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Markets and moral economy in the labour market for function musicians

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Abstract

This article examines the labour market for ‘function’ musicians in London. It shows how the market encompasses a chain of relationships between clients, intermediaries and musicians, considering how the idea of ‘moral economy’ - a subject of revived interest in employment sociology - fits empirical reality. It shows that function musicians have created a strong moral economy regulating the distribution of opportunities and resources within bands. However, other actors in the chain, particularly agents, are able to impose intensified labour competition on bands. This competition leads trust relationships to fray and social expectations about the distribution of resources to weaken. These tensions are embodied in the role of the fixer; a musician who uneasily straddles market and moral domains.

Introduction

Labour markets in cultural work have attracted extensive empirical examination (e.g. Siebert and Wilson, 2013; Simms and Dean, 2015; *self-citation deleted*, 2016), but areas of theoretical understanding remain underdeveloped. While a growing literature examines the labour process of cultural production (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Thompson et al., 2016), circulation in cultural labour markets is less well understood. Existing literature stresses how cultural workers create spaces which are sheltered from market pressures, leaving scope for more communitarian and non-instrumental interaction (Bain and McLean, 2013; Coulson, 2012; Vail and Hollands, 2012). This has led to discussion of the ‘moral economy’ of cultural workers as a brake on the self-regulating market (Banks, 2006), though this line of thought remains underexplored.

The moral economy concept has been regaining traction in the sociology of work and employment, particularly through the efforts of writers in *Work, Employment and Society* (e.g. Bolton and Laaser, 2013; Breslin and Wood, 2015). However, so far little scholarship has examined the kinds of moral economies that can exist in highly diffuse and individualised freelancer labour markets, as found in the creative industries. How do creative workers’ moral economies respond and adapt to the fierce competitive pressures characterising their sectors? What are the main threats and limits to these moral economies? It is these questions that this article seeks to address.

In doing so, it makes an important empirical contribution, examining actors who shape and challenge musicians’ moral economies, but who have so far attracted barely any scholarship. These are the intermediaries and pseudo-intermediaries that control and distribute work opportunities in corporate function music, be they professional agencies or ‘fixer’ musicians who act as bandleaders and contact points with buyers. The article shows that function musicians cultivate a strong moral economy which exerts demands on bandleaders; to distribute proceeds from gigs in an egalitarian way, to pressure buyers over problems such as late payments, and to uphold expectations around fee levels. But changing market and technological conditions have made it easier for buyers and new types of

intermediaries to 'stage labour competition' (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2015) thus making these expectations harder to realise.

Hence the article makes three main contributions. It enters under-explored conceptual territory by examining how moral economies function in highly disparate freelancer labour markets; it sheds light on the little-documented empirical actors that shape and challenge these moral economies; and it expresses a scepticism about the durability of moral economies that deviates from much literature on the creative industries. The following sections introduce the idea of moral economy, before considering how it can be applied to creative work. After discussing research methods, there follow three empirical sections. The first describes the 'functions' labour market in broad terms. The second describes the moral economy predominating among function musicians and bandleaders, while the third shows how market pressures imposed by buyers and intermediaries threaten it. A concluding section considers the implications of these findings for relevant literature.

Moral economies, markets and 'disembedding'

The 'moral economy' is often taken to denote a distinct social realm which exists at the opposite end of a continuum with the market economy (Booth, 1994). While the market is characterised by economic self-interest, the moral economy exists where actors have shared moral norms around how much one should receive for particular jobs, what prices are acceptable for certain goods, or how resources should be divided among a community (Sayer, 2000). The term has been most notably applied in historical works examining transitions from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies. Thompson's (1971) influential account focuses on conflicts between community and commercial domains, showing how collective opposition to market pricing of food was legitimised by widely-held social norms in rural communities (see also Scott, 1977).

In this sense, the moral economy's boundaries are contested terrain. Moral economies are threatened by the expansion of the market, necessitating collective defence by its participants. Given this, it is potentially highly relevant to work and employment sociology, and is garnering renewed interest (Bolton and Laaser, 2013). It is highly applicable to caring professions, where workers develop strong informal rules regarding appropriate treatment of service users (Breslin and Wood, 2015). It has also been used to show how the imposition of market discipline on firms may undermine workplace norms and relationships (Laaser, 2016), and how the pooling of tips can help counter the individualised precarity of service work (Mulinari, 2016). Bolton et al. (2012) suggest moral economy as an analytical tool for critiquing the use of contingent work by firms. Moral economy is thus re-emerging as a tool for analysing community in the workplace and the threat posed by the market.

