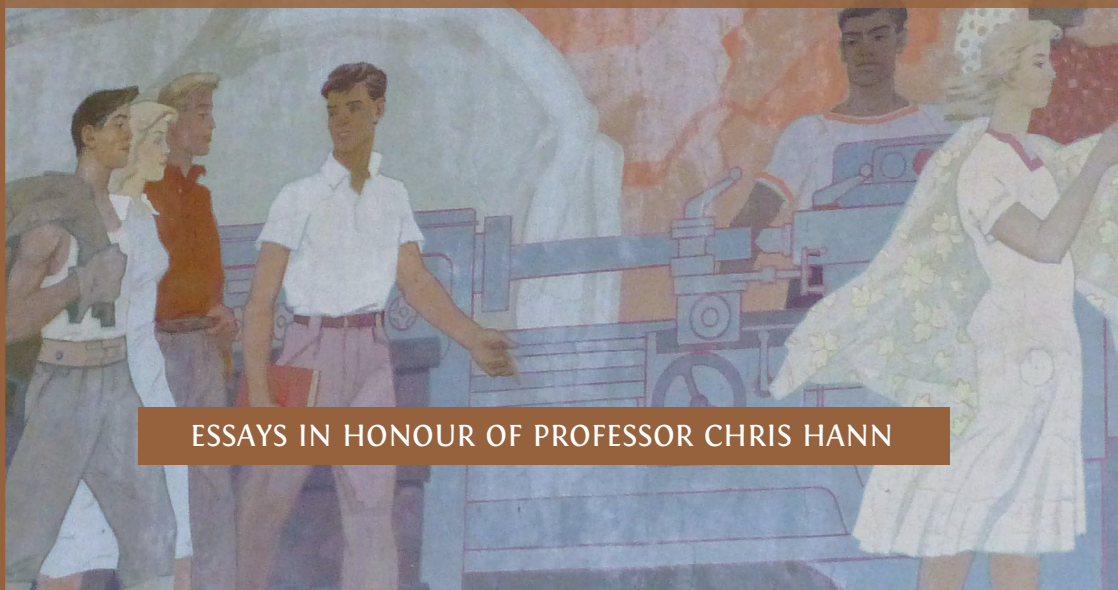




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ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

From Europe to Asia and Back



ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR CHRIS HANN



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6. The Moral Dimension of (Un)Employment

Work and Fairness in an Eastern German Town

Katerina Ivanova

Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the connection between work as value and material economy of employment in an industrial town in Saxony. I am drawing on the ethnographic data that I gathered during one year of fieldwork in 2018–2019 in Zwickau as well as on historical material. My research in Zwickau has been focused on the transformations in its automotive industry and social structure. During socialist times, the town became famous for being the birthplace of Trabant—an iconic East German car. Unlike many other towns in former East Germany, Zwickau has retained its automotive industry since the reunification in 1989. Thanks to Volkswagen’s extensive investment, the car production there continued, keeping thousands of jobs in the region. The recent shift towards electric vehicle production, however, poses some new challenges for the production site and for the locals. During my fieldwork, I was following social networks and relationships in Zwickau, talking to former and current automotive industry workers, trade union activists, local politicians, and other locals.

The rich industrial history of Zwickau, with its continuities and changes, makes the town an exceptional site for studying work and industrial labour in particular. By looking at a moral dimension of employment throughout time, I aim to examine the embeddedness

of certain policies and discourses of (un)employment in the long-standing local traditions regarding morality of work. Employment, being a remunerated form of work, has inherited the moral significance of work in general, as employment and unemployment are framed in moral terms in both official discourse and everyday communication. In the following chapter, I will explore the moral meaning of work in the Zwickau region over time, and the ideas that might have influenced it, including the Protestant ethic, nationalist ideology and socialism as well as the material conditions under which they developed. By recognising the moral dimension of the economy, as suggested by Hann (2018: 231), in the sense of a collective and systemic basis for long-term shared values, I strive to analyse both moral values and material economy in their simultaneity and complexity.

Work as a Moral Value before Socialism

Zwickau, which is located in Saxony at the foot of Erzgebirge mountain range, was a centre of Zwickau coal mining district (Zwickauer Steinkohlenrevier), where black coal has been extracted for almost 800 years since the tenth century and up until the resources were exhausted in 1979. It was thanks to black coal mining that the industry of Zwickau flourished, especially since the beginning of the wide use of steam engines. The Zwickau machine factory, rope factory and the whole automotive industry owe their existence to the coal mining industry. Before industrialisation the town was famous for wool weaving and silver mining.

Some of the oldest German industrial worker biographies were also found in this region. For example, the biography of Carl Neumann, written down and published by his brother-in-law and a pastor Tobias Leberecht in 1853, tells a story of a worker in an industrial town (Fischer 1972). A half-orphan Carl Neumann learns to be a carpenter from his uncle, then marries and takes over a small indebted house and a business from his father-in-law. After he loses his small business, he moves to a Saxon factory town, rents a place for his family and works as an errand boy in a sugar factory. Thanks to his strong faith, skills and hard work (*Tüchtigkeit*) he moves ahead on the social ladder and becomes a respected craftsman (*Meister*), buys a house and gains the

economic freedom that he would have probably never achieved before the age of industrialisation (Fischer 1972: 294). The biography was an instructive story of social descent and ascent from petty bourgeois, to de-classed worker and then to middle-class craftsman. In this story, the two virtues, faith in God and hard work, being strongly intertwined, stood at the core of personal evolution. The positive image of the worker in this and similar biographies was created through the narrative of taming the 'inner beast', or the allegedly anti-social and undisciplined nature of the working class, by turning to God (Jensen 2005: 542).

