



Introduction

Moral Economy at Work

LALE YALÇIN-HECKMANN

The coronavirus has changed the agenda of both European and global politics. Countries that had previously been praised for having tight state budgets (like the Netherlands) or low public spending (including saving on public health services, like Italy and Spain) have come under criticism and found themselves with problems trying to control the spread of the pandemic. Germany, for instance, without any major public debt, has been changing its policy of avoiding debt and promising to protect almost everyone from the expected financial crisis and recession. What has happened? Does the massive increase in public spending and the more general reassertion of state responsibility occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic represent a reversal of decades of neoliberal marketization? Can this moment in history be viewed as a reassertion of social protection in the sense of Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944])?¹ It is clear that moral issues are being raised at multiple levels, from who gets access to ventilators in failing hospitals, who can work from home, whose work should be considered ‘essential’ for the society and allowed to go on, to which kinds of welfare state are able to help their citizens get through this crisis both medically and financially. We observe many states promising to protect the economically vulnerable: is this symptomatic of a more general revival of a ‘moral economy’ in the sense of historian E.P. Thompson (2010 [1991])?

In times of global crisis such as the present pandemic, evoking moral values and the state is usual and understandable. The financial crisis in 2008 raised similar calls, which became the subject of sociological (Karner and Weicht 2016) and anthropological (e.g. Gkintidis 2016; Kofti 2016; Palomera and Vetta 2016) discussions. The balance between ecology and

economic development, heatedly debated by emerging ecological movements, is perhaps the best example of concerns over the moral economy.² Politicians and corporations have been criticized, despite the fact that some of them have long incorporated moral reasoning as part of their corporate social responsibility agendas: they claim to care for both the environment and their workers by promoting ethically responsible working conditions.³

This volume addresses moral reasoning and values as they are embedded and evoked in economic action. It looks specifically at how moral economic obligations and acts arise out of and within the context of work, at the ethnographic examples of primarily but not only small- and medium-sized urban enterprises in Eurasia.⁴ We are inspired by the works of E.P. Thompson (1971 and 2010 [1991]) on the moral economy of the English poor, by James Scott's (1976 and 1985) interpretation and expansion of the concept as well as further appraisals and critical works of anthropologists like Didier Fassin (2009), Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta (2016), Chris Hann (2010 and 2018) and James Carrier (2018). We first turn to Thompson's work before discussing the other authors and moving on to our own engagement with the concept and its intellectual legacy.

Thompson's concept of moral economy grew out of his research into the reactions of sections of the English poor to rising grain prices in the eighteenth century. He criticized the 'economic reductionism' and 'abbreviated view of economic man' (Thompson 2010 [1991]: 187) that were allegedly characteristic of historical and economic analyses of contemporary bread riots. These were represented in previous scholarship as 'rebellions of the belly' (*ibid.*: 186), but Thompson asked how behaviour was modified by 'custom, culture and reason' (*ibid.*: 187). The riots were not a mechanical response to hunger but were fuelled by moral indignation over changing conditions of food production and distribution.⁵ The crowd 'was informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs . . . supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by the authorities' (*ibid.*: 188). Thompson's discussion then addressed claims and beliefs (rights or customs) that motivate people to act and authorities (that is, various levels of the state, in his terms 'the paternalist control') to support these claims but also reinforce them. Various aspects of his concept have been subsequently elaborated by numerous authors, economic and social historians and anthropologists; they asked what these values, social norms and obligations might be, how they are rooted in traditions, which groups might have such moral economic values, and what kinds of circumstances of injustice and deprivation would lead to communal outrage and hence could be termed moral economy. These publications also raised the question of how widely such moral economic action would apply to other historical and economic con-

texts. Thompson returned to these discussions in a lengthy chapter of his 1991 book *Customs in Common*.⁶ There he rejected the idea that the moral economy as discussed in his original essay could be understood to apply ‘to all kinds of crowd’ (2010 [1991]: 260). He insisted on the specificity of his historical case and that he was concerned with the ‘political culture, the expectations, traditions, and, indeed, superstitions of the working population . . . and the relations – sometimes negotiations – between crowd and rulers which go under the unsatisfactory term of “riot”’ (*ibid.*). He then became critical of both reductionist and over-expansionist uses of the concept: ‘. . . to understand the “political” space in which the crowd might act and might negotiate with the authorities must attend upon a larger analysis of the relations between the two’ (*ibid.*: 261). Nevertheless, at the end of his review, he left the concept open to further comparative research: ‘it is an agenda for forward research’ (*ibid.*: 351).

