

CALL FOR PAPERS

Moral Economy at the Crossroads of history and social science: Finding *Customs in Common*?

Confirmed keynote speakers

- **Neville Kirk**, Professor Emeritus of Labour History, Manchester Metropolitan University
- **Andrew Sayer**, Professor Emeritus of Political Economy and Social Theory, Lancaster University
- **Melissa Beresford**, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, San José State University

Deadline for submission of abstracts or papers: August 31, 2023

Organisers

- Dr Edda Nicolson
- Professor Andrew Perchard
- Anya Kaufman
- Professor Keith Gildart
- Dr Knut Laaser
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Workshop overview

The aim of the workshop is to review application of moral economy research across history and the social sciences, considering the limitations and potential for conceptualisations in future research, as well as the potential of moral economy research to contribute to community and labour organising across the globe. We welcome contributions from academic researchers at all stages, practitioners, and activists, in the form of developmental or developed research papers or oral contributions on topics such as (but not confined to):

- *Moral economy, enhancing quality of working life and extensions of (un)democratic control of workers;*
- *The moral economy of working lives, labour contestation, activism and studies and projects bringing together researchers, communities, and labour activists;*
- *Moral economy research exploring the intersections of history and the social sciences;*
- *Debates around the attribution of morality and historical periodization, following Thompson's initial work, and how they continue to resonate in contemporary applications of his concept;*
- *Moral economy, emotions, and emotional history*

- *Moral economy, worker collectivism, the informal organisation and meaningful work;*
- *The moral economy of meaningful work;*
- *Moral economy, new commodity trades, colonial legacies, evolving technologies and enduring inequalities in political power, health and wealth; and*
- *Inquiries into the foundations of moral economy.*

We encourage submissions to provide details of any innovations in methodological approaches and interdisciplinarity. We also encourage discussion of the application of moral economy frameworks within different spaces (agrarian and domestic labour, as well as industrial), places and time (giving consideration to moral economic phenomena in different socio-historical settings), and deliberations of questions of class, gender and race. We are particularly keen to encourage submissions from postgraduate researchers and early career scholars. A fund exists to support PhD students to attend.

Situating the workshop

Over the past 20 years, a growing body of work by anthropologists, historians and social scientists has revisited and revived the concept of moral economy conceived of and associated with social historian Edward Palmer Thompson and anthropologist James C Scott. This workshop offers opportunity for cross and interdisciplinary reflections on the growing development and utilisation of moral economy concepts against a rising tide of critiques of capitalism, following the 2007-8 financial crisis and the rise of populist movements around the world (fuelled in part by growing disparity in wealth and rising inequality and a sense of dislocation). The renewed focus on Thompson's work can be characterised in several forms: 1) that which applies and interrogates his work in different historical and social contexts, such as in relation to deindustrialization (Perchard and Phillips, 2011; Phillips, 2013, 2017); 2) research that seeks to enrich Thompson's conception, alongside the work of, and extensions to, the political economist Karl Polanyi's notions of the social embeddedness of markets as outlined in *The Great Transformation* (1944), and those of James C. Scott and Andrew Sayer, amongst others (Kirk, 2007; Bolton and Laaser, 2013; Bolton et al, 2016; Strangleman, 2016; Carrier, 2018; Gibbs, 2018; Perchard and Gildart, 2018, 2022; Phillips et al, 2021); and 3) work exploring the foundations of moral economy (Tomlinson, 2011; Carrier, 2018; Rogan, 2018).

Thompson originally developed the concept of moral economy in his 1971 article, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century'. In this cornerstone work, Thompson sought to redress, 'the crass economic reductionism' in existing explanations of eighteenth-century food riots and the "mob" in England; as he put it (p.78): 'The weakness which these explanations share is an abbreviated view of the economic man'. Thompson sought to define the moral economy of the crowd in the following terms (p.79): 'This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action.' Crucially, Thompson drew a distinction between what he viewed as the 'Tudor policies of "provision"' and the 'new political economy' with which he associated Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (pp.89-90). Thompson's expounding of the concept followed from his ground-breaking study of labour history, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). James C Scott, influenced by Thompson, adapted the concept to explore rural subsistence economies in Southeast Asia, in his 1976 *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*,

where he explored the impacts of colonialism and the introduction of a market economy on a feudal moral economy.

