

# Introduction



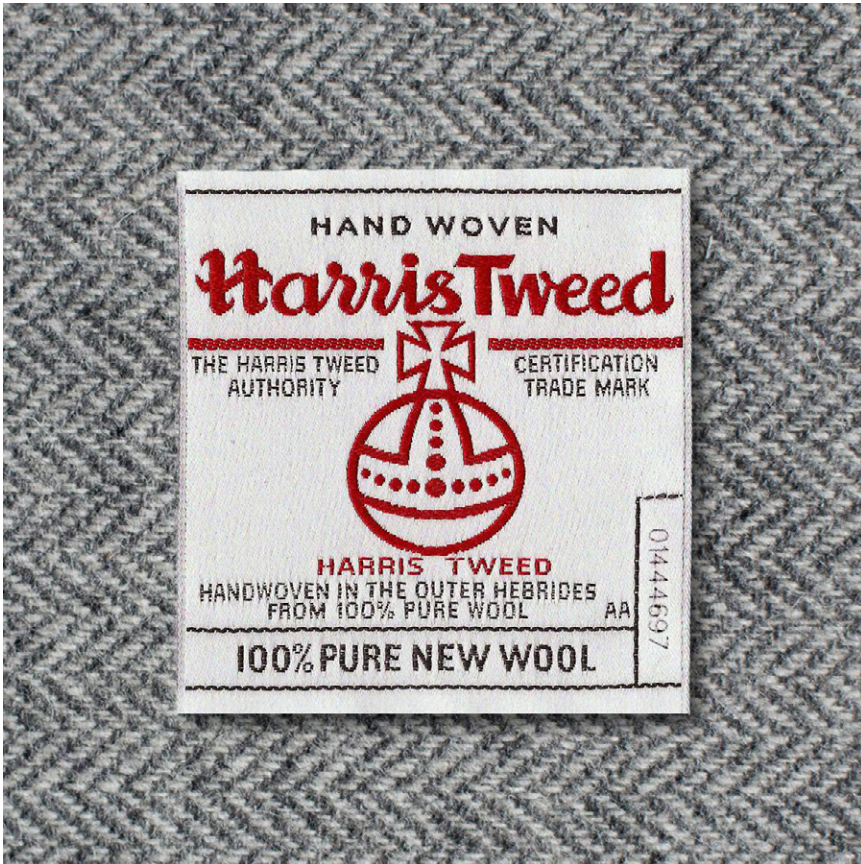
In this Act, 'Harris Tweed' means a tweed which –

- (a) has been handwoven by the islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides, finished in the Outer Hebrides, and made from pure virgin wool dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides.
- (b) possesses such further characteristics as a material is required to possess under regulations from time to time in force under the provisions of Schedule 1 to the Act of 1938 (or under regulations from time to time in force under any enactment replacing those provisions) for it to qualify for the application to it, and use with respect to it, of a Harris Tweed trade mark.

—Harris Tweed Act 1993: 6

When I was growing up, I just assumed this was what everyone else did anywhere in the world.' Kim<sup>1</sup> chuckled, amused by the certainty of her childhood belief. 'It was all around you, the weaving. Especially here on the West side. We had a loom, and so did most houses up and down the road. You could hear them – *clickaddy-clack, clickaddy-clack* – when you walked through the village.' Taking a break from her weaving work, Kim invited me into her kitchen for a cup of tea. She continued – 'It was only when I was eighteen and moved to the mainland to study and work that I realized – hold on, they don't all have looms in their houses like we do back home'.

Eventually, while she was 'away' in the Scottish mainland, Kim realized just how singular the weaving industry from her islands was. The hard-wearing, woollen cloth that her family and their neighbours were busy weaving in their domestic loom sheds on the west side of Lewis when she was growing up had long been known, around the world, as 'Harris Tweed'. Trademark protected since 1910, Harris Tweed can only be produced in the Outer Hebrides, a group of islands located off the west coast of Scotland. Moreover, a cloth can only be called 'Harris Tweed' and stamped with the recognizable 'Orb' trademark (Figs. 0.1 and 0.2) if it has been handwoven at the homes of the islanders using wool dyed and spun in local island mills. Since 1993, Harris Tweed has



**Figure 0.1.** HTA-issued label over a length of Harris Tweed in a grey herringbone pattern. Photo © Harris Tweed Authority, used with permission.

become the only cloth in the world protected by its own Act of Parliament.<sup>2</sup> This legislation emphasizes how ‘it is vital to the economy of those islands that the integrity, distinctive character and worldwide renown of Harris Tweed should be maintained’ (Harris Tweed Act 1993: 1).

The geographical situation of the Outer Hebrides – located so far to the west of Scotland that they’re also known as the Western Isles – along with their economic fragility, declining population, and distinctive social and cultural histories, provided sound justification for this legal protection. According to the most recent census in 2011, the total population of the Outer Hebrides was 27,684, and it was concentrated primarily on the Isle of Lewis and Harris (21,031). Stornoway, the only large town in



**Figure 0.2.** Stamping of the Orb trademark (pre-1969, n.d.). Photo © Harris Tweed Authority, used with permission.

the archipelago, had a population of around 8,100 (National Records of Scotland 2013). The ‘remoteness’ of these Gaelic-speaking islands, the harsh weather, striking scenery, and the ‘preservation’ of a ‘crofting way of life’ have, for over a century, captured imaginations around the world. While Harris Tweed can only be produced in the Outer Hebrides, the rugged woollen cloth that was once known locally simply as *clò mòr* (Scottish Gaelic for ‘big cloth’) is exported today to over fifty countries, and is trademark protected in over thirty.

The centrality of terms like ‘provenance’ and ‘heritage’ in descriptions of the Harris Tweed industry might suggest that the production of the cloth would lie in the hands of a select group of people, perhaps ‘born and bred’ (Edwards 2000) on the islands, maybe descendants of a weaving family, possibly taught by relatives who have passed specialized skills, knowledge and values on from generation to generation. While this was certainly the case for some of the weavers I met during my fieldwork, it quickly became clear that the industry was more demographically diverse than I had anticipated. A significant proportion of people employed in the Harris Tweed industry today come from sharply contrasting backgrounds, and several were born and bred elsewhere – on the Scottish mainland, in England, or in another European country. At the same time, the region’s long history of labour and educational migration meant that most ‘local’ islanders were also ‘returners’ of some kind – and that several Harris Tweed workers had arrived at their present position after a diverse career history.

Although she came from a weaving family, Kim told me that she ‘had never imagined’ she would eventually become a Harris Tweed weaver herself. When she moved away twenty years earlier, she thought she was leaving the familiar ‘crofting way of life’ behind her, going to University in Glasgow and taking on work in different mainland cities. For a long time, Kim was certain that her work and life would mostly be lived ‘away’, with occasional visits to the island where she was born and raised. Circumstances, however, changed. Moving back to Lewis three years earlier – and eventually finding work as a weaver – was an unexpected plan that only emerged as a result of significant transformations in her personal and professional situation while living on the Scottish mainland. After the company where she was working decided to move her position to a different city, and she found herself working in conditions that made her job ‘horrible’, she discussed the possibility of a change with her husband – who at the time was also in a job he disliked. They had both wanted to try their hand at crofting, and ‘had been talking about it for ages’. So, when a relative ‘back home’ in Lewis fell ill and her husband was offered redundancy, they took the leap and relocated to her family croft.

When Kim moved back to Lewis, she still did not know how to weave, despite ‘coming from a weaving family’ and having observed her parents’ and siblings’ involvement in the industry when she was growing up. In fact, for Kim, the idea of trying to become a weaver did not arise until a few months after she and her husband had decided to move. Initially, the plan had been ‘all about crofting’,<sup>3</sup> and waiting to see what income-generating jobs might be available when they got there. Yet once the opportunity to get a loom emerged, weaving suddenly seemed like the perfect option. ‘After all,’ she reasoned, ‘weaving and crofting have always been an ideal combination in this area.’ Eventually, she was taught to weave by a fellow Harris Tweed weaver – a German neighbour who had moved to Lewis nearly ten years earlier – who had been recommended to her as a potential weaving mentor. Kim detailed how much she had learnt from her mentor – the mechanics of the loom, the weaving principles, the myriad skilled practices, and the mental preparation for the prospect of occasional ‘quiet’ periods, following fluctuations in international orders that might slow production down and leave her loom temporarily ‘empty’.

As my fieldwork progressed, I soon realized that ‘locals’ (people who had been born and raised in the Outer Hebrides), ‘returners’ (‘locals’ who had spent time living, studying and working ‘away’ before relocating to the islands), and ‘incomers’ (people from elsewhere who had

moved to the islands) were all involved in the industry as *islanders* – just the term used in the legal definition of Harris Tweed. And when shifts in global demand for the cloth shaped fluctuating work prospects, the possibility of labour uncertainty was imagined and experienced not primarily by incomers as might be expected, but by *islanders* across that spectrum – locals, returners and incomers.

Discussions about migration and resettlement in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland have highlighted the widespread use of terms like ‘local’ and ‘incomer’ throughout the region, and the meanings attributed, in different contexts, to place-based ‘labels’ of this kind. As I became increasingly familiar with the intricacies of social life in the Harris Tweed industry (and in Lewis and Harris more generally), I noticed a striking contrast between the inclusive possibilities I observed, and some of the descriptions I had read of other similarly ‘insular’ places in the Highlands and Islands, where ‘incomers’ might be described, for instance, as ‘white settlers’ (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996).<sup>4</sup> The unexpected contrast suggested by the inclusive notion of ‘islanders’ in this context led me to examine how local understandings of belonging and place-making were articulated, within and beyond the Harris Tweed industry. These observations made me wonder if an ethnographic study of a localized ‘heritage industry’ such as Harris Tweed could capture some of these nuances and suggest alternative possibilities for understanding the diversity of region-specific experiences of migration, belonging, work and life in contemporary capitalism.

Anthropologists have variously explored the relationship between people, place, and the production of various kinds of ‘things’ – including the social implications of place-based and industry-related notions of belonging (e.g. Kondo 1990; Yanagisako 2002; Hart 2005; Mollona 2005, 2009). In this book I discuss how studying the Harris Tweed industry ethnographically, focusing particularly on the lived experiences and livelihood strategies of its demographically diverse workforce, rendered visible some of the social complexities, contradictions and possibilities involved in processes of settlement and place-making. Considering the everyday practices, moral understandings and shifting perspectives of workers employed in a so-called ‘heritage industry’ that is so fundamentally rooted in these islands revealed people’s engagement in the different kinds ‘work’ involved in making the material *and* social fabric of these islands – whether they were locals, returners or incomers. Unsettling established narratives surrounding ideas of rootedness and belonging, this book illuminates some of the inclusive, resourceful and generative practices and outlooks involved in addressing various kinds of uncertainty in this

region. Doing so, I suggest, improves our understanding of the social and moral complexities of contemporary work and livelihood strategies, highlighting the importance of locating them in relation to particular regional, industrial and personal histories.

For thirteen months (August 2016 – September 2017), I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on the Isle of Lewis and Harris – the Outer Hebridean island where the Harris Tweed industry came to be concentrated.<sup>5</sup> I spent time in the workplaces involved, in different ways, in the making of Harris Tweed – domestic loom sheds, woollen mills, tweed vans, the offices of the Harris Tweed Authority – learning from workers, sometimes working alongside them. Conducting participant observation in these contexts directed my attention to the ways in which work processes, workers and workplaces conjured certain moral understandings, implicated individuals in particular social relationships, and constantly tested people’s expectations, assumptions, and visions of ‘lives worth leading’.

Focusing on the lives of workers employed in an industry that is peculiarly rooted in a ‘remote’ location, but fundamentally connected to the whims of global markets, also offered an opportunity to reflect on how people variously make sense of their place in the world as they navigate the volatility, paradoxes and opportunities of contemporary global capitalism. Most strikingly, as I mentioned above, learning about workers’ lives and about their everyday experiences of work in this localised and peculiarly structured industry revealed the prevalence of inclusive social dynamics that contrasted with more parochial, kinship-centred or otherwise exclusionary notions of ‘community membership’ observed in other places – within and beyond the Scottish Highlands and Islands – similarly described as ‘insular’, ‘remote’ or ‘self-contained’ (e.g. Strathern 1981; Cohen 1987; Rapport 1993; Jedrej and Nuttall 1996; Edwards 2000). Gradually, I realized how this inclusive ethos seemed to shape everyday practices and experiences of work, and how it became particularly noticeable when occasional slumps in global demand for the cloth slowed production down, leading to temporarily ‘empty’ looms. Fluctuations in demand for Harris Tweed exposed one of the industry’s enduring challenges – trying to find a balance between the number of self-employed weavers ready to take on orders, and the volume of orders required for weavers to make a reasonable living and remain in the industry. Yet on these occasions, I was told, patterns of work distribution and attitudes towards fellow islanders – whether locals, returners or incomers – continued to be guided by ‘egalitarian’ principles, revealing inclusive understandings of a shared precariousness.

In this book I consider how these seemingly contradictory dynamics were experienced and discussed locally in relation to specific regional and industrial histories, and understood as part of particular personal narratives, family histories, and shared moral principles. Doing so, I highlight how anthropologists are ideally positioned to attend to the diverse, shifting and nuanced ways in which people experience and articulate their views on labour uncertainty, resettlement and belonging. Besides spending long periods of time in different workplaces and learning how to perform particular tasks – e.g. weaving, warping, filling pirns<sup>6</sup> – I also learnt Scottish Gaelic, conducted interviews within and outwith the industry (i.e. with current and former workers; with people whose relatives had been involved in the industry; and with other islanders who had no direct involvement in it), and circulated a questionnaire in one of the mills. I was occasionally invited to social and industry-related events organized by Harris Tweed weavers and mill workers – from more formal occasions, like the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Harris Tweed Weavers, to more informal gatherings and conversations. As part of my research, I also visited several local museums and consulted local archives (Tasglann nan Eilean Siar, Harris Tweed Authority Archives), libraries (Stornoway Public Library, Lewis Castle College Library), and records available in local historical societies (Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, Comann Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar, Stornoway Historical Society).

During my time in the Outer Hebrides I also became involved in a community wool-working group, I attended several local events dedicated to Scottish Gaelic language and culture (e.g. concerts, public talks, theatre plays; musical and storytelling competitions during the Royal National Mòd; and Highland dance and piping competitions), and I learnt how to weave baskets and other artefacts using local plants – including willow, heather, and marram grass.<sup>7</sup> Occasionally, I took part in croft work, cutting peats, shearing sheep, helping in separating the sheep from their lambs, and preparing them for the winter. I also joined community coastal walks, and attended social gatherings and fundraising breakfasts at local historical societies and village community halls. Along with my time spent in Harris Tweed workplaces, engaging in these activities allowed me to take part in other dimensions of local life, and to meet people who would also become important interlocutors as I sought to learn more about contemporary experiences of work and life on these islands.

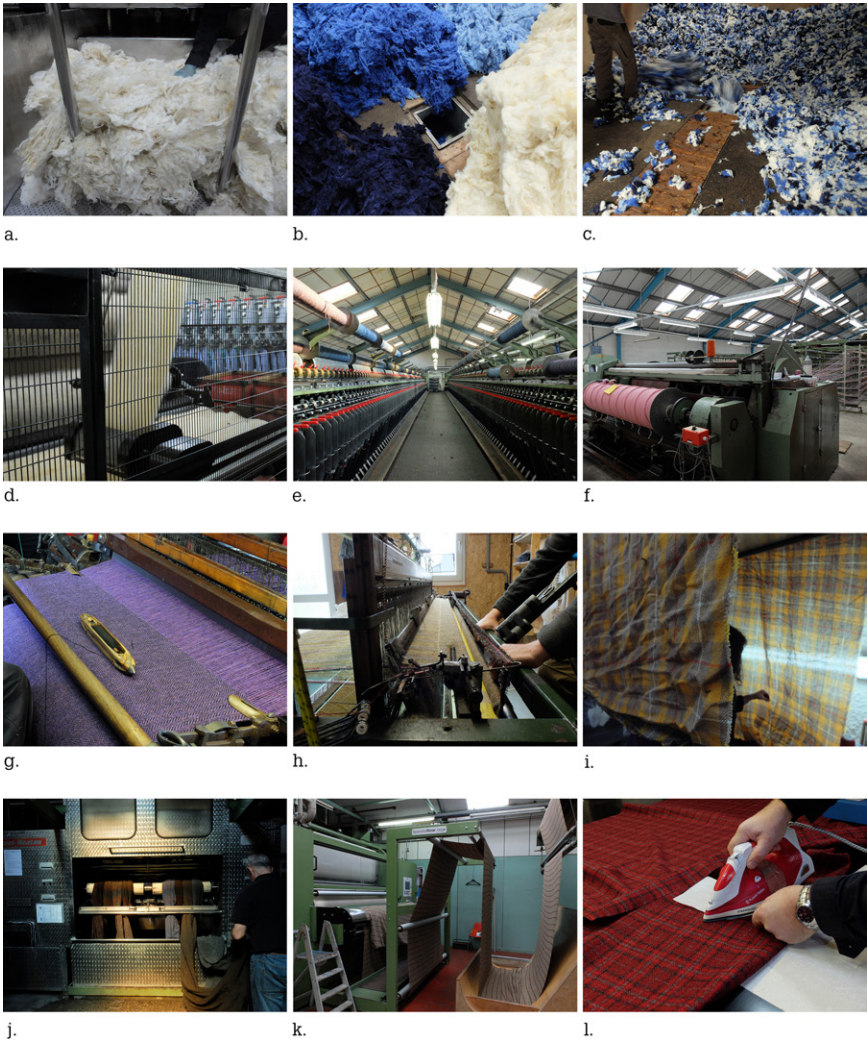
## An Industry of Paradoxes

One of the puzzling features of the Harris Tweed industry – and part of the charm that has attracted consumers to the cloth for over a century – lies in its ability to survive as a reputed global-reaching industry despite (and, as I suggest in this book, because of) its unusual production model. According to its legal trademark protection, Harris Tweed can only be produced in the Outer Hebrides, following strict production practices that encompass both domestic hand-weaving and industrial mill work, establishing particular relations between different working elements in a way that might elsewhere be perceived as ‘inefficient’ or counterproductive. Yet I found that, for several islanders whose livelihoods depended on working for the Harris Tweed industry, its distinctive productive model was understood, instead, to match the needs and specific geographical, historical and socio-economic circumstances of the islands, contributing to population retention and enabling the pursuit of particular visions of a ‘good life’ – despite potential labour uncertainty.

Several months into my fieldwork, realizing the productive conversations surrounding this theme, I persisted in asking people how they would explain the workings of the Harris Tweed industry. Workers across the industry invariably began by telling me about its three main elements – woollen mills, self-employed weavers, and the Harris Tweed Authority (HTA). They highlighted how each of these elements had a unique role to play, which could not be replaced or transferred to any other element. The relations between them, I soon realized, were not only seen as vital for the industry’s survival, but are crucial to understand the nature of Harris Tweed – not just as a manufacturing industry, but as an enduring local project that encompassed certain moral and social commitments.

These discussions focused, in part, on the practical aspects of the relationship between those three elements. The local mills cannot weave the cloth in their premises, since Harris Tweed can only be stamped with the Orb trademark if it has been handwoven in weavers’ own homes. The self-employed weavers working from home rely on the mills for producing the right quality of woollen yarn (which they then use to weave the cloth), and for the industrial equipment and expertise required to wash and ‘finish’ the woven cloth, before it is inspected and stamped by the HTA. The vast majority of weavers also rely on work issued by the mills,<sup>8</sup> which have a wider reach into global markets and attract most customers’ orders. The mills rely, in turn, on weavers’ ability to complete orders in a timely manner and according





**Figure 0.3.** Some of the stages of production in the Harris Tweed industry, 2017. © Joana Nascimento. Stages *a. to f.* and *i. to l.* take place in the mills, while stages *g. and h.* take place in weavers' domestic loom sheds. **a.** A mill worker adds layers of 100 per cent virgin wool inside a dyeing pot. / **b.** Dyed wool ready to be blended into one of the yarn colour recipes. / **c.** Blending. / **d.** Carding. / **e.** Spinning. / **f.** Warping and beaming / **g.** Hand-weaving on a single-width Hattersley loom / **h.** Hand-weaving on a double-width Bonas Griffith loom / **i.** Darning / **j.** Washing / **k.** Finishing / **l.** Stamping.

to high quality standards so that the cloth can be stamped by the HTA with the Orb trademark and sent to customers around the world. Both weavers and mills rely on the HTA not only to promote and legally protect the industry's brand, but also to physically inspect and stamp each metre of cloth. The HTA, a statutory body that does not produce or sell any cloth itself, is funded exclusively through the stamping fees paid by mills (and by weavers working as independent producers). Stamping fees are paid according to the length of cloth produced, so this revenue – and thus the Authority's ability to undertake educational, promotional and legal responsibilities – also depends on shifts in local production, which are importantly shaped by fluctuations in international orders.

The protection afforded by the Orb trademark and the Act of Parliament establishes these rules and limitations, but the responsibility for enacting them appropriately, and thus safeguarding the industry's reputation, is perceived to lie in the hands of workers operating across these three key elements – woollen mills, domestic loom sheds, and the HTA. The only way the industry can work, I was often told, is if these three elements are 'working in symbiosis'. This term – 'symbiosis' – was used frequently by people across the industry as they summarized the responsibilities and complexities involved in maintaining a balanced relationship between those three elements. This symbiotic relation was variously described by reference to images or geometrical shapes that emphasized the supposedly 'egalitarian' nature of this dynamic, where mills, weavers, and the HTA were all seen to perform an equally important role. 'Not one of them is more important than the other', explained one of the workers, echoing the descriptions I was given by various weavers, mill workers and managers, and HTA employees.

While various people explained this relationship as 'a triangle', one mill manager hesitated to use that image after realizing that, once it was drawn on a piece of paper, it seemed to suggest instead a hierarchical relation between the three, resembling a pyramid instead of a flat triangle. A circle connecting the three might be more appropriate, I was told. Some people also invoked the image of a Venn diagram, with three circles intersecting to create a unique shared centre where 'Harris Tweed' could exist.

There are, of course, certain features of the industry that suggest the potential for unequal power dynamics to emerge.<sup>9</sup> In the past, there were occasions when tensions emerged between different actors, disrupting this balance in ways that threatened the survival of the whole industry (see e.g. Hunter 2001 for an account of some of these moments

in the history of the industry). I gradually learnt that workers' emphasis on the centrality of symbiosis in the industry, and the recognition of the equal importance of each element, was often informed by their knowledge – or even first-hand experience – of these histories. Moreover, as my research progressed, I became increasingly attuned to the ways in which widespread notions of egalitarianism, symbiosis, interdependence and responsibility not only persisted in workers' descriptions of the industry, but also tempered how they framed their own expectations, anxieties and experiences of work in a localized industry that is so vulnerable to the vagaries of shifting global markets. These ideas, which highlighted the power and necessity of local cooperation and interdependence, seemed particularly relevant to overcome periods when orders appeared to be going 'quiet' and future work prospects looked momentarily uncertain.

Focusing on these narratives, I argue in this book, reveals the potency of shared references, moral understandings and industrial histories, and their role in shaping workers' everyday experiences and perspectives as they navigate the challenges, contradictions and possibilities of shifting politico-economic circumstances. In this particular case, focusing on these moral understandings rendered visible how people variously made sense of their place in an industry that had challenged widespread business practices by establishing a unique production model designed to prioritize the long-term welfare of local communities over fast profit-making, but which was nevertheless continually dependent on certain 'ordinary' or routinized workings of global capitalism.

Writing at a time when the industry was particularly successful,<sup>10</sup> the historian Francis Thompson also highlighted the unusual combination of economic planning and social commitment that shaped the seemingly contradictory place of the Harris Tweed production model in global markets. In his 1969 book on the history of Harris Tweed, Thompson described it as 'an industry of paradoxes' (1969: 27). Outlining the origins of local tweed production for domestic consumption in previous centuries, and the transformations that eventually turned it from a small-scale cottage industry into a global-reaching business, Thompson pointed out the unusual and seemingly contradictory features of Harris Tweed's growth. As the industry had retained some of the traditional, localized and small-scale manufacturing processes and production models from its early days (particularly the hand-weaving in islanders' homes), its vast global reach was seen as somewhat surprising in comparison with other industries. He pointed out how 'the present-day stature of the Harris Tweed industry is out of

all proportion to its actual size and method of manufacture' (ibid.). Moreover, Thompson observed that, despite those 'paradoxes', it had 'succeeded where other industries, with more formally recognized methods for manufacture and commercial organization, have often faltered and too often failed' (ibid.).

At the same time, Thompson pointed out another aspect that made the industry 'unique' – a certain commitment to concentrate not simply on maximizing profits but also on safeguarding the place of the industry in island life, acknowledging its important contribution to islanders' livelihoods. In his words, the Harris Tweed industry 'is also an industry whose organizers have an aim beyond that profit motive which is the *raison d'être* of commercial enterprise: they have a remarkable understanding and recognition of its social and economic value to the people of the Western Isles. In this respect the industry is unique' (Thompson 1969: 27).

The enmeshment of 'local' moral economies in world-encompassing capitalist relations of production and distribution has been increasingly explored by scholars, with anthropologists drawing attention to the ways in which people's lives and imaginations are both shaped by, and contribute to the making of, the shifting dynamics of contemporary global capitalism. Some of this work has focused on examining more closely some of the localized social, political and economic dynamics animating global commodity and value chains, bringing a more critical lens to the study of these large-scale, interlinked processes (e.g. Tsing 2000, 2005, 2009, 2015; Bestor 2001; Cross 2014). A focus on the relationship between work processes, relations of production, and politico-economic dynamics at different scales has revealed the uneven and unequal ways in which places, industries and markets participate in contemporary global capitalism (e.g. Herzfeld 2004; Bair 2005, 2011; Ferguson 2006; Cross 2010, 2014; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014).

I argue that paying attention not just to the organization of work and labour, but also to the ways in which workers understand the operational features (and histories) of those mechanisms, can expand our understanding of the resourcefulness involved in inhabiting, in meaningful ways, everyday experiences of labour uncertainty, 'flexibility', and the constant possibility of change. In this sense, my research builds on the contributions of anthropologists like Jamie Cross and Rebecca Prentice, whose research has highlighted how workers' imaginations and subjectivities in contexts shaped by neoliberal policies and other large-scale politico-economic transformations – in Special Economic Zones in India (Cross 2014) and in the Trinidadian garment

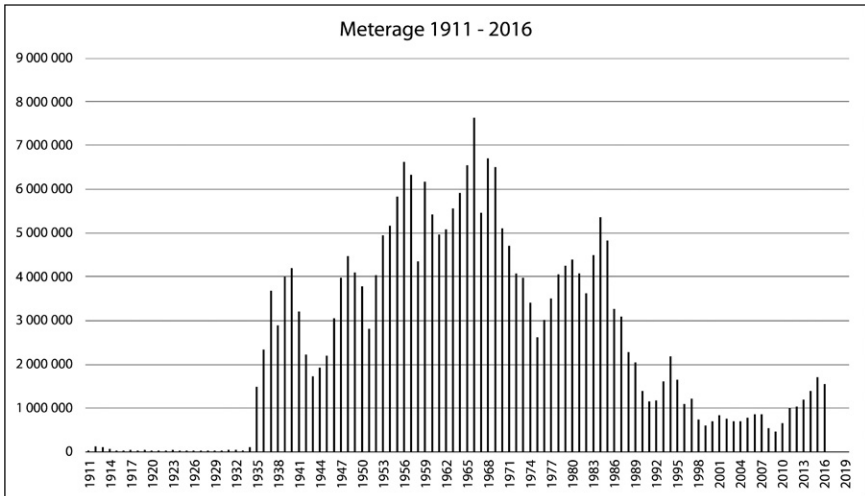
industry (Prentice 2015), for instance – also expose the social complexities, emotional affordances and moral understandings emerging in geographically localized workplaces. At the same time, this book contributes in unique ways to recent debates on work and labour by challenging widespread narratives about the novelty of labour precarity in so-called Western countries, highlighting the uneven distribution and diverse histories of present politico-economic forms. Locating contemporary experiences of work and life in global capitalism within region-specific and personal histories, this book focuses on what happens in certain ‘Western’ contexts where socio-economic disruption is experienced, instead, as part of a very long history of labour uncertainty, out-migration and depopulation.

Moreover, I argue, locating the emergence and development of certain industries within particular histories – regional, industrial, personal – also renders visible the complex social and moral implications entailed in these politico-economic processes. The Harris Tweed industry was created and continues to be sustained, in part, through the establishment of (sometimes unexpected) alliances between private capital, philanthropic actors, industry workers, and government institutions – from the shared efforts that led to the 1910 Orb trademark protection and the 1993 Act of Parliament, to the more recent state-sponsored investment in mill facilities and business plans. Government support of this kind, along with other ‘regional development’ policies, have sometimes been informed by the state’s assessment of these regions as ‘problem areas’ (see e.g. Ennew 1982). Over time, these external perceptions and formal procedures have contributed to the continuity of the industry as it faced different challenges. At the same time, I argue, a more detailed and ‘micro’ analysis is necessary to understand how the industry was developed and shaped into what it is today – and how it continues to grow and to take shape – through the active involvement of many islanders (see also Chapter 1). Since the nineteenth century, local people’s resourcefulness, political views, moral understandings and personal convictions have played a vital part in these processes. Examining the articulation between these different layers can illuminate not only how an idiosyncratic production model has been retained in this ‘industry of paradoxes’, but also how its retention has both *shaped* and *been shaped* by particular understandings of belonging and interdependence, and a sense of shared responsibility for what many islanders regarded as the ‘common good’.

## Resourcefulness, Precariousness and Anticipation

When I was visiting Kim, it became apparent that her views on current realities of work and life on the islands and in the Harris Tweed industry were informed by a particular understanding of ‘local’ livelihood strategies. Like several other workers I met, Kim evoked the place of weaving within local household practices and socio-economic structures – ‘weaving and crofting have always been an ideal combination in this area’, she pointed out. In this case, as the cloth has to be woven from home and weavers are self-employed, they have been able to decide, to a certain extent, how to balance their time between attending to croft work and weaving in their domestic loom sheds. At the same time, the limited size and fertility of crofting plots – inherited from nineteenth-century landownership practices, ‘improvement’ policies and profit-driven exploitation – has always required crofters to balance working the land with one or more additional income-generating occupations. As I was frequently reminded during my fieldwork, the relationship between crofting and weaving was only one among other arrangements devised, over generations, to address the multiple challenges faced by people who had decided to make the Outer Hebrides their home. Living on these windswept islands involved more than coping with the ever-changing, harsh weather and limited access to fertile land. It also required finding ways of dealing with the region’s economic fragility, limited employment opportunities, and uncertain, ever-changing labour futures.

The history of the Harris Tweed industry exemplified, for many islanders, both the uncertainty and the sense of possibility experienced by generations of workers seeking to make a living on these islands. While the Orb trademark (1910) and the Harris Tweed Act of Parliament (1993) have provided vital legal protection against counterfeiting and other threats against the brand, the industry has other vulnerabilities – and it has been periodically marked by significant ‘peaks and slumps’ that have made and unmade local livelihoods at different points in the past (see Fig. 0.4). Fluctuations in global demand for Harris Tweed have shaped these cycles since the early days of the industry, and while recent strategies within the industry have significantly contributed to reducing a dependence on seasonal demand and volatile markets, I found that the possibility of sudden change continued to inform many workers’ perceptions and everyday experiences of work.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on these impressions revealed how workers perceived the industry’s history of peaks and slumps, and how their knowledge informed resourceful practices and outlooks that were



**Figure 0.4.** Metres of tweed stamped with the 'Orb' trademark between 1911 and 2016. Image © Harris Tweed Authority, used with permission. According to the HTA, 'the certification trademark was amended in 1934 to allow mill-spun yarn to be used. Pre-1934, all yarn was handspun' (Source: HTA, November 2017, personal communication).

seen as vital to navigate the constant possibility of change on these islands (see e.g. Chapter 4).

Since the industry's beginnings, people's recurrent responses to these shifts included seeking alternative sources of income, periodically relying more on the limited returns of crofting, or moving away from the industry (and sometimes from the islands altogether). At the same time, however, periods of relative stability and recovery introduced new people to work in the industry, contributed in important ways to population retention, and affirmed the possibilities of working in an industry that enabled the pursuit of particular visions of a 'good life'.

Considering the ambivalence and resourcefulness that have marked experiences of work and life in the Harris Tweed industry, this book addresses some of the tensions, paradoxes and possibilities that emerge in contexts where labour uncertainty, and a long history of economic fragility and changeability, colour people's everyday lives. Recent anthropological discussions on precarity and precariousness have offered valuable insights on the lived experiences and social complexities involved in navigating different kinds of uncertainty, flexibility and insecurity. Paying due regard to the degree of severity and

temporal persistence of these diverse uncertain conditions, anthropologists have highlighted the ways in which people across the world variously inhabit, navigate, and make sense of their past, present and future lives. Focusing on work and life in the Harris Tweed industry, I contribute to these discussions by considering the articulation between localized livelihood strategies, and the ‘work’ involved in imagining and making particular kinds of lives.

I am interested, in particular, in the ways in which people’s understanding of their own circumstances can suggest diverse (and sometimes unexpected) ways of thinking through different forms of labour uncertainty and ‘flexibility’. In her discussion of ‘precarity’ – a notion that often refers to ‘the fact that much of the world’s population lacks stable work and steady incomes’ (2018: 1) – Sharryn Kasmir outlines how scholars have variously mobilized this concept, with different political and analytical implications (see also Millar 2017). For instance, the concept of precarity is often used to describe the realities and experiences of ‘post-Fordism’ – a term used to capture the decline, in the late twentieth century, of stable forms of full-time employment, and their replacement with flexible labour regimes, shaped by neoliberal interventions. Used in this way, the concept of precarity is often associated with particular claims – like the ‘pronouncement that precarity is new and that it manifests a distinctive phase of capitalist development associated with neoliberalism’ (Kasmir 2018: 1). However, while useful in certain contexts, this sense of precarity’s ‘novelty’ obscures not only the geographical and social unevenness of Fordism, but also the different place it occupies in particular regional histories and imaginaries (Baca 2004; Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012; Millar 2017; Kasmir 2018).

A different way of theorizing precarity and precariousness, Kasmir points out, has involved thinking about precariousness as an ontological condition. Drawing on Judith Butler’s distinction between ‘precarity’ and ‘precariousness’, Kasmir suggests how this framing can illuminate the lived experiences and emotional complexities involved in navigating various kinds of disruption and uncertainty. In this ‘critical distinction’, Butler ‘sees precariousness as a generalized human condition that stems from the fact that all humans are interdependent on each other and therefore all are vulnerable’ (Kasmir 2018: 2). By contrast, precarity is ‘unequally distributed’ – something that is ‘experienced by marginalized, poor, and disenfranchised people who are exposed to economic insecurity, injury, violence, and forced migration’ (ibid.; Butler 2004, 2010). Thinking through these conceptual propositions allows us to consider not only the circumstances that people find themselves in, but also the very particular and intimate ways in which



they navigate and make sense of the challenges they encounter. In Kasmir's view, anthropologists' attention to 'emotion and subjectivity' shows how 'they are particularly attuned to the structures of feeling associated with precarious lifeworlds' – including how these fluctuate and change, calling into question assumptions about the 'regularity' of everyday life (2018: 3).

This sense of precariousness as something that is variously defined, inhabited and understood by people as they navigate its manifestations echoes some of the insights I gathered from conversations with workers across the Harris Tweed industry (and with self-employed domestic weavers in particular). In their knowledge of Harris Tweed's vulnerability to shifts in global demand, workers variously expressed how they nevertheless made sense of the relative uncertainty in their work and life in relation to concepts as diverse as freedom, autonomy, resourcefulness, and the inevitability of change. Their often unexpected and optimistic understandings, expectations and visions of what a good life might look like in contexts of potential labour uncertainty, resonated with the sense of possibility and ingenuity expressed by other people whose 'flexible' work conditions and livelihood practices have been researched by anthropologists in different parts of the world (e.g. Prentice 2012, 2015; Millar 2014, 2018; Tsing 2015), and observed at different points in the past.

Attention to these dynamics in the Harris Tweed industry invites questions that can contribute to furthering our understanding of contemporary realities and lived experiences of work in this context and beyond. How can a cultivated attentiveness to the shifting perceptions and manifestations of uncertainty in people's lives inform more nuanced descriptions of work and life in 'flexible' labour markets? How are particular regional and industrial histories understood by workers, and how do they shape people's livelihood strategies, moral understandings, and personal outlooks on the constant possibility of change? How are workers' imagined labour futures informed by family histories, childhood memories and personal narratives surrounding their own career trajectories? Can concepts like resourcefulness and anticipation help to illuminate and capture the nuance of local strategies and outlooks on labour uncertainty and 'flexibility'? These are some of the questions that I address in this book, exploring how workers' views can inform not only how we understand localized experiences of global capitalism and 'flexible' labour regimes, but also how we think about 'work' itself.

## **An Expanded Concept of Work and Labour**

Learning about the Harris Tweed industry by spending time with people who are variously involved in its making revealed the myriad ways in which labour processes entailed not only the manufacturing of the cloth, but also the production of many other significant ‘things’ – from songs and pattern designs, to self-identities, social relations, notions of belonging, and resourceful outlooks on the constant possibility of change. In this book I reflect on the analytical possibilities afforded by the concept of work and labour, not only by discussing the lives of workers, workplaces and work processes involved in the production of Harris Tweed, but also by proposing an expanded understanding of this concept. My interest in these terms stemmed both from engaging with scholarly debates, and from learning about certain local practices and discourses, within and outwith the Harris Tweed industry.

Considering this particular regional and industrial context, in this book I show how examining the intertwinement of people, place, and the making of various kinds of ‘things’ through the lens of work and labour suggests alternative possibilities for thinking through the relationship between particular forms of employment, belonging and place-making. Researching the lived experiences of workers – whether locals, returners or incomers – whose livelihoods and commitment to remain on these islands are linked in important ways to the continuity of the Harris Tweed industry, revealed how people made sense of their place in the world not only in relation to the work they performed to make the cloth, but as part of wider projects such as the production of self-identities, social relationships, and forms of belonging. In some ways, the narratives and lived experiences articulated by these workers echo certain social dynamics that have been discussed in other anthropological studies of work and labour – but they also suggest alternative ways of thinking through old questions, and inform the formulation of new ones.

Today, the terms ‘work’ and ‘labour’ are often used interchangeably in the social sciences to refer to those activities that contribute to the livelihoods of people around the world, identifying practices that range from income-generating activities in so-called formal or informal sectors, to wageless occupations and unpaid household responsibilities that contribute in vital ways to social reproduction. While my interlocutors occasionally used these terms interchangeably to refer to the same things, and in this book they often appear to perform the same role, it is nevertheless important to briefly consider how other scholars have defined and framed them, and how I build on their con-

tributions. Addressing the question of whether a concept of work/labour is useful for anthropological research – and if so, how useful it is, and what kind of concept it should be – Susana Narotzky begins by highlighting a definitional issue:

English-speaking scholars have often been using a distinction between ‘work’ and ‘labour’, where labour is defined as human effort [that] pertains to capitalist relations of production, and work describes the rest of human energy expenditure in relation to non-capitalist realms, whether these be reproductive tasks (which eventually became subsumed by the ‘care’ concept) or socially relevant, non-market-orientated tasks (generally but not solely reproductive) in the margins and interstices of the capitalist market system or non-capitalist historical or present-day societies. (Narotzky 2018: 31–32)

However, she points out, this is a distinction that does not hold in other languages where a single word is used to refer to both (e.g. Spanish, French, Portuguese), or in some cases where even more categories exist to refer to diverse forms of ‘creative effort’ (Narotzky 2018: 32) – a common issue encountered by anthropologists ‘in the field’ while learning about relevant categories and conceptual distinctions. Moreover, Narotzky argues, attempts to neatly define ‘work’ and ‘labour’ as separate concepts can result in significant analytical limitations:

The main problem with the work/labour conceptual distinction, in my opinion, is that it makes two presuppositions: first, that there is something inherently different between one form of effort expenditure and the other, namely the kind of value that is created; and second, that they cannot be simultaneously present in the human experience of energy expenditure. (2018: 32)

I found Narotzky’s point particularly pertinent as I sought to make sense of the experiences and narratives articulated by my interlocutors as they navigated their own working lives. Moreover, Narotzky’s questions (2018: 30), and those posed by other authors featured in the same special issue on ‘Dislocating Labour’ (Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018) echoed my own concern with seeking an expanded concept of work/labour. Considering the Harris Tweed industry through these concepts, I suggest that the lens of work and labour can not only perform descriptive functions, but it can also offer alternative analytical possibilities for making sense of people’s lived experiences, subjectivities *and* livelihood strategies as they navigate particular regional circumstances and localized expressions of global capitalism.

Other scholars have hinted at the broader analytical potential of the concept of work/labour, in ways that inform my analysis of the relationship between people, place, and the continuous making of various kinds of ‘things’. Before Marx’s ‘narrowing of his approach to labor’ (Roseberry 1997: 37) in *Capital* (1977) – where he concentrates on labour in its relationship to capital – his early writings with Engels expressed a view of ‘labour as human essence’, which led him to criticize ‘an economic process that channelled workers into specialized, repetitive tasks, thus only partially developing a fuller human capacity’ (Roseberry 1997: 37). According to Roseberry, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1970) ‘began not with nature or with material “conditions”, but with a collectivity of humans acting in and on nature, reproducing and transforming both nature and material conditions through their actions’ (Roseberry 1997: 27). In this context, labour was imagined not only as part of livelihood strategies, but as an integral part of the ways in which people related to each other and to the world, acting on it and being transformed, themselves, in the process: ‘The process of provisioning, of interacting with nature and individuals through labor, was seen to transform both nature and the collectivity of individuals’ (Roseberry 1997: 27).

Similarly, Polanyi’s conceptualization of labour and land as fictional commodities – that is, not originally meant to be sold on the market – highlights the importance of considering their existence beyond capitalist relations of production:

Labour is only another name for a human activity [that] goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale, but for entirely different reasons; nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized. [L]and is just another name for nature, which is not produced by man. (Polanyi [1944] 2001: 75)

Not only do Polanyi’s and Marx and Engels’s conceptualizations of human labour highlight the moral significance of people’s action in the world (independently of the commodification of their labour for profit generation), they also draw attention to the ways in which the world itself, the individuals, the collectivities, and the things they produce are all transformed in the process. Such things include not only tangible objects but also social relationships and individual subjectivities, worldviews and imagined possibilities. In my view, this focus on labour as process is crucial to understanding how it is not only jobs that are ‘worked at’, but also people and the social fabric that are constantly being ‘worked on’.

In *Places of Possibility: Property, Nature and Community Land Ownership* (2013), Fiona Mackenzie suggests that a more encompassing concept of ‘work’ can offer a productive analytical lens to make sense of particular social and political processes, considering how particular local histories and moral understandings can inform alternative ways of thinking about ‘property’, ‘nature’ and belonging. Also based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Outer Hebrides, her study focused on the case of the North Harris Trust, formed after the local community purchased the land comprising the North Harris Estate. In her book, Mackenzie introduces the notion of ‘unruly pasts’ to refer to particular ‘metaphors and material practices through which the land has been conjured in the effort to maintain a collective or common right’ (ibid.: 36). Doing so, she suggests how these ‘local’ concepts and practices are not only providing a vocabulary for legal and moral claim-making, but actively *reworking* ideas of property and nature that have long been taken for granted as part of capitalist processes of production, established models of private property ownership, and neoliberal discourses. In this process, she points out, not only are these models questioned, but the places and people involved in their reworking are reframed and their relationships reconfigured, illuminating previously obscured or unanticipated political possibilities.

Mackenzie’s recurrent use of terms like ‘working’ and ‘reworking’ to describe the practices, processes and ideas involved in community landownership projects suggests how a more open concept of work can be mobilized to make sense of the active role played by people as they navigate – and shape – complex material, legal, and politico-economic situations and possibilities. Similarly, in this book I am interested in exploring how an expanded concept of work and labour provides a useful lens to consider not only how specific production models enmesh workers in particular social relations aimed at producing a material commodity, but also how people’s involvement in particular industries leads to the emergence of other kinds of significant, though often less tangible, ‘products’. Considering workers’ everyday experiences through this lens revealed the potential for particular moral understandings, outlooks on uncertainty, and notions of belonging to continuously emerge, develop and be ‘worked at’ through everyday practices and conversations, revealing the Harris Tweed industry’s role in producing the material *and* social fabric of the islands in significant ways – today and in the past.

In this context, the metaphor of weaving provides a particularly apt image not just for thinking about the production of ‘webs of meaning’ (Geertz 1973) and social ties in this context, but also to render visible

the ongoing social processes and active strategies required to ensure the continuity of practices and habitation in a region threatened by depopulation – and to reveal how particular local histories and shared moral understandings can be mobilized as part of that ‘work’. Thinking through weaving, I eventually realized, could render visible how people’s efforts to maintain the material and social fabric of the islands have involved drawing on past threads, tying them into present ones, and continuously weaving these into potential ‘island futures’. In this book, I suggest that thinking about social processes through the lens of work/labour and the metaphor of weaving can illuminate how people variously draw and elaborate on a diversity of histories, references, resources and ideas as they move through the world seeking both to make a living and to build particular kinds of lives – for themselves and for others around them. An ethnographic focus on these different kinds of ‘work’ allows us to consider not only the active, ongoing and participatory nature of particular social dynamics, but also how certain ‘pasts’, narratives, and shared references are resourcefully mobilized (and reworked) to cultivate inclusive forms of belonging and visions of sustainable collective futures.

### **Working the Fabric**

Since the nineteenth century, Harris Tweed has contributed in important ways to population retention in an economically fragile region where employment opportunities have often been scarce and uncertain.<sup>12</sup> A key aim of the 1910 trademark protection was to safeguard the integrity of the cloth known as Harris Tweed and the livelihoods of the islanders associated with its production. This legal protection asserted islanders’ exclusive right to produce locally the unique cloth that had been developed over the course of generations, emphasising the connection between people, place, and cloth production as part of ‘local culture’. It also highlighted the economic and demographic vulnerability of these islands, and thus the significance of enforcing this legal protection, which had been proposed as a tentative solution to address the growing threat of counterfeiting that had emerged as Harris Tweed became increasingly popular in the early twentieth century, leading to a proliferation of lower quality textiles, usually produced elsewhere, by manufacturers who sought to benefit from the reputation of the Harris Tweed brand. Today, these arguments continue to inform the discourse of industry officials and workers, both on the islands and as part of international efforts to uphold the

brand and trademark, which have been bolstered by the passing of the 1993 Harris Tweed Act of Parliament. Today, islanders continue to benefit from this legal protection – whether they are locals, returners or incomers.

Like the Harris Tweed industry, recent community land buyouts have also played an important part in population retention, shaping people's ability to live and work in the Outer Hebrides. Moreover, as Fiona Mackenzie (2013) suggests, some of them have also been shaped by similarly inclusive and egalitarian principles.<sup>13</sup> Focusing on the making of more sustainable and fair futures in a regional context that has long been threatened by depopulation, local communities have justified their claims to collective land ownership and management by drawing on particular ideas about people's relationship to place. These ideas, Mackenzie points out, can be outlined in relation to the metaphor of *dùthchas*, a Scottish Gaelic word often used to refer to local beliefs about people's collective and inalienable rights to the land, which can be traced to a time preceding the Highland Clearances, the birth of crofting, and even the clan system, when the *tuath* was the predominant mode of social organization in the region (ibid.: 38–40). The metaphor of *dùthchas*, Mackenzie explains, can be 'conceived as *both* an inherited right *and* an evolving right to land' (ibid.: 38, emphasis mine). In this sense, *dùthchas* can be understood as

the expressed collective belief in the inalienability of the land; not in the sense of its formal appropriation through law as property or as a materially measurable commodity, but in the sense of land as *their* land, an inherited occupancy, a physical setting with which Highlanders were indissolubly tied through a continuity of social and material practices. (Withers 1988: 389, quoted in Mackenzie 2013: 39)

This idea about a 'continuity of social and material practices' (Mackenzie 2013: 39) has remained a crucial part of local understandings of belonging – people's connection to a place being conceived not as a fixed right, but as a flexible entitlement that is justified through the ongoing practices that emerge in that continuing inhabitation. Mackenzie quotes one of her interlocutors – a crofter from Harris – who articulated the local significance of these ideas:

There is no sense of ownership; it is a sense of belonging. You are part of the land. ... It is your heritage ... In Gaelic, you never think about the land belonging to you; *it is you that belongs to the land*. The people belong to the land. That's the only connection that's made in relation to people and land ... People belong to the land ... Not just the land, but the whole concept

of belonging to that land, everything that goes with the life we live here. (Interview, May 1997, quoted in Mackenzie: 2013: 40)

At the same time, Mackenzie points out, in local discussions about community land ownership not only is the relationship to the land primarily described as one of belonging (rather than private entitlement), but this sense of belonging is also understood as something that is constantly worked on, something that is ‘made’ rather than given. In this context, the idea of people’s ‘inherited right’ to live on this land is mobilized not as an exclusionary claim, but as an inclusive possibility that is granted to those who choose to use the land and live on it.

In the particular case of the North Harris Trust, membership rules highlighted the establishment of an inclusive idea of ‘community’ that was ‘defined by residence rather than interest’ (Mackenzie 2013: 65).<sup>14</sup> The significance of these ‘criteria for membership’ in the trust, and their role in ‘the negotiation of community’, lies precisely ‘in their opening up of rights to residents who had previously not had these rights, and redefining crofters’ rights as such’ (ibid.: 67). Claims for the right of collective ownership were thus ‘based on an inclusive notion of community defined through place – where one resided – rather than through a fixed marker of identity – for example, a crofter with or without genealogical depth on the island’ (ibid.: 68). In this process, not only were ‘boundaries of belonging’ disturbed, but the meanings of the land shifted,<sup>15</sup> as the concept of *dùthchas*, conceived as ‘an inalienable right to the land’, was mobilized simultaneously in reference to inheritance, and as an open-ended inclusive possibility (Nash 2002: 39; Mackenzie 2013: 68). The fact of inhabiting and ‘working’ the land through social and/or material practices became the central justification for local people claiming rightful entitlement to the land, whether they had been ‘born and bred’ in that area or not. At the same time, this emphasis on actively ‘working’ the land echoed the terms of crofting legislation, which establishes that a croft can be reclaimed by the Crofting Commission (Coimisean na Croitearachd) if the land is not ‘cultivated and maintained’ or if it is ‘misused or neglected’ by the crofter (and if no appropriate provisions are made to address this ‘breach of duty’) (Crofting Commission n.d.).

The idea of ‘working property’, suggested by these conditions and invoked in Mackenzie’s discussion of recent discourses and practices surrounding ‘community right to buy’ legislation in the Outer Hebrides, offers a useful lens through which to examine the place of the Harris Tweed industry in local politico-economic and social dynamics.



There are significant parallels between the practical motivations and moral concerns surrounding recent land reform movements involved in ‘commoning’ the land in the ways described above, and those associated with the trademark protection of the Harris Tweed industry, today and in the past. Firstly, like these recent community land buy-outs, the protection of the Harris Tweed industry has, since the early twentieth century, been primarily aimed at safeguarding the ‘common good’ and promoting the well-being of islanders, recognizing particular regional and politico-economic challenges that threaten their ability to remain on the islands. Today, these values remain at the core of the relevant legislation, and dictate the Harris Tweed Authority’s responsibilities. Secondly, just like recent initiatives to secure community land ownership, the legal strategy involved in establishing the Harris Tweed industry’s trademark protection in 1910 was also considered to be ‘ahead of its time’, a resourceful and groundbreaking approach that differed from other similar legal projects of the period (Hunter 2001: 63). Thirdly, both projects have involved inclusive definitions of ‘community membership’, unsettling social boundaries and assumptions about hereditary entitlement by embracing more flexible, active, and open-ended ideas of belonging. Using criteria like local residency and people’s engagement in local activities to define categories such as ‘islander’, ‘crofter’ and ‘inhabitant’, these conversations suggest how local belonging can be imagined and *made*, rather than just given.

In this context, the notion of ‘common property’ as defined by Nicholas Blomley (2008: 318) and cited by Mackenzie (2013: 21) to describe the status of community-owned land in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, could also be used to describe some of the legal workings of the Harris Tweed industry:

Common property is used here to refer to a situation where ‘a resource is held by an identifiable community of interdependent users, who exclude outsiders while regulating internal use by community members’ (Blomley 2008: 318). Defined thus, common property is distinguished from ‘open access’ regimes, which are not subject to any form of ownership or control (Mansfield 2007: 67).

This description echoes some of the social and operational complexities inherent in the Harris Tweed industry, highlighting the legal workings of a project informed by particular ideas of common good and collective property. However, while recent movements in community land ownership present a helpful way to consider the particularity of moral claims described above, a focus on the Harris Tweed industry

offers yet another layer of conceptual possibilities beyond the idea of ‘commoning’ as a particular kind of labour (Mackenzie 2013; Bodirsky 2018).

Katharina Bodirsky proposes that we ‘adopt a perspective on property relations that sees them as mutually constitutive with relations of production’ (2018: 126). In this book I show how doing so entails paying attention to the actual lived experiences and social relations that emerge as relations of production are enacted in the everyday. At the same time, I argue, exploring an expanded concept of productive work/labour requires examining ‘production’ beyond a narrow sense, locating it within broader processes of social reproduction. As Bodirsky points out:

It is not only about the production of things needed for physical reproduction; rather, it is about the reproduction of whatever goes into the making of social life. It is about forms of knowledge collectively produced, shared, or withheld; it is about the labor that goes into the making or unmaking of social ties as much as into particular relations to the environment. (Bodirsky 2018: 126)

The Harris Tweed industry is, itself, a locus of working practices, centred around the labour processes and relations of production required for the making of a globally exported commodity – but, as this book shows, it is also a site where the production of many other significant things takes place. In this sense, I argue, an ethnographic focus on the different kinds of ‘work’ involved in this industry can contribute to an anthropology of work and labour that is not only concerned with employment processes and experiences, but that considers these dimensions as an important part of broader human circumstances, experiences and imaginations.

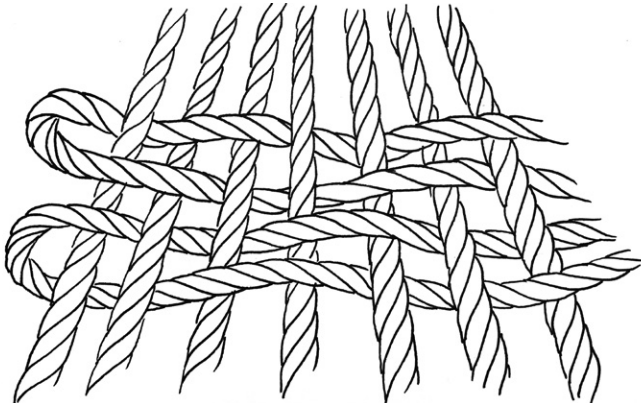
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In this book I explore how ethnographic research and an expanded concept of work/labour can improve our understanding of particular livelihood strategies, social dynamics, and lived experiences of work and life in contemporary capitalism, considering the entanglement of social and economic life within and beyond the workplace. This approach revealed how different forms of ‘productive work’ intertwined in the Harris Tweed industry, leading not only to the production of the *material* fabric known as Harris Tweed, but also to the emergence of different experiences of place-making, social ties, collective projects, and notions of belonging that contribute to make the *social* fabric of the islands.

Learning about the Harris Tweed industry has also shaped my understanding of textile production processes in important ways, and I gradually began to see the analytical potential that the metaphor of ‘weaving’ could hold. As an ongoing process that is both limited by some structure *and* open to the constant addition of new threads in the making of a shared mesh, weaving offered a productive framework to consider the role played by the Harris Tweed industry – and its workforce, across different periods – in ‘working the fabric’ of these islands. This image of weaving suggested unexpected possibilities for thinking about cultural production and socio-economic life, highlighting the open-ended, participatory and inclusive possibilities that emerged in this context – some of which I discuss in this book.

At the same time, despite its focus on a particular industry and geographical context, my hope is that this book invites further reflection on the importance of more holistic approaches to the study of economic life. Ethnographic approaches and anthropological lenses provide valuable tools to examine the relationship between the organization of production and the organization of social life, and their complex social, cultural and politico-economic implications. Paying attention to the practices, values and beliefs associated with these processes, and contextualizing them in relation to particular histories, is essential to understand not only their nuance and diversity, but also to reveal parallels and recurring patterns that can enrich comparative perspectives across different settings and periods.

The chapters that follow offer a glimpse into the social life of different workers, workplaces and work processes involved in these layered forms of ‘production’ – within and beyond the Harris Tweed industry. Moving between different settings and situations, these chapters draw on ethnographic insights and on a diversity of concepts and anthropological lenses to explore their complexity and nuance. Setting the scene, Chapter 1 locates contemporary experiences of ‘island life’ and notions of ‘island resourcefulness’ within particular regional histories and enduring narratives about the islands’ ‘remoteness’ and ‘peripherality’. Following the tweed van along island roads, and reflecting on the connection between local lives and global politico-economic processes, Chapter 2 highlights the vital but underdiscussed material and social role played by tweed van workers as they move between the mill and the domestic loom sheds of individual weavers scattered across Lewis and Harris. Entering weavers’ domestic loom sheds, Chapter 3 draws on the views, experiences, and peculiar work arrangements of self-employed Harris Tweed weavers to discuss the relationship between time, ‘value’, work and life in contemporary capitalism – in



**Figure 0.5.** Interweaving warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) threads.  
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this industry and beyond. Broadening the focus to include the views and experiences of workers across the industry, Chapter 4 draws on the concept of ‘anticipation’ to explore how regional, industrial and personal histories intertwine and inform contemporary understandings, experiences and resourceful ‘local’ strategies aimed at addressing different kinds of uncertainty perceived by many as integral to ‘island life’. Considering Harris Tweed’s reputation as a ‘heritage industry’, Chapter 5 examines how this status has informed not only external perceptions of the islands, but also local experiences, self-identities, and practices of place-making. The concept of ‘shared repertoires’ is introduced in this chapter to explore the relationship between people, place, and the production of different kinds of ‘things’ – and to suggest the participatory and open-ended possibilities of cultural production and social life. The concluding chapter of this book then brings these different strands together in a reflection inspired by the final stages of cloth production, highlighting the generative possibilities and new beginnings that they also promise and engender.

#### NOTES

1. To protect the anonymity of my interlocutors, all names used in this book are pseudonyms. In some sections, biographical details have also been changed.
2. The Harris Tweed Act of 1993, quoted at the very beginning of this chapter, contains the most recent legal definition of ‘Harris Tweed’, building on the wording of earlier trademark legislation (from 1910 and 1934).

3. Crofting is a term generally used to describe the practices and livelihood strategies associated with a small-landholding system that became common throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the nineteenth century, and which survives, with certain practical and legal transformations, until today. While particular histories and current crofting practices vary across the Highlands and Islands, a common feature of crofting in these regions concerned the small size of plots made available to tenants. In Lewis and Harris, these small plots were also often located in the least fertile areas of the islands (the best land was reserved by landlords for commercial sheep rearing and later for deer-stalking grounds), requiring tenants to seek some additional form of income-generating work to pay their rents and to complement their limited returns from the land. This situation was profitably exploited by landlords during the boom in kelping in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A labour-intensive industry that involved collecting and processing seaweed on these shores, kelping absorbed the hands of local populations seeking to pay their rents on small crofts but faced with the absence of alternative employment options in the region (see Chapter 1). The occupational pluralism that is still observable today throughout the islands was often described by my interlocutors in reference to these histories, drawing attention to the livelihood strategies of crofter-kelpers, crofter-fishermen and crofter-weavers in the past (see e.g. chapters 1 and 4). The relationship between occupational pluralism and crofting histories in this region has also been discussed by Mewett (1977).
4. For further discussions on the use of terms like ‘local’ and ‘incomer’ in the Highlands and Islands, see, for example, Jedrej and Nuttall 1996; Macdonald 1997: 129–62; Masson 2006, 2007; McKinlay and McVittie 2007; and Oliver 2011. It is also worth noting that the term ‘incomer’ has similarly been used in this region to refer to people from the same island – e.g. a woman who moved into her husband’s neighbouring village after their wedding could still be called an ‘incomer’ (Mewett 1982a: 125; see also Macdonald 1997: 146 on the same practice taking place on the Isle of Skye). Jedrej and Nuttall (1996) also discuss the use of the term ‘white settlers’ in the Highlands and Islands to refer to particular ‘incomers’. However, while that expression is also mentioned briefly in other studies (e.g. Macdonald 1997; Oliver 2011), I never heard it while living in the Outer Hebrides. The concepts of ‘home’ and ‘away’ (often invoked alongside categories like ‘local’ or ‘exile’) have long been used by islanders to make sense of local experiences of migration, belonging and place-making, and to reflect on this region’s enduring histories of displacement and resettlement (see e.g. Mewett 1982b, 1988; Macdonald 1997:129–62; Parman [1990] 2005; Oliver 2011).
5. During this period of fieldwork, there were three active Harris Tweed mills, all of them located in Lewis (the northern part of the Isle of Lewis and Harris). While employment numbers fluctuated during this period, there were approximately 120 mill workers in Lewis, and around 216 active weavers working from their homes in townships across Lewis and Harris. Over 80 per cent of active weavers at this time were men. Besides providing employment

for weavers and mill workers, the industry also involved employees working in the Harris Tweed Authority offices in Stornoway, and supported other industry-related trades. Harris Tweed was also the key material used by many designers and makers across the Outer Hebrides, who marketed and sold their products online and in local shops throughout the islands. Overall, it was estimated that in 2016–17 the Harris Tweed industry supported around 400 jobs in the islands across these different activities. While recent employment numbers in the industry contrast sharply with those recorded in the 1950s and 1960s (when the industry was at its peak and employed approximately 2,400 people, about 1,500 of them working as weavers [Moisley 1961]), they were seen as a hopeful improvement in comparison with those from ten years earlier. When I was conducting fieldwork, the industry was said to be going through a ‘renaissance’, having nearly disappeared around 2006–7 (see also Chapter 1), and had resumed its role as a significant source of employment in the region. For a detailed history of the Harris Tweed industry, including the origins and transformations in its trademark protection since 1910, see Hunter 2001. See also Thompson 1969 for a historical account that covers earlier textile-making practices in the region, as well as the industry’s development from the early twentieth century until the 1960s; and Moisley 1961 for an account of the origins and growth of the industry until the late 1950s. For anthropologists’ discussions of the Harris Tweed industry, see Ennew 1980: 28–46, 1982; Parman (1990) 2005: 76–96.

6. Pirms (*iteachan* in Scottish Gaelic) are the small bobbins (or spools) of weft yarn placed inside the shuttles used in Hattersley looms (see Chapter 3). As a weaver operates the pedals, a shuttle is thrown across the loom to weave the weft into the warp.
7. Marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) is a plant that can be found in the sandy and wind-battered dunes of the western coast of the Outer Hebrides. With its fibrous, matted roots, and its resilience to harsh weather, marram grass plays a key part in keeping the integrity of sand dunes, promoting the proliferation of other species of plants in its surroundings. In the past, marram grass was used widely throughout the islands for making ropes and thatching the roofs of blackhouses (traditional local houses).
8. While all weavers working in the Harris Tweed industry are self-employed, they can either choose to work on orders issued by mills, or to work as ‘independent producers’, designing, weaving and marketing their own cloth, handling orders and managing their business autonomously (see also Chapter 3). Nevertheless, even weavers working as independent producers rely on mills to produce the yarn for weaving, and to wash and ‘finish’ their woven tweeds; like mills, they also rely on the HTA to inspect and stamp their woven cloth with the Orb trademark.
9. For instance, while Harris Tweed weavers can work as independent producers, taking orders and working directly with customers, the vast majority of Harris Tweed weavers operate as self-employed workers completing weaving assignments issued by the local woollen mills, whose international exposure and scale allows them to capture the largest proportion of customers’

orders. In an industry that depends primarily on substantial international orders, these numbers were bound to create a sense that mills could potentially occupy a dominant position in this production system, placing most weavers in a position of dependency. At the same time, some people argue that Harris Tweed weavers could also potentially hold significant power, because the mills depend on their work as home-based self-employed workers to fulfil these substantial orders, and weavers' relative independence also has the potential to disrupt vital production timelines. In her book on the history of the Harris Tweed industry, Janet Hunter (2001) also highlights the powerful role played by weavers at different times in the past, when they mobilized their position in this peculiar production model to take part in negotiations and decision-making processes, advancing particular agendas aimed at safeguarding the integrity of the industry and the interests of weavers (and islanders more generally).

10. In the mid-1960s, demand for Harris Tweed reached the highest point in the history of the industry. This increase in production, visible in records documenting the number of metres stamped with the Orb trademark each year, reached its peak in 1966, when 7,632,150 metres of cloth were stamped (see Fig. 0.4). Hunter describes the global scale of this 'unprecedented boom', and its local implications: '[In 1965] well over 70% of production went to export markets at a time when British industry was being urged to "export or die". The mills were working double shifts to meet orders from the continent, America, Australia and New Zealand. In this happy situation the weaver was naturally seen as a key factor in the industry ... Recruitment of young weavers became an urgent priority' (Hunter 2001: 278–79).

This scale of production is hardly comparable to more recent trends, as the graph in Fig. 0.4 shows (for a detailed account of the peaks, slumps and other transformations that would take place in the industry in the years following the 1960s boom, see Hunter 2001). Nevertheless, the stamping figures for the year when I started doing fieldwork (1,551,374 metres in 2016) were viewed optimistically within the industry, especially in light of the radical decline observed in the previous decades (Fig. 0.4 and Chapter 1).

Moreover, as Hunter also points out, the volatility of the industry, with its dependence on international market demand, was evidenced shortly after the 1965–66 boom, as by 1967 the numbers were already decreasing significantly. The 10 per cent drop in production that year brought about a contrasting situation where 'the mills were working one week on and one week off' instead of the double-shifts implemented just a couple of years earlier, 'as falling sales hit an island in which unemployment figures ranged from 19 to 27 per cent' (Hunter 2001: 281).

11. While I focus on the ways in which workers themselves imagined, experienced, and dealt with the possibility of labour uncertainty, it is worth pointing out some recent efforts, within the industry, to minimize the impact of potential global fluctuations on local production. Plans to proceed with these strategies were already beginning to develop in one of the mills when I was conducting fieldwork in 2016–17, and today they seem to be more widely

pursued, as a representative of the Harris Tweed Authority explained to me in a more recent communication (September 2019). According to mill managers and the HTA, in order to keep weavers busy and ensure they do not have to leave the industry in search of other work, mills have sought to diversify their markets beyond the fashion industry (e.g. interiors, accessories) and to produce for stock in order to avoid seasonal fluctuations. According to the HTA, they also try to calculate more substantial deliveries of work assignments to weavers before and after holiday mill closures. While it would be interesting to examine how these changes have shaped weavers' experiences and perceptions since the time when I conducted fieldwork, my observations are limited to the ethnographic research conducted in 2016–17.

12. After the trademark protection was approved in 1910, the industry grew in scale and reach, providing employment not only to domestic weavers located even in the most 'remote' rural parts of the islands, but also to hundreds (and, at a certain point, thousands) of mill workers. While the industry has gradually shrunk since its peak in the 1960s, it continues to provide valuable employment opportunities not only to hundreds of weavers working from home across the rural areas of Lewis and Harris, but also to mill workers employed at the three woollen mills in Lewis, to the Harris Tweed Authority employees, and to many designers, makers and shop workers throughout the Outer Hebrides.
13. In a region threatened by depopulation, with a long history of displacement and high rates of out-migration, the proposals and projects developed by community buyouts have created not only more affordable local housing, but also employment opportunities, and (especially through wind farms) a substantial income that is used to fund community-centred needs. Made possible by the passing of legislation contained in Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2003) concerning 'The Crofting Community Right to Buy', Outer Hebridean community land buyouts have challenged the tendency of past absentee landlords to purchase the land to extract its resources rather than actually live on it. In the process, they have reframed established ideas about private property ownership and the workings of capitalist markets, and conjured 'a politics of the possible that works against exclusionary claims and essentializing identities' (Mackenzie 2013: 47). However, it is worth pointing out that, despite their emphasis on egalitarian and democratic principles, processes of decision-making within community landowning trusts can nevertheless generate power imbalances and divisions among its members. The case of Stòras Uibhist, a community landowning body based in South Uist which was initially marked by 'ongoing and, frequently, bitter dispute', is often cited as an example of the conflict and disagreement that can emerge even in organizational forms informed by particular 'egalitarian' and democratic principles (see e.g. Mackenzie 2013: 68–70).
14. It is important to note that the owners of holiday homes 'who reside on the estate for only a few weeks a year' (Mackenzie 2013: 67) were excluded from this membership, further confirming the significance of local residence and active engagement in local life in this understanding of 'community'. As



Mackenzie points out, this is 'a matter of particular moment in places such as West Harris, where 41 per cent of the housing stock (89 houses) on land now owned by the West Harris Crofting Trust is classified as holiday homes or self-catering cottages' (ibid.; CIB Services 2008: 2). The recent increase in the ownership of holiday homes is unevenly distributed across the islands, but where it is particularly prominent it is considered to have contributed, along with other factors, to the escalation in house prices that 'are out of the reach of young, local people, a reality that is all too evident throughout the Highlands and Islands' (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996; MacKinnon 2005: 12; Logie 2007; Mackenzie 2013: 178). Mackenzie highlights how community landowning trusts, in North Harris and elsewhere, see the creation of affordable housing as a vital part of their strategy to address the issue of out-migration and the threat of depopulation. In these contexts, investing in affordable housing was understood as a priority, an essential part of a collective strategy to 'build a more socially, culturally and economically sustainable future' (Logie 2007: 16; Mackenzie 2013: 178).

15. Mentioning the work of various scholars (Hunter 1976, 1991; Devine 1994; McCrone 1997; Hutchinson 2003; Mackenzie 2006), Mackenzie points out how these 'meanings of the land' have long been 'a central signifier of identity in the Highlands and Islands', and how they remain so today (Mackenzie 2013: 68).