James Scott (1976) developed his own interpretation of moral economy by interpreting Southeast Asian peasants’ political behaviour in terms of a subsistence ethics. Subsistence ethics describe economic practices of peasants being grounded in social relations and moral values. Accordingly, the peasants are cautious about the fluctuations and vagaries of rural life, concerned with showing solidarity with the members of their community and dependent on the powerful for protection. Thompson (2010 [1991]: 341–50) found Scott’s application and expansion helpful, although Scott elaborated more on resistance than riots, especially in his 1985 work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (see also Fassin 2009: para. 21).⁷ Palomera and Vetta summarize Scott’s contribution as follows: ‘Scott sees peasant mobilizations not as a direct outcome of absolute surplus extraction, but as a violation (backed by the colonial state) of a social pattern of moral entitlements and expectations . . .’ (2016: 417).⁸

In recent decades, many scholars, often referring to both Thompson and Scott, have continued to use the concept, with some criticizing its inflationary use and increasing vagueness (e.g. Browne and Milgram 2009; Fassin 2009; *Focaal* 2015; Götz 2015; Hann 2018). Fassin (2009) offers an extensive discussion of moral economy, returning to Thompson’s original 1971 essay and indicating how and why Thompson became critical of the way the concept has been received. According to Fassin, Thompson’s moral economy has two components, the moral (norms, values and obligations) and the economic (encompassing production, distribution and consumption); Thompson’s aim was to show how they are connected. Fassin points to two ways of approaching moral economy. First, it could be contrasted with political economy, which mainly addresses relations of production and power relations, whereas the moral economy in this contrast would cover mores, norms and obligations. Secondly, Fassin argues, Thompson’s use of

moral economy could have another ‘opposite’ (a point that Thompson did not develop, except possibly implicitly). It would be possible to contrast the moral economy/(ies) of different social classes, such as ‘the moral economy of masters, capitalists, or owners confronted with the moral economy of workers, proletariat, or peasants’ (Fassin 2009: para. 13). Fassin finds this second reading of moral economy more inspiring and uses the contrast himself in his essay, ending up with moral economies in the plural.⁹ For the authors in this volume, moral economy does not imply a plurality *per se*, as if the concept pertained to clearly bounded social groups. Nevertheless, the authors explore how employers, employees and self-employed businesspeople use moral values in the economy in making community and how they differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – similar to processes of group-making as dealt with within the Durkheimian tradition but not too far away from Weber’s *Wirtschaftsethik* – that there may be different tensions involved between the rationalization of the economic and other values.¹⁰ This use is often dynamic and involves contradictory strategies; for instance, employers sometimes uphold moral obligations towards kin when organizing labour (see Deniz, Tocheva, Szücs and Chaki in this volume), but at other times they downplay the role of kin in accumulating capital (Chaki), or invoke modern management’s emphasis on merit when recruiting employees (see Deniz, Rajković and Tereshina). On the whole, as Fassin suggests, this opening allows us to discuss moral values and obligations in the dynamic setting of organizing work and production.

Fassin’s essay also provides a summary of Scott’s work, outlining how the focus changed from ‘riots’ to ‘resistance’ and how Scott brought back the notion of value by pointing out the relevance of a ‘sense of justice’ (Fassin 2009: para. 21). This line of thought can be fruitfully examined in relation to working lives and the organization of work. In my own research (Yalçın-Heckmann 2019), I have looked at the organization of agricultural and industrial production of rose and rose oil in Isparta, Turkey and have pointed out the ‘sense of injustice’ and moral indignation that were articulated by many actors in this process, from rose-producing small and large farmers, intermediaries buying the rose harvest, rose oil-producing small firms, to an agricultural cooperative doing both agriculture and industry, as well as the sale of rose oil in global markets. The chains of production and trade involved multiple procedures where information could be withheld and become veiled, hiding production levels, payments, prices and profits. I argued that the frustration about the lack of transparency fed this ‘sense of injustice’.

The contributions to this volume address the themes of working lives and access to and organization of work in their historical and political economic contexts and as fields in which individuals often experience, test

and develop their own ‘sense of justice’. In classic sociological and anthropological works (e.g. Firth 1964; Durkheim 1973; Weber 1978), working lives in urban settings have been identified as readjusting and shaping individual values and orientations. Hence in this volume we argue that the particular ‘sense of justice’ experienced in working lives allows us to open up the moral dimension of the economy and expand the analytical value of moral economy as a theoretical concept. Fassin notes that although Scott’s contribution to the idea of a moral economy has brought back the notion of value in the form of demanding social justice and criticizing inequalities, so far this has been done only from the perspective of the dominated. Our contributions to the discussion of moral economy aim to expand the applicability of the concept (similar to Fassin) by adding the perspectives of the dominant social groups (employers, managers, self-employed business owners, entrepreneurs of medium-sized firms). Nevertheless, the individuals and groups in these dominant social positions are studied by means of a relational analysis; that is, their positionality is firmly embedded in their local, historical and global contexts and temporal junctures.

