



## Call for Papers

### Workshop

## Moral Struggles in and around Markets

November 11-12, 2016 | University of Neuchâtel

### Organizers

Philip Balsiger (University of Neuchâtel)

Simone Schiller-Merkens (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies)

### Keynote Speakers

Patrik Aspers (Uppsala University)

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Economic activity is always “morally embedded”. Adopting a sociological view of morality as historically and socially located norms and beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad, worthy and unworthy, a number of studies have investigated how ethics and economic activity intermingle (Fourcade/Healy 2007). That markets are “the theater of a morality play” (Fourcade 2013: 620) becomes especially visible in moments of moral struggles, where different moral views on market exchanges clash. Moral struggles often relate to market boundaries, when the exchange of certain goods on markets provokes moral opposition – for instance, organs, life insurance, arms, cannabis or sex (e.g., Zelizer 2011; Sandel 2012; Healy 2006; Vergne 2012). But moral struggles also arise in relation to specific practices in markets that are deemed unjust or immoral, including practices relating to conditions of production, salaries, price setting, or greed. One expression of this critique is the rise of alternative markets with explicit moral goals, such as fair trade, local agriculture networks, or social investment.

In this workshop, we want to bring together a range of researchers who have been studying “morals and markets” with divergent theoretical perspectives. Indeed, contributions to the role of morality in markets have come from different disciplines and research fields who rarely engage with each other. Aspects of market morality have been addressed, among others, by economic sociologists studying market boundaries or processes of valuation; by organization and (critical) management scholars studying corporate social responsibility and social entrepreneurship; by social movement scholars stud-

ying the contentiousness of markets; or by anthropologists studying the meanings of economic exchanges and moral economies. We believe that in order to advance research on the moral embeddedness of markets, it is crucial to bring together this variety of disciplinary perspectives. Thus with this conference, our aim is to bring researchers together who already study moral struggles and processes of market moralization but without necessarily referring to the research category of morality. In particular, we seek to deepen our understanding of morality in markets in three directions.

## 1 Moral struggles

First, we suggest studying the moral embeddedness of markets through a focus on “moral struggles”. We look for contributions studying how moral contention in and around markets works – its discourse, action repertoires, strategies and material expressions. For example, this includes (but is not limited to) asking questions such as:

- How do moral entrepreneurs contest market practices? What action repertoires do they use?
- Who are those moral entrepreneurs? Social movements, politicians, non-governmental organizations, consumers? Which market actors yield to moral issues and which ones don't? Are there instances where market competitors act as moral entrepreneurs? Does this change the functioning of moral struggles on markets, and if so, how?
- How do market actors react to moral challenges? Do they develop alternative moralities, e.g., do they start justifying their practices in explicit moral terms?
- Which conditions of the social context enable and constrain moral entrepreneurship? In the process of market moralization, (how) does moral entrepreneurship change these conditions?
- What role does the law and politics play in this process?
- Are there struggles around the legitimate definition of moral market categories? What counts as moral and what doesn't, and who is “authorized” to make the call? On what does the credibility of actors to impose their criteria rest?

## 2 Historical and comparative perspectives

Second, we particularly encourage contributions adopting a historical and/or comparative perspective. By analyzing the transformations of moral market values over time, historical perspectives are important because they help us better understand what distinguishes current moral struggles and processes of market moralization from previous ones taking place in different times and contexts.

- Is there really a growing moralization of markets today?
- To what extent are current forms of moral struggles on markets part of a long-term process of capitalist dynamics?

Comparative perspectives can further shed light on the moral embeddedness of markets. On the one hand, through cross-market comparisons of moral struggles and processes of market moralization:

- Are there certain markets that are more likely to become “moralized”, and if so, why?
- What moral issues are addressed on what kind of markets and in which countries?
- Do moral struggles “travel” from one market to another, from one country to another, and if so, how?

A global perspective on processes of market moralization, on the other hand, could address broader consequences of market moralization by asking questions such as

- How do moral struggles play out along transnational supply chains? For instance, how do social business initiatives handle moral critiques in developing countries?
- When do social ventures internationalize and which moral struggles do they face?
- How do processes of market moralization affect global inequalities between the West and the global South, between consumers and workers?
- When do these processes reinforce inequalities?

### 3 Morality as a category of analysis

Third, we also aim to encourage contributions that take a self-reflexive perspective on the category of morality as such. As this workshop and a number of other recent events show, more and more scholars study the question of morality in business and markets. In parallel, a renewal of the sociology of morality is now well under way (e.g., Abend 2014; Hitlin/Vaisey 2010; Farrell 2015). Studying “morals and markets” contributes to this broader knowledge on morality, by analyzing morality “in the wild” (Hitlin/Vaisey 2010). But studying the relation between morality and the economy should also lead us to raise the underlying questions about morality as a category of practice and as a category of scientific inquiry.

- How do different authors use the term morality and morals, what different theoretical perspectives are there?
- How do actors use morality as a category of practice?
- What actions and discourses count as moral, and which ones don't?
- What is the specificity of moral embeddedness of markets?
- What are the frontiers between morals and politics?
- How does a moral critique work and what distinguishes it from a social or political critique?

#### Practical details

The workshop will take place at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Institute of Sociology, on November 11–12, 2016.

The deadline for all abstract submissions (max 500 words) is **April 30, 2016**. Submissions should be sent to [philip.balsiger@unine.ch](mailto:philip.balsiger@unine.ch) and [ssm@mpifg.de](mailto:ssm@mpifg.de). Applicants will be informed on the outcome by e-mail no later than May 30, 2016. Final papers should be sent by **October 15, 2016**.

#### References

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