



**Eleanor Rathbone Social Justice Public Lecture Series 2024–25**

**A license to kill:  
Necroeconomic suffocation by stealth**

**Professor Imogen Tyler & Professor Beverley Skeggs, Lancaster University**

**Wednesday 14 May 2025, 17:30–19:30**

**School of Law and Social Justice Events Space – ([Campus Map](#))**



*Eleanor Florence Rathbone, Social and Political Reformer  
(12 May 1872 – 2 January 1946)*

Three decades of austerity in the UK and a longer history of deregulation, privatisation and financialisation of state services have seen the deterioration of the elemental infrastructures, those that provided a basic level of security for the population. Our water now contains significant amounts of industrial toxins and sewage, our land and soil have been infiltrated by long-standing PCBs that manifest through food and the air is filled with noxious chemicals. Vitally, air, water, and land pollution are concretised in people's homes.

What are the consequences of being exposed to these forms of pollution in everyday living environments? Which structural interrelationships facilitate these forms of 'everyday' poisoning? What are the broader deleterious societal impacts of necroeconomic policies?



In this lecture, we analyse the case of Awaab Ishak, whose death (age two) made these harms visible when he suffocated from mould in his home in Rochdale, North West England. Making visible the necroeconomic policies that have made our most intimate spaces for daily living dangerous, we examine the incompetence and indifference displayed by those who profit from their investment in housing, and consider how premature deaths from indoor air pollution have been symbolically legitimated (through classism, racism and xenophobia). We argue that the deregulation and sale (privatisation) of state social housing has granted property owners and managers a licence to kill. However, communities living and working at the frontline of collapse of Britain's social and welfare infrastructures are 'fighting for life' (Kelley, 2024). In Awaab's case, it was the determination and tenacity of family, journalists, clinicians, lawyers and coroners forced the endemic malignancy at the heart of the deregulated UK housing industry into public view, compelling a national government response. A fight for life that teaches us that we need to put people before profit everywhere.

Bev Skeggs is one of the foremost feminist sociologists in the world, possessing a wealth of experience addressing the multi-dimensional nature of inequality. Her book *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997) has been profoundly significant in drawing attention to the intersections between class and gender inequality.

Imogen Tyler is Professor of Sociology and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. Imogen's research focuses on social inequalities of poverty, class, race, gender, disability and citizenship, and draws on both current and historical research to examine how people protest and resist injustice.