Meanwhile, contemporary moral economy approaches across the social sciences, often take Thompson's moral economy as a starting point for a revised conception – focusing on the demands of capitalist markets, the norm generating capacity of institutions and people's sense of justice and fairness (Koos & Sachweh, 2017; Mau, 2005). In this environment, moral economy research suggests people's experience of inequality is formed by perceptions of just distributions, autonomy and livelihoods (Götz, 2015; Mau, 2003; Sachweh, 2012). Andrew Sayer's work further provides an actor-centred understanding and his concept of lay morality, highlights ongoing monitoring and evaluation of actions and faring in practices develop well-being or trigger suffering (Sayer, 2005). Sayer argues moral dispositions are formed by living in, and through, social relationships that enable or constrain development of attachments and connection with others. In this way, the economic and cultural context builds a moral economy that renders "what is deemed appropriate and acceptable" (Sayer, 2011, p.129). Sayer has endeavoured to develop this into a coherent taxonomy of social theory (2000, 2005), resembling Bourdieu's habitus concept, understood through structuring that produces regularity in people's moral dispositions, emotions, and ethical responses.

About the Centre for the Political Economy of Labour

Understanding how, why and where people work, and how working lives and landscapes are being transformed in neighbourhoods, fields, factories and laboratories across the globe, requires attention to accelerating environmental, political and social change. By considering labour as involving paid and unpaid work across the spheres of economic production, cultural and social reproduction, the Centre for the Political Economy of Labour brings together researchers and labour activists to explore how new commodity trades, colonial legacies, evolving technologies and enduring inequalities in political power, health and wealth are experienced, accommodated and resisted by workers. CPEL seeks to contribute to the theory and practice of labour contestation. See: <https://www.politiceconomyoflabour.org/>.

Indicative reading

Beresford, M Wutich, A Garrick, D Drew, G (2022) Moral economies for water: A framework for analyzing norms of justice, economic behavior, and social enforcement in the contexts of water inequality. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water*, 10(2): 1627.

Bolton, S and Laaser, K (2013) Work, employment and society through the lens of moral economy. *Work, employment and society*, 27 (3): 508-528.

Bolton, S, Laaser, K, and McGuire, D. (2016) Quality work and the moral economy of European employment policy. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54 (3): 583-598.

Carrier, JG (2018) Moral economy: What's in a name? *Anthropological Theory*, 18 (1): 18-35.

Fraser, N (2017) A triple movement? Parsing the politics of crisis after Polanyi. In M. Burchardt and G. Kim (eds.) *Beyond neoliberalism*. pp.29-42. Cham: Macmillan.

Gibbs, E (2018) The Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields: Managing Deindustrialization under Nationalization, c.1947-1983. *Enterprise & Society*, 19 (1): 124-152.

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Koos, S and Sachweh, P (2017) The Moral Economies of Market Societies. Popular Attitudes Towards Market Competition (Socio-Economic Review (advance access), Redistribution and Reciprocity in Comparative Perspective').

Mau, S (2003) *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*. London: Routledge.

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Perchard, A and Gildart, K (2018) 'Run with the fox and hunt with the hounds': Managerial Trade-Unionism and the British Association of Colliery Management, 1947–1994. *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 39 (1): 79-110.

Perchard, A and Gildart K (2022) Managerial ideology and identity in the nationalised British coal industry, 1947-1994. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* [Online First]. DOI: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0143831X211069413>.

Perchard, A and Phillips, J (2011) Transgressing the Moral Economy: Wheelerism and the Management of the Nationalised Coal Industry in Scotland. *Contemporary British History*, 25 (3): 387-405.

Phillips, J (2013) Deindustrialization and the Moral Economy of the Scottish Coalfields, 1947 to 1991. *International Labor and Working Class History*, 84: 99-115.

Phillips, J (2017) The moral economy of deindustrialization in post-1945 Scotland. In S High, L MacKinnon and A Perchard (eds). *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*. pp.313-330. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Phillips, J, Wright, V and Tomlinson, J (2021) *Deindustrialisation and the Moral Economy in Scotland since 1955*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rogan T (2018) *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sayer A (2000) Moral Economy and Political Economy. *Studies in Political Economy*, 61 (1): 79-104.

Sayer A (2005) *The Moral Significance of Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sayer, A (2011) *Why things matter to people: Social science, values and ethical life*. Cambridge University Press. Scott JC (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Strangleman T (2016) Deindustrialisation and the Historical Sociological Imagination: Making Sense of Work and Industrial Change. *Sociology*, 51 (2), 466-482.

Sachweh, P (2012) The moral economy of inequality: Popular views on income differentiation, poverty and wealth. *Socio-Economic Review*, 10(3), pp.419-445.

Thompson EP (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin.

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Thompson EP (1991) *Customs in Common*. Monmouth: Merlin Press.

Tomlinson J (2011) Re-inventing the 'moral economy' in post-war Britain. *Historical Research*, 84 (224): 356-373.