Palomera and Vetta (2016) offer another review of Thompson’s and Scott’s original concepts and link their ubiquity to the spread of Polanyi’s (1957 [1944]) notion of the embeddedness of the economy. The authors note that many readings of Polanyi have interpreted his critique of disembedded markets as a ‘dichotomous approach’ juxtaposing the embedded economy with autonomous markets, leading to Polanyi wrongly being seen as ‘a moral economist *avant la lettre*’ (Palomera and Vetta 2016: 418). They argue that bringing in the perspective of the social reproduction of capital and class allows us to treat moral economy as a dynamic concept; furthermore, paying attention to hegemony, they suggest, would help us grasp the nature of contradictory and historically contextualized class relations. The special issue (*Anthropological Theory* 2016, vol. 16, issue no. 4) and its introduction, written and edited by Palomera and Vetta, offer a strong argument for integrating the anthropological analysis of moral economy further with that of political economy and employing moral economy as a suitable theoretical concept for the analysis of ‘moments of historical rupture’ (2016: 428).

A more recent critique comes from Chris Hann (2018), who, like Fassin, argues that the term has been massively over-extended. In an earlier contribution (Hann 2010), he noted how the idea of moral economy had challenged economicistic interpretations and upheld the importance of values and norms. There he argued that peasants in Hungary had norms and values that made them pro-market, whereas the dominant paradigm following Thompson and Scott stressed peasants’ responses to new markets. In his 2018 publication, Hann (following Etzioni 1988) broadens the framework

by arguing that we need to move away from a ‘clumpish’ understanding of moral economy (as Thompson himself commented in his 1991 publication) and instead recognize ‘*a moral dimension* in the sense of a collective and systematic basis in long-term shared values’ (emphasis in the original, 2018: 231). He supports his argument with evidence concerning attitudes towards work in Hungary, beginning in pre-industrial times and continuing through socialist collectivization, post-socialist decollectivization and the recent welfare programmes introduced by the party of Viktor Orbán.

Conversely, James Carrier (2018), although similarly critical of the muddled use made of moral economy in recent decades, finds the concept worth salvaging, provided it is made more precise and applied rigorously to relationships arising out of economic interaction. Harking back to the old discussion (instigated by Polanyi) between formalist and substantivist understandings of the economy, Carrier notes that ‘people’s lives are full of choices of all sorts’ (2018: 21). A moral choice depends on the invocation of a transcendent value of significance to society in the long term (Parry and Bloch 1989). This understanding of ‘moral’, which he argues is close to Thompson’s and Scott’s respective uses of it (Carrier 2018: 23), is rooted in Durkheimian ideas of morality arising out of cooperation in society:

To call an act moral in this sense is to point not only to the obligation that it expresses, but also to its basis, the relationship between the actor and someone else. My goal here is to suggest that we recognise that people’s interaction in their economic activities can generate obligation. (*Ibid.*: 23–24)

Obligations and transactions are thus interdependent and generate ‘heightened degrees of mutuality’ (*ibid.*: 27; see also Gudeman 2016). Whereas Hann does not show how values may be activated in economic relationships, Carrier’s approach underlines the emergence of moral ideas in obligations and shows how these are linked to expectations and mutuality. However, Carrier has less to say about where these moral ideas come from and how they emerge in different forms in different kinds of society. Combining these two critical approaches in analyses rooted in ethnography makes it possible to operationalize the concept of moral economy in order to connect the realm of values to the realm of actions.

Social Organization of Work

The research presented in this volume draws primarily on recent investigations of medium- and small-sized firms. Compared to large corporations, we can expect very different forms of moral reasoning and economic activity in smaller companies, as they are more vulnerable in economically

volatile times and places. We are particularly interested in the social organization of work.¹¹ In her ethnography of a Bulgarian glass factory, Dimitra Kofti (2016) pays attention to the changing relations of production and differences in the values held by workers and management respectively. The workers in this example are themselves fragmented by the value regimes of flexible capitalism and ‘situationally draw from different values derived from antagonistic and coexisting moral frameworks’ (Kofti 2016: 438), including values rooted in the family (or what Stephen Gudeman would call the house economy). Like Kofti, the authors in this volume attend to a variety of value regimes, as well as ‘the interplay between self-interest and moral norms, which are both present in all economies’ (*ibid.*). The difference is that the small scale of the enterprises investigated in this collection offers an added focus on social reproduction in that these businesses combine their house economies and business enterprises more intimately and intensely than in large factories, thus making it easier to see clearly how rents are extracted between the different spheres (Gudeman 2016). On the whole, less attention has been paid to the moral dimension of values and actions in such smaller enterprises; here we expect to find blurred boundaries between social and economic obligations, which may be mediated through relations of kinship and informality.

