

ARTICLES

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CATEGORY STATUS AND ITS RELATIONAL MARKET ORDERING MECHANISMS

Status categórico e seus mecanismos relacionais de ordenação dos mercados
Estatus categorial y sus mecanismos relacionales de ordenamiento del mercado

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ABSTRACT

Status systems bring social order to markets, but they are non-meritocratic arrangements that benefit those of a higher status and penalize those of a lower status. Paradoxically, these systems are also maintained by those who suffer the most from their inequalities. The literature tends to explain the persistence of these systems through macro-oriented or micro-oriented mechanisms. We propose an alternative path by investigating relational mechanisms that might explain the persistence of this paradox. In an haute cuisine market, we used the social network analysis perspective to identify relational mechanisms that maintain this collective system. The results revealed a three-role structure of symbolic deference/appreciation (diffuse, selective, and egocentric). To conclude, we highlight the social order as a continuous tension between normality and chaos in the relationships between roles and the procedural aspect of structuring market roles, which we call authorizing the representation of a market category.

Keywords: markets, status, social order, social network analysis, mixed-method.

RESUMO

Sistemas de status trazem ordem social aos mercados, mas eles são arranjos não meritocráticos que, em essência, privilegiam positivamente aqueles de mais alto status e penalizam desproporcionalmente aqueles de status inferior. Paradoxalmente, esses sistemas são mantidos não apenas por seus maiores beneficiados, mas também por aqueles que mais sofrem com suas desigualdades. A literatura tende a explicar a persistência desses sistemas por mecanismos macro ou micro orientados. Propomos uma via alternativa e complementar ao investigar os mecanismos relacionais que possam explicar a persistência desse paradoxo nas ordens de status. Tendo como objeto a hierarquia de status categórico de restaurantes em um mercado de alta gastronomia, empregamos a Perspectiva da Análise de Redes Sociais para identificar mecanismos relacionais (via modelagem em bloco) que atuam na manutenção desse sistema coletivo de produção de desigualdades. Os resultados da modelagem em bloco na rede de atribuição de deferências entre os produtores desse mercado revelaram uma estrutura de três papéis de deferência/apreciação simbólica (difusa, seletiva e egocêntrica). Como conclusão, destacamos a ordem social como uma contínua tensão entre normalidade e caos nas relações entre papéis e o aspecto processual da estruturação de papéis dos mercados, o qual denominamos autorização da representação da categoria de mercado.

Palavras-chaves: mercados, status, ordem social, análise de redes sociais, método misto.

RESUMEN

Los sistemas de estatus traen orden social a los mercados, pero son arreglos no meritocráticos que benefician a los de mayor estatus y penalizan a los de menor estatus. Paradójicamente, estos sistemas también son mantenidos por quienes más sufren sus desigualdades. La literatura tiende a explicar la persistencia de estos sistemas por mecanismos macro o micro orientados. Proponemos un camino alternativo al investigar los mecanismos relacionales que pueden explicar la persistencia de esta paradoja. Teniendo como objeto la jerarquía de estatus categorial en un mercado de alta gastronomía, utilizamos la perspectiva de análisis de redes sociales para identificar mecanismos relacionales que mantienen este sistema colectivo de producción de desigualdades. Los resultados revelaron una estructura de deferencia/apreciación simbólica de tres roles (difusa, selectiva y egocéntrica). Para concluir, destacamos el orden social como una tensión continua entre la normalidad y el caos en las relaciones entre roles y el aspecto procedimental de la estructuración de roles de mercado, lo que llamamos: autorización de la representación de la categoría de mercado.

Palabras clave: mercados, estatus, orden social, análisis de redes sociales, método mixto.

INTRODUCTION

Markets are social arenas, spaces for exchanges, and material and symbolic disputes (Beckert, 2009; Fligstein & Calder, 2015). In this respect, organizations struggle to develop the best differentials in their products and consequently accumulate economic assets. They also seek social approval assets in these arenas, such as legitimacy, reputation, and status (Hubbard et al., 2018; Vergne, 2012). One of the main regularities of social judgment in markets, which leads to an important approval asset, is the emergence of status hierarchies (Podolny, 1993; Podolny & Lynn, 2009). An actor's status results from the position it occupies in a hierarchical stratification based on some criterion of "respect and admiration accorded by others to a target individual" (Magee & Galinski, 2008, p. 371). Podolny (2005) explains that, unlike the objectivity of quality, these hierarchical systems send out status signals. Although status signals and quality are correlated, their effects have proven to be distinct (Lynn & Podolny, 2009).

The importance of status signals has been widely shown in terms of their influence on consumer behavior (Soule & Sekhon, 2022), pricing behavior (Askin & Bothner, 2016), market competition (Podolny, 2005), corporate acquisition behavior and market reaction (Shen et al., 2014), and the formation of strategic alliances (Chung et al., 2000; Lin et al., 2009). Furthermore, status is essential in explaining negative consequences, such as the generation and maintenance of inequalities within groups (Ridgeway, 2014).