Another similar social mobility was described in a famous worker's biography of a coal miner (*Bergmann*), published in 1906 by Friedrich Naumann. The miner, Franz Louis Fischer, was a son of a small mine owner, who was impoverished and committed suicide, when Franz was a child. Franz, after being a bell ringer, an errand boy and a shepherd boy, became a coal miner in 1870 (Emmerich 1975: 386).

He later became a miners' representative and from 1886—a milk trader. In his biography, special attention is drawn to the 'civil virtues' (*Bürgerliche Tugenden*), most of all diligence (*Fleiß*) (Sinjen 2013). Fischer noted proudly that he inherited those virtues from his father and grandfather, and that his whole family worked like "bees" (*wie die Bienen*) through good and bad (Sinjen 2013). Both biographies, although it was claimed they had been written by the workers themselves, were written down and published by two pastors. Friedrich Naumann, who told the story of Fischer the miner, was a social thinker, theologian and a politician, who stood at the origins of the liberal democratic party (the modern FDP). Naumann published workers' biographies through his interest in the 'social question', which he hoped would be solved in non-Marxist terms. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the extent to which the opinions voiced in these biographies were truly those of the workers and protagonists of each story. But if we were to treat them as valid sources of information, we could mark a strong connection between religiousness and work, as well as their affinity with the 'Protestant ethic', especially in its Calvinist expression, as discussed by Weber, which emphasises diligence, discipline and thriftiness. According to this ethic, the working man fulfils his calling in the world through hard work, and work is seen as a goal in itself. In these writings we can see how idleness (*Nichtstun*) is presented as dangerous for the soul. Both biographies present

hard work as a moral virtue, which eventually raises those who exhibit it up on the social ladder. Naturally, the class struggle is absent in these writings and a worker is presented as a majorly middle-class subject. Here, it is, perhaps, also important to mention that Zwickau became a hotspot for the Reformation when Thomas Müntzer, a rebellious Protestant preacher and a leader of the peasant uprising of 1525, came there in 1520 to preach in St. Mary's Church, and later in St. Katharine's Church. It has also been theorised that Müntzer's preaching was strongly influenced by a tense socio-economic situation in Zwickau at the time, where the gap between the rich and the poor was particularly noticeable in the context of the cloth-making industry (Scott 1989). Rapid industrialisation made nineteenth-century Saxony a space where the tensions of modernity were particularly noticeable.

The impoverished working class became associated with various 'social ills', such as alcoholism, criminality, prostitution, child labour, high child mortality, etc. (Jensen 2005). At the same time, some literature began to appear which might be roughly considered early working-class ethnography, influenced by social democratic ideas: *Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche: Eine Praktische Studie*, written in 1891 by a priest, Paul Göhre, who went on to work in a factory for three months and described his experiences, and *3 ½ Monate Fabrik-Arbeiterin* by Minna Wettstein-Adelt, published in 1893. With its growing urban working class, Saxony was at that time becoming a cradle for early workers' movements, in which the textile industry around the Chemnitz area played an especially important role. The five-month strike of the Crimmitschau (a small town north of Zwickau) textile workers in 1903 for the reduction of working hours is especially worth noting. Although ultimately ending in the defeat of the workers, the strike had some long-lasting effects on wider industrial relations in the region and resulted in the creation of employers' associations. The end of the nineteenth century introduced the German 'founding father' Otto von Bismarck's answer to the 'social question', in the form of health, accident and pension insurance for all workers, a development which is often considered to mark the beginning of the German welfare state. Although some forms of state-provided insurance already existed by then, the recipient of such benefits was redefined: it was no longer 'the poor' but 'the worker', which unintentionally contributed to the differentiation of the working

class (Kocka 2016: 400). The state's social insurance system was also meant to contribute to the processes of nation-building, strengthening the state and preventing the spread of socialist ideas.

Bismarck's simultaneous introduction of a social welfare system for the workers and the attempts to suppress the social democratic movement through *Sozialistengesetze* (laws against socialists) became known over time as the policies of 'carrot and stick'. The fact that the social welfare system was a conservative, rather than leftist, project constitutes one of the particularities of the German case (Kocka 2016: 404). Saxon social democrats were also gaining power, as in the Reichstag elections of 1874, when six representatives of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*) entered the Reichstag. After the 1903 Reichstag elections, when the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, the SPD) won twenty-two of the twenty-three constituencies, the land became known as the 'Red Kingdom'. These developments in Saxony led to some unrest among the conservatives, whose response came in the form of a new, restrictive, three-class franchise election system (*Dreiklassenwahlrecht*) adopted in 1896 for the Landtag elections. Voters were divided into three groups depending on their tax payments, and their votes varied in weight accordingly. Due to their lower incomes and taxes, social democratic voters' votes were weighted rather low. In 1909, despite 54% of the voters supporting socialist candidates, the SPD received only 39% of the votes, because most of their voters only had one vote (Retallack 2019: 29). Saxon conservatives also strove to signal that Saxony had to endure the democratic pressures coming from Baden, Württemberg and Bavaria, which threatened the whole German Reich (Retallack 2019: 37). The antisocialist political groups and the opponents of the "bloody revolution" defended their ideologies by framing democracy and equality as something foreign to culturally defined "Germanness" (Retallack 2019: 36), which might have made Saxony an especially fertile ground for nationalist political developments later on. Apart from being framed as 'civil virtues', *Fleiß* [hard work] and *Arbeit* [work] were later on increasingly associated with Germanness within the nationalist ideology. Within the process of the so-called *Nationalisierung der Arbeit* [nationalisation of work], work was cast as a German virtue, whereas laziness signalled a foreign, 'non-German' spirit (Brückner 1998: 61).

Work, regarded strictly in the sense of wage labour, has also been promoted as an exclusively male task, as campaigns against the working women and the 'double earner' (*Doppelverdiener*) families took place in 1933–1934 (Buggeln, Wildt 2014: XI). 'Freedom to work' turned into 'duty to work', which was presented in the propaganda as an 'honour to work' (Buggeln and Wildt 2014: XII). Work, especially manual work, was associated with purifying and educational functions.

This ideology found its terrifying expression in the unfree labour and the concentration camps, where manual work was supposed to educate and 'raise' the opponents of the regime. *Arbeit macht frei* ['Work sets you free'] was the ironically dark slogan at the gates of some Nazi concentration camps. On 15 July 1925 Hitler delivered a speech to an audience of about 3500 in Zwickau, where he also emphasised the importance of work for German identity, as he talked about the inability of Jews to perform productive work. About 20,000 unfree labourers, including those sent from the concentration camp Flössenburg, worked in Chemnitz and Zwickau Auto Union (the predecessor of Volkswagen's subsidiary, Audi) plants in Saxony. The use of unfree labour by Auto Union also received a lot of criticism in the Sachsenring newspaper during the GDR period. Ironically, the link between the two continued as it became clear that Volkswagen had received goods produced by unfree labourers in GDR prisons.

Work and Employment in the 'Workers' and Peasants' State'

In the post-war years the economy of the SBZ and then later the GDR retained some of the elements of Nazi wartime economy, such as the workbook (*Arbeitsbuch*), fixed wages and forced labour (*Arbeitseinweisung*). Not so far from Zwickau, in Erzgebirge, Wismut AG was mining ore to produce uranium. In 1951 the paper factory in Crossen, north of Zwickau, was expropriated and used for the processing of uranium. Wismut was especially known for the use of forced labour, poor and dangerous working conditions, as well as constant policing from the side of the armed Soviet forces (Hoffmann 1999).

With time, however, the company relied less and less on forced labour, as the relatively high wages and good supply of consumer goods for

the uranium miners attracted workers, despite working conditions that were still extremely harsh. Tough working conditions, high pressure on workers, and the constant raising of work targets caused dissatisfaction and unrest among workers in the GDR. Despite the June 1953 'New Course' policies, which were supposed to reduce pressure on workers, an uprising broke out on 17 June, and was forcefully suppressed. As a result of the uprising, surveillance and control over workers was severely increased. However, the uprising succeeded in a way, in that it caused the state power to take the satisfaction of the workers on the shop-floor more seriously, as it also undermined the self-image of the GDR as the workers' state. The economy of Zwickau at the time was mainly based on mining, the textile industry and the automotive industry. In 1977, after almost 800 years of extraction, coal mining stopped because resources were exhausted. The automotive industry proved to be most resilient industry in the region, remaining crucial for the livelihoods of its inhabitants since it began in 1904, when August Horch opened his first car factory in town. In 1958 the former Horch and Audi plants were united under the name of *VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau*. As we discuss the socialist era, we can turn to the personal experiences of my informants, many of whom were Sachsenring workers during the GDR period. In the GDR, employment was guaranteed by the state, even though the state sometimes had difficulties in fulfilling this guarantee, especially in the post-war period. It was not only a constitutional right but also a duty (Jancius 2006; Rudd 2006). A significant part of socialist ideology revolved around work and its meaning for being human. This socialist obsession with work, although a characteristic feature of the GDR, was far from a new phenomenon in eastern Germany. The idea of work as a duty towards the community and an ultimate virtue had deep religious underpinnings in the Protestant ethic. In this sense, work as a moral virtue was a shared concern of both the state and religion. However, despite these shared values, in the early years after the 1949 foundation of the GDR, the state's policy towards the church was rather hostile. At that time, 81.9% of the population were Protestants, whereas by 1986 this number had dropped to 23% (Cordell 1990). In the later census of 2011, the population of Zwickau, in particular, was registered as mostly (about 75%) atheist, with 21.7% being Protestants. Although the church has suffered significant losses in membership due

to aggressive policies of secularisation, it has still managed to coexist with the state for a rather long time. The strategy that made this possible was what the evangelical church termed itself “a church in socialism”, as opposed to a church alongside, or against socialism (Cordell 1990).

Despite the seemingly conflictual relationship between the Protestant Church and the socialist state, they did share similar stances on certain moral issues. These included anti-fascism, the ideals of peace and community, framing economic matters in terms of morality (Graf 1994) as well as humanism, equality and solidarity (Pollack and Richter 2012). Contrary to Weber, some have argued that Protestant ethics had the potential to give rise to socialism as much as it facilitated capitalism due to its dual focus on individualism and social accountability (McCormack 1969). Indeed, I would argue that by adapting to the socialist reality, the church in the GDR did not necessarily have to betray Protestant principles. In other words, the idea of the ‘church in socialism’ is far less contradictory than it may seem. The shift towards post-materialistic values in the West and the rise of secular ecumenism in the 1970s resulted in the critique of capitalism as well as the re-evaluation of socialist systems among theologians in the West (Pollack and Richter 2012). As argued by Peperkamp (2010), an emphasis on humanity (*Menschlichkeit*) was something that characterised the understanding of religiosity among her East German informants, and was also in line with the values officially promoted by the state, such as justice and equality. Also, for a state dealing with the problems of declining work ethic and alcoholism, the church’s emphasis on work ethic as well as its position as a provider of social welfare were rather appealing (Goeckel 1988).

Although Marx has famously claimed that communism should realise the principle “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”, the socialist states have often claimed a different principle: ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his work (*Leistung*)’. As argued by Mladenov (2017), state socialism and early capitalism shared the same principle of commodification of labour, according to which the only way to sustain oneself was increasingly to become wage labour. Although the ideal of public ownership of enterprises was meant to reduce the alienation of the workers, in reality, the means of production was controlled by the state, or the elites, rather than the workers. This commodification of labour led to the spread of

productivism—a cultural-material mechanism that reduces humans to resources (Mladenov 2017: 1120).

However, one could argue that the work in state socialism was less ‘alienating’ due to its deep intertwinement with the social fabric. In the GDR, the factory would seep into all spheres of life, including the private sphere: health, leisure and family life were all closely connected to the workplace. And the larger the enterprise, the more its influence would spread beyond the formal work. As Berdahl (2005: 241) observes, the workplace in the GDR was not only the centre of everyday sociality, but it was also a symbolic space of social membership and national belonging. “Our factory was our family”, many former Sachsenring workers say. According to Thelen (2005) personal networks in the workplace developed as an outcome of both economic constraints and as a part of the official policy, whereas trust within those networks developed as a by-product. As has been discussed in some studies (Friedreich 2007; Kohli 1994), strong workplace relationships and informal relationships within the socialist brigades also strengthened the bargaining power of workers on the factory floor. Sachsenring employees also enjoyed many advantages in that the enterprise had its own kindergarten, polyclinic, and sports teams and provided good holiday spots (*Ferienplätze*) on Lake Balaton or in Erzgebirge. These advantages, which went far beyond financial compensation, constituted the so-called *Zweite Lohntüte*, or ‘social wage’. One former Sachsenring engineer, as we talked about how work had changed after the shift to a market economy, drew my attention to the difference between the two concepts of *Job* and *Arbeitsplatz* [workplace]. A job for him was something temporary and alienating, whereas the workplace was associated with permanence and a deep sense of personal connection. For him, a job belonged to capitalism, whereas the workplace belonged to socialism. Some, however, found the growing ‘flexibility’ and diversity at work rather liberating and emancipating. As long as it did not mean losing one’s job, flexibility could be seen as a learning opportunity and a tool against the deskilling of the workers. In return for more flexibility and skills, which made the rotation of the tasks within the team possible, the workers received better payment in the new market economy. Andreas, a sixty-year-old former Sachsenring shop-floor worker, who transferred to Volkswagen overnight, remembered the transition from Sachsenring

to VW as an interesting and eventful time and talked about the rigidity of the working roles in the GDR more sarcastically than nostalgically:

In the GDR times you mostly did the same job, there was little flexibility. I attached the front left wheel. And some did that their whole life long. It doesn't matter if it's a front-left or back-right [wheel]: you put a wheel there, tighten the four screws, bend—and that's it. Or for example in Sachsenring there were nicknames for certain colleagues, depending on their occupation. There was one, they called him the 'fuel tap' [*der Benzinhahn*], I don't even know what the guy's name was. This colleague pre-assembled the fuel taps, and he did it in our shift his whole life. That was the 'fuel tap'.

Some, however, found ways to bring some diversity into their working routine. Jens, another former Sachsenring shop-floor worker, was a highly skilled welder, working as a 'Jumper' (*Springer*), which meant that, unlike most of his colleagues, he was trained to work at multiple stations and was ready to 'jump in' where he was needed. He also took pride in being able to challenge himself this way:

The work was very diverse. But they would always ask you. Not like 'you have to do', but 'would you do that?'. Everything on a voluntary basis, not like a must. But I never said no. No, because I have to say honestly, I actually enjoyed it. I didn't want to do the same work every day. So I did that... And also the salary was higher if you were the '*Springer*', because you were highly skilled.

Car industry workers' privileged position, compared to, for example, textile workers in Zwickau was evident not only in the pay they received but also in their position in the context of the shortage economy. Easier access to one of the most valuable goods in the GDR—Trabi spare parts—granted them power on the informal exchange market and privileged access to high-value consumer goods, such as meat or furniture. The high demand for the car also made the work more meaningful and made the workers feel like they were a part of an important mission. The workers knew about the multiple flaws of Trabant cars, as well as their inferiority compared to Western cars. However, the choice on the 'market' was rather limited, and in this context, Trabi was a highly desired commodity. Wartburg, which was produced in Eisenach, was seen as a better alternative, but also a rather costly one. Furthermore, the inferiority of the Trabi, in the eyes of all of my informants, had no

bearing on their skills or ability to work hard. Rather, the flaws were blamed on the shortage of materials and the difficult decision-making process in the planned economy. Therefore, despite the criticism of the product they produced, the workers could maintain a certain pride in their work. In fact, other studies (Lüdtke 1994) have also discussed the fact that the ability to produce *at all* under poor working conditions, within the shortage economy and the slow, inefficient decision-making of a centralised economy was itself a source of particular pride.

As Jens told me proudly,

In the peak times, we made 603 cars per day! Ok... But all the parts had to be there. For example, all of those electronic parts were from the suppliers. And they had to be here. There was always a problem of shortage—shortage of skilled workers and shortage of materials. But like I said, in the peak times we produced 603 cars in two shifts.

In large enterprises like Sachsenring there was a constant *Fachkräftemangel* [lack of skilled workers], which also made the workers feel important and needed. To reflect that, one of the slogans of the time read “Alles was jung ist und Hände hat nach Zwickau, an den Trabant” (All that is young and has hands—to Zwickau, to (work on) Trabant). The competition among the enterprises for the workers not only strengthened their bargaining power, but also contributed to their sense of self-worth and pride, which made the experience of excess labour after 1989 especially painful. The high symbolic status of the workers was also supported by state ideology. Work, and especially factory work, was mythologised as a heroic act, and workers—as heroes (*Helden der Arbeit*). This expression reflects the generally militarised rhetoric surrounding work (Kohli 1994: 42). In the early years of the GDR, the state sought its legitimacy in the rhetoric of anti-fascism. This was especially vivid in Sachsenring’s newspaper *Die Kurbelwelle* in the 1950s, which used anti-fascist and anti-war language to condemn the founder of the Audi and Horch plants in Zwickau, August Horch, who was accused of collaborating with the Nazi regime by producing military equipment and forced labour. “The ‘fine locksmith’s apprentice’ August Horch [...] who supported the great genocide of our history by all means”—read one of the headlines of *Die Kurbelwelle* at the time. In later years this source of legitimacy was not as pronounced, but certain parts of the discourse persisted. Here is

how Andreas, whom I mentioned earlier, described this ideologisation of work to me:

So in the Sachsenring it was always said—“boys, watch out, we have to build more cars for peace again today [laughs]. And we did it, we built one more car for peace. Although we had the timing out of sync, today we built more cars for peace... Then from 01.01 [the day of his transfer to Volkswagen] nobody could say anymore ‘we need a car because of peace’, but rather: guys, we have to push it, we need the cars. The *customers* need the cars! Not like in the GDR times.

As one study carried out in the 1970s shows, the proud status of a worker was so highly valued socially, that almost everyone from a shop floor worker to the plant manager was willing to identify himself with the working class (Engler 1999). Because of this high status of workers in the GDR, it has been called an *arbeiterliche Gesellschaft* [workers’ society] (Engler 1999), or, as my informants often said not without a degree of irony, an *Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat* [Workers’ and peasants’ state]. The symbolic and ideological primacy of the workers did not necessarily bring privileged status in terms of access to material goods or political power. However, in the case of the car industry in Zwickau, the ‘working class people’ enjoyed certain better opportunities (in terms of education or holiday spots, for example), and high wages. As we discussed the events of the Peaceful Revolution, Jens told me: “they made one mistake—they held the worker too ‘small’. If the worker had more freedom, there would be no protests.” He then told me about the difficulties of going abroad and exchanging the money. For him, the whole process was humiliating. It was perhaps also the gap between ideological pathos and praise of the worker on the one side, and the lack of freedom and political power on the other, that largely contributed to the dissatisfaction.

In the two sections above I have discussed the development of work as a moral value in and around Zwickau both before and during the GDR period. I started by presenting some early workers’ biographies, in which the Protestant ethic represented the morality of work, glorifying it as an end in itself, as a purifying force and as a tool for self-realisation. Hard work has also been framed in nationalist discourses as a German virtue. At the same time, another, lesser-known side of the Protestant ethic is social accountability, i.e. the idea of work as duty towards the

community was developed in Nazi Germany in less attractive ways. In socialism, the notion of work as a duty towards the community was articulated through the ideological heroisation and glorification of work. Workplaces in the GDR, due to their extensive involvement in all spheres of life, also became spaces of social and national belonging, once again connecting work to community and nation. As I have shown, despite the complicated relationship between the church and the state in the GDR, some Protestant ideas proved to be rather compatible with the socialist system (such as work discipline and social welfare). On the basis of historic and ethnographic material, I emphasise the continuity, rather than disruption and change, of work as a moral value over time in the Zwickau region, challenging the binary divisions between capitalism and socialism, individualism and collectivism, secular and religious. In the next section, I will discuss how the material conditions around work changed after the German reunification and transition to the market economy. I argue that the way that challenges of the labour market after 1989 and the subsequent employment policies were received by the people 'on the ground' should be discussed in the context of the importance of work as a moral value, deeply rooted in local history.

Zwickau Labour Market after 1989

After German reunification in 1990, the fate of Sachsenring was in the hands of Treuhandanstalt, which divided it into twenty-six enterprises, closed down most of them and privatised the rest. By the end of 1994, Treuhandanstalt had 12,354 VEBs in its portfolio, of which 3,718 were shut down. As some of my interlocutors in Zwickau believed, many enterprises were prematurely closed down in order to either speed up the privatisation process or to kill off the competition for Western companies. The textile industry in the Zwickau region was often mentioned as an example of such a sell-out. Some of the enterprises, like Sachsenring, went through a long cycle of new investments and bankruptcies. Surviving enterprises, which were assessed as profitable, were privatised by mostly Western investors. In some cases, the enterprises were sold for a symbolic amount of one mark. Under the circumstances of such a shock therapy, more than one million people lost their jobs after the reunification and the real unemployment has

been estimated as reaching 40% in the early 1990s (Turner 1998). As Mau (2019: 151) put it, many of the *Werkstätige* [working people] turned into *Untätige* [idle people]. Unemployment spread unequally among different groups according to qualifications, age and gender (Trappe 2006). For example, among those who were between fifty and sixty-five years old at the time of the *Wende*, more than one million people were forced into *Vorruhestand* [early retirement] (Mau 2019: 155). The early retirement often led to material, social and cultural dispossession. Due to the premature end of their working lives, the pensions of these early-retired were low, their social networks were broken, and their sense of self-worth was threatened. As a result, many of the early-retired see themselves as the actual losers of transformation (Mau 2019: 155).

The fact that the new society of which they became members tolerated unemployment came as a shock to many (Rudd 2006). The state found itself unable to fulfil the promise of *blühende Landschaften* [blooming landscapes], as it became clear that the economic disparity between the East and the West would persist for many years to come. This failed promise, the *Ausverkauf* [sell-out] and closing of the enterprises, as well as activities carried out by *Treuhand* in general, sparked a number of protests and factory sit-ins all over eastern Germany (Böick 2011). Here is how one of my informants, a former accountant at Sachsenring, described the situation at the time:

Millions, millions were unemployed [after the *Wende*]. And there were no jobs. Many people didn't really like to work. And, such people, they thought when the West comes, and we will get the Western money (*Westgeld*), and then 'the fried ducks' will fly in our mouths without having to work for it. They didn't expect that one has to really work (*rabotten*) so that he can live. And those people were the first on the street, unemployed. Some people were naive (*blauäugig*), they let themselves be blinded, main thing—Western money. And then they were on the streets.

Employment at Sachsenring also dropped tremendously from 11,500 people in 1989 to 6,500 in 1991 and 2,200 in 1992. As the anxieties concerning layoffs piled up, the workforce organised a protest in order to urge *Treuhand* to set up an employment and training agency, or in fact to come up with any solution that would take care of the soon-to-be-laid-off workers. After a number of conflicts, strikes and sit-ins, as well as support from then Saxon Minister-President Biedenkopf, despite *Treuhand*'s unwillingness to do so, the *Sächsische Aufbau- und*

Qualifizierungsgesellschaft (SAQ) was founded. At its initiation, SAQ took over 3,600 employees and 550 trainees and was considered a successor of Sachsenring's work council and IG Metall (Swain 2002). SAQ provided re-training programmes for the workers and was supposed to help them find subsequent re-employment. The attitudes towards SAQ among the research participants in Zwickau were quite ambivalent. Active union members from IG Metall would say that it played a crucial role in mobilising the workers. The managers and engineers argued that it was a useless organisation, which promoted the inaction of the workers on the labour market, had a demoralising influence on them, and did not really help them find a new job. Some of my interlocutors even went so far as to say that SAQ was used as a scheme for a subsidy fraud. The workers who went through training at SAQ mostly neither praised nor condemned it.

One of my informants, Elke, a former shop-floor worker, who had just finished her apprenticeship at Sachsenring in 1990 and ended up being employed at SAQ, saw it as quite a positive development. It not only helped Elke in some practical matters, but, as she got pregnant in the meantime, it provided a sort of bridge, a safety net that gave her time to adapt. She explained that it was very important for her psychologically that she did not just start getting the unemployment benefits, but still felt like she was working, and it allowed her to stay embedded in social networks at work. Almost all of my informants would agree that the training that SAQ provided was rather pointless in terms of employment and was mainly meant to keep the workers off the streets. Keeping them off the streets basically meant preventing both unemployment and protests. "These training companies mushroomed all over and got a lot of funding, SAQ as well. And they offered pointless training, which mostly brought nothing. The people didn't find jobs through that. Pointless, because there were no jobs here... All enterprises were closed off", said Mrs Schulze. Employment at SAQ was mostly seen by the 'outsiders' as a sort of a useless mock-labour (Rajković 2017).

The next crisis after the *Wende* was caused by the reforms of Agenda 2010, connected with one of the most substantial cuts to the social security system in German history. The reform included such neoliberal measures as the loosening of job security and the decrease of social costs to the employer at the expense of the employees. Schröder himself described the reform as one that would "reduce the state

benefits, promote individual responsibility and request more personal contribution from each individual”.

In 2004, the reform sparked protests against *Sozialabbau* (social cuts) all over Germany. The protests were carried out on Mondays and were called *Montagsdemos*, which was criticised by the government as an inappropriate analogy with the peaceful revolution of 1989. In my fieldsite in Zwickau, the protests against Hartz IV started in August 2004, and during some over 4,000 people gathered on the main square. The protests continue even fifteen years later, as the local MLPD (*Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands*) leader still stands with between seven and ten people in front of the shopping mall, Arcaden, in the Old Town of Zwickau almost every Monday at 5p.m. When I first encountered the protesters, they were holding a poster which declared “Wir wollen Arbeit, von der wir leben können! Keine Almosen! Weg mit Hartz IV—das Volk sind wir!” [“We want work, from which we can make a living! Not charity! Away with Hartz IV—we are the people!”]. Later, their leader told me that they had started the demonstrations with the trade unions. However, the trade union almost immediately distanced itself from MLPD, and since then there had been two separate Monday demonstrations in Zwickau. In November 2004 the trade unions stopped their demonstrations under some pressure from SPD. The results of Agenda 2010 are mostly considered a success because unemployment in Germany did gradually fall from 10.5% to an average of 5% in 2019, and the economy has steadily grown since then, although causality is not transparent in this case. The unemployment rate mostly declined in the East, which could also be partially explained by the fact that some of the long-term unemployed, who lost their jobs during the *Wende*, retired. The reform was also blamed for its negative consequences, such as growing inequality and poverty. It has led to a stronger stigmatisation of the unemployed in public discourse and caused a boom in the temporary employment business (*Leiharbeitsfirmen*). People prefer temporary employment (even with poor working conditions) to the idea of becoming a Hartz IV recipient, which is seen as both morally and financially problematic. Indeed, to many of my interlocutors in the field, receiving benefits was considered shameful:

I would say, if you want money from the state, then you should please sweep the streets, or clean windows, or go to some firm, or build

the streets. But no, they [the unemployed] don't want to! And they keep receiving their benefits. That is why we still have thousands of unemployed in Zwickau.

In March 2019 I attended a 'conversation at the kitchen table' (*Küchentischgespräch*) in Zwickau which was organised by SPD, the party which was primarily responsible for Hartz IV, as a part of a campaign for the Landtag elections. The name of this event was 'What comes after Hartz IV?', and the clear suggestion of the party was the *Bürgergeld*, or basic income. The format of this discussion allowed the public to sit in a pub, at the 'kitchen table', with the politicians and to ask them questions. Although it turned out to be rather a matter of politician's monologues than a discussion, some people managed to ask their questions and share their concerns. One of them, a young woman in her thirties, was a single mother of two and a former bank employee, who left her job to engage in volunteering in the area of female unemployment. She started her speech with the phrase "I am very nervous because I want to come out (*mich outen*)—I am a Hartz IV receiver". She went on to talk about the stigmatisation and the shame that she was subjected to. "We are not all lazy or incapable. There is a story behind each one of us", she said with her voice shaking.

The stigma and the tragedy behind unemployment seems to be strongly connected with the deeply-rooted moral values which I discussed earlier in relation to early workers' biographies, and which are also connected to the perception of work in Protestantism. Falling out of working life was considered not only shameful, but also destructive for the soul and one's mental health. The 2004 reforms seem to have capitalised on these traditional narratives of work as an instrument of moral growth. Despite some attempts to establish a countermovement (such as the Monday demonstrations against the Hartz IV reforms), the protests have failed to appeal to the general public, who instead reached a general consensus in agreement with state policies.

Moral Dimension of Work

Despite continuing interest in the entanglement and interplay of the spheres of economy and morality, the concept of *moral economy* has received a fair amount of criticism recently. Although not invented

by Thompson (1971), the term moral economy was introduced into widespread academic use in his article, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century'. The term has since then 'migrated' from history to political science through the writings of Scott (1976), and to sociology and anthropology (Edelman 2012: 59). However, rather than promoting a dialogue by moving across the boundaries of separate disciplines, the concept has contributed to a certain "division of labour" between studies focused on either economy or morality (Hann 2016: 4). In his critique of the concept, Chris Hann (2018) makes a case for dropping the term 'moral economy' altogether in favour of the *moral dimension* of economy, a term he borrows from sociologist Amitai Etzioni. Hann suggests that recognising the moral dimension of economy as opposed to 'moral economy' would help in overcoming the division between economy and morality. In this chapter, I have followed Chris Hann's (2016: 7) suggestion that we should recognise "a moral dimension in the sense of a collective and systemic basis in long-term shared values", which captures both the dynamic nature of morality and economy, and the resilience of some long-term, dominant values. I am focusing here on the moral dimension of work as a central activity for economies everywhere (Hann 2018: 7). Industrial work is of particular interest in this regard, as it became separated in time and space from the rest of peoples' lives and was associated with the economic sphere (Parry 2005: 142). E.P. Thompson (1967) has contrasted the rhythm of the factory and its abstract clock-time with work on the fields, which is governed by the rhythms of nature and characterised by short periods of intense labour alternating with long periods of idleness. In contrast to pre-industrial work, where one was directly in contact with the results of his work, industrialisation turned labour into a "fictitious commodity" (Polanyi 2001), which was to be sold to a capitalist in return for money, which further separated work from other domains of life. The word 'fictitious' implied that labour (man), just like land (nature) and money, was never 'produced' with the intent that it be sold as a regular commodity for the price of wages or rent (Polanyi 2001: 136–137).

The distinguishing feature of the work ethic in modern capitalism is increasing flexibility. Flexibility has become a measure of one's value as a worker, as the burdens of market uncertainty are transferred onto wage earners or the state (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 218). To accommodate

fluctuating demand, part-time and temporary employment have increasingly become the norm among workers. Although Volkswagen in Zwickau has abstained from employing a temporary workforce since the emissions scandal in 2016, its multiple suppliers in the region do employ temporary workers through temporary employment agencies. The combination of two types of workforce within one enterprise causes division between the workers, one of the reasons being their unequal treatment although they are often equally qualified and perform the same tasks. Without temporary workers, flexibility within Volkswagen factories is achieved via different means, but often also at the expense of the workers, who need to transfer to a different team, intensify their labour, or work overtime to compensate for the changes on the market. Uncertainty has also become a more tangible threat to the workers in Zwickau since the factory has been set to shift solely to the production of electric cars, as many of the workers fear that the demand will not be sufficient to keep the plant running in the long term. I have argued in this chapter that compliance with the commodification of the labour market and neoliberal social policies was achieved not only due to economic conditions, but also due to the embeddedness of such policies within the system of values concerning morality and work. In this chapter, I have attempted to show certain continuities of such values in the region since early industrialisation, through socialism and in the modern context. Focusing on the moral dimension of (un)employment in Zwickau allows us to identify the moral grounds, informing both economic and political decisions. In line with Hann (2018), I have sought to connect the development of certain moral sentiments with changes in the material economy. By doing so, I have attempted to explain the attitudes towards work, employment and compliance with certain employment policies in an eastern German industrial town and their connection to the morality of work in a late-capitalist context.

In his analysis of work as a moral value in provincial Hungary, Hann (2018: 249) argues that the government's *közmunka* workfare policy is endorsed at the local level because it is embedded in long-term moral values, such as a pre-industrial Christian ethic of work as an end in itself, and the ethics of socialist industrialisation, which was focused on the glorification of work as a state ideology. He also shows how the idea of work's moralising influence is used by populist politicians to legitimise workfare policy as a way of dealing with the perceived 'moral deficit'

among the Roma population and justifying negative attitudes towards the new category of migrants—refugees. In this chapter, I have pointed out several similarities between the two cases of rural Hungary and an industrial town in Saxony. The prevalence of the Weberian type of work ethic is one of them. Aside from hard work, craftsmanship and manual skills are especially valued within this Christian work ethic. In the Saxon case, hard work also constitutes an important aspect of national identity, and it was central to the process of nation-building. The centrality of work under socialism, similarly to rural Hungary, was quite in line with the previous moral narratives concerning work in the region. Although in reality the organisation of work in socialism was often ridiculed for its sluggishness, frequent pauses and informality, which were also denounced by my informants in Zwickau, none of my informants confessed to being guilty of such idleness themselves. Rather, they would still talk about work as value, not in the sense of a sacrifice, but as an enjoyable and honourable activity in itself. As in the Hungarian case, work as a moral value is also used in anti-migrant rhetoric in order to divide people into groups of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’. Deservingness among my informants in Zwickau was mostly focused on productivity and hard work—qualities they believed they had but felt the need to defend due to the discourse of sluggishness surrounding the discussions of work in East German factories.

Conclusion

Despite dramatic changes which occurred in the economy of the region, certain moral values and discourses around work persisted over time and left their mark on issues of employment. As in Hann’s (2018) analysis of provincial Hungary, recognition of moral dimensions allows us to uncover certain consistencies beneath the ever-changing and fluid economic life in Zwickau. The changes to the labour market since 1989 have posed for a challenge to the workers in Zwickau. Initially, the wave of unemployment swept many off their feet and the long-term moral value of work as a duty towards the community was shaken. First, unemployment stood in the way of individuals’ ability to contribute to society through work. Second, on a more practical note, with workplaces being central to most social relations during socialism, losing one’s job

often meant being cut off from one's social networks and communities. Many found themselves in a moral dilemma: they had to work to stay a part of the community, but had no opportunity to find employment. Temporary employment measures such as SAQ assisted some workers in material terms, but did not manage to cover the moral vacuum that the loss of employment created. In order to be morally respectable, work had to be meaningful and useful, and taking courses on constructing a resume were not seen as such. Fear of the moral descent associated with unemployment pushed some into conforming to the rising flexibility and precarity.

Although they were initially met with a certain resistance, the social welfare cuts which came with the Hartz IV were ultimately accepted by the public. I argue that the failure of the protest might be connected with the embeddedness of the reforms' rhetoric in long-term, shared values concerning work, which dictated that one must only be rewarded according to his individual contribution and effort (*Leistung*). These values were also cemented within socialist ideology in the form of *Leistungsprinzip*. As I have shown in this chapter, the morality of work in Zwickau included both work as a duty towards the community and as an individual responsibility. Rather than being an inherent feature of either a capitalist or socialist system, these values remained central in the long term and constituted the moral dimension of work in the region.

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