

## Workshop: Moral Economies of the Polycrisis. Conflict, Critique and Legitimation in Critical Times

### SCHEDULE

#### MONDAY, 16 JUNE

*12 – Arrival*

**13:00 – Opening, round of introductions**

**13:30 – Kick-off lecture by Michael Vester**

*Coffee break*

**15:00 – Moral Economies of Work**

- **Nicole Mayer-Ahuja** (Göttingen) – The moral economy of labour. How legends of better days inform conflicts at the workplace and beyond
- **Georg Barthel** (Duisburg) – The relevance of freedom for the moral economy of workers
- **Valentina Nava** (Paris Cité) – Welfare chauvinism and meritocracy. Deservingness as a new paradigm reshaping moral economies

*Coffee break*

**17:00 – Theorizing Moral Economy**

- **Matthew Donoghue** (UC Dublin) & **Adam Standring** (ISEG Lisbon) – Untangling morals, ideology, and discourse
- **Friederike Beier** (FU Berlin) & **Jule Govrin** (U Hildesheim) – Debt and re/productive time. Theorizing the temporality and morality of debt

**19 – Evening lecture “Moral Economy in Crisis? Reflections on an Ambiguous Concept” by Patrick Sachweh, with a commentary by Nicole Mayer-Ahuja**

*Workshop dinner*

#### TUESDAY, 17 JUNE

**9:30 – Crises as Sites of Struggle**

- **Clara Lucas** (Sciences Po Bordeaux) – A revolt of dignity: the moral economies of the Yellow Vests movement in La Réunion
- **Brice Molo** (EHESS) – Disaster, moral economies of local residents, and the renegotiation of the public good in Cameroon
- **Mo Torres** (U Michigan) – “They Ran that City Down”. Segmentation, stigma, and the moralization of urban crisis

### *Coffee Break*

- **Patrick Sachweh & Timo Wiesner** (Bremen) – Moral economies of wealth
- **Dmitrii M. Zhikharevich & Katharina T. Paul** (U Vienna) – The moral economy of vaccine injury in the US

12:30

*Lunch*

*Break*

### **13:30 – Inequality, Institutions and Legitimation**

- **Laura Lüth** (Hamburg) – The moral economy of gender inequality & political class practices
- **Clara Mascaro** (Edinburgh) & **Larissa Nanning** (Hamburg) – A moral economy of disability?
- **Clara Heinrich** (FU Berlin) – The crafting and contestation of state capacity in post-war Germany: Towards a sociology of public investment and the household analogy
- **Christof Wittmaack** (Bremen) – Labor market transformation and crisis in the public eye (of the beholder)

### *Coffee break*

### **16:00 The Moral Economy of Climate Change**

- **Till Hilmar** (U Vienna) & **Linus Westheuser** (HU Berlin) – The moral economy of fuel prices. Interpretive struggles around justice and blame in the energy crisis
- **Katharina Zimmermann** (Hamburg) & **Vincent Gengnagel** (Flensburg) – From floods to status stranding: The dual burden of loss in the climate crisis
- **Ludwig Ipach** (Hamburg) & **Christian Möstl** (Flensburg) – Status preservation as focus of just transition? Comparative analysis of media discussions in Germany, Belgium and Slovenia

17:30 – *Concluding discussion*

18:00 – *End*

*Call for Papers – International Workshop*

# Moral Economies of the Polycrisis

## Conflict, Critique and Legitimation in Critical Times

**16-17 June 2025. University of Hamburg.** Organizers: Laura Lüth (University of Hamburg), Till Hilmar (University of Vienna), and Linus Westheuser (Humboldt University Berlin).

Keynotes by **Patrick Sachweh** (SOCIUM, University Bremen) & **Michael Vester** (University of Hannover)

By disrupting what is taken for granted, moments of economic, political, and ecological crisis reveal the implicit *modus operandi* of a society. As routines get derailed and settled arrangements come under strain, institutions are forced to explicate the “implicit social contract” (Barrington Moore) underpinning power, domination, and inequality. Who deserves protection when times get rough? Whose suffering matters and whose claims are made to count? Who is blamed? And what even counts as a crisis and what is shrugged off and fades into a ‘new normal’?

These questions touch on a tacit structure of social expectations commonly discussed under the heading of *moral economy*. Drawing on thinkers like E.P. Thompson, James C. Scott, or Marion Fourcade, the moral economy perspective examines expectations of unequal reciprocity and distributive claims in economic relations; ideas of systemic legitimacy resting on mutual obligations between dominant and dominated groups; or political priorities tied to assumptions about the (un)deservingness and moral worth of social groups. Moral economy approaches focalize the ideational and institutional architecture of capitalist societies by parsing how legitimacy and hegemony are embedded in everyday moral reasoning. In addition these approaches also often look at social practices, struggles, and forms of critique centered around the violation of moral claims.

At our workshop, we want to discuss work in the moral economy paradigm that sheds light on the current “polycrisis” composed of geopolitical turmoil, economic shocks, ecological breakdown, as well as crises of care and political legitimacy.

- What can the moral economy perspective teach us about the way capitalist societies navigate these crises?
- To what extent do crises open up a space in which dominated groups can critique inequality and demand a renegotiation of the implicit social contract?
- How do demands and political responses informed by existing moral economies deepen inequality and domination?
- How do institutions like the welfare state or social and eco-social policies seek to mend rifts in the moral economy?
- What are moral background assumptions that make some developments (such as migration) but not others (such as poverty and extreme wealth) appear as crises?
- And what is the explanatory status of moral economy as a concept? For instance, are popular moral sentiments and subjective aspirations a driver of political and economic action, or are they merely a symptom of existing power relations? Is moral economy about agency or structure? And if both, how exactly?

These are some of the questions we want to discuss with a group of international scholars.

We invite papers taking a moral economy perspective to empirically research or theorize the current conjuncture. Papers can be at all stages of development, the event is meant to collaboratively discuss work in progress. We especially welcome submissions from doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. Limited funds are available to assist with travel and accommodation for those lacking institutional support.

*The workshop is supported by the Economic Sociology Section of the German Sociological Association (DGS), the Research Unit Economic Sociology at the University of Hamburg, and the Research Unit Macrosociology at Humboldt University Berlin.*