Others deny that moral and market economies can be separated like this. Much economic sociology argues that no market transaction can exist without some form of social 'embedding' (Fligstein and Calder, 2001; Krippner et al., 2004). While this term originally implied the development of social movements and institutions that emerge to counter the market (Polanyi, 1957), the focus has shifted to micro-level situations, charting individuals' informal behaviour and personal interactions within particular marketplaces (Granovetter, 1985; Krippner and Alvarez, 2007). In this view, it is incorrect to juxtapose market and moral economies, since any market transaction depends on interpersonal networks (Beckert and Wehinger, 2013), socially-held conventions around what can acceptably be commodified (Zelizer, 1978) and social coordination around what constitutes value (Beckert, 2009). From this perspective, the disruptive power of the market is limited by broad propositions such as the need for trust (Block, in Krippner et al., 2004) and honesty (Barber, 1995).

These literatures create a tension: to what extent do markets threaten moral economies? 'Embedding' literature is sceptical that extending market mechanisms disrupts the social world, since the latter is a necessary condition for the former (Fligstein and Calder, 2001). However, a stronger view of the disruptive power of the market insists that market competition can lead to 'disembedding', undermining social norms and relationships (Deutschmann, 2015). This view, like the moral economy concept, is also gaining currency within employment sociology. Employers' agency is emphasised here: they may have sufficient mobility to 'stage labour competition', thus forcing down workers' expectations (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2015) and hollowing out regulatory institutions (Wagner and Lillie, 2014).

If we accept that intensified market competition may weaken or 'disembed' moral economies, there remains much ground to explore. Most studies of moral economy emphasise the stability of community within the units they study; the recurrent collective interactions through which shared norms develop. However, in jobs where work relationships are much more transient and diffuse, and where workers interact with a disparate and shifting network of employers and co-workers, what kind of moral economies can emerge? Moreover, how might these moral economies withstand the pressure of intensely competitive and individualising labour markets? The next section considers this with reference to cultural workers.

The moral economy of cultural work, and its limits

Following Banks (2006: 457), 'cultural work' here refers to employment in 'those activities involved in the production of symbolic goods and services, whose principal value is derived from their function as carriers of meaning'; typically comprising fields such as design, media, theatre, art, and the present case study, music. When considering markets and moral economy in cultural work, a juxtaposition emerges. Cultural labour markets are highly competitive, weakly regulated, and characterised by exploitative working conditions (Ross, 2008; Siebert and Wilson, 2013; *self-citation deleted*, 2014). However, many researchers conclude that those within it tend to behave in highly egalitarian and communitarian ways (Bain and McClean, 2013; Cornfield, 2015; Coulson, 2012; Vail and Hollands, 2012).

Banks (2006) uses the idea of moral economy to understand this empirical setting. He critiques the assumption that, since cultural work is so unregulated, the market must run amok. He finds significant evidence of non-instrumental and communitarian activity among creative workers: they 'self-consciously engaged in forms of practice that contain ideas about what is "good" (and therefore "bad"), exhibit moral ways of acting towards others and negotiate the balance between holding instrumental and noninstrumental values' (p456). Specifically, this activity involves trying to create new spaces and opportunities that are not subject to market pressures (Leadbetter and Oakley, 1999). For instance, undertaking voluntary mentoring activity, or arranging fund-raising events supporting good causes.

Other writers, without necessarily using the moral economy terminology, suggest similar empirical findings. Coulson (2012) sees her subjects as 'accidental entrepreneurs' who actively manufacture opportunities for non-instrumental collaboration in defiance of market logic. The ethos revealed is often one of 'do-it-yourself' (Bain and MacLean, 2013), circumventing the marketplace to pursue 'self-reliance, autonomy, self-management and collectivity' (Vail and Hollands, 2012: 337). Hence, there is a growing recognition that cultural workers fashion non-market spaces in which to build sustainable artist communities (Cornfield, 2015). In doing so, they present a more cooperative model which seeks to cut out those who profit from musicians' labour. While this often means venues or buyers, it could also be intermediaries such as agents and managers, who may help cultural workers to navigate labour

markets and find more work, but extract commission in exchange (Lizé et al., 2011). There have been few studies of these kinds of actors, perhaps since, as Lizé et al. (2011) show in the French case, they only impact the careers of a relatively small proportion of workers. Nonetheless, actors who bear a resemblance to these kinds of 'traditional' agents prove highly relevant to the data presented below.

These sources reveal one way in which moral economy applies in cultural work; the pro-active creation of new spaces or opportunities in which market logic is not applied. Thus, for Banks (2006), cultural workers' moral economy emerges within the gaps and imperfections of neoliberal capitalism. The market is not all-consuming, and it leaves spaces in which community can be built, through the staging of events or the provision of unremunerated work to the benefit of good causes.

This view leaves important questions unanswered. The previous section argued that moral economies are not simply separate from the market, emerging in the 'gaps' of neoliberalism, but actively conflict with it as workers seek to support themselves and their communities in the face of commercial pressures. Hence, the questions introduced above can be rendered more explicitly: Firstly, to what extent does moral economy influence cultural workers in their interactions with employers and co-workers, particularly regarding working conditions and income distribution? Secondly, to what extent do wider market conditions, and the agency of other actors such as employers, threaten to disembed this moral economy? 'Function' music is one of the most 'market-facing' forms of cultural work, in which musicians interact and negotiate extensively with customers and intermediaries. Hence it provides an interesting lens through which to view these questions.

Methods

The bulk of the data presented here derives from interviews with 30 London musicians, conducted between December 2011 and January 2013. Participants were jazz musicians by training, who were building freelance careers through diverse job mixes including music tuition, live performances in bars, clubs or theatre, and function work. Whereas previous articles using this data (*self-citation deleted*, 2014; 2015) examined how participants balanced these different income streams, this article provides a detailed case study of one discrete marketplace- function work. This means private events where musicians are booked as entertainment (as opposed to public performances at concert venues, pubs, bars, or festivals). Clients are either private individuals organising celebrations or corporate organisations throwing fundraisers or networking events. Function work is therefore structured through sequences of disparate engagements with diverse, usually one-off, buyers.

All participants had knowledge and experience of function work, in varying quantities. Table one indicates the extent of respondents' function working, with the caveat that, given the week-to-week variance in musicians' careers, categories must necessarily be drawn broadly. 21 respondents across categories B, C and D had current experience as a bandmember, and six respondents across categories A and B also worked as 'fixers'; i.e. bandmembers who doubled as contact points with buyers and hence had a 'pseudo-intermediary' role. The five respondents in category E had either had previous experience of function work and rejected it, or were actively trying to break into function networks. Hence, while they were not doing function work at the time of the interview, they possessed valuable knowledge on the topic which was useful in contextualising the sector.

TABLE ONE HERE

Interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours. They encouraged respondents to talk in a semi-structured way about their major sources of income and their interactions with other actors such as buyers, co-workers and trade unions. The initial interviews were transcribed and coded manually. In the coding process, functions work emerged as an important source of income common to almost all

participants, and consequently specific code themes relating to functions emerged, namely the means of accessing function work; the expectations concerning the division of labour within bands; musicians' attitudes regarding remuneration; and their interactions with buyers, be these direct clients or intermediaries such as booking agencies.

Since data analysis, after the first interviews, progressed in tandem with data gathering, these codes became an increasingly important interview focus throughout the research. Half of the thirty participants provided briefer follow-up interviews, usually over the phone, to pick up on emerging themes. One theme which appeared particularly significant was the role of intermediaries such as booking agents. All participants in categories A-D had experience of working with agents and were able to discuss their interactions with them; categories A and B were particularly important in this respect, as these respondents usually had first-hand knowledge of dealing with agents. Later, in autumn 2016, interviews were conducted with senior management figures in five music agencies. While time, resource and access constraints prevented further data from agents, these respondents were used as key informants, with extensive and specific insights into agents' work that would enable further corroboration and contextualisation of musicians' remarks. Agent interviewees are shown in table two.

TABLE TWO HERE

Snowball sampling was used, beginning with two author contacts who were well-connected in the London functions scene. One consequent limitation is the relative lack of diversity; five musicians were female, and only one was from a minority ethnic background. This reflects a recognised gender imbalance in jazz music (MacDonald and Wilson, 2001). While this is an important limitation, the sample as it stands did enable conclusions to be drawn regarding the research questions outlined above.

Mapping the function music scene

Figure one depicts the functions labour market, indicating the main actors involved, and the contact chains linking them. The starting point in describing the chain is the client; the private individual or corporate actor looking to obtain a function band. They could, through contacts, word-of-mouth, or increasingly, internet searches, contact a bandleader directly. Alternatively, they might approach a booking agent. The agent would have a roster of bands to propose to the client, or take a brief from the client and find an appropriate band. Function bands therefore work to a tightly delineated brief with little scope for creative expression; it is something that a 'jobbing' musician would do primarily for the money. In this sense, some participants saw function work as an undesirable, even unacceptably 'capitalistic', form of music work (JF, category E).

Whether through client or agent, the gatekeeper to musicians was the bandleader or 'fixer'. The fixer was part of the band but was also responsible for promotion, liaising with buyers and agents, agreeing prices, recruiting bandmembers, and assembling repertoire. For this reason, musicians without strong connections to bandleaders were likely to struggle to find regular function work (HR, category E). The buyer would often, but not always, have a written contract with the fixer. Some participants spent their entire working lives as fixers; at other times, they were involved in various projects, acting as bandleader on some occasions and as bandmember on others.

Once engaged, the fixer enlisted bandmembers. As bandleader, their 'function band' could simply mean a particular name, website, and repertoire, rather than implying a specific set of musicians. Most function bands did have a relatively stable personnel. However, musicians usually had many projects, meaning diary clashes were common. In such cases 'deps' were used; another musician who fills in on

particular gigs. Sometimes the fixer found deps when bandmembers were unavailable, but often the bandmembers found replacements for themselves ('dep themselves out'). Hence a bandmember's status in the function band was more a position that they controlled, and could pass out to others, rather than a job they had to attend each time. Relationships between the fixer and bandmembers would almost never be contractualised; they were typically based on trust and verbal commitments.

The relationships and expectations involved differed radically at different points in the chain. Broadly speaking, a highly 'marketised' relationship existed between bandleader and buyer (particularly so when an agent was involved, as explained below), while the relationship between fixers, bandmembers and deps was more embedded. It had elements of a moral economy, but one whose parameters were constrained by market dynamics and intensifying competition.

FIGURE ONE HERE

Moral economy among fixers, bandleaders and deps

Fixers usually had contracts with buyers determining an overall band fee and hours. However, recruitment of personnel and the determination of individual bandmembers' earnings was typically decided informally. The fixer decided, but was usually influenced by expectations shared by the band. The internal allocation of money tended to reflect a strong sense of what was morally acceptable. One musician who 'fixed' bands for an in-demand function singer described the process dividing the fee.

'She phones me up and says "this is the budget, I'm taking this much, this is your budget, break it down how you want". She'll ask if I think we've got enough for the full band and I'll say yes or no. [I'll] have a look at the figures and see what I think. Will the musicians get paid enough?... I wouldn't ever really want to give anyone less than £150 for a function gig. So if she gave me a budget of, say, £800, I'd probably make that a five piece, and if she gave me more I'd make it a seven piece. And then if she didn't give me enough money, I'd have to say we weren't able to do it, or just put in the very least amount of things... But I wouldn't want to ask musicians to go out for a small amount of money' (FG1, category A)

Musicians' fees were morally embedded; to go below £150 meant the fixer had failed in 'keeping the value and integrity of the work' (MR1, category B). Musicians, in practice, might entertain offers of less, but expected contacts to be sufficiently apologetic, sensitive to the belief that to expect this as a matter of course was 'not cool' (MR1, category B).

Beyond the overall fee, musicians also expected that the division within the band was egalitarian, as one bandleader explained:

'If you start employing people there is a responsibility there. And if you are on the gig, people might drop hints or be annoyed if you take a bit more money even though you've put in however many hours extra work to have the gig... It does feel weird and there is a tension that I'm finding quite difficult.' (TP, category A).

Hence bandleaders may even have felt pressured to take less than bandmembers:

'I was always very on the case with demanding things for the band, in terms of dressing room and rider. Demanding they get treated well, looking after their interests. Making sure they got paid well. And I always put their pay above my priorities' (MS, category A)

'[Fixers] I talk to spend hours and hours doing these things, then coming away realising that they didn't charge enough to cover the travel, so they've got to pay everyone travel, otherwise

they're going to lose face... it's not really the done thing to change the fee after it's been agreed, so they're coming away with no fee' (JW, category C)

The function band's moral economy therefore emphasised widely-held expectations around minimum fees, and egalitarianism among bandmembers. Fixers sometimes embraced this, seeing themselves as part of the band, or it may have been exercised through pressure. The moral economy was (partially) 'enforced' through the stigmatisation of perceived violators. Agents and fixers that undercut risked reputational damage. Here, MR1 (category B) referred to musicians who had recently graduated from fixing to running their own agency, and who had gained a reputation for offering low-paid work:

'This guy... wrote this formal pdf email with the agency email on it, saying "recent events have led us to think we should outline our policy... With regards to the fee, we're just doing what we need to do to be competitive". Unapologetically... It was simply that they were being competitive and undercutting other function bands is simply the nature of the beast... Oh my god- these guys are now hated... At the time, every conversation I was having with every musician in London was "Did you get that email from [the agency]?"... Honestly, he really didn't see where he'd gone wrong... Others will refuse to take any of his gigs so he's restricted in the pool he can draw on. People do still do them because they need the work, but they've driven the fee up now.'

Thus most assumed that while bad bandleaders did exist, 'you'll probably have heard of them, before they call you' (FG2, category C).