In some ways, however, one can argue that all economies are moral economies (Palomera and Vetta 2016: 419; see also Carrier 2018). Like the socialist communities studied in the collection by Hann and Parry (2018), neoliberal regimes also have their moral values, albeit very different from the norms of working-class solidarity. The morality of neoliberal capitalism has been investigated by Andrea Muehlebach (2012) with reference to reflexive individual subjects, namely voluntary workers in Italy’s Lombardy region. Muehlebach illustrates how the rise of ethical voluntarism has been accompanied by the state’s mass mobilization of selflessness. The rationality of neoliberalism produces ethical citizens, who actively make gifts of their labour to the public. Similar arguments are developed by Berta, Szücs, Rajković and Tereshina in this volume.

Many of the chapters in this volume deal with work relations involving small enterprises, often employing informal practices. They provide examples from countries with diverging historical, political and sociocultural backgrounds. Others have also paid attention to the moral ideas that prevail in workplaces. Michèle Lamont’s work on *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000), for instance, tackles similar questions of self-worth and status. Nevertheless, our approach in this volume pertains more stringently to moral ideas that are developed in action, specifically in work organization and relations. Lamont’s approach covers a broad range of moral ideas that are related to group identities of ‘us’ and ‘others’, of migrant workers, of

people from different classes and ethnic backgrounds and do not necessarily address work-related obligations: this is where we differ from her study.

Comparative Dimensions of Moral Economy at Work

We propose to examine the contributions to this volume as addressing moral economy in work relations along three axes: 1) the individual versus the social level of action in moral economy; this is where Weberian sensitivity to social stratification and competing value spheres could be examined;¹² 2) the role of the state in cultivating or alternatively challenging moral economy; this is where Scott's ideas of resistance to state power could be tested and refined; 3) the role of kinship in the small-scale organization of work and labour; this is where Polanyian ideas and concern with the *oikos* could be followed up and the Durkheimian sense of community could be probed. Through these axes, we hope to show how the concept of 'moral economy' could be reoperationalized around the theme of work.¹³

The *first axis* addressing the individual versus social levels of actions in the moral economy is most clearly addressed in Berta's, Hornig's and Szücs's chapters. Anne-Erita Berta looks at highly skilled and educated middle-class small business owners in Aarhus, Denmark, who fashion their moral selves by 'being good' and 'living good'. She examines how business owners want to be good and how they also link this to living morally, which they frame as going beyond material interests. Even though these desires may pertain to the individual, they nevertheless reflect sociality and the individual's desire to be granted social recognition. Berta argues that these business owners act in moral ways in order to constitute and articulate the values of a moral community. Nevertheless, there are variations in how her interlocutors interpret what being good entails. Her first case, a small baker who produces good-quality but affordable pastries and emphasizes personal satisfaction in one's life and work, shows an affinity with economic values in other modern, highly developed and established welfare state societies, of which Denmark is obviously an example. Her second case, a toy seller, is concerned with selling ethically produced toys, which again is reminiscent of ethical production and consumption regulations found in the European Union. These individual small business owners enact the moral values in Danish society, Berta argues, but they are equally concerned about self-interest and a work-life balance. Hence there is a limit to their being 'good' in the eyes of the society. Berta's discussion of Danish small business owners in several niche economies lends itself to comparative questions concerning human universals. Are the desires for autonomy and the independent work of Burman small business owners in Myanmar,

discussed by Laura Hornig in this volume (see below), at all similar to the desire for a self-fashioned life of moral economy on the part of Danish small business owners, as Berta argues, or to the good employer/retail shop owner, as discussed by Luca Szücs in this volume (see below)?