However, despite all the knowledge accumulated on the effects of status signals, little is known of how status signals, which create "positive or negative privileges" (Weber, 1978, p. 305) and even produce inequality, persist over time. Status orders are non-meritocratic systems that essentially favor, positively and disproportionately, those of a higher status and unfairly penalize those of a lower status. The literature uses the Biblical passage from the Gospel of Matthew 25:29 to explain this tendency: "For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance, but whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (Podolny, 2005, p. 22). In these terms, status orders are a paradox, maintained not only by those who benefit most from them but also by those who suffer most from the inequalities they produce. But why does this contradictory behavior exist in the market arena? Why do those who suffer more than they should from status orders, i.e., those of lower status, contribute to the maintenance of a hierarchy which prejudices its social judgment in the market?

There are two opposing attempts to explain the status order paradox. One micro-oriented and one macro-oriented. On the one hand, micro-oriented approaches argue that differences in disposition and individual characteristics account for this paradox. On the other hand, macro-oriented approaches claim that the persistence of status inequality is due to the socially constructed nature of intersubjective agreements regarding the legitimacy and meritocracy of status hierarchies (Washington & Zajac, 2005). Therefore, social interactions produce a consensus of meanings and, consequently, result in a general acceptance of status

orders. Although they are not meritocratic, status orders are institutionally consolidated. Sullivan and Stewart (2009) claim that: “Theories of social order, in general, suggest that status evaluations should converge and reach stability over certain factors” (p. 28).

Nevertheless, two problems must be recognized here. First, the literature neglects the possibility of significant variations in showing deference. Second, by ignoring these variations and concentrating on micro or macro explanations, the literature does not consider the role of relational (i.e., mezzo) mechanisms (Rivera et al., 2010) in maintaining order. The market as an arena of symbolic disputes is socially and relationally constructed (Fligstein & Calder, 2015) and involves a negotiation between multiple actors that occupies different spaces in the market (Dalmoro & Fell, 2020; Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Therefore, the relational and meso analysis perspective is fundamental for understanding its mechanisms, including the maintenance of the paradox of the social order. Actors, their practices, and arrangements allow the understanding of how markets are constituted and its dynamics (Dalmoro & Fell, 2020; Leme & Rezende, 2018).

Therefore, we argue that by showing deference, social actors structure a collective relational trajectory that generates mechanisms of a relational nature in a market (Rivera et al., 2010). Thus, these mechanisms guarantee the persistence of status orders, no matter how great the inequalities they generate. This occurs because these mechanisms conform to patterns of ties and, consequently, in relational roles, which make status systems even more stable (Rivera et al., 2010). This argument also aligns with Dalmoro and Fell (2020) about how supposedly destabilizing practices coexist, giving a dynamic character to markets while guaranteeing the maintenance of their stability.

We propose that when addressing a relational phenomenon, as is the case of status hierarchies, we should avoid the dualism actor-structure (Leme & Rezende, 2018) and favor the identification of actual relational mechanisms before the individual or institutional ones, which explain possible variations in the degree of homogeneity/heterogeneity in showing deference. We opted to do this through social network analysis. We established the objective to structurally compose the network of deference patterns among a haute cuisine market and identify possible relational patterns (roles) (using the blockmodeling analysis technique) that might explain the maintenance of the status order, explaining the paradoxical stability of the market through a meso perspective.

Organizations in haute cuisine markets can be fully or partially recognized as members of this category (Hannan, 2010). From a network perspective, belonging to a category is a collective construction, depending on the judgment of several market actors. In these terms, an actor belongs or does not belong to a specific category depending on how the other actors in the market judge them. We considered seventeen restaurants considered by their peers as belonging to this category in Curitiba. Using the social network analysis perspective, we identified how the relationship between them can explain three roles that contribute to maintaining the status hierarchy at a meso level of analysis.

THE ORDERING OF MARKETS EXPLAINED BY MACRO-ORIENTED AND MICRO-ORIENTED MECHANISMS

Status is a relational, and therefore comparative, position within a hierarchical system that was socially constructed and founded on a criterion of value, and consequently generates positive and negative privileges that are not or only loosely coupled with some kind of objective measurement of quality/performance (Podolny, 2005; Sauder et al., 2012; Washington & Zajac, 2005). Irrespective of the producers' performance, when competitors accept the distribution of privileges as a rule, status symbols contribute to the social order (stability through reciprocated expectations) of markets, even though the measurement is not meritocratic.

Several studies have shown that status systems confer more privileges on actors with higher status positions. Washington and Zajac (2005), for example, investigated how status could increase the chances of university basketball teams being invited to take part in a prestigious tournament, irrespective of their performance in previous games. The researchers concluded that a team's status not only increased the likelihood of an invitation but also moderated the effects of prior performance on the chances of being invited. Controlling the effects of other variables, Benjamin and Podolny (1999) showed that wine producers in California with higher status succeeded in charging higher prices than those of a lower status.