Depping was also embedded in a moral economy. It was a way of building trust networks, helping musicians to gain work, and reciprocating where others had provided work in the past. Hence it had both moral and instrumental underpinnings. However, it also implied responsibility, particularly towards the bandleader. Bandleaders saw it as normal to arrive at an engagement to find unexpected changes to lineups, but expected musicians to take 'depping themselves out' seriously: 'if they want to not do the gig they have to find a replacement. If they drop me in it, then they just risk not being asked to do another gig.' (MS, category A). Conversely, musicians were also critical of those perceived to be too instrumental in widening their pool of contacts (MR1, category B).

The function musicians' moral economy resembled that described by Banks (2006) in that, *within the band unit*, there were widely-held egalitarian norms. However, the band unit's dynamics were in tension with the wider commercial chain. The fixer embodied the contested frontier between moral and market economies. They had to present competitive services to buyers, while maintaining within-band moral norms. Consequently their position could be uncomfortable, and subject to mistrust as someone who might potentially want to take a bigger cut, or become too close to buyers and agents (JK, category C). They could be caught between their band responsibilities and their sometimes problematic commercial relationships:

'I [fixed] two function gigs about a month ago... So I phoned up two musicians and asked them to play, and so I'm responsible for getting the money. And actually that money hasn't come in yet. It's getting a bit late, so they're asking me about it. I've phoned the guy and he says he hasn't got it yet. So, is it going to be my responsibility to pay them, if we don't get paid?... You definitely feel slightly blamed as the bandleader if you haven't been paid, even if they haven't got the money in. It's like "oh come on, chase this money up". Even if it's probably not [your] fault...' (MP, category B)

The social embeddedness of function bands thus exacerbated pressure on the fixer, and was a means of defence for musicians. Egalitarian pay was more likely when bands knew each other well.

Conversely, those without strong contacts might be excluded from engagements; this made young musicians particularly vulnerable to being put at the bottom of pay hierarchies (TO, category C). This is examined further in the next section.

Function musicians' moral economy assumed a particular form, centred on the band; a much more transient type of unit than most 'traditional' workplaces. When bands were assembled for function work, its members brought a set of expectations emphasising acceptable fees, responsible use of deps, and an egalitarian division of money. To an extent, it was enforceable through the need to maintain reputation and good relations with other musicians. However, data gathering also revealed factors which were intensifying market competition in function work and, in the process, challenging this moral economy.

Facing the market: customers and agents

The bandleader's position joined the moral and market economy, with different expectations on each side. This section argues that changes in the market structure and in the nature of intermediary actors were leading the market to encroach on the band's moral economy. Firstly, the dynamics of supply and demand in function work were changing. Most participants observed declining demand since the 2008 crisis and subsequent austerity. This drop-off had caused relationships to strain. The circulation of dep jobs had slowed as people tried to hang on to positions (HR, category E). Relations between bandleaders and member had also become fraught:

'There's a lot of empty promises with promoters and other musicians. And everyone's in a bad position. No-one's phoning up going "oh I've got so much to do this month, can you take something over for me?" Everyone's phoning up and saying "have you got anything?" "No, I haven't, have you?" "No, I haven't". That's where the anxiety comes from... My relationships have strained in recent years because a lot of my musician friends were dependent on me for work. And they're all very disappointed and frustrated with me for not providing it. They understand there's not much work out there but they wish I was doing more.' (MS, category A)

Diminished work had also made price expectations harder to realise:

'I know the leader of this function band I play in, feels a lot of pressure... to always have work coming in... It means that the value often gets compromised. She'll make sure she gets work by ensuring competitive pricing. That's fine for the people who get the work. But... when you look at how much the gigs are paying, the compromises they're making in order to drive that fee down...' (MR1, category B)

Expanding higher education provision in music had also increased supply (Whyton, 2006), causing annual influxes of young workers into the functions labour market. As will be shown below, this created significant market-intensifying opportunities for intermediaries.

Buyers set fees with fixers in various ways. Individual buyers might simply ask fixers for a quote. This quote was informed by the moral economy, and the buyer would decide whether or not to accept. If the client was relying on word-of-mouth or contacts, they may have been a limited pool of bands from which to choose, giving fixers relative leeway. However, the situation was different if the buyer went through a 'booking agency'. This requires clarification, since the 'traditional' agent's role is to advance their artists' career development and actively prospect for work on their behalf in exchange for a (usual) 20% commission. Such actors do not necessarily intensify market competition and may even limit it by restricting market access (Lizé et al., 2011).

