From Trabi to E-mobility: Industrial Labour and Social Transformation in Eastern Germany

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis is based on the ethnographic field research that I carried out among the former and current automotive workers in Zwickau from September 2018 until October 2019. The dissertation touches on a variety of themes related to industrial transformations (postsocialist transformation, post-Fordism, transformation towards electromobility) in the car industry in eastern Germany. The emphasis is put on the social and political impact of industrial transformations on the lives of the automotive industry workers and other local residents. These transformation processes are analysed based on the literature on postsocialism, post-industrialism, industrial labour and populism both within and outside of the field of social anthropology. In this dissertation, I show that despite the relatively successful development of the automotive industry in Zwickau after the collapse of socialism, the workers have experienced various forms of disenfranchisement and devaluation, including the decline in social status, devaluation of production and qualifications acquired during socialism, the economic and symbolic hegemony of the West. Together with the weakening of the labour movements, neoliberalisation, uneven development and the threats of capitalist disinvestment, these experiences of devaluation lead to feelings of misrecognition and lack of representation on the political level.

Key words: eastern Germany, automotive industry, working class, industrial labour, postsocialism

Abstrakt

Táto dizertačná práca vychádza z terénneho etnografického výskumu medzi bývalými a súčasnými pracovníkmi automobilového priemyslu v Zwickau od septembra 2018 do októbra 2019. Práca sa dotýka rôznych tém súvisiacich s priemyselnými transformáciami (postsocialistická transformácia, postfordizmus, transformácia smerom k elektromobilite) v automobilovom priemysle vo východnom Nemecku. Dôraz sa kladie na sociálny a politický dopad priemyselných transformácií na život pracovníkov automobilového priemyslu a ďalších miestnych obyvateľov. Tieto transformačné procesy sú analyzované na základe literatúry o postsocializme, postindustrializme, priemyselnej práci a populizme v rámci aj mimo oblasti sociálnej antropológie. V tejto dizertačnej práci ukazujem, že aj napriek relatívne úspešnému rozvoju automobilového priemyslu v Zwickau po páde socializmu, robotníci zažili rôzne formy zníženia prestíže, vrátane poklesu sociálneho postavenia, poklesu významu priemyselnej výroby a kvalifikácie získanej počas socializmu a vyplývajúcimi z ekonomickej a symbolickej hegemónie Západu. Spolu s oslabovaním robotníckych hnutí, neoliberalizáciou, nerovnomerným rozvojom a odlevom kapitálu vedú tieto skúsenosti znehodnotenia k pocitom nedostatku uznania a reprezentácie na politickej úrovni.

Kľúčové slová: východné Nemecko, automobilový priemysel, robotnícka trieda, priemyselná práca, postsocializmus

Zusammenfassung

30 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall existieren in Deutschland immer noch deutliche symbolische, wirtschaftliche und politische Unterschiede zwischen Ost und West. In letzter Zeit gewannen rechtspopulistische Parteien bei den Bundestagswahlen einen bedeutenden Stimmanteil in den ostdeutschen Bundesländern, darunter auch in Sachsen. Es wird häufig angenommen, dass Rechtspopulismus in armen, deindustrialisierten Regionen mit einer hohen Arbeitslosenquote besonders erfolgreich ist. Jedoch teilt Sachsen diese Charakteristika nicht: das Bundesland hat einen hohen Industrialisierungsgrad und eine relativ niedrige Arbeitslosigkeit. Die Automobilindustrie im sächsischen Zwickau wird sogar gerne als Erfolgsgeschichte eines gelungenen postsozialistischen Wandels aufgeführt. Im Unterschied zu vielen anderen Industriestädten der ehemaligen DDR wurde hier die Automobilproduktion auch nach der Wiedervereinigung weitergeführt. Die vorliegende Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit verschiedenen Aspekten des industriellen Strukturwandels (der postsozialistischen Transformation, Postfordismus, dem Wandel hin zur Elektromobilität) in der Autoindustrie sowie mit deren Bedeutung für das Leben der Menschen vor Ort. Der Fokus liegt auf den sozialen und politischen Auswirkungen des industriellen Wandels für Arbeiter:innen in der Autoindustrie sowie für andere Einheimische. Diese Transformationsprozesse werden mithilfe der Literatur zu Postsozialismus, Postindustrialismus, Industriearbeit und Populismus analysiert, sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb des Feldes ethnologischer Forschung.

