

C H R I S H A N N

## *Moral(ity and) Economy*

### *Work, Workfare, and Fairness in Provincial Hungary<sup>1</sup>*

#### Abstract

The relationship between morality and economy has been muddied in the course of disciplinary specialization. While dominant paradigms in economics abstract from the moral dimension, recent approaches to morality and ethics in anthropology neglect the material economy. E. P. Thompson's "moral economy" has been an influential bridging concept in recent decades, but recent inflationary usage has highlighted shortcomings. Following an overview of the disciplinary debates, the moral dimension of economic life is illustrated in this paper with reference to *work as a value* between the late 19th and early 21st centuries in Hungary. Contemporary workfare is explored with local examples. It is shown how discourses of work and fairness are being extended into new ethical registers to justify negative attitudes towards a new category of migrants.

*Keywords:* Economic anthropology; Hungary; Migrants; Moral Economy; Max Weber; Populism; Work; Workfare.

#### *Introduction: across the disciplinary trenches*

The production of knowledge in the contemporary social sciences differs greatly from ancient traditions of moral philosophical

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Chris HANN, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale [hann@eth.mpg.de]

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reflection on how the pursuit of wealth contributes to “human flourishing” (Aristotle) or “people satisfaction” (Confucius) [Lin, Peach and Fang 2014]. We owe the word economy to Classical Greece, and in particular Aristotle’s exploration of the well-managed, ideally self-sufficient *oikos*, but its meaning has been transformed in recent centuries [Hann and Hart 2011]. Those in the modern mainstream consider their discipline to be a branch of science rather than of philosophy. Their task is to lay out the mechanisms of “the economy” objectively, without reference to their own moral values and political preferences, abstracting from socio-cultural contexts. The values of those investigated are generally bracketed out, to be studied by other academic specializations (generally considered “soft” in comparison with the hard rigor of economics).

But some heterodox economists reach out creatively to other social sciences. The communitarian “I & We” paradigm of Amitai Etzioni [1988] was a notable example, but the zone of engagement remains muddled and the labels are frequently confusing. A good deal of cultural political economy or cultural economic sociology, or economic anthropology, endeavors to apply models derived from economics (such as the “new institutionalism”) to recalcitrant socio-cultural data. There are significant differences in national traditions: property rights theory and efficiency models are more prominent in the Anglosphere, while French scholars have traditionally paid more attention to the relative autonomy of non-economic variables and to moral justifications of economic practices [Boltanski and Chiapello 2005]. But sometimes it is the other way around. Sociologist Michel Callon was taken to task (perhaps unfairly) by the anthropologist Danny Miller [2002] for allegedly accepting the premise that decision-taking in modern markets is disembedded, in other words that calculating agents can be “disentangled” from their social relationships and culturally specific values and aspirations.

The larger theoretical issues have been central to economic anthropology since the emergence of this interdisciplinary field in the middle of the last century. Embeddedness was a key term of Karl Polanyi [1944; 1957]. It has given rise to a large and somewhat confusing literature [Beckert 2009]. Polanyi himself did not make matters easier by introducing a dichotomy between traditional social orders, in which economic activity was embedded holistically in society, and the modern situation in which market exchange is the dominant “form of integration”. He came close to arguing (and many of his “substantivist followers did argue) that there was little scope for

socio-cultural analysis of such economies, since the “economistic fallacy” had become a reality. Miller [2002] expressed the protest that a majority of contemporary anthropologists would endorse. What changes with the rise of the “market principle” is the new prevalence of an abstract economic ideology; but for Miller this is merely a “culture of representation”; in practice, agents’ social relationships and moral values remain crucial for understanding economic behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Miller concludes that the expansion of a market ideology in our age should not be confused with the traction of a market logic in understanding and explaining economic behaviour. What counts, what the economic anthropologist (or sociologist) can illuminate, is the agents’ “larger sense of value,” which can never be reduced to price.

Karl Polanyi emphasized institutional contexts and paid relatively little attention to the moral dimension of embeddedness. However, his substantivism can be renewed in such a way as to recognize the importance of both values and ideologies for the study of a community’s economic life [Wilk 1996]. One obvious step is to return to Max Weber, whose concern to grasp value-based social action has long been applauded by economic anthropologists [Billig 2000]. Weber contrasted values that are ends in themselves with means-ends “instrumental rationality.” His analysis of “value spheres” and their relation to the “life order” was suggestive, but never fully developed.<sup>3</sup> The resurgence of interest in morality and ethics in anthropology in recent years has neglected this work, along with the broader Weberian agenda to connect changes in value spheres (especially in the sphere of religion) to changes in economy. Rather, the discipline that has historically specialized in the empirical analysis of more or less cohesive communities has moved away from classical sociological theorizing to focus on an ethics which resonates with new theories of individual subjectivity and personhood. But these anthropologists have so far paid relatively little attention to the domain of economy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Miller and Callon agree that the ideology of economics has gained dramatically in strength in recent decades, and that this process (which the former terms “virtualism” and the latter approaches with a concept of “performativity”) has real consequences in terms of bureaucratization and “audit culture”. Yet they differ in their assessments of the political implications as well as epistemologically. For Miller, the projection of abstract economic optimizing behaviour is merely a “ritualized expression” or “beguiling myth”. In reality agents make decisions

in “totalising” ways, and Callon is dismissed as a “quintessential economist” [2002: 231] for positing a domain free of entanglements.

<sup>3</sup> Weber’s most celebrated contribution is *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. His key programmatic text concerning the value sphere was written only later, still with a focus on religion (Weber 2009). It was never integrated into his contrasting of *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität* (1978). See Terpe 2016.

<sup>4</sup> See Fassin 2012, Keane 2016.

In short, communication across the evolved disciplinary boundaries (economics, sociology and anthropology) is unsatisfactory. In the first part of this paper I explain why the concept of “moral economy” does not solve this impasse. In the empirical sections which follow, based on case materials from Hungary, I set out an alternative approach to what I call, following Etzioni, the moral dimension of economy.

### *Moral economy*

In recent decades the most conspicuous tool in efforts to bridge the chasm between morality and economy has been the concept of “moral economy.” Norbert Götz [2015] has surveyed its multifarious usages since the era in which this coupling first became thinkable, as the pendant of political economy. Prior to the 18th century there was no notion of economy as a *thing*, a rather important and complex thing in a rapidly developing commercial society, comprising the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. With the onset of industrialization the meaning of economy shifted, though not all at once, and not in all milieus. The ensuing ambiguities are still prevalent today. To *economise* connotes sensible household management, a usage that Aristotle would recognize. But he would be puzzled by methodological individualism, the approach through which utilitarian philosophers paved the way for the modern discipline of economics, which largely excludes politics (not to mention anthropology and sociology, addressing subjects that Aristotle would have subsumed under politics).

Early uses of moral economy are obscure and of interest primarily to historians of Christian theology (as in “moral economy of the deity”). Götz notes a sermon at the University of Cambridge in 1729. By the end of the eighteenth century the coupling is being applied in secular contexts, with links to benevolence and later to crime statistics (for which it is a synonym). The Chartist James Bronterre O’Brien used it in a way akin to that of E.P. Thompson in his celebrated contributions more than a century later [Thompson 1963; 1971; 1991]. The English historian argued against reductionist materialist explanations, notably of “bread riots”. His interest lay in society as a moral entity - the premise of the discipline of sociology, above all in its French tradition. Didier Fassin, one of the most productive

contributors to recent debates about moral economy, criticizes Thompson for precisely this [Fassin 2009]. He prefers the approach of James Scott [1976], interpreting Scott's emphasis on a "subsistence ethic" as opening up to a fluid approach to *values*, as distinct from Thompson's more sociological stress on "norms and obligations."

In his own review of the recent literature, Fassin includes a long list to illustrate how the concept has been trivialized through its faddish application to almost everything. However, historian of science Lorraine Daston is excluded from this dismissive list. Her call in 1995 for more attention to the values and emotions of scientific communities engaged only marginally with socio-political dimensions and not at all with economy in the familiar material sense. Conceding that this use of moral economy might be nothing more than "lexical coincidence," Fassin nonetheless applauds it and contrasts Daston to both Thompson and Scott. He then proposes a middle way between these three authors (even if no simple synthesis is possible). If Daston's insights are added to those of the social historian (Thompson) and the political scientist cum anthropologist (Scott), we shall be in a position to take the moral dimension seriously. Fassin's ensuing definition of moral economy mimics a famous definition of "political economy" by Jean-Baptiste Say: "we will consider moral economy to be the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space" [Fassin 2009: 15].<sup>5</sup> Fassin concedes that this approach to moral economy emphasizes the adjective rather than the noun: by stressing norms, values and emotions the concept loses its "original strictly economic dimension" [*ibid.*: 22]. But he considers this to be a price worth paying and concludes that the path is now open for "an ethnography of moral economies in modern societies" and thus in turn for a politically grounded "anthropology of moral economies."

Addressing the concept myself a few years ago, before the recent stock-takings of Fassin and Götz, my basic criticism of Thompson was similar to that levelled by Götz. Thompson's emphasis on popular resistance to price-making markets at the onset of industrialization was too specific. It could not even be generalized to other European economies undergoing a comparable transition. In Hungary under socialism the moral basis of the rural community included the values

<sup>5</sup> English translations and page references to Fassin's article are reproduced from the version available in the internet (last accessed on 23 September 2016): URL : [www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-2009-6-page-1237.htm](http://www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-2009-6-page-1237.htm).

of private property and a market in land [Hann 2010]. It is moreover problematic to generalise about the values of any stratified community, especially one implicated in overt class warfare. In short, moral economy is an unsatisfactory, “clumpish” term (to use an adjective applied by Thompson himself [1991: 13] to the concept of culture). My objection to Fassin is simpler: economy is not merely downplayed in his clearing of the conceptual bush: it is so completely bowdlerized as to become meaningless. When he proclaims that “At least, moral economy is moral” [Fassin 2009: 15], “economy” might as well be dropped altogether. One might just as well refer to a moral system, framework, climate, or “background” [Abend 2014]. Since a communitarian bias is the main common denominator of most if not all of the research inspired by Thompson, why not speak simply of a moral *community*?

As Norbert Götz argues, the dominant Thompsonian usage implies not just a specific politics (anti-capitalist) but a specific moment in global economic history. Moral economy is not a concept that has been deployed in the analysis of sharing or pooling among hunter-gatherers, or gift exchange among horticulturalists. It becomes relevant long after the emergence of “commodity economies” [Gregory 1982], at the point when, in highly differentiated societies, a normative consensus among certain groups concerning basic entitlements is threatened by an expansion of the market principle. Götz is sympathetic to sociologists who would extend the concept beyond this encounter, e.g. by applying it to the inter-generational contracts that underpin developed welfare states. Having criticized the specificities of Thompson’s usage, however, he then undermines his own logical critique by proposing to restrict it in a different way: to civil society in the sense of third-sector initiatives and “humanitarianism.” Fassin himself has moved in this direction in his empirical work. Whereas the latter continues to engage with politics by “articulating” different scales of analysis between the local and the global, Götz ends up seeking common ground with behavioural economists. He suggests deploying moral economy “as a concept to illuminate such key features of economic allocation as are motivated by ideational, rather than material expectations of personal gain” [2015: 148].

Others, more sympathetic to Thompson’s political critique, have argued for retaining the concept by privileging the ideational in a quite different way. Palomera and Vetta [2016] highlight the congruence between moral economy and the Polanyian concept of embeddedness. They recommend pluralizing the concept on the premise that all

groups and classes have conflicting patterns of moral reasoning, which they see as emerging from the course of capital accumulation. From this perspective the investigation of moral economies blends into the analysis of Gramscian cultural hegemony and, in a further step, ideology [Narotzky 2016]. As an *approach*, this proposal to extend the range of the original moral economists [Thompson and Scott] is attractive. Unlike Didier Fassin, Palomera and Vetta maintain tight links to the material political economy. But what remains of “moral economy” as a *concept* when it is stretched in this way?

In contrast to the creative adaptations recommended by these various authors, I argue in this paper that the time has come to discard the concept altogether as a clumpish reification. Didier Fassin protects himself against such a charge when he notes that “moral economies are unstable or at least fluid realities traversed by tensions and contradictions, since conflicts of emotions and values oppose as much as they divide social groups, but are also subject to change and negotiations, according to circumstances and configurations” [2009: 21]. But is economic life really as unstable as this implies? Following Etzioni, I prefer to recognize a *moral dimension* in the sense of a collective and systemic basis in long-term shared values. (By contrast ethics, which in the anthropological literature is increasingly deployed as the more general term, emphasizes fluidity and tends to place individuals rather than cohesive collectivities at the centre of the analysis.) This approach is consistent with the Weberian framework that, although it privileges individuals, still allows for recognition of resilient dominant values that facilitate societal integration.

In the following sections I shall demonstrate how the persistence of a crucial value pertaining to the sphere of the economy integrates the value sphere of provincial Hungarians, and how this is nowadays manipulated by political actors. My aim is to connect “the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments” with changes in the material economy. I do so by focusing on the activity of work, which is central to economy everywhere (even if its forms differ greatly and not all persons need perform it). I examine work as a value in rural Hungary, drawing both on secondary literature and field research in a village that I have known for 40 years. A key feature of the present economic conjuncture in Hungary is the attempt to address unemployment (the lack of paid work) through workfare. I distinguish two phases in these schemes, in the more recent of which an earlier moral consensus in the community is breaking down. Through a multi-scalar “articulation” approach of the kind advocated

by Fassin [2009], I then show how politicians have responded by shifting the ground to identify new scapegoats. Work as a dominant value remains unquestioned and this is manipulated by power holders as they seek to bolster their declining legitimacy by displacing attention away from local workfare schemes toward an aggressive anti-immigration campaign on a national and European scale.

### *Work in rural Hungary*

Work, broadly understood as goal-directed activity to secure survival and reproduction, is a universal feature of economy. As such, it can be studied in all human societies, including those which lack a clear concept of economy and which do not separate in their thinking the time of work from the time of leisure [Spittler 2016]. The performance of work involves complex patterns of interaction with artifacts and environments in which many factors extraneous to a narrow calculus based on principles such as “least effort” play a part. Work figures prominently in social imaginings of the economy and is often the prime object of moral sentiments. It was a central topic of investigation for anthropology and adjacent fields on the eve of the fieldwork revolution, especially in the German-speaking world, where scholars sought to explain why the members of “primitive societies” toiled as they did, often communally, without distinguishing between work and magic [Spittler 2008]. In recent generations, however, this vital activity has attracted less attention from economic anthropologists than other aspects of economy, such as consumption, exchange and finance.<sup>6</sup>

The peasantry of preindustrial Hungary exemplifies the centrality of physical effort in the moral order of the Christian rural community, where hard work was commonly represented as an end in itself in Max

<sup>6</sup> This is a sweeping statement which needs some qualification. The latest edition of James Carrier’s *Handbook of Economic Anthropology* [Carrier 2012] devotes two of its 38 chapters to “Labour” and “Industrial work”. Both contributions (by E. Paul Durrenberger and Jonathan Parry respectively) provide excellent reviews. However, reflecting the way the field has developed, the authors have more to say about themes such as social class, industrial relations, the welfare state and the informal sector than about the

immediate *experience* of work, as studied by Gerd Spittler [2016], or about the labour theory of value and alienation as explored in decades of neo-Marxist work, or about *work as a value* in the Weberian sense developed in this paper. Work does not feature prominently in Katherine Browne’s [2009] theorizing of a “moral sphere” or in other contributions to this recent collection devoted to anthropological approaches to the links between morality and economy [Browne and Milgram 2009].



Weber's sense. Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer [1969; 1972] collected rich ethnographic materials from Átány, a Calvinist village on the Great Hungarian Plain, on the eve of socialist collectivization. Dedication to the soil was a measure of the moral person. The goal was by no means maximum self-exploitation but rather something akin to Aristotelian sufficiency and a proud satisfaction in the proper tilling of the fields according to the rhythm of the seasons and custom.<sup>7</sup> Fél and Hofer quote a peasant called Ferenc Orbán:

It is fine to be in the fields, to work there; one is drawn outside by his desire. This is my favorite work. I was born into it, I grew up in it, I would like to do it as long as I live [1969: 58].

At the same time, the ethnographers noted pronounced inequalities in this rural society. The moral principle of work implied a peasant meritocracy, but this was undermined by another value, that of private property. Many Átány villagers were landless, or lacked sufficient acreage and other resources to become self-sufficient "proper peasants". Whereas sociological analysts might speak of class differences and exploitation, the villagers themselves (according to their ethnographers, perhaps biased toward the well-to-do among their interlocutors) emphasized the commonality of values. The poorly endowed and the landless were more likely to consume alcohol to excess, in which case there was agreement that they alone were responsible for their misfortunes.

These rich descriptions by native ethnographers were augmented a generation later by the neo-Marxist account of US anthropologist/sociologist Martha Lampland [1995]. Although based primarily on field research carried out in the early 1980s in Sárosd, a Catholic village in Western Hungary, this study too digs deep into the past. Whereas Fél and Hofer present an idealized account of work in "traditional society," Lampland outlines a more dynamic model. She emphasizes how the moral significance of work as "possessing activity" changed from the late 19th century onwards with the consolidation of a capitalist economy. In the immediate wake of feudalism, according to Lampland, work did not yet take the form of *labour*. By the inter-war decades, however, "labor property" had become the basis of a capitalist agrarian economy, as well as the yardstick of social value and moral esteem. Lampland downplays the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Malinowski [1935] on the "practical work" of the good gardener in the Trobriand Islands, who achieved social recognition

through effort and skill in much the same way as the proper peasant of Átány.

importance of landownership (surprisingly in view of the fact that the community of Sárosd was characterized by large manorial estates until the 1940s). The “proper peasants” were an even smaller minority in this settlement complex than they were in Átány. Lampland notes that strict discipline and even physical violence were required to make the manorial servants and day-labourers work with a modicum of efficiency; she does not apply the concept of “moral economy” but it is even harder here than in Átány to imagine that the rural proletariat perceived and valued their work in the same way as their more prosperous neighbours.

Lampland argues that the process of labour commodification continued in the socialist era, especially after 1957 when the Communist Party sought new ways to bolster its fragile legitimacy. Collectivization severed the value of labour from property. In the new technocratic hierarchies of the collective farm, remuneration was calculated according to time rather than “work-unit”. During the last decades of socialism, thanks to an innovative symbiosis between large-scale socialist units and village households, the Hungarian countryside prospered as never before [Hann 1980, Swain 1985]. Different forms of calculation persisted in the household sector, along with the old respect for hard manual work. In the last decades of socialism, however, the idea of work as an end in itself weakened with the emergence of a new concept of leisure, especially among the young. For male and female villagers alike, the consumerist accumulation of goods was the end, and time meant money. In this way, according to Lampland, by the 1980s the commodification of labour was completed under a nominally Marxist-Leninist regime. Wealth was accumulated, many new houses were built, and a highly stratified peasantry previously excluded from the national society was effectively integrated into it, on a much more egalitarian basis than hitherto.

This accomplishment of integration via a resilient rural household sector was paradoxical, since it took place under a regime that was ideologically committed to the expansion of collective production, industrial methods of farming, and the supremacy of the urban working class. Collectivization went against the grain of the norms and values of the majority of the rural population. In this sense, the flourishing of the material economy was out of synchrony with the moral dimension: older villagers bemoaned the loss of their private property rights; they criticized both the proliferation of bookkeepers and other white-collar employees in the new collective farms and the excessive staffing and low levels of performance of their manual

work-brigades. But overall, there was considerable harmony between material efflorescence and the moral dimension, thanks to continuity with a dominant value. The “second economy” of late socialist Hungary was full of dubious dealing and moral aspersions, but the great majority of participants, especially in the rural sector, owed their successful accumulation to their own strong work ethic, which usually had a practical, physical dimension.

Contrary to analysts who exaggerate the boundary between public and private spheres, Lampland argues that an economic utilitarianism prevailed in both. She also plays down the differences between socialism and capitalism, arguing that the former is better considered as an “eccentric” form of the latter [1995: 15]. The muddying of the moral dimension was reflected in discourses of corruption and in everyday pressures to put the welfare of one’s family before that of the collective (in the past the family had been prioritized vis-à-vis the manor in a similar way). To siphon off collective goods and to “slough off” during one’s official working time were tolerated up to a point, but public opinion condemned farm leaders who were considered to take *too much* for themselves. Through all this, work remained unchallenged as the foundation of social value, with a bias to its manual forms. There was a basic congruence between the Marxist-Leninist ideological focus on the value of labour and the evolved peasant work ethic. Propaganda campaigns condemned workers who flitted from one job to another (*vándormadarak*—literally “migrant birds”). Those who failed to show a registered workplace at all were classified as *közveszélyes munkakerülők* (literally “publicly dangerous shirkers”). They could expect to receive a 28 day jail sentence to encourage them to mend their ways.

By the time Lampland’s study was published, further far-reaching changes had taken place in the Hungarian countryside. The land was privatized and socialist institutions rapidly dismantled [Swain 2013]. Most villagers, especially the elderly, approved of the restoration of private ownership, on moral grounds [Hann 1993]. They criticized the concessions made to economic rationality in the decollectivization legislation, notably the failure to return land to owners in its original boundaries. Before long, however, villagers began to realize that, without the socialist synthesis, the economic prospects for the rural population as a whole were bleak. Some of those who had previously opposed the socialist institutions for emotional and ideological reasons now conceded (at least privately) that without some sort of collective agent the household sector would not be able to retain its vitality. The

eventual demise of the latter was due to a combination of factors, including the abundance of cheap imported foodstuffs in foreign-owned supermarket chains. The “dumping” of subsidized products from western and southern Europe undermined the basis of the petty commodity production that had brought wealth to the countryside in the late socialist decades. It led many households to give up raising animals and growing vegetables, even for subsistence purposes, since the same items could now be acquired cheaply in the stores. The moral satisfaction which accompanied decollectivization was thus followed by years of great uncertainty and discontent. Meanwhile, in the cities, in the course of the privatization frenzy the link between wealth and practical work weakened even more dramatically. Even in villages, some individuals succeeded in amassing fortunes through shady dealings, while the majority struggled to maintain the income levels to which they had become accustomed in the preceding decades.

The lack of congruence or synchrony between the dimensions of morality and economic effort was a continuation of that noted above for the socialist era, but now in reverse form. The concept of moral economy is clumpish and unhelpful in grasping this transformation. Private property, a key value of the evolved peasantry, was re-established, but respect for hard physical work clashed with the new order, in which the market was now the dominant “form of integration” in Polanyi’s [1957] sense. In contrast to the socialist era, many young people nowadays have little hope of finding jobs in the village or the wider region. Since EU admission in 2004 they are as likely to fetch up in London or Dublin as in Budapest. Those who remain at home have improved access to television and the internet, but the work ethic of the socialist era has been definitively subverted. Many of the well-equipped houses built in the socialist period are now up for sale, at give-away prices that barely cover the costs of their raw materials.

The continued importance of work as a value with sensitive political implications is reflected in the public attention paid to the unemployment rate (a statistic that did not exist under socialism). One way to reduce unemployment (a highly desirable goal for the ruling party, especially in the run-up to an election) is to create new jobs through public works programmes.<sup>8</sup> In line with similar schemes to

<sup>8</sup> Other ways to address increasing inequities in the availability and remuneration of work in a neoliberal globalized economy by generating new forms of mutuality and social protection have been examined in Italy by

Muehlbach [2012], who emphasizes volunteering and develops the concept of “ethical citizenship”, and in South Africa by Ferguson [2015], who analyses cash distribution to the poor by the state.

reform welfare entitlements in advanced capitalist states, provision for workfare (*közmunka*) was introduced in Hungary in the 1990s. These provisions were first activated on a significant scale in 2009 by the Hungarian Socialist Party as part of a conscious policy (called “Road to Work”) to tackle unemployment and decentralize welfare responsibilities. By this time it was already clear that the right-of-centre Fidesz party of Viktor Orbán would win an overwhelming victory at the general election of 2010.

The new government was able (with some justification) to represent the country’s dire economic situation as the consequence of a bungled transition in which liberals and socialists alike had lost sight of traditional values while shamelessly lining their own pockets. Orbán placed particular emphasis on work as the supreme value, highlighting its uplifting moral effects in his rhetoric and frequently identifying Gypsies (Roma) as the indolent “other” of the naturally industrious and virtuous Magyar.<sup>9</sup> From 2011 onwards the Fidesz-led government simultaneously expanded workfare programmes and slashed unemployment benefits, leaving local government officials to pick up the pieces as best they could.

While free market economists tend to deplore workfare for its distorting of labour markets, critical social scientists are more likely to view it as a disciplinary intervention on the part of the state to sustain the conditions of neoliberal exploitation [Peck 2001; Wacquant 2012]. There is general agreement among analysts in Hungary that the programmes have had little success in meeting their ostensible goal of retraining workers for the regular labour market.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, Orbán’s party has adhered to its vision. Following another election victory in 2014, workfare programmes were greatly expanded. The official rate of unemployment has continued to fall. Critics allege that the huge numbers nowadays employed in *közmunka* represent

<sup>9</sup> Similar schemes in neighbouring Slovakia in the same period led to a “moral panic” concerning the lazy, the criminal and other “underserving poor,” especially Roma [Makovicky 2013].

<sup>10</sup> Since 2013 the number of *közmunkások* has exceeded 200,000 nationwide, but the picture is marked by great regional inequalities. The number of workfare employees in most cities and developed western counties is small and has been falling in recent years. Elsewhere, however, it has continued to rise as the government has expanded funding to enable authorities to offer short-term

workfare contracts to every local resident able and willing to sign up. The unemployed may be entitled to a small monthly payment (approximately 75 EUR) if they have worked at least 30 days in the previous 12 months; if they do not meet this criterion, they have no entitlement whatsoever to state assistance. While unemployment has officially declined (to below 5% in most regions), it is widely pointed out that many citizens, especially in the countryside, have ceased to register themselves as seeking work, thus dropping out of the statistics. See Varga 2014.

a disguised form of unemployment, just as many of those nominally on the books of socialist collectives had constituted a form of hidden unemployment before 1990. In the next section I look in more detail at recent entanglements of the material and the moral in a region where I have been working since 1976.

*God's vineyard and Viktor's kingdom in 2015-6*

Jesus's parable of the workers in the vineyard is narrated in Matthew 20: 1-16. Early one morning a mischievous landowner (a prototype of today's experimental behavioral economists) hires labourers for his vineyard, agreeing to pay them the standard sum of 1 *denarius* at the end of the day. He hires more men at intervals throughout the day, and when the work is completed he pays 1 *denarius* to everyone, even to those who have barely gotten their hands dirty. Those who have toiled much longer are disgruntled, but the landlord denies any wrongdoing, since those hired at the start of the day have received the sum they contracted for. Matthew's narrative is fairly well known to Hungarian Christians, at least in the wine-producing region of the Danube-Tisza interfluvium. It was the basis of the sermon preached in the village church of Harkakötöny in early September 2016, when some farmers had already begun to harvest their grapes.<sup>11</sup> When I asked a friend later for his interpretation, he was unsure; but then he ventured that, beyond emphasizing that all would be treated equally and fairly in the afterlife, the priest might have intended a commentary on a quarter of a century of post-socialist transformation. Citizens' rewards in the profane present might bear little relation to the work they do, but this was of secondary importance in view of the greater accomplishment that socialism had been swept aside.

This parable contradicts the moral sentiments of the great majority of contemporary Hungarians (and perhaps of humanity). It also contradicts the philosophy of workfare, which plays such an important role in the Hungarian countryside nowadays. The preacher of that September sermon made no reference to *közmunka*, nor to the "migrant crisis", the burning political issue of the moment, even though every street in the village had just been adorned with bright

<sup>11</sup> I have described the patriotic event to which this Catholic mass was a preliminary in more detail in Hann, 2018.

blue government posters calling for a “No” vote in a referendum to be held a month later.<sup>12</sup> In the mass media ministers emphasized that the jobs and pensions of ordinary Hungarians would be jeopardized if more non-European immigrants were allowed to enter the country. Most opposition parties called for a boycott of the referendum. Some critics of the government argued that the main threat to the welfare of ordinary citizens and the cause of widening inequity in the distribution of goods, was the ever more blatant cronyism of Viktor Orbán’s government.

The village of Tázlár (resident population nowadays *circa* 1,750) and the market town of Kiskunhalas (*circa* 29,000) are positioned mid-way between Átány and Sárosd, the villages discussed above. Due to the regional ecology and settlement patterns, the zone between the rivers Danube and Tisza was spared the typical forms of collectivization. Rural households here were generally able, thanks to a loosely-structured “specialist cooperative,” to continue farming almost exclusively on a household basis [Hann 1980]. This meant a different type of symbiosis from that found elsewhere, where the household plot complemented large collective holdings. In Tázlár, most farmers did not work in the socialist sector at all, which entailed a slower progression to labour commodification than that outlined for Sárosd by Martha Lampland [1995]. For those who wanted a wage-labour job, the specialist cooperative was one possibility, until its collapse after 1990. Many others were available, including numerous factories in nearby towns such as Kiskunhalas. These “worker-peasants” continued to produce economic value through their household farming. Raising hogs was the most significant branch of production; this was accomplished in private sties with the assistance of the cooperative in the form of cheap fodder and guaranteed sale prices. Local people boast that Hungary produced so much meat in those years that consumption levels were the highest in Europe, and that there was still enough left over to export paprika salami to Italy.

The distinguishing feature of Kiskunhalas most relevant to this paper is its proximity to the state border with Serbia. During the Cold War its barracks housed large numbers of soldiers, Soviet as well as Hungarian. This changed rapidly after 1990. Some of the military sites were adapted for capitalist commercial purposes. The largest

<sup>12</sup> The referendum of 2nd October 2016 asked the following question (considered by most foreign analysts to be highly tendentious and possibly even illegal): “Do you

want the European Union to be able to order the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without parliament’s consent?”

factory in the new era was Levi-Strauss, which employed over 500 workers. The town has struggled economically since this firm (which has its European HQ in Brussels) decided to close down its operations at short notice in 2009. There was no resistance.<sup>13</sup> No further significant foreign investments have been forthcoming.

Moralizing discourses about workfare in Tázlár and Kiskunhalas are similar to condemnation of “benefits scroungers” in other European welfare states. It is considered to be only natural that people should work, rather than receive benefits from the state without working. The very category *közmunkás* can call forth immediate suspicion and a pejorative evaluation: why does this person not take up a proper job?<sup>14</sup> But when it comes to the implementation of workfare schemes at the local level, a different picture emerges. The main activity in Tázlár since 2014 (prior to this year only a handful of individuals were hired to maintain parks and verges) has been market gardening on plots owned by the community. Part of the production is sold commercially, part is consumed collectively within the village through the school kitchen, and part (vegetables that don’t look good enough to meet the criteria of the market for economic value) is sold at a 30% discount to the workers, or on occasion distributed free to supplement wages. When I enquired in 2014, even those who in principle were ideologically critical of public sector interventions tended to approve of these activities in their village.

While there was no strong sense of solidarity among the *közmunkás*, there seemed to be equally little stigma attached to this form of work. Some evidently derived considerable satisfaction from the tasks they were carrying out for the community; they might even have felt at times that their work was an end in itself, a value in Weber’s sense [Hann 2016; Szóke 2012: 108–109]. Although the contracts were always temporary and premised on the assumption that workers should at some point rejoin the regular labour market, workfare was accepted throughout the community and even popular with the participants themselves. It was presented in a positive light by the

<sup>13</sup> Women were a major component of the Levi-Strauss workforce. These seamstresses recall the work as demanding but satisfying, also in terms of relatively high wages and numerous fringe benefits. For a contemporary report of the closure, see <http://nol.hu/gazdasag/lap-20090325-20090325-31-326020> (accessed on 7.10.2016).

<sup>14</sup> The official term since 2011 is no longer *közmunkás* (public worker) but *közfoglalkoztatott* (public employee); but the older, shorter terminology dominates in everyday parlance. For analysis of survey data concerning values and attitudes among both participants and the organizers of *közmunka* programmes in their early phase after earlier forms of social benefit had been drastically cut, see Koltai 2014.



officials charged with its implementation, notably the mayor, who viewed it as humane and fair.<sup>15</sup>

Workfare participants in Tázlár were diverse in terms of age, gender and qualifications. For some, this form of work was an alternative to long-distance migration, which they might notionally prefer but could not consider (for example, because they lacked the networks or had dependent relatives in the village). In the Danube-Tisza interfluvium, the main alternative to workfare is work on one's own land plus day-labouring, opportunities for which are readily available at most times of the year, especially in vineyards. Calculated on a daily or hourly basis, this labouring pays better than workfare (which is pegged at a figure well below the national minimum wage, yielding a net monthly income of around 170 Euros for most participants). Apart from the seasonal element, such private work is tougher and seldom generates the camaraderie that at least some of the workfare participants seem to value in the public scheme. Those who muddle through outside workfare are unlikely to be adding to their pension entitlements; some do not even have basic health insurance.

In August 2014, in addition to vegetable production, the 12 *közmunkás* in Tázlár also maintained the small central park, cut grass in other public places, and stabilized dirt roads. By summer 2015, in line with the national trend, their number had risen to 34; one year later it was 47. The new mayor<sup>16</sup> confided that the state was now providing sufficient resources for him to be able to offer *közmunka* to everyone who wanted it (previously the recruitment had been highly selective). It was in the community's financial interests to utilize these funds. Even Gypsies were now included (Roma are a small but expanding presence in Tázlár due to the relative cheapness of housing here). Increasing emphasis was now placed nationwide on the production of economic value and activities in the vegetable branch

<sup>15</sup> Mayors are glad to have a significant workforce placed at their disposal to counter the consequences of reductions in public funding in recent decades [Váradi *et al.* 2016]. These schemes gave village leaders considerable power in the early years of the scheme, when central allocations sufficed to hire only a fraction of the unemployed. In practice it was the mayor himself who selected the beneficiaries on the basis of lists provided by the local employment agency. As the employer, the mayor has also has

considerable discretion in how workers are treated and remunerated. Thelen *et al.* [2011] showed how the "social citizenship" of Roma was undermined by the mayor of another village on the Great Plain, who humiliated members of the minority in the way in which he paid out their wages.

<sup>16</sup> A new mayor running on the Fidesz party ticket was elected in the local elections of Autumn 2014. The previous mayor, in office for the preceding 20 years, was an independent—see Hann and Kürti 2015.

were no longer sufficient.<sup>17</sup> The mayor therefore applied under a new scheme to support capital investments, and in Summer 2016 most workfare employees in Tázlár gathered daily at a location on the edge of the village where a new pig-sty had been constructed and was about to receive its first animals. New machines and vehicles were acquired to facilitate a revival of hog production. In future, in addition to marketing surplus vegetables, the village would earn much-needed cash from its surplus pigs, now raised centrally through workfare rather than in peasant households.<sup>18</sup>

Local commentaries in 2016 were more variegated than in previous years. The new mayor is a teacher at the village primary school. He visits his employees daily but finds it difficult to organize a large and diverse group with only two foremen to assist him.<sup>19</sup> Work begins daily at 6.00 am in the summer, but later in the winter. The mayor is expected (according to national guidelines) to enforce an 8-hour day and is considered to be more strict than his predecessor. Prior to 2014 employees had to work only 6 hours daily, which allowed them time to put in a more lucrative afternoon shift in the private sector when such informal opportunities were available. Yet the current mayor continues to show considerable flexibility. If a diligent *közmunkás* is invited by a farmer to work as a day-labourer on a task that is urgent (e.g. harvesting elderberries), he or she is allowed to take the day off from the public scheme. A trusted worker may be allowed to divide the working day between public and private employers (the latter may or may not be legalized through taxation and insurance declarations). This flexibility is important for prosperous landowners as well as for the labourers themselves, and might be considered a novel form of public-private collaboration.

<sup>17</sup> The key concept in recent years has been “public employment that creates value” (*értékteremtőközfoglalkoztatás*). The term *érték* (*Wert*, value) has a comparable semantic range in Hungarian to that which it has in other European languages. In this case it is clear that *közmunka* should serve self-sufficiency in the village but simultaneously produce commodities for the market. Legally, the products of these programmes are not supposed to be sold “for profit”; but this law is apparently open to interpretation and

in any case was not being monitored in this region in 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Household raising of hogs declined dramatically in the postsocialist decades with the collapse of the socialist synthesis.

<sup>19</sup> These persons are paid some 30 Euros extra monthly, but their authority is weak. The previous mayor once refused to re-employ a *közmunkás* he considered to be excessively lazy on the job; but the increased numbers have made it in practice harder to implement this sanction.

The *közmunka* workforce continues to comprise both men and women of all ages up to 60, most of whom lack any skill or qualification.<sup>20</sup> Berci, a veteran of the schemes since 2010 whose biography I have presented in an earlier account [Hann 2016], was apprehensive about the future. He was happy that the new mayor was continuing to grant him considerable personal autonomy, but he ruled out the possibility that he would participate in a new division of labour at the communal pig-sty. Berci thought that the scheme's expansion had brought in large numbers of villagers who did not work effectively at all, even when clearly specified tasks were given to them. This inclusionary policy was clearly unfair (*igazságtalan*).<sup>21</sup> Such opinions were echoed by other villagers, inside and outside the programme. Due to this atmosphere, the low level of income, and the absence of any training element that would improve their future job prospects, a few villagers declined the mayor's offer of *közmunka*, even when this entailed losing any possibility of welfare support. Others do not bother even to register as unemployed. This is in part a legacy of this region's history under socialism, when many households kept their distance from the formal labour market. Such persons can still supplement their small farms with day-labouring in peak periods, as they did in the past. Yet there were complaints from some residents that the expansion of the *közmunka* programmes had made it harder for them to recruit casual labour. This was a problem not only for prosperous vineyard owners but more generally, e.g. for pensioners who needed occasional help because they were unable to perform demanding practical work in their house and garden personally. Some made wry comments to the effect that *közmunka* was becoming a new form of collective farming and pointed out that Tázlár had managed to avoid collective pig-sties even in the socialist era.

While economists in the capital might be concerned that the expansion of commodity production through the *közmunka* programmes distorts markets and creates unfair competition for rival,

<sup>20</sup> In both Tázlár and Kiskunhalas women form the majority (two thirds in Tázlár). Men are more likely to have regular jobs, whether locally or as long-distance commuters within Hungary or as international migrants. In Kiskunhalas significant numbers of white-collar workers have been employed as *közmunkás* in public offices, thereby reducing costs to the municipality as regular civil service positions are eliminated. State-owned enterprises (e.g. in infrastructural provision) can also profit from this source

of cheap labour. Even in Tázlár two young graduates obtained temporary positions in the mayor's office to improve its IT capacities. They were the only local *közmunkás* who managed to move on to regular jobs when their contracts expired. Such workers receive up to 50% higher wages than unskilled manual *közmunkás*.

<sup>21</sup> The first dictionary equivalent for *igazságtalan* is "unjust" but Hungarian has no closer term for unfair.

private producers, and Foucauldian sociologists tend to view them as a new form of incarceration, condemnatory opinions are still outweighed in the village by the sentiment that performing practical work is intrinsically preferable to welfare dependency. But the work should be *meaningful*. This became clear to me in the town of Kiskunhalas, 15 kms from Tázlár, where inhabitants contrasted village *közmunka* programmes based on the production of economic value with what they observed daily in their urban setting. Large numbers of *közmunkás* (among whom Roma are conspicuous) are very visible in the streets and parks of this market centre. It has never been so well maintained, its residents acknowledge. But it has only a finite number of flower beds, and leaves cannot be swept throughout the year. The visible activities of the workfare programmes strike many observers as rather pointless, and certainly very inefficient.

Altogether, in the summer of 2016 I heard significantly more criticism of the *közmunka* programmes than I had heard in the two previous years. The earlier consensus that endorsed the government's edifying moral philosophy of a "work-based society" was being undermined as both villagers and townspeople questioned whether this work was properly organized, whether it was work at all, whether it was undermining established forms of employment, both public and private, and whether it was fair (*igazságos*) in the way that it rewarded deserving and undeserving alike. Given this weakening of support for a central plank of its economic policy, it was therefore convenient for the government to be able to shift attention from the summer of 2015 onwards to a supra-national crisis that offered new possibilities for generating a moral consensus in the Hungarian nation.

### *The migrant crisis of 2015-2016*

Few residents of Tázlár and Kiskunhalas have had any encounters with those seeking a route through Hungary on their way to a better future in Western Europe (primarily Germany). Nonetheless the proximity of the state border enhanced the impact of the "migrant crisis" of 2015-16 in this region of East-Central Europe. Local attitudes have been overwhelmingly negative [Hann 2015]. Hungarians did not need to encounter migrants physically in order to

agree with their political leaders that they were a threat, not deserving of support in European societies where they did not belong. Moreover, some of these European societies had increasing difficulty in maintaining standards of living for their own citizens, above all due to a shortage of suitable *work*. The general stance in Hungary resembles that documented in other Visegrád countries (and also in some countries of Western Europe). Of course there are local nuances, one conspicuous argument in Hungary being the Roma issue: “we have enough difficulty to integrate this minority that has a long historical presence in our society, and which speaks our unusual language; how can we be expected to integrate elements that are by any criteria even more foreign?”<sup>22</sup>

In the national referendum of 2 October 2016, over 98% of those who cast valid votes endorsed the government’s message to reject the imposition of EU quotas. Since fewer than 50% of eligible voters cast a valid vote, the result had no legal validity. The turnout was certainly a disappointment for Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who had organized an expensive campaign in an effort to gain additional support from centrist and left-wing parties. In Tázlár 99% of voters supported the government’s line, but with turnout at just over 55% this was nonetheless far short of the resounding communitarian endorsement sought by the government.

Most villagers I spoke with in the weeks before the referendum were supportive of Orbán’s rhetoric concerning the need to defend the frontiers of Europe’s Christian civilization.<sup>23</sup> Some however, preferred to stress more concrete, pragmatic arguments for resisting immigration and opposing the *liberális* policies espoused by other EU states. Many families in communities such as Tázlár and Kiskunhalas are torn apart by international migration, which takes place because decent well-paying jobs are simply not available at home. The government is perceived to be massaging its unemployment statistics

<sup>22</sup> Such sentiments are frequently expressed in Kiskunhalas, where the Roma form a significant minority. The otherness of the Roma has been accentuated since the end of socialism, but one strand of continuity concerns their alleged disdain for practical work. Countless jokes are told by Hungarians to reinforce the stereotype of Gypsy indolence, e.g. “Have you heard about the Gypsy who complained that the level of benefit entitlement in Hungary is excessively low, because the *Magyar* population has lost its former work ethic?”

<sup>23</sup> A few (generally the more educated, often belonging to an ethnic or religious minority) moralized in the opposite direction by pointing out that the Hungarians are themselves an immigrant people in the Carpathian Basin, and that the Great Plain had to be repopulated in the eighteenth century following the defeat of the Ottoman Turks. Others mentioned the fact that hundreds of thousands of Hungarian were welcomed in the West following the revolution of 1956.

through the workfare programmes. How, people ask, in the light of these circumstances can it be *fair* that Germany and other wealthy members of the EU should expect a country such as Hungary to accept even a small quota allocation of migrants from outside Europe?

Elements of frustration and resentment loom strongly behind these attitudes (along with nostalgia for a socialist era in which careers were easier to plan and some form of work was always available). Hungarians know from often sensationalized media coverage that not all migrants come from the poorer strata of their home societies: you need resources to make it through the Balkans all the way to Germany. It is theoretically open to residents of Tázlár and Kiskunhalas to apply for passports to enter Germany, but few of them have the necessary resources: it is not just a question of money but also of contacts, without which they could not hope to survive more than a few days in a foreign country where they would have the disadvantage of *not* being classified as refugees or asylum-seekers. They also lack basic language skills to integrate and find work outside Hungary.<sup>24</sup>

The wave of populist nationalism throughout Hungary can be interpreted as a new ethical register (one that poses more ethical challenges for the foreign investigator, who is unlikely to find this register attractive). But what I found striking is that numerous interlocutors in Tázlár and Kiskunhalas continued to mingle arguments about fairness with economic propositions, often with reference to work. In a direct comparison with the recipients of workfare, one old friend asked me why the Hungarian state should pay a much higher sum to cover the costs of board and lodging for a migrant than it pays out to a village *közmunkás*, earning a monthly income of 170 Euros? It is commonly alleged that the migrants have no intention of ever taking menial jobs, but seek only to benefit from the generosity of the richer nations. I was told of a case in Germany in which migrants had apparently refused to carry out the *közmunka* allocated to them by the Bavarian village in which they had been billeted (with full board), on the grounds that they were being offered only 1 Euro per hour as payment. This is roughly the same amount that a *közmunkás* in Tázlár receives per hour of work, but the migrants were demanding to be paid the German minimum wage—8.50 Euros per hour, a figure unimaginable in Hungary.

Is it helpful to speak of a *moral economy* in these contexts, either at local, national, or even supra-national levels? I prefer to recognize

<sup>24</sup> The primary school in Tázlár was unsuccessful in its efforts to recruit an English language teacher for the school year 2016–2017.

(following Etzioni 1988) a *moral dimension*, an ethical context in which deeply-rooted values pertaining to practical work are being invoked by power holders in the context of an increasingly dysfunctional real or material economy.<sup>25</sup> This moral dimension of economy is articulated at multiple levels from the individual to the global capitalist system. To understand why Levi-Strauss, a multinational corporation with a global brand, closed down its operations in Kiskunhalas in 2009, and why employers' organizations in Germany have generally been sympathetic to the influx of migrants in 2015-2016 (while calling for their rapid integration into the labour market), the economic anthropologist must turn to the work of political economists. To understand the choices individual villagers make between low-paid wage labour, workfare and day-labouring, some economic anthropologists find it helpful to apply the methods and techniques of the neoclassicals, e.g. in constructing models of the labour market. These are equivalent scientific paradigms, both of which bracket morality.

And yet the ethnographer is likely to find that, on the ground, both micro and macro economic issues are thoroughly entangled with moral sentiments, giving rise to personal and collective dilemmas. In Kiskunhalas the influx of unwanted migrants in 2015-2016 filled some of the unused space in the town's abandoned barracks and created jobs for warders and policemen. The working conditions were hardly attractive, but the positions advertised in Summer 2016 offered wages some three times higher than workfare. In consequence, some locals conceded that a situation of which they disapproved in moral or civilizational terms (in agreement with their Prime Minister), often justifying their stance with economic arguments concerning access to work, might at the same time bring the supreme benefit of jobs to their particular settlement. Their town is not just tidier, it is also more secure than ever before (though police convoys and sirens in the middle of the night are sometimes an irritation).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> On dysfunctionality and corruption under the present Fidesz government, see Magyar 2016. On the wider capitalist political economy which condemns Hungary to long-term peripherality, see Streeck 2014.

<sup>26</sup> The situation changed again in Spring 2017 when the migrants were relocated to container accommodation at the border. This step led to international criticism and rebukes for the Hungarian government from the Commission of the European Union in

Brussels as well as Human Rights groups. For many in Kiskunhalas this meant an improvement in their daily living conditions; they did not feel comfortable with the fact that many residents at the barracks had been free to enter the town, just 1km away; and they were glad to be free of the sirens; for warders and security staff, however, the change was unwelcome because it meant losing jobs or accepting new commuting routines.

I shall close by considering four Tázlár brothers who I have known throughout their lives. One decided in 2016, after years of insecure employment in the catering and road haulage sectors, to apply for a job as a Special Forces Policeman. This can be readily formalised in the paradigm of the neoclassical economist: the job is quite well paid, locally based and less risky than other options open to him. Perhaps this young man holds nationalist values which lead him to view the work with migrants with distaste and will influence the way he performs it, if his application succeeds. In any case, his decision to apply for this post is not simply instrumental or “economistic”, since it follows from embedded moral values, in particular long-term commitments to purchase a house and provide for his partner, and perhaps also to be in a position to do more for his parents. In the language of Miller [2002], this young man’s decision is obviously entangled.

The same is true of the decisions taken by his three brothers. The eldest has an insecure, poorly paid wage-labour job in the private sector in another nearby town; his partner’s job is more secure and they have decided to take out a mortgage to purchase a modest family house. A younger brother performs semi-skilled labour on a casual basis in the south of England, though he has tertiary education and qualifications in a quite different field; he does not earn enough to be able to transfer money home and after several years his parents have no idea of his long term intentions. The youngest brother has also left the family home, but he is attempting to set up a capitalized family farm on the periphery of the village, with the help of EU subsidies. He works closely with his ageing parents, who used to work for the local cooperative until its collapse in the 1990s and only became full-time farmers thereafter. These four brothers have made different decisions, reflecting individual circumstances and relationships that space does not permit me to pursue. All four, raised in Tázlár in the postsocialist decades, share a conviction that satisfying work should be an ultimate source of meaning in their lives. The parents (nominally pensioners) and youngest son continue to produce economic value through their household farming. During this activity they may experience moments when work is still valued as an end in itself, as an *érték*. Overall, however, in Weberian terms it is clear that work is now experienced not as a dominant “sphere of life” but as both a scarce resource and an instrumental activity pertaining to the life-order [Terpe 2016].



*Conclusions*

In this paper I have considered the concept of moral economy and, more precisely, the moral dimension of work and workfare in contemporary provincial Hungary. From a historical perspective, I have argued that the government's implementation of workfare, far from being an authoritarian punitive measure, is endorsed at local level because it can draw upon both the pre-industrial ethic of the smallholding peasantry, when work was an end in itself, and the ethics of socialist industrialization, when work was enshrined in the ideology of the state. Both emphasized what Malinowski [1935] called "practical work," activity that is central to every human economy. As a basis of worth or recognition, work is a principle that seems irrefutable. This naturalization is highlighted in Hungary by the increasing inequities of the post-socialist decades. Since 2010, the resilience of *work as value* has been reasserted by populist politicians.

When it came to the practical implementation of workfare schemes, opinions were modified as the schemes were expanded. Yet in 2016 in Tázlár there was still a broad consensus of support for the flexible way in which successive mayors have implemented the *közmunka* programmess. Beyond the basic valuation of work as such, mayorial sensitivity to the needs of individuals in his community, rich as well as poor, offers insight into moral dimensions of the economy. We might even speak of a moral community. But this hardly warrants the identification of a "moral economy". Rather, these values and evolved practices are important elements of context, of which any investigator of the embedded economy of Tázlár needs to take account. A holistic historical analysis must engage both with subjective attitudes to work/labour under very different regimes, and with the condition of the material economy that has created a need for interventions such as workfare (last experienced in Tázlár at the height of the Great Depression).

Although I end up discarding his clumpish term, my approach is broadly consistent with E.P. Thompson's analysis of a context where he was concerned with the just price, rather than the fairness of work or labour. Looking back on his coinage, Thompson [1991: 271] suggested that "sociological economy" or "political economy" might have been more felicitous terms. Classical political economy is the search for regularities, even laws, in the large-scale evolution of economic systems, a branch of science that was not very attractive

to Thompson as a humanist historian. In any case it makes sense to distinguish between political economy as a scientific modelling of economic life and enquiries into how economic action is continuously shaped by subjective convictions of good and bad. But the two are bound to be deeply entangled.<sup>27</sup> The larger question here (raised but not resolved by Max Weber) is how to study causalities in the relationships between values and the material economy.<sup>28</sup>

My critique of Didier Fassin is that his version of the articulation of moral economies remains an idealist exercise unless it is extended to connect with articulations in the real, i.e. material economy. The reactions of various nation-states and diverse social groups within them to the current influx of migrants to the European Union cannot be grasped without an analysis of global neoliberal political economy. Fassin leaves us in a world of free-floating moralizing discourses and does not pay enough attention to this real economy.

I have distinguished theoretically between the dimension of positive (material, objective) economy and normative enquiries into moral, or ethical subjectivities. Most projects in socio-cultural anthropology, and certainly in economic anthropology, will be concerned with both. We must attend to the common-sense meaning of economy, i.e. the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, involving markets, money and material technologies. These modern analytic categories can be applied to any human economy, including those in which people do not themselves recognize “economy”, do not distinguish between practical work and ritual (or between the work of men and the work of Gods). This material economy can be studied from the perspective of methodological individualism as a process of the rational maximizing of profits or utility. The formalist tradition in economic anthropology replicates this neoclassical approach. Subjectivities and values (including virtuous and altruistic motivations) can also be interpreted as the

<sup>27</sup> Moral arguments may be advanced to conceal a logic that is rooted in political economy, but power holders do not always succeed with such tactics. Some Hungarians suggested that the German Chancellor was duplicitous in the Summer of 2015. Under the pretext of humanitarian aid, so this argument went (I heard it from only one individual in Tázlár but it was common in urban contexts), Angela Merkel’s true objective was to admit the additional labour urgently needed by German capital to keep costs low, maintain profit rates, and thereby

buttress its political domination over weaker EU members such as Hungary.

<sup>28</sup> In the case of work, Lampland posits the rise of a capitalist economy as the causal variable which explains the new value of work as “labor property.” This is persuasive but it does not suffice to justify speculative arguments about the long-term evolution of morals/morality. There may be something so general (even universal to our species) about “practical work” which renders it more impervious to historical change than other values.

properties of individuals, in the Weberian tradition. At the same time, they cannot be understood without analyzing the more or less localized communities which these individuals inhabit. For this task inspiration can be taken from Karl Polanyi and his followers in the substantivist tradition, who investigate the human economy in both its ideational and its material-institutional embeddedness. As Miller insists [2002], the task does not change in any essential way when market exchange becomes the dominant form of integration. Nor is it helpful to juxtapose moral economy to political economy. They are not just asymmetrical: moral economy as theorized by Didier Fassin is an unfortunate construction best abandoned, because it deflects analysis away from the economy altogether. We should think instead of embedded human economies [Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010] with multiple dimensions; the material and the moral are equally fundamental. Understanding the moral dimension in the spirit of Etzioni involves tracking dominant values through history, as tentatively theorized by Weber, and their concrete reconfigurations and enactment through social relations.

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## Résumé

La relation entre la moralité et l'économie a été perdue au gré de la spécialisation disciplinaire. Alors que les paradigmes dominants en économie font généralement abstraction de la dimension morale, les approches récentes de la morale et de l'éthique en anthropologie négligent l'économie matérielle. Le concept intermédiaire d'« économie morale » proposé par E.P. Thompson a été influent au cours des dernières décennies, mais l'inflation récente de ses usages a mis en évidence d'importantes lacunes. Après un tour d'horizon des débats disciplinaires, la dimension morale de la vie économique est saisie dans cet article à partir du cas du travail comme valeur en Hongrie, entre la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> et le début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le modèle contemporain du « workfare » est exploré à partir d'exemples locaux. Il est montré comment les discours sur le travail et l'équité sont étendus à de nouveaux registres éthiques pour justifier des attitudes négatives envers les migrants.

*Mots-clés* : Anthropologie économique ; Hongrie ; Migrants ; Économie morale ; Max Weber ; Populisme ; Travail ; Workfare.

## Zusammenfassung

Die fortschreitende Spezialisierung der Disziplinen hat die Beziehung zwischen Moral und Wirtschaft ausgeblendet. Während die dominierenden, wirtschaftlichen Paradigmen die moralische Dimension außer acht lassen, vernachlässigen jüngste Ansätze der Moral und der Ethik in der Anthropologie die materielle Wirtschaft. Das dazwischen liegende Modell der "moralischen Wirtschaft" von E.P. Thompson hat in den letzten Jahrzehnten einen großen Einfluss ausgeübt, wengleich jüngste Anwendungen seine Lückenhaftigkeit verdeutlicht haben. Der Zusammenfassung der Fachdebatten folgt eine Analyse der moralischen Dimension des Wirtschaftslebens, verdeutlicht in Sachen Arbeit als Wert am Beispiel Ungarns vom Ende des 19. bis zum Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts. Das zeitgenössische Modell des "workfare" wird mittels örtlicher Beispiele untersucht. Es wird aufgezeigt, wie Reden über Arbeit und Gerechtigkeit auf neue ethische Register ausgeweitet werden, um negative Verhaltensweisen gegenüber Migranten zu rechtfertigen.

*Schlüsselwörter* : Wirtschaftsethnologie; Ungarn; Migranten; Moralökonomie; Max Weber; Populismus; Arbeit; Workfare.