However, category A and B participants, as well as agent respondents, revealed changes in agent business models. The internet had encouraged agents to rely less on esoteric contact networks in favour of internet searches (Director, Agency A). Rather than performing artist development and job search functions as a matter of course, agencies increasingly acted as online 'shop windows' (Director, Agency B) where buyers could browse thousands of acts as on a price comparison website. This model was 'client-oriented rather than artist oriented' (Manager, Agency C), aiming to offer the best prices to buyers. They thus explicitly encouraged bands to limit their pricing ambitions, stressing the competition implied by being part of the agency's roster; if they were not picking up work, the price was likely too high (Director, Agency B). 'The idea of being competitively priced has become much more prevalent in recent years when discussing with musicians' (email conversation, Director, Agency C). Some agents were explicit that the regular influx of young workers from conservatoires intensified this pressure (Co-founder, Agency D).

The term 'agent' as used here denotes these newer models. Many of these agents still followed the traditional industry norm of 20% commission rates. In principle, this could create an incentive for agents to try to boost fees, but in reality larger companies focused on volume, and price haggling slowed transactions down (Manager, Agency C). Other newer agencies might use less transparent practices to get higher commissions. They might demand a flat rate from bandleaders when they made initial contact, before negotiating fees separately with clients, taking 'whatever we can get' in each case and keeping the difference, unbeknownst to the band (Co-founder, Agency D). Musician interviewees corroborated these methods. One, for instance (JB, category, B) had received, by accident, the agent's cheque after performing, and noticed it was three times the band's total fee.

In such cases musicians could have strikingly little knowledge about agent rates, and sometimes proclaimed to not want to know; this position was in stark contrast with the concern for equality within the band itself.

'We don't really know [about agent fees] because we don't want to be too shocked *laughs*... A lot of musicians will say "god knows what he's taking, I don't want to know. I just need the work so I'll do the gig"' (JK, category C)

'They [the fixer] have a relationship with the agency, and the agent hooks them up with gigs. It's got nothing to do with me honestly, I'm just not interested... Oh, there's no question that the musicians get exploited because the agents are taking massively more money than the musicians are... But I choose to detach myself from the whole thing because if you think about it like that it's going to drive you crazy' (JC, category C)

Thus agents were total outsiders to the band's internal moral economy, and their actions were opaque from the band's vantage point. The egalitarian moral economy influenced how money was divided once the band was paid, but had little influence over the power dynamics between buyers and sellers, and consequently the amount of money entering the band in the first place. In one case, an agent reduced the band's fee after the event (after the singer had depped the gig out to an under-prepared replacement): 'I think that was them saying "we aren't going to pay the singer". But we ended up just divvying it up equally anyway... That's the thing- in recent times I've learnt to deal with things by not caring' (MR2, category C). In short, the egalitarian economy within the band took precedence over questioning band-agent relations. Bandmembers also questioned why fees remained static despite wide variation in the apparent opulence of clients but this was never taken up with agents. Internal fee norms establish a band's asking price, and the subsequent dealings of the agent were typically seen as outside the band's purview.

Musicians also experienced agents organising *ad hoc* spot markets; simply telephoning musicians or posting on social media sites (the Facebook page for 'dep' musicians has around 40000 members), specifying a job, often at short notice, looking for those willing to work for the lowest fees (JB, category C). This was the most marketised kind of agent-fixer relationship, since it implied the immediate 'staging of labour competition' (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2015). Here, the fixer may struggle to maintain fee expectations:

“What’s the least amount of money you’d be willing to go out for?” That’s a phrase I’ve heard a few times... it’s just not nice to be asked that. It’s a shame, isn’t it, because most musicians spend their whole lives practicing, and they could go out for £50 a night- well, some might.’ (FG, saxophone)

The presence of young market entrants exacerbated this competition. Some participants (MR2, category C; MR1, category B) described fixers and agents that specifically sought out young workers in order to assemble cheaper bands. Another (TO, category C) had encountered fixers that paid musicians according to age and status. This clearly ran counter to the musicians’ moral economy; the problem, however, being that fee information was kept back from the band. One fixer (MS, category A) recalled losing engagements to student bands willing to work for lower fees.

Changing market dynamics and the role of intermediaries therefore exerted pressure on band fees, challenging the function musicians’ moral economy. This challenge was also manifested in the common problem of late payments. Many interviewees described waiting many months for payment from buyers or agents; one (GJ, category C) estimated this applied to 50% of his function work. The market-intensifying power of agents made fixers afraid to challenge them:

‘I do push to be paid after a month, but it seems to take twice as long as it should do... And I always do say this to the band members, that unfortunately, certain agents might take a while to pay... That is upsetting for me, because... the band start pressuring me for money, and I haven’t got it yet, so I start pressuring the agent... That is obviously your job but it is frustrating and I feel it reflects badly on me when I haven’t got the money to pay the band. But I’m trying my best to get the money, as well... They’re giving me the work and I don’t want to burn bridges... If I’m too pushy about that, then it could be to the detriment to any future work I get’ (TP, category A)

Here, the conflicted role of the fixer was most apparent; the antagonistic logics acting on them could cause relationships to strain and trust to break down (MS, category A; TP, category A). The band itself, meanwhile, normally viewed buyers and agents as outsiders. This was typified not just in attitudes towards agent fees, but also in attitudes towards audiences. Musicians are keenly aware that function audiences value highly-developed musicianship considerably less than musicians do: ‘People aren’t educated enough to be able to tell the difference between someone that’s got 10 years’ experience and someone that’s been doing it for six months’ (AB, category C). ‘In the UK, most musicians feel a bit down on the listening public’ (MS, category A). Such comments exemplified the sense of mutual incomprehensibility between moral and market economies in function work. Where fee norms were broken, musicians might reduce effort accordingly (JB, category B), to the indignation of the client. The latter may have spent a substantial sum on the band after factoring in agent fees, entirely unaware that bandmembers saw their fee as insultingly low.

This section has highlighted threats and limits to function musicians’ moral economy. Market dynamics and emerging intermediaries had intensified competitive pressure. It would be wrong to overstate the diminution of the moral economy, since bands continued to emphasise egalitarian

distributions of pay. Nonetheless, important claims can be made based on this evidence. Intensified competition strained trust relations between fixers and bandmembers; fixers found it harder to provide for their networks, and problems with late payments left them uncomfortably caught between two domains. Moreover, there was growing pressure to be 'competitive' in pricing bands, and the presence of an extensive supply of young workers was something of which more 'entrepreneurial' fixers and intermediaries were well aware. Finally, musicians rarely challenged agents in defence of conditions, partly for fear of losing work, and partly because their dealings were seen as the opaque actions of outsiders.

Discussion and conclusion

This article makes three main contributions to the empirical and conceptual literature on moral economy, and on the creative industries. Firstly, it brings the study of moral economy into a distinctive employment context. Secondly, it presents important and novel empirical material, particularly around the role of intermediaries. Thirdly, it takes a different, arguably more pessimistic view of the effects and influence of cultural workers' moral economy. This section will expand on these contributions.

The moral economy concept has recently experienced renewed interest in work and employment sociology (e.g. Bolton and Laaser, 2013; Breslin and Wood, 2013; Laaser, 2015; Mulinari, 2016). In such scholarship, it closely overlaps with ideas like community, suggesting that shared expectations about the distribution of resources arise through personal contact between workers. This also applies to musicians, but because musicians' workplaces were so diffuse and transient, this happened in a particular way. Band units repeatedly formed and dispersed around the fixer, and the musicians involved brought expectations that might have been shared by the fixer, or might have been forced on them through pressure. As a result, the fixer's role personified the tension between moral and market economies, causing them significant anxiety. The responsibility on them was greater since bandmembers themselves tended to distance themselves from the 'outside' world of buyers, being more concerned with the band's internal dynamics.

This transposing of the moral economy concept to diffuse freelancer labour markets is important, given wider trends. Function musicians are by no means the only group who negotiate these kinds of markets. Many workers within the so-called 'gig economy', or among the rising numbers of freelancers in the broadly-defined and increasingly influential 'creative industries', encounter similar situations. As such, it is important to understand what kinds of moral economy they may create. The findings here suggest that moral economies which influence market conditions are likely to take root in these settings, as workers' informal expectations are carried from one transient workplace to another by individuals. It also suggests that the most responsibility and pressure for preserving these expectations is likely to rest on the equivalents of function 'fixers': those workers who, by virtue of their market contacts, are relied on by others as a source of work. Moreover, it shows the conflicts and contradictions likely to be experienced by people assuming this role.

The article makes an important empirical contribution by illuminating changes in the role of cultural work intermediaries. This group has been little studied. Lizé et al. (2011) offer a rich and detailed study of cultural labour market intermediaries in France, but focus on 'traditional' agents and managers who operate very differently to the ones described here. This article, by contrast, shows how changes in technology and market structure were combining with other types of 'agent' who were much more likely to 'stage labour competition' (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2015) within cultural work. While such actors were most obvious in function work, there is every reason to predict that they will proliferate in other regions of the creative industries, as the esoteric skills of traditional entertainment

intermediaries become easier to bypass through internet search engines. In this sense, the article sides with writers that emphasise the ability of powerful market actors to 'disembed' moral economies, showing how new intermediary actors are catalysing this process in cultural work. While economic sociologists may well be right to emphasise the importance of trust and honesty (Barber, 2005; Krippner et al., 2004) as the underpinnings of any market, these findings reveal how these things can, even if they never disappear entirely, be intensely strained by the dynamic power of market competition.