These studies not only prove that status results in advantages that go beyond the merits of competitors in terms of quality/performance but also that as lower-status actors accept playing by these rules, they end up legitimizing a system that creates and maintains inequalities (Hayes et al., 2018). Lower-status social actors choose to legitimize a system that ignores many of their merits in terms of product quality, for instance, to favor actors with better contacts and a historical legacy (Washington & Zajac, 2005). An example of how lower-status actors support those of higher status is the composition of cooperative councils with little diversity, which constitutes a significant challenge to the notion of fair trade, as greater favor is shown to the interests of high-status actors (Taylor et al., 2005). However, even practices that promote inequality contribute to the stability of role expectations.

Markets' reciprocal expectations (i.e., social order) are often explained through macro-oriented and micro-oriented mechanisms. The "macro" elements include institutions. They sustain the non-meritocratic nature of market competition because non-meritocratic rules are naturalized. They are embedded in cultural-cognitive assumptions and taken for granted. This occurs through practices that incorporate asymmetric power relationships handed down from one generation to another (Hayes et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the "micro" elements include individual traits, such as the tendency of some social actors to fight harder for dominance, i.e., high status. In contrast, others tend to accept their lower-status positions. Pratto et al. (1994) defined this tendency to accept inequality as a personality variable: social dominance orientation. At this same level of analysis, the literature also associates the variation in the acceptance of hierarchies and inequalities of status systems with emotional changes (Steckler & Tracy, 2014) and even hormonal variations (Knight & Mehta, 2014).

CATEGORY STATUS AND RELATIONAL MARKET ORDERING MECHANISMS

An organization's struggle due to belonging to a market category was considered the forefront of social judgment in markets and used to observe the status and examine its relational mechanisms between the micro and macro levels. In agreement with [Freeland and Hoey \(2018\)](#), we understand that status is best understood as a network of relationships and deference. Belonging to a market category should be thought of as constructed from a set of appreciations of other social actors. In terms of deference, i.e., symbolic appreciations that may result from a category classification, market categories function as a family name. Therefore, the simple fact that an organization has a specific "family name" means that it will enjoy the same symbolic privileges as all the others in that same family/market category ([Negro et al., 2010](#)).

However, not every organization is viewed as a pure and legitimate member of its market category ([Hannan, 2010](#)). Some organizations simply seem to belong more (*sic*) to a specific market category than others. [Hannan \(2010\)](#) gives an extreme example of the problem of partiality considering belonging to a category by comparing Harvard University, National Defense University, and McDonald's Corp.'s Hamburger University. If belonging to a category is evaluated by collective judgment, Harvard will likely be classified as a member of the university category by a higher number of actors. Producers belonging to the same market category are compared in the same terms and considered, therefore, as described by [White \(2000\)](#), peer producers – actors that have comparability from the perspective of other actors present in the market.

How well producers fit into a market category is evaluated by diverse audiences. [White \(2000\)](#) specifies that producer markets are mainly constructed through discursive mechanisms and mechanisms of interactions with their (i) peer producers; (ii) suppliers; and, (iii) buyers. However, [White \(1981a, 1981b, 2000\)](#) argues that analyzing the social construction of markets must favor the networks of social relationships among producers. According to the author, "Markets are self-reproducing social structures among specific cliques of firms and other actors who evolve roles from observations of each other's behavior [...] the key fact is those producers watch each other within a market" ([White, 1981b, p. 518](#)). It should be highlighted that buyers and suppliers are not summarily ignored in [White's general market model \(1981a, 1981b, 2000\)](#), but seen as reflected in the decisions of firms that compete with one another.

According to the model of [White \(1981a, 1981b\)](#), social relationship networks among producers in a market are the principal starting point for considering the flow of deference that generates different stocks, i.e., status positions ([Podolny & Lynn, 2009](#)). We argue that the flow of deference in a market presents a relational trajectory, a history. This history of symbolic appreciation conforms to patterns of differential ties between producers in a market. [Rivera et al. \(2010\)](#) explained that a repetition mechanism operates in dyadic relationships, as is the case of deference relations, responsible for increasing the possibility of interaction based on previous ties. Because of the Matthew Effect ([Podolny, 2005](#)), this mechanism tends to operate even more sharply in deference ties. In addition to the effects of repetition in the formation of patterns of relations, relational roles

(roles related to other roles) also emerge because of the agglutination of structurally equivalent actors in terms of their deference ties. When different actors show a similar pattern of ties to their deference target, they are structurally equivalent in terms of status allocation. According to [White \(2008\)](#), the profile of ties generates a block of structurally equivalent identities. In turn, actors from the same block adopt roles in which they relate to other roles, thus forming a role framework. We argue that it is this role framework that, in relational terms, could explain the social order of markets.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

Research context

As specified, we sought to understand the operation of relational mechanisms that contribute to the ordering of markets in category status assignment networks. For this purpose, we chose a haute cuisine market. In terms of accessibility, we restricted the market to Curitiba. In theoretical terms, we chose this type of market because it is considered a sector with clear cultural rules and has the power to guide the behavior of the actors who struggle for the status of belonging to the category ([Svejenova et al., 2007](#)). The Michelin guide ([Michelin Guide, 2019](#)) is a source that most formally reflects these cultural rules. It is dominant in the orientation of the behavior of producers that are players in this market. It also orients the definition of the restaurant's status ([Koch et al., 2018](#)). According to the guide, restaurants that strive for stars are evaluated using five criteria: the quality of the ingredients used; mastery of flavor and cooking techniques; the personality of the chef in his cuisine, value for money; and consistency between visits. As it is legitimized and widely known, the Michelin Guide helped to generate a high level of consensus regarding the criteria that must be considered when defining the category of the haute cuisine market. In this respect, this market is satisfactorily suited for this study. Although no restaurant in Curitiba has a Michelin star, these criteria serve as a benchmark for any chef and restaurant that wish to belong to the haute cuisine category ([Svejenova et al., 2007](#)).

Data collection

We used a sociometric survey design since this methodology can deal with metrics produced from social media relationships ([Maciel, 2018](#)). The first stage in the development of the questionnaire applied in the survey was to list the restaurants that were most likely to be considered haute cuisine. After considering recommendations from consumers, chefs, a critic, and websites, we identified twenty-six restaurants. The questionnaire consisted of a column with the restaurants' names and another column with the following instruction: "Mark with an X if you consider this restaurant haute cuisine" (thus, X=1, otherwise 0). As a result, nineteen restaurants were considered haute cuisine. After excluding two restaurants that did not wish to participate in the study and

discarding the names of the restaurants that were not classified as haute cuisine by their peers, we worked with a sample of seventeen restaurants, considering this group as the market under research. Therefore, it was possible to delimit the market based on the producers' perspective (White, 1981a). The questionnaire included questions about the respondents' relationship with other restaurants and their attention to the menu, quality, service, and prices of each competitor, using this data to build the sociogram.

A qualitative interview was conducted with the seventeen restaurants to complete the survey and present the restaurant and their understanding of haute cuisine. We present a summary of this information in Table 1, the real names have been replaced.

Table 1. Summary of restaurants' style, opening and respondents

Restaurant	Style	Year of opening	Respondent
A	Asian	2015	Chef
B	Asian	2007	Chef
C	Classic french	1953	Owner
D	International classic	1983	Owner
E	Contemporary international	2004	Chef
F	Contemporary international	2011	Owner and chef
G	Contemporary international	2015	Owner and chef
H	Contemporary international	2009	Owner
I	Contemporary international	2008	Owner and chef
J	International classic	1999	Owner and chef
K	French contemporary	2010	Owner
L	French contemporary	2007	Owner
M	Italian-french contemporary	2009	Owner and chef
N	Contemporary rustic	2001	Owner
O	Italian contemporary	2012	Owner
P	Italian contemporary	2001	Owner and chef
Q	Italian-french contemporary	2014	Public Relations

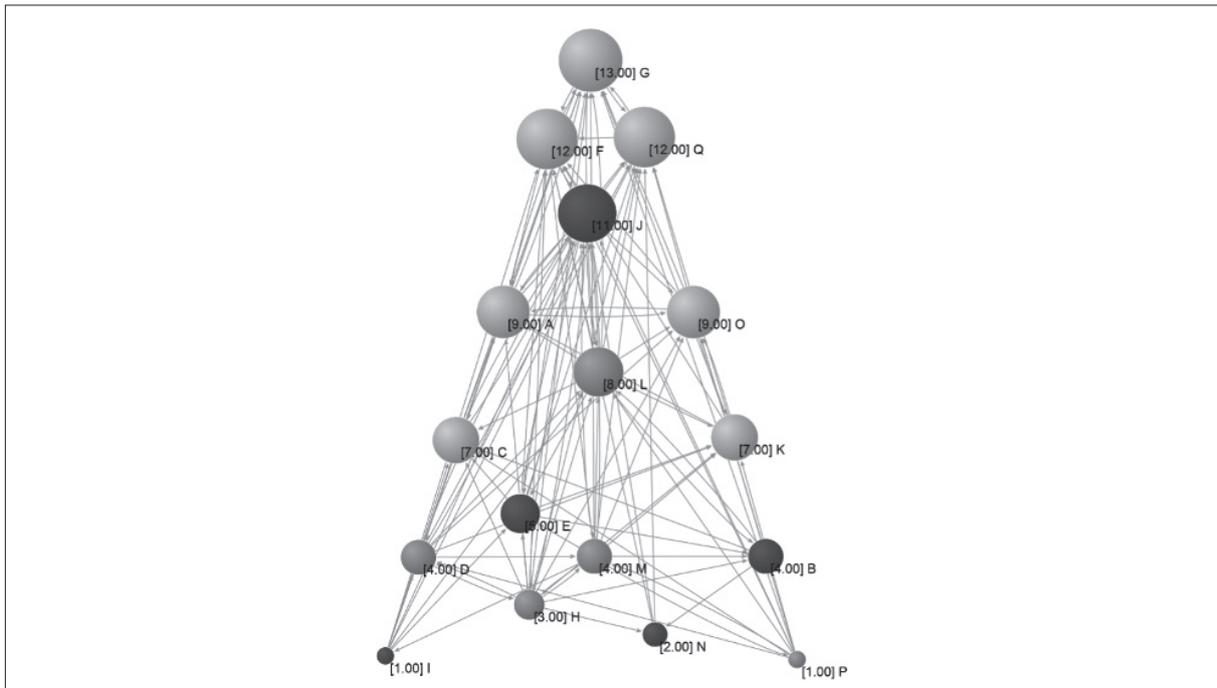
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

DATA ANALYSIS

Topological analysis of the deference flow pattern

From the citations of peers classifying restaurants as haute cuisine, we prepared a 17x17 square matrix in which each cell was assigned a value of 1 if the actor was classified as a restaurant of haute cuisine and a value of 0 if it did not. The indegree of each actor ranged from 1 to 13. Using topological analysis with the Pajek 3 software, which shows the shape of a dataset and similar positions for similar actors (Shibata et al., 2007), we extracted the sociogram (Figure 1) that evidence the hierarchical topology of the haute cuisine deference network. We used the node size to represent each actor's indegree (Nooy et al., 2018). The analysis showed an effectively hierarchical order within the haute cuisine category in the market of Curitiba.

Figure 1. Deference network for haute cuisine status



Source: Elaborated by the authors

Consensus analysis

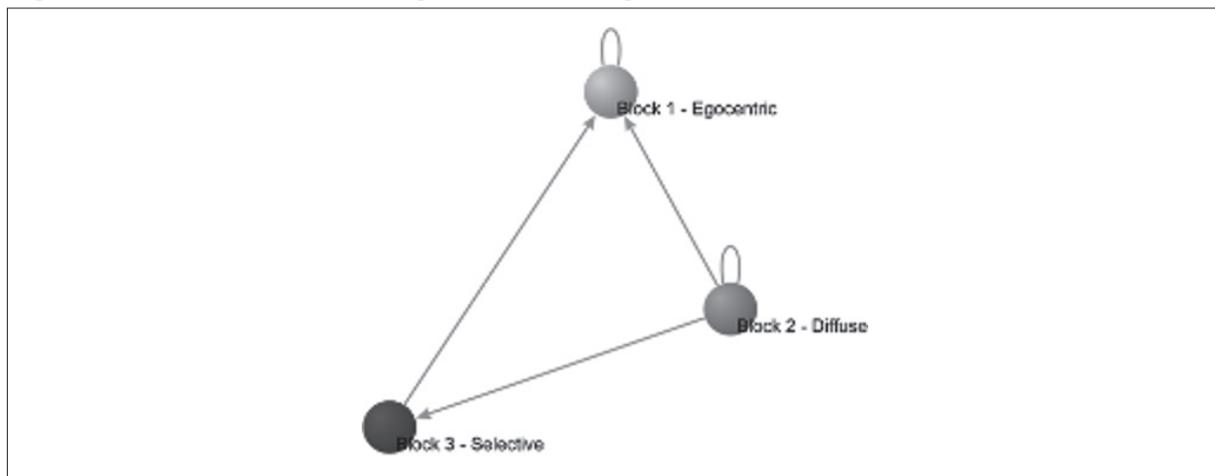
The second step in the data analysis consisted of testing the assumption of status theories that advocate high levels of homogeneity in showing deference. According to this assumption, there is high consensus among those who show deference to those with high and those with low status (Sullivan & Stewart, 2009; Washington & Zajac, 2005). The homogeneity of deference ties was tested using consensus analysis with Ucinet 6.666 software. In general, this analysis makes it possible to gauge whether a given set of social actors has one or more cultural or attitudinal

patterns (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). The 17x17 square matrix was submitted to factor analysis, and the highest eigenvalue (3.93) was divided by the second-highest eigenvalue (1.62), producing a result of 2.42. According to Borgatti and Halgin (2011), the first eigenvalue should be at least three times the second eigenvalue to indicate a homogeneous pattern of showing deference. Therefore, the consensus analysis contradicted the assumption of homogeneity advocated in several status theories.

Analyzing the roles of the haute cuisine market (blockmodeling)

Due to the heterogeneity of ties in showing deference, proven in the consensus analysis, we submitted the 17x17 matrix to a role analysis using blockmodeling with the CONCOR structural equivalence algorithm, available in Ucinet 6.666 software. The structural equivalence analysis identifies different patterns of ties and clusters actors with similar ties into distinct blocks/partitions. After comparing the density matrix of the blocks and the adjusted R-squared for diverse configurations of role framework, between two and eight blocks, we opted to analyze a framework of three roles (Adjusted R-squared = 0.25). The ties between the blocks, indicated by the directions of the arrows, were established by comparing the total density of the network (effective ties concerning the number of possible ties) = 0.41 with intra- and inter-block density. A tie was established when the intra-block and inter-block densities were greater than the network's total density. Figure 2 shows the role framework in the first sociogram and the corresponding actors for each role (block) by following the three colors of blocks in the second sociogram of the deference network.

Figure 2. Analysis of roles through blockmodeling



Source: Elaborated by the authors

We named the types of roles of deference in each block, considering the nature of the relationships between them: Egocentric (Block 1), Diffuse (Block 2), and Selective (Block 3). In Block 1 - Egocentric are the restaurants G, F, Q, A, O, C, and K and are blue in figure 2. In Block 2 - Diffuse are the restaurants D, H, L, M, and P, represented in light green and in

Block 3 - Selective are the restaurants B, E, I, J, and N, represented in dark green. Jointly, these blocks form a role framework. We decided to analyze the relationships (in accordance with the straight lines and loops) within the role framework in the light of White's (1981a, 1981b, 2000, 2008) social network analysis perspective.

White (2008) completely inverts the idea that identities and roles form relationships between social actors. His perspective favors how social relationships generate structurally equivalent actors, i.e., with a similar pattern of ties, and, in turn, how these blocks of equivalent actors create collective identities and relational roles. White's (2008) most original aspect is the argument that identities and roles are inferred from blocks of structurally equivalent actors. Following this reasoning, the order of the haute cuisine market in Curitiba is supported and perturbed by a dynamic of normality and chaos. This dynamic materializes through relationships between actors who perform the egocentric, diffuse, and selective roles of deference. On the one hand, normality is found, for instance, in the expectations of deference between Blocks 1 and 3, which are reciprocal. However, on the other hand, there is a chaotic tendency in some of the relationships of non-reciprocal expectations in Block 2 with the others.

This dynamic is one of the most natural characteristics of social life and emerges from the struggle for control over different identities. White (2008) explains that the expected or lack of reciprocity of roles exists because social actors tend to perceive themselves in different blocks or relational roles and constitute a collective identity. In addition to understanding themselves in specific roles, social actors classify other actors into other roles. These other roles can confirm or contradict expectations, as is perceived in the relationships between the blocks in the haute cuisine market in Curitiba.

The actors in Block 1 (Egocentric), who mostly occupy high-status positions, tend to classify only the restaurants in their block as haute cuisine. The behavior of these market actors tends to exclude actors from outside their block, and they only show deference to one another, in other words, to other high-status restaurants. Restaurant G indicates Restaurant F as an example of haute cuisine:

Restaurant G (block 1): We have a huge example here that is [restaurant] F (block 1). She [the chef and owner] does an impeccable job, very nice. And most of her clients are tourists.

This means, considering the role framework as a whole, the actors in Block 1 tend to cultivate the belief that the other actors should show deference to the actors in Block 1, the same ones Block 1 did not show deference to. Thus, we can deduce from the formation of ties that the actors in Block 1 feel that the actors from the other blocks do not have the same characteristics that they have. Therefore, there is a clear expectation of reciprocal deference among the actors in Block 1 and an expectation of deference to them from the actors in the other two blocks, as they judge that the actors from the other blocks while wishing to belong to the block or market category that they represent. Restaurant O speaks about how desirable they are by the clients, a status well seen by all restaurants:

Restaurant O (block 1): There are several clients that cannot come here every month, but people desire to come here once a year, once a semester, because people value this whole package and experience.

The actors from Block 2 (Diffuse) present a pattern of deference ties that does not distinguish between the actors of the three blocks. For the actors in this group, the actors from Block 1, 2, and 3 belong to the haute cuisine market. These actors are mostly low-status and ignore the rules and expectations of the actors from Block 1 (Egocentric). Their deference patterns do not respect the expectations of Block 1, who are of a higher status. Furthermore, their behavior is also not entirely in agreement with the expectations of Block 3, which views only Block 1 as haute cuisine restaurants. The reciprocal expectations that exist between Blocks 1 and 3 are disturbed and somewhat at odds with the expectations of Block 2 concerning the other blocks. The actors in Block 2 are more inclined to label all the actors in the market as haute cuisine, and this is contrary to the expectations of Blocks 1 and 3. This means there is a more chaotic trend about respecting the rules of deference in the market.

The actors in Block 3 (Selective) only show deference to the higher status actors of Block 1 (Egocentric). For them, Block 1 deserves more considerable deference than Block 2 and themselves. Restaurant J, for example, shows strong opinions about how some new gastronomy trends can not be classified as haute cuisine:

Restaurant J (block 3): They call this one fusion, you know? (...) It's not food to eat, it is food for show, for plating beautifully, a small piece here, a little flower there and that's it... that's what Ferran Adrià did. There is nothing to do with what I like. I like Bocuse, that's the one.

The Selective block is the only one that does not show deference to its own market actors. The relationship between the selective (Block 3) and the diffuse (Block 2) is a relationship of divergence of expectations. Block 2 attributes status to the actors from all three blocks, but Block 3, like Block 1, denies the expectation of deference on the part of the diffuse Block 2. If Block 2 judges that it belongs in the haute cuisine category, it is evident that it also expects to be judged by the other blocks as haute cuisine. Block 3 shows an apparent convergence of expectations with Block 1. The actors in Block 1, which comprises the actors with the highest status, believe that only they belong to the haute cuisine category. Block 3 confirms this expectation in the judgment of Block 1, as it does not show deference to itself or Block 2.

DISCUSSION

Before reflecting on the results of the primary purpose of this study, it should be highlighted that our findings sharply problematize the notion of order in the market by showing that relational roles are responsible for reinforcing some expectations between different groups of

actors by generating diverging expectations among them (White, 2008). On the one hand, the relationship between the roles of Ego-centric (Block 1) and Selective (Block 3) deference reveals the convergence of expectations (in terms of deference). Thus, this relationship aids the stability of the market actors. There is also a convergence between the expectations of Block 2 regarding the deference that Block 1 expects. On the other hand, Block 2 generates divergences concerning the expectations of the other two blocks when it behaves by deferring indiscriminately. These relationships, role assignments, and deference reveal the haute cuisine market as a complex social system actively shaped by actors and their practices (Giesler & Fischer, 2017).

The explanation of market dynamics based on relational aspects takes place at a meso level of analysis, i.e., without privileging particular characteristics of an individual actor (micro level) or even without emphasizing the strength of the structure (macro level) (Leme & Rezende, 2018). As Rivera et al. (2010) suggested, we show how the complexity of networks explains roles and stability mechanisms. However, unlike what the authors point out, our study showed that non-reciprocal ties, such as those with lower status actors (Block 2), are not withdrawn and, contrary to expectations, do not contribute to instability and change but to the maintenance of a hierarchical system.

Therefore, the role framework of the status order is simultaneously one of reproduction and tension, mainly when the relationships of one dyad of roles affect another dyad. Thus, the idea of market order must be understood more reasonably, as Beckert (2009) presented, as a dynamic flow marked by actors who seek to preserve and destroy the stability of expected roles. This entails substituting the notion of social order as a synonym for converging expectations with the more realistic idea of simultaneity between normality and chaos in the relationships that form the reproducible framework of roles in markets (Beckert, 2009; Fligstein & Calder, 2015; White, 1981a, 1981b, 2000).

With specific regard to the aims of this study, the results of the blockmodeling also generated interesting problematizations. We sought to explain, via relational mechanisms, why lower-status actors, who are unfairly penalized in non-meritocratic status systems, help to positively and disproportionately favor high-status actors. We asked: how can this contradictory behavior be explained? Why do those who suffer more than they ought to, i.e., low-status actors because of status orders, help to maintain them? As previously described, the role framework of the haute cuisine market is constituted by blocks of actors who perform the role expected by other blocks. There is also a block that plays a role not expected by the actors from the other two blocks. This makes any description of a relational nature that can explain the reproduction and transformational tension of a role framework even more interesting.

In this respect, the explanation derived from data analyses in the light of White's (2008) network analysis perspective is that some relationships that reproduce expectations between roles (feeding the status system's inequality dynamic) while simultaneously challenging relationships with other roles (dissuading the inequality dynamic) are maintained because of a relational trajectory. This trajectory increases the possibility of repeating patterns of forming ties (of normality and chaos) because of structurally equivalent collective identities.

More specifically, we warned that there is a social order of markets, but one in which the standard is living between chaos and normality, following [White \(2008\)](#). In status systems, as explained by the Matthew Effect ([Podolny, 2005](#)), the production of inequality is the norm, and the relationships that challenge the tendency to show more considerable deference to actors of a higher status represent the chaos within status systems. Following this reasoning, status systems come to be viewed as systems of the persistent creation of inequalities and the persistence of perturbation of relationships that create inequality. More appropriately, this means that market status systems are simultaneously systems of normality and chaos.

The explanation of the persistence of simultaneous normality and chaos in the market status system in question can be furthered by the concept of comparability of equivalent actors. Comparing social actors in a market, for example, helps to delimit social referents. These referents serve to generate the agglutination of actors as targets for differentiation. [Azarian \(2005\)](#) explains that social actors invariably perceive which group they belong to. This occurs by drawing comparisons with similar social actors and others who are different. Comparing leads the social actor to perceive the position they occupy, not only in terms of the proximity of those similar to them but also in terms of distancing and differentiation from actors in other structurally equivalent groups. As each actor finds their group, there is a tendency to reinforce distinction from other groups. Thus, it may be inferred that the three structurally equivalent roles we found in the haute cuisine market tend to persist, primarily because of the continuous comparison of groups and trends of agglutination and differentiation. As pointed out by [White \(2008\)](#), identities seek to control a place among the other roles, becoming part of one or another block of structurally equivalent actors and attempting to colonize other social spaces.

[Azarian \(2005\)](#) claims that referents function as a guide to develop “guidance about how to be and behave” (p. 104). Social referents typify, explaining the actions that appear to “naturally” configure a certain kind of actor, for example, the actors in the haute cuisine market. Typifying an actor that competes in the haute cuisine market gives a sense of normality regarding what it means to be that type of actor, making them more abstract, generic, and understandable. [Azarian \(2005\)](#) explains that this sense of normality emerges because actors need to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity and reduce the chances of confusion. This does not mean excluding the possibility of change, as social actors are embedded in multiple networks simultaneously and are “subjected to the erratic bombardments of heterogeneous flows” ([Azarian, 2005, p. 103](#)).

However, the disproportionate force of the tendency to generalize types of actors, as in the case of haute cuisine, cannot be ignored. As seen in the role framework of the haute cuisine market, although deference patterns compete with one another, the three types of structurally equivalent actors converge when it comes to showing deference to actors of a higher status. Therefore, the highest-status actors are authorized by the other producers in this market to personify (i.e., materially) and typify (i.e., be the abstract configuration of the actor) producers in the haute cuisine market. Thus, we identified another relational and procedural aspect of maintaining the role framework in markets, which we call authorizing the representation of a market category. In this respect, status orders have room for both chaos and normality

of deference flows between market roles. They also operate as an interpretation framework (Podolny & Lynn, 2009), enabling the majority to define their typical representatives. The partial convergence (Block 2 does not only choose the higher-status actors as representatives) of the market representatives supports the argument for the Matthew Effect (Podolny, 2005) but requires a relativization – the result of choosing this representation does not occur without resistance to the Matthew Effect. Inequality is not reproduced so amenable by the lower-status actors as the literature would have us believe.

CONCLUSIONS

We began this article by highlighting the importance of the status of organizations in markets, especially when markets are understood as not being strictly instrumental but rather as arenas for disputing social approval assets (Hubbard et al., 2018; Vergne, 2012). We proposed belonging to a category as a criterion for identifying status hierarchies from a deference network of peer producers (White, 2000) in the haute cuisine market. Although it has been recognized that “how organizations are placed within collective categorization systems affects the social, cultural, and material resources available to them” (Negro et al., 2010, p. 4), studies in this field have ignored the fact that market categories lead to collectively constructed status hierarchies. Therefore, this article brings theoretical contributions to different areas of organizational studies: relational studies, market order, market categories, and status systems. We used the social network analysis perspective to handle the collective and socially embedded aspect of the status of belonging to a category (Borgatti et al., 2009).

From the imperative of the Matthew Effect (Podolny, 2005), we consider that the status of belonging to a category, as occurs in status hierarchies formed using other criteria, creates a paradox. This paradox was exposed through the following question: Why do those who suffer more than they should because of status orders, i.e., those of lower status, help to maintain these orders? This question stems from the fact that the deference patterns of lower-status actors toward higher-status actors continually reproduce the differences in status emerging from inequalities in market competition. In this respect, our article highlights that even inequalities between producers in a market contribute to the social order – stability of expectations among actors. Through reciprocal and non-reciprocal ties, peer producers interact to maintain a hierarchy, which, unlike what is presented in the literature (e.g. Freeland & Hoey, 2018) benefits specific blocks and not all members of the market category.

We conclude that the idea of White's (2000, 2008) role frameworks allowed us to go beyond binary roles, such as market incumbents and challengers (Fligstein & Calder, 2015) or producers and buyers (Ahrne et al., 2015), also extrapolating the three problematic biases pointed out by Giesler and Fischer (2017): the economic actor bias, the tendency to focus only on the consumer-producer relationship; micro-level bias, a tendency to focus on how individual actors feel, think, and act; the variance bias, which treats the market as composed of stable material substances.

This was observed when we counterposed not only different relational roles of actors in a dyad but also the relationship of a dyad of roles (e.g., egocentric-selective) concerning another dyad of roles (e.g., selective-diffuse). Our results showed that status orders are not configured linearly and without resistance, as proposed by the Matthew Effect (Podolny, 2005). Actually, what should be understood as a social order in markets encompasses a dynamic that is simultaneously composed of relations of chaos and relations of normality. Thus, the social order of markets gains an ongoing characteristic because of structurally equivalent identities that are reinforced and challenged.

Moreover, we concluded that the unequal distribution of deference between producers in a market becomes an ecological structural plan that supports the cognitive and normative bases of market categories from a few representatives who are authorized by their competitors. This structurally established fragmentary composition emerges as a process that makes what a few actors in the market are doing more important and dominant, although there are disagreements in some of the relationships within the market's role framework.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Tiziana Brenner Beauchamp Weber: Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

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Cristiano de Oliveira Maciel: Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Validation; Project administration; Supervision; Writing – original draft.