

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).*

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 particularly encourage submissions by doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. Limited funds are available to support traveling and accommodation for those without institutional support.

Please send an abstract of max. 500 words to: [laura.lueth@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:laura.lueth@uni-hamburg.de), [till.hilmar@univie.ac.at](mailto:till.hilmar@univie.ac.at) and [linus.westheuser@hu-berlin.de](mailto:linus.westheuser@hu-berlin.de)

**Deadline for abstract submissions: 7 April, 2025**

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