Finally, the most important contribution here is the overall argument made. Work and employment sociologists have not often transposed the moral economy concept to cultural work, but there have been more explicit attempts to do this in fields like cultural sociology, particularly Banks (2006). This article agrees with many of Banks's observations about the communitarian instincts of cultural workers, but is more pessimistic about the extent and durability of cultural workers' moral economies. This scepticism is a product of a more specific focus on the organisation of the labour market and the agency of profit-extracting actors therein. In the findings presented here, the key point is not the existence of non-marketised space, but the way this space conflicted with the wider commercial chains into which it was integrated. Its boundaries were fraught with tensions and pressures.

To return to the research questions sketched above, it is clear that function musicians have a moral economy, which is shared remarkably widely given the diffuseness of the labour market. They have shared norms and expectations and a strong sense that fixers should try to uphold these. However, the scope of the moral is limited, since bandmembers saw arrangements with agents and buyers as highly opaque, and were more concerned with maintaining an egalitarian ethos within the band than challenging outside actors. Moreover, wider economic conditions were combining with the influence of new, market-intensifying intermediaries to exert strain on bandmember-fixer relations, and on the attainability of desired fees. The article thus describes the limits of the moral economy, and specifies the contested boundaries between it and the marketplace.

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Table 1

| Category | Description | Number of respondents |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Category A | Fixing function work is the primary source of income. | 4 |
| Category B | Function work is the primary source of income; also works occasionally as 'fixer'. | 2 |
| Category C | Function work is the most important source of income, but never works as 'fixer'. | 14 |
| Category D | Function work occupies less than half the participant's time. | 5 |
| Category E | Currently rejecting function work, or seeking to break into it. | 5 |

Table 2

| Agency | Age of company | Number of acts | Respondent |
|----------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agency A | 20+ years | Approximately 100 | Founder and Director. NB: This respondent also works as a councillor at the trade |

| | | | |
|----------|-----------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | body for UK entertainment agents. |
| Agency B | 10 years | Over 1000 | Founder and director. |
| Agency C | 17 years | Approximately 1500 | Member of management team. NB: Company Director also provided answers to questions over email. |
| Agency D | Two years | Eight | Co-founder |
| Agency E | 12 years | Over 3000 | Co-owner and director of live music |

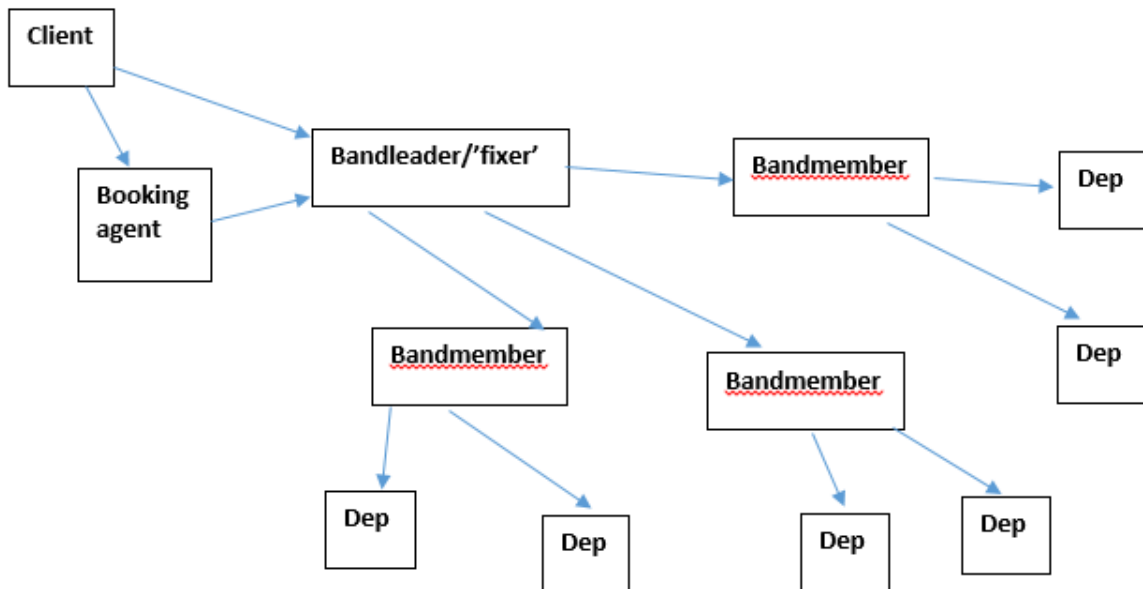


Figure 1