundary conditions related to the challenges of constructing a transnational logic regarding shared socio-environmental problems such as global warming (e.g., Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013). When global environmental protection and national economic development are explicitly at odds, what kind of field governance may be effective? How and why do countries differ in their approaches to these collective problems? The institutional logics perspective can not only help us understand current challenges to collective action around climate change, but perhaps help us more proactively identify opportunities for progressive change that could inform environmental policy (Hoffman & Jennings, 2018; Hoffman & Ventresca, 2002). Of course, given the centrality of environmental protection to world society (Frank et al., 2000), how do current challenges related to climate change feed into contemporary resistance to world society as frustration continues to grow with the status quo?

In sum, while it is useful to debate the challenges and opportunities of different research orientations and theoretical programs, the problems and challenges we face as a global society are too profound for us to engage in petty family squabbles. The major battle is as it has been—against those who promulgate functionalist, realist, or reductive rational choice theories of action that are more easily understood, accord with megalomaniacal assumptions of human control over all things, and support policy choices that go awry or do great violence to the human condition. Even though the research agenda we advocate aims to enhance understanding of profound contemporary dynamics of economy and society, we believe that this knowledge can be useful to those who seek to contribute to the remaking of capitalism and world society for the greater good (e.g., Adler, 2019). Thus, we believe that constitutive institutional analysis provides a critical and sophisticated scholarly tradition that may also enable a generative influence on progressive policy making. More optimistic than Kafkaesque, this is the promise of the clearing we contemplate.

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