Laura Hornig's chapter presents another example for discussing this first axis of individual versus the social level of action in moral economy. She examines employer-employee relations in small-scale businesses in Pathein, Myanmar. Here, moral considerations were important in all firms and relationships. The employers emphasized the difficulty of finding suitable and reliable workers; while the employees were looking for 'good employers'. Hornig examines the role of such moral considerations in employee-employer relations by looking at small-scale self-employment; here the high value placed on autonomy seems to be a determining factor in economic action. Using the case study of a water-seller, Hornig shows how this self-employed and uneducated petty trader finds justification for his trade in a range of reasons, from water being pure and essential – and religiously highly valued – to his own independence from a boss, which enhances his moral sense and individual autonomy. Hornig interprets this desire for autonomy as a historically embedded moral value. There are nevertheless a number of pragmatic reasons underlying this desire for autonomy. Self-employment not only means autonomy but also the flexibility to attend to other morally and socially embedded tasks such as kinship obligations. This is 'relational autonomy', as described by Millar (2014), she concludes.

Hornig's discussion of the moral expectations and obligations around work is developed within the framework of recruitment and working conditions, which she examines from the perspective of employers as well as employees, in line with the theme of this volume. She contrasts small businesses with large ones and traces their respective expectations from pre-industrial and pre-migration contexts. As we know from Thompson's and Scott's contributions on moral economy, it is especially in periods of considerable transformations, like Myanmar is currently experiencing, that moral expectations may clash with newly emerging economic realities. Hornig skilfully illustrates how employers and employees pursue their own interests while maintaining their dignity and self-worth. Moral judgements are then part of the value system marked by kinship and religion among other factors, but they also emerge out of work relations.

The employers in Luca Szücs's chapter – like Berta's small business owners – also imagine themselves as morally good, although their criteria for goodness reflect historical comparisons and contemporary relationality. Her chapter focuses on three tobacco shops of a firm in the Hungarian city of Szeged and engages strongly with the web of social relations between employees, employer-owners, shop managers, shop assistants, employees

and customers, studying how the physical setting as well as social background of these people impact the way the relations are established and could develop into moral obligations. In contrast to Szűcs's case, the uneducated and unskilled self-employed in Myanmar described by Hornig (see above) value autonomy and flexibility in their working lives as a high moral good. One can conclude from this comparison that, regardless of social class and level of education, business owners are concerned about their moral image, their self-determination having moral value in terms of economic action. The three cases suggest that business people worldwide share more than we commonly assume, and they are not only guided by their own specific historical and cultural contexts but also have moral ideals that are indeed universal.

Still along the same axis, the social embedding of morality in economic action is a dominant theme in the case discussed by Detelina Tocheva. Her chapter visits yet another context of work and labour organization, in rural Bulgaria. Unpaid collective labour was common in rural communities in Bulgaria, as well as in many other former socialist countries, especially in building a private house. This was a traditional form of free and reciprocal labour exchange. Tocheva shows that this unpaid labour has not disappeared with the end of socialism but has changed by being restricted to a smaller circle of acquaintances and kin. Her approach brings together Carrier's (2018) view of self-interested transactions leading to mutuality with Hann's (2018) intervention and plea concerning moral economy in understanding it rather as a 'moral dimension' and value with shared historical roots. She argues that the actions of the moral economy that surround house construction have deep historical roots and evoke a traditional value as well as having the dynamic effect of transforming mutuality, as Gudeman (2016) has stressed.

The *second axis* of comparison between the contributions in this volume takes up the role of the state in shaping actions in the moral economy. To begin with, Sudeshna Chaki's chapter looks at how small-scale manufacturing firms came into being in Palghar, in provincial India, the vicinity of greater Mumbai. She argues that the Indian state developed policies in order to encourage the emergence of big players; yet examining state policies is not enough in order to understand the variation in industrial development. Certain groups like trading castes or merchant communities seem to have a comparative advantage in being able to follow the path of development 'from trade to industry'. Questioning the role of the supposed 'entrepreneurial spirit' of the first small-scale industrialists in Palghar, Chaki examines the significance of family and community background in amassing the start-up capital. By comparing businessmen with and without such community backgrounds, she discusses the strategies they used to

compensate for the lack of support from kin or the state. Her discussion shows that state support has been crucial in the emergence of small- and medium-sized firms in provincial India. This support was important in accessing capital and other resources, and it gave such business owners an alternative to the support of kin and the community, hence weakening the reliance on kinship morality and the obligations of the moral economy from and towards relatives. Nevertheless, at other stages in the development and expansion of these firms, relations of kinship and community, as well as the need to establish trust in business partnerships, invigorated the moral dimension of economic action, making trust the basis of long-term partnerships with non-kin partners. In Chaki's case study, we see the deep mutual entangling of state and kinship-based solidarities, even though at times they are alternatives to one another in the moral signification of economic relations.

State support or rather expecting state support in the case of a former socialist car factory in Serbia is discussed by Ivan Rajković as omnipresent, rooted in the memory of the socialist state as well as in the actual financial arrangements of the public–private partnership. Rajković first looks at a strike initiated by workers for higher wages, more employment and lower output quotas and follows this up by showing how conflict was negotiated between foreign capital, the Serbian state and local workers (as in public–private partnerships, or PPPs). Using this opening vignette, he is able to bring back the role of the state into the articulation of moral economy, as in E.P. Thompson's original study of the English poor in the eighteenth century. Thompson explored the moral outrage against the unjust grain prices that emerged from the accumulating change of relations of production, price and distribution in which the state's policies played a decisive role. Similarly, in Rajković's example of the public–private partnership in the car factory, the outrage was directed against not only capital but also the state as the mediator between labour and capital. With this PPP, not only do the funding mechanisms change but the role of the authorities is also redefined; the former paternalist firm now finds it possible to distance itself from its past obligations, such as providing accommodation for workers. The public good can thus come to be interpreted as pertaining to different national, common or étatist principles. Rajković sees PPPs as not only blurring but also misrecognizing 'the connection between state governance and private profiteering, patriotic policies and business ethics'. He contends that moral obligations are split in PPPs such that the private part becomes the 'immoral' part, while the public part is still associated with obligations. That is, the latter is re-moralized.

What does Rajković's study of the afterlife of the car factory tell us about the relevance of moral obligations in the organization of labour? Even if this

case seems to be very different from the organization of family labour in small firms, it is highly relevant for understanding state intervention in the relationship between capital and labour and hence brings in the Polanyian perspective as well as the question of scale. In large firms, informal arrangements of care and protection are uncommon. Nevertheless, as we can see in this chapter, demands for protection may be historically embedded in the socialist legacy of labour or rather selective memories of it, which may evoke claims of a moral economy that was even more transparent and less obscure in the socialist past. This reminds the reader that it is not only in small firms but also in such earlier large-scale car factories that the notion of ‘job inheritance’ – that is, employing workers who are the descendants and kin of existing or former workers – could develop historically into a moral claim and obligation. In comparison, Szűcs’s discussion of the Hungarian state and its economic role in the small-scale retail sector also suggests strong memories of the socialist state, yet weak state presence in contemporary times, as the state only enforces certain laws – laws that can, to a certain degree, be circumvented by the employers.

The third case for the *second axis* comes from the Russian Federation. Daria Tereshina’s chapter offers a similarly intriguing discussion of the role of the state, here in relation to the small-scale garment manufacturing industry in Smolensk, where textile and linen manufacturing were important during the Soviet period. Like Chaki, she is concerned with questions related to the life cycles and developmental trajectories of small firms. Where does their starting capital come from? What kinds of strategies are available to owners of small firms when they have to struggle with global market pressures? Lidia Alekseevna, the small firm owner whose life and firm biographies Tereshina unravels, acquired her initial capital during the Soviet era. Like many other new business people in the late socialist and early post-socialist periods, Alekseevna grabbed property from a former socialist enterprise and used her socialist connections to establish her business as in the ‘*komsomol* economy’, an economy of favours, using shared knowledge, power networks and her access to resources. Alekseevna justifies her own ‘scrambling for resources’ as still upholding the Soviet moral ideal of building a ‘better future’, an ideal that stayed with her throughout the crisis years. She has tried to cope with post-socialist deindustrialization and the global financial crisis by diversifying her production through subcontracting (and keeping her workers, albeit in fewer numbers and at lower pay) and maintaining her own (and her daughter’s) aspirations to creativity by producing fancy dresses, which does not bring in any financial profit but increases her own ‘sense of agency’. Tereshina explores, in a rich and sensitive way, how Alekseevna’s work and production strategies could have different readings: being rooted in individual subjective morality but also

in the Soviet-style moral ideal of doing something good for the community and Russian cultural ideals of ‘resistance’ (by referring to the ‘Russian soul’ and having a ‘deeper sense of things’), to being a more straightforward strategy of resisting global economic pressures (by producing cheaper but also lower quality goods). Even from the perspective of one entrepreneur, activities within the moral economy could have multiple reference points of varying temporal and spatial depths.

Further comparisons along the *second axis* of the state’s role in moral economy are due here. In Tereshina’s example, as in the Serbian case, the state is reclaimed – for having been developmentalist-cum-moral in the socialist past – yet distanced as well for being neoliberal and corrupt. The business owners in her case refashion their morality in certain essentialist and culturalist ways, as well as practise the individualist positionality of being temporally both ‘inside and outside the system’ of this state-cum-global political economy. They are therefore unlike Berta’s small business owners in Denmark (even if similar in their search for creativity), who are active in their niche economies. Berta’s interlocutors (see above) transcend the state through their individual moral aspirations even while benefiting from a strong and controlling welfare state. They distance themselves from this state, accusing it of being on the side of big capital and industry and of having become fully integrated into a globalized consumption economy where one’s own good-quality ethical products do not receive as much support as they should. Hence, they choose to be agents themselves in a moral economy in which they lead ethically good lives, produce in morally responsible ways and enhance the moral economy of their community even if understating the role of the state in it.

Hornig’s chapter raises many questions related to the existence of a welfare state and the implementation of labour laws. In the absence of these, work relations in Myanmar seem to depend on the individual responsibility of employers making moral judgements, as well as employees demanding morally responsible behaviour from their employers. However, their sole bargaining power remains their ability to walk away from less attractive jobs if alternative jobs are available. Finally, the rural Bulgarians discussed by Tocheva, even though they are dependent on state support and regulations in organizing a house construction, their ideal regarding the significance of building a house with unpaid labour has historical and social roots, emphasizing the community and the reciprocal sociality within it.

The *third axis* pertains to the role kinship plays in the organization of work and labour. Deniz’s and Chaki’s contributions both extensively explore the moral obligations of kinship and communal relationships and discuss the strength of these ties and obligations in imbuing the organiza-

tion of production and labour with morality and moral discourse. Briefly to Ceren Deniz's chapter: she focuses on the morality of kinship in medium-size firms in Çorum, a city in Anatolia. Modernization theories, following Max Weber's legacy but particularly Talcott Parsons' works, problematized kinship and relatedness as hindering the establishment of rational bureaucratic procedures in institutions, including economic ones. Yet kinship-based recruitment and promotion in workplaces have been universally acknowledged to exist, including in developed capitalist economies and modern societies. Deniz places her discussion in the context of the dilemma firms face between kinship-based recruitment being a widely acknowledged 'problem' and traditional familism being a strategy in innovative small firms. Her view of the persistence of kinship-based morality in recruitment and work relations is reminiscent of Raymond Firth's (1964) discussion of the emergence of a new morality in modern industrial and economic systems of the twentieth century. Firth refers to the morality of the developmentalist era, when resisting industrialization and progress was seen as morally wrong (1964: 184). However, he too was sceptical about how new this morality was, concluding that human intellectual curiosity had been always guided by moral thoughts and that 'morality in action' is essentially about making choices on the basis of moral ideals we already have (*ibid.*: 185).

The assumed distinction between moral ideas in industrial and pre-industrial societies respectively has been critically addressed by Sylvia Yanagisako, whom Deniz follows closely. Like Yanagisako (2002), Deniz challenges the taken for granted stability of kinship morality in employee-employer relationships, especially the assumption that if employees and/or employers are kin the morality of kinship will spill over into the economic relationship and necessarily work for the benefit of the employer, who can then exploit their employed relatives. Her example of a factory in Çorum shows that relations of kinship can be a burden to the employer as well, or that they can be interpreted differently, while the morality involved can be short-term or long-term, as Maurice Bloch (1973) argued many decades ago. Employers play down or deny the existence of relatives working in their factory, while employees who are their relatives reject their broad classification as kin and emphasize that being an employed relative is a status that needs to be earned and that requires diligence and loyalty working for the firm. Hence, moral obligations and expectations need to be defined in context and through negotiations over kinship and labour relations. Deniz's chapter skilfully unravels the morality of relations of kinship, showing how they are embedded in the economy as part of the normative system. The moral considerations can, however, occasionally be discarded when the firm's interests are in jeopardy. Nevertheless, moral understand-

ing of kinship and the way this gets reflected on to the firm resonates the historically defined broader understandings of status, hierarchy and reciprocity in Turkish society, similar to what Hann (2018) argues in relation to deeply rooted notions of work and their moral value in Hungary.

In Chaki's case study from India, kin became relevant in the later stages of firm development in the sense that when partnerships with non-kin ended firms' owners preferred to bring in their own kinsmen and kins-women to share ownership. Similarly, in partnerships with non-kin, economic relations gave rise to moral obligations, which cannot solely be explained by market rationality or individual profit-seeking. Her discussion shows how small-scale businessmen in provincial India have to navigate between different factors promoting or hindering firm development, at times extending the morality of market relations beyond their capitalist assumptions, especially when relations of trust are being forged.

In the primarily small-scale enterprises that the contributions to this volume engage with, one would expect a morality of kinship – in the sense of favouring kin over others in payment and recruitment and/or expecting kin to inherit the firm – to be fairly constant. Yet we find that Hornig's case contradicts this assumption, as Burman small-scale business owners in Myanmar do not want to employ close kin (apart from spouses) and equally clearly do not want their children to become involved in the same firm, let alone inherit it. In Deniz's case of medium-size firms in Anatolia, although they observe the expectation that they should employ their relatives, employers have different short- and long-term expectations of close and distant kin respectively. Also, these relations of kinship are open to interpretation, being seen as unmodern and against economic rationality (because they contradict merit-based recruitment) or because being a relative is a status that needs to be earned. Tocheva's rural example demonstrates similar variations in moral expectations; close kin are no longer recruited on the basis of a generalized reciprocity in the provision of unpaid labour, but of social pressure (i.e. being close), as well as being justified as a system of trust in the informal economy of post-socialist transformation. Szűcs's example from tobacco shop employees illustrates how kin relations could be a subject of paternalist care by employers; that they protect jobs when employees become ill and have to as single parents provide for their families. Here, it is the employer who cares and protects the employee (and her kin) and not the state laws, even if these exist. Rajković's example of the relevance of kinship is probably the most surprising, given its large-scale context of industrial PPP in car production. Kinship remains a stable context of moral expectations – this time, however, on the part of management – namely that relatives should inherit jobs in the car factory as they did in the socialist past.

Lale Yalçın-Heckmann is a senior researcher at Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, professor at the Martin Luther University, both in Halle/Saale and docent at the University of Pardubice, the Czech Republic. She is the author of *Tribe and Kinship among the Kurds* (Peter Lang, 1990), co-editor (together with Bruce Grant) of *Caucasus Paradigms: Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area* (LIT Publishers, 2007) and author of *The Return of Private Property: Rural Life after Agrarian Reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan* (LIT Publishers, 2010). Her most recent research is about the moral and cultural economy of the fragrant rose and rose oil industry in Isparta, Turkey.

Notes

I would like to thank Chris Hann, Ceren Deniz, Samuel Williams and Berghahn's anonymous reviewers for their critique and suggestions on the earlier version. They have helped me to improve my thoughts; I alone, however, am responsible for the remaining deficits. The work for this chapter has been funded by the European Research Council (Grant Agreement no. 340854, REALEURASIA).

1. *The Economist* called this 'the most dramatic extension of state power since the second world war'. *The Economist*, 28 March 2020, p. 10.
2. Before the pandemic, the moral dimension of the economy was omnipresent in public discussions; for example, when a conglomerate like Siemens was criticized for the ecological consequences of its support for the Australian coal industry. The company's policy was challenged not only by media commentators but also by shareholders for being morally dubious and doing ecologically damaging deals. See the article and comment by Thomas Fromm, 'Siemens: das falsche Signal' and 'Kleiner Auftrag, großer Ärger' in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 January 2020; also Marc Beise, 'Konzerne und Moral: Saubere Geschäfte' and 'Jetzt auch Ärger mit Aktionären' in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 January 2020.
3. Abend (2014) places the moral reasoning of firms firmly in the moral background of business ethics. For more specific discussions of corporate social responsibility, see Garsten and Hernes (2009) and Pitluck (2009).
4. We diverge here from other works on moral economy that have focused on markets, ethics and consumption, see for instance Browne and Milgram (2009), Carrier and Luetchford (2012), Makovicky and Henig (2017), Mandel and Humphrey (2002).
5. For a broad contextualization of Thompson's and Polanyi's arguments and those of their contemporaries, primarily economists, see Rogan (2017).
6. His 1971 journal article 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' as well as his 'The Moral Economy Reviewed' are chapters of this book.
7. References to Fassin's work are to the online English version of his 2009 publication.
8. For another look at Thompson's and Scott's respective uses of moral economy but with a new focus on contemporary peasant economies and their global connections, see Edelman (2005).

9. Hann, who provides a detailed summary of Fassin's essay, criticizes this plurality. See Hann (2018: 229–30). Fassin is aware, however, that Thompson's renunciation of the concept is related primarily to this understanding of the moral economy in plural terms.
10. I owe this point to Sam Williams.
11. In comparison to the volume edited by Hann and Parry (2018), for instance, the focus here is on the social organization and moral dimension of work relations in smaller settings, and not on class and precarity in large industrial settings, as in their volume. For another similarly useful edited volume where workplace ethnographies, gendered lives and social relations beyond workplaces are discussed, see Narotzky and Goddard (2017).
12. See also Terpe (2018) for a critical discussion of Weber's spheres of value.
13. I thank Sam Williams for pointing out these broader connections.

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