Die postsozialistische Arbeiterklasse in der ostdeutschen Automobilindustrie stellt eine besondere Herausforderung für die ethnologische Forschung über Arbeit im Postsozialismus dar. Einerseits beschäftigen sich viele ethnologische Studien zur postsozialistischen Arbeiterklasse überwiegend mit dem arbeitslosen bzw. unterbeschäftigten und armen proletariat. In diesem Zusammenhang bewegt sich die Diskussion oftmals um *underclasses* oder „Armutskulturen", die aus Deindustrialisierung und kapitalistischer Enteignung resultieren. Andererseits wird die ehemalige DDR aufgrund ihrer Integration in einen kapitalistischen Staat mit einer vollständig entwickelten Marktwirtschaft und bereits bestehenden Institutionen oft als Sonderfall unter den postsozialistischen Staaten hervorgehoben. Aus diesem Grund passt die – bis auf einige deindustrialisierte Regionen und soziale Brennpunkte in den Städten – vergleichsweise wohlhabende Arbeiterklasse in Ostdeutschland nicht ins übliche Muster und wird eher als Ausnahme gesehen als als Teil globaler Kämpfe untersucht zu werden. Folglich werden

kulturalistische statt wirtschaftlicher Erklärungen für soziopolitische Ausrichtungen in der Arbeiterklasse wie Politikverdrossenheit, Nostalgie oder Empfänglichkeit für rechtpopulistische Ideen vorgelegt. Durch die Betonung des relativen Wohlstands in bestimmten Segmenten der Arbeiterklasse wird in kulturalistischen Ansätzen die Bedeutung von Klasse und Ungleichheit zugunsten von Kultur und historischen Pfadabhängigkeiten vernachlässigt. In der vorliegenden Dissertation sollen diese Dichotomien – Wirtschaft vs. Kultur, Kultur vs. soziale Klasse, Gesellschaft vs Markt usw. – aufgelöst werden, indem ich den Blick auf die subjektiven Erfahrungen von Arbeit, Klasse und industriellen Transformationen richte, anstatt auf formale Maßstäbe der ökonomischen Ungleichheit. Im Fall der ostdeutschen Arbeiter:innen bedeutet dies konkret, dass besonderes Augenmerk auf die Erfahrungen des Sozialismus, der postsozialistischen Umstellung und Privatisierung sowie der symbolischen und wirtschaftlichen Hegemonie des Westens nach der deutschen Wiedervereinigung gelegt wird. Die Forschung verfolgt unter anderem das Ziel, das Geflecht von globalen Prozessen der Neoliberalisierung, kapitalistischer Enteignung, der Zunahme von Neo-Nationalismus sowie des Postfordismus zu entwirren, um vor dem Hintergrund der lokalen Geschichte und des lokalen Kontexts die Auswirkungen dieser Prozesse vor Ort zu verstehen.

Zentrale Konzepte, die für die Analyse eine wichtige Rolle spielen sind Arbeit, die Kommodifizierung von Arbeit, Einbettung, Klasse und Wert. Kapitel 1 bietet einen Überblick über die aktuellen Diskussionen dieser Konzepte in der Anthropologie des Postsozialismus, der Industriearbeit und darüber hinaus. Die Debatten um die „Einbettung“ der Wirtschaft in soziale und politische Institutionen und Beziehungen sind vor allem durch das Werk von Karl Polanyi beeinflusst. In seinem epochalen Buch „*The Great Transformation*“ beschreibt Polanyi die Entbettung der Wirtschaftssphäre aus dem sozialen Gewebe durch Prozesse der Kommodifizierung, in denen fiktive Waren (Arbeit, Boden, Geld) zunehmend wie Waren auf dem Markt gehandelt werden. Als notwendige Folge dieser Entbettung der Wirtschaft, so Polanyi, bildete sich gesellschaftlicher Widerstand in Form von Gegenbewegungen, die sich der Expansion des Markts in alle Bereiche des sozialen Lebens widersetzten. Aufbauend auf die neuere Forschung zum Thema verwende ich ein breiteres Konzept von Gegenbewegungen als von Polanyi vorgeschlagen, um bestimmte Formen von wirtschaftlichem Chauvinismus, Rechtspopulismus, Nationalismus und ähnliches einzuschließen. Ebenso wie die Expansion des Marktes nicht zwangsläufig entbettet sein muss und stattdessen in Kultur, Moralvorstellungen und soziale Beziehungen eingebettet bleiben kann, so repräsentieren Gegenbewegungen nicht notwendigerweise

linken politischen Widerstand. Wie ich im Literaturüberblick zeige, kann Polanyis Ansatz durch die Anwendung marxistischer Konzepte wie Klasse, Hegemonie und Ausbeutung bereichert werden, um Fragen der Machtverhältnisse in der Analyse zu berücksichtigen.

In der Dissertation setze ich mich zudem kritisch mit der Literatur zum Postsozialismus und Fragen der postsozialistischen Alterität auseinander. In letzter Zeit wird die Frage, „ob wir Postsozialismus noch brauchen", immer wieder in der Ethnologie und anderen Sozialwissenschaften gestellt. Obwohl die Analyse gewisser „Familienähnlichkeiten" unter den postsozialistischen Staaten, und die Anerkennung gemeinsamer subjektiver Erfahrungen der postsozialistischen Transformationen zweifellos wichtig sind, ist dabei Vorsicht angeraten, um eine Fortsetzung essentialisierender Narrative, die in der Orientalisierung der Menschen aus den postsozialistischen Ländern, und insbesondere aus den Arbeiterklassen münden, zu vermeiden. In der Ethnologie mit ihrem Interesse für das exotische Andere ist diese Gefahr besonders groß. Der Fokus auf Postsozialismus riskiert ebenfalls, die Teilung in „vor" und „nach" 1989 zu reifizieren, in dem die Brüche den Kontinuitäten vorgezogen werden. In Wirklichkeit brachte der Zusammenbruch der sozialistischen Regime nicht immer eine 180-Grad-Wende in der ökonomischen und politischen Entwicklung der jeweiligen Länder. Ein bedeutender Teil der Forschung untersucht die Kontinuitäten zwischen den ehemaligen sozialistischen Regimes und den darauffolgenden freien marktwirtschaftlichen Systemen.

Die vorhandenen Untersuchungen des sozioökonomischen Wandels in Ostdeutschland beschäftigen sich beispielsweise mit Themen wie den Veränderungen und Kontinuitäten im religiösen Leben, dem Verhältnis zum Staat, Geschlechterrollen, postsozialistischer Nostalgie, materieller Kultur und Konsum, kollektiver Erinnerung und nationale Identität, Beziehungen am Arbeitsplatz sowie der Stellung der Arbeiterklasse. Ferner wurde in den letzten Jahren Fragen der Privatisierung in den 1990er Jahren und den Aktivitäten der Treuhandanstalt viel Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet.

Trotz der beträchtlichen Anzahl von Studien über die sozioökonomischen Transformationen in Ostdeutschland, gibt es – vor allem im Bereich der Ethnologie – wenig Forschung, die die lokalen industriellen Entwicklungen in Ostdeutschland im Kontext der globalen ökonomischen, politischen und sozialen Kämpfe untersucht, oder auch die Veränderungen, die sich in den letzten 30 Jahren seit der Wende vollzogen haben, miteinbezieht. Neuere ethnologische Studien über den Postindustrialismus in Ostdeutschland beschäftigen sich überwiegend mit Wissen, affektiven Antworten und Haltungen gegenüber der Zukunft, während Verknüpfungen mit politischer Ökonomie

dagegen relativ vage bleiben. Erfolgreicher in dieser Hinsicht ist die Studie von Mau (2019) über das soziale Leben in der Rostocker Plattenbausiedlung Lütten Klein, in der neben der Darstellung der Erfahrung der Menschen vor Ort auch Verknüpfungen zum „großen Ganzen“ hergestellt werden. Seine soziologische Perspektive könnte dennoch durch die Einbindung ethnologischer Methoden und Theorien bereichert werden. Meine Dissertation soll dazu beitragen, diese Forschungslücken zu schließen. Aufbauend auf der vorhandenen Forschung stellte ich folgende Forschungsfragen: Wie haben sich Arbeitsverhältnisse in der ostdeutschen Autoindustrie durch den Übergang zur Marktwirtschaft, zum flexiblen Kapitalismus und zur Elektromobilität verändert? Welchen Einfluss haben diese Veränderungen auf das Leben der Arbeiter:innen, ihre Weltanschauungen und ihre politischen Einstellungen? Welche breiteren politischen, ökonomischen und sozialen Auswirkungen haben diese industriellen Transformationen auf das Leben und die Beziehungen zwischen den Menschen in Zwickau?

Die empirischen Daten für diese Dissertation stammen aus ethnographischer Feldforschung in Zwickau zwischen September 2018 und Oktober 2019. Während dieser Zeit führte ich teilnehmende Beobachtung und ausführliche Interviews mit gegenwärtigen und ehemaligen Arbeiter:innen, Ingenieur:innen und Gewerkschaftsmitgliedern in der Automobilindustrie durch. Dabei verstehe ich den Betrieb als einen sozialen und sozial eingebetteten Raum, und nicht lediglich als einen technologischen und produktiven Raum. Daher fand meine Feldforschung überwiegend außerhalb der Werkstore statt, denn die soziale Einbettung der Fabrik macht die Erforschung der Beziehungen und Abhängigkeiten über den physischen Raum des Automobilwerks hinaus erforderlich. Teilnehmende Beobachtung wurde auch bei öffentlichen kommunalen Veranstaltungen und Sitzungen über Themen wie Politik, Arbeit und die Autoindustrie durchgeführt. Der politische Raum der Stadt war während der Feldforschungsperiode besonders interessant und bat viele Anlässe zur Beobachtung. So fanden 2019 fanden mehrere Wahlen statt: die Kommunalwahl, die sächsische Landtagswahl sowie die Europawahl. In den detaillierten Interviews lag der Fokus der Fragen auf den Themen Arbeit, Arbeitsverhältnisse, Erfahrungen des Wandels, Ungleichheiten und Machtverhältnisse, Existenzgrundlagen sowie Moral und Gerechtigkeit im Zusammenhang mit Wirtschaftssystemen und sozialen Beziehungen unter verschiedenen sozialen Klassen und Gruppen in der Stadt.

Kapitel 2 stellt den Feldforschungsort vor und erläutert die industrielle Entwicklung von Zwickau und der dortigen Autoindustrie. Seit mehr als hundert Jahren hat Zwickau einen hohen Industrialisierungsgrad und ist ein wichtiger Standort für die Autoindustrie. Bereits

1904 baute Audi die erste Autofabrik im nördlichen Teil der Stadt. In der DDR-Zeit wurde die Autoherstellung unter dem Namen Sachsenring fortgesetzt, und die Anlage wurde für die Produktion des Trabant – das ostdeutsche Pendant des VW-Käfers – berühmt. Zum Zeitpunkt der Markteinführung des Trabant im Jahre 1958 galt er mit seiner Karosserie aus Duroplast als modernes Auto. Allerdings veraltete er schnell, denn aufgrund von Materialmangel und politischen Einschränkungen wurden im Laufe der Zeit nur wenige Modernisierungen vorgenommen, und das Auto blieb bis zur Einstellung der Produktion im Jahre 1991 weitestgehend unverändert. 1989 waren über 11.000 Menschen im Automobilwerk Sachsenring beschäftigt – was etwa ein Zehntel der Stadtbevölkerung ausmachte. Anfang der 1990er Jahre wurde das Automobilwerk dann im Zuge der Wende aufgeteilt, und die einzelnen Bereiche wurden entweder aufgelöst oder privatisiert. Basierend auf früheren, noch vor der Wende geschlossenen Vereinbarungen mit Sachsenring kam Volkswagen nach Zwickau und übernahm die neue Sachsenring-Anlage im Zwickauer Ortsteil Mosel. Die Arbeiter:innen der Autoindustrie sowie andere Einwohner:innen begrüßten die Investition von Volkswagen und hofften, die Firma würde alle Abteilungen des ehemaligen Sachsenring-Werkes übernehmen, und die Arbeitsplätze der Beschäftigten somit sichern. Die Übernahme verlief allerdings weniger reibungslos als die Arbeiter:innen gehofft hatten – und auch nicht so positiv, wie sie im Pressematerial von Volkswagen dargestellt wird. Erst nach mehreren Jahren stieg die Anzahl der Beschäftigten im Volkswagenwerk auf etwa 7.000. Die Zulieferernetzwerke, die Tausende von ehemaligen Sachsenring-Arbeiter:innen beschäftigten, mussten ebenfalls erst wieder aufgebaut werden. Während dieser turbulenten Zeit erlebten viele Arbeiter:innen Umbrüche und Unsicherheit, sie mussten mehrmals den Arbeitsplatz wechseln oder wurden arbeitslos. Dennoch war die Autoindustrie in Zwickau deutlich besser aufgestellt als die dortige Textilindustrie und auch deutlich besser als die Industrien an anderen Industriestandorten der ehemaligen DDR. Der Rückgang der Autoindustrie in Eisenach, die für die Wartburg-Autos bekannt war, und deren Automobilwerk von Opel (General Motors) übernommen wurde, war beispielsweise viel signifikanter im Vergleich zu ihrer Größe während des Sozialismus.

In Kapitel 3 wird erläutert, wie die Erfahrungen von Arbeitslosigkeit und Turbulenzen des Arbeitsmarktes der frühen 1990er Jahren die Einstellungen der Beschäftigten in der Autoindustrie im Hinblick auf Arbeitslosigkeit und die Arbeitslosen prägten. Sowohl Angestellte als auch Arbeiter:innen verstanden diese Erfahrungen als Prüfung ihres persönlichen Wertes; dies trug zur Akzeptanz des neoliberalen Narrativs und eines naiven Sozialdarwinismus des „Überlebens der Tüchtigsten“ bei. Die Arbeitslosigkeit

traf die Arbeiter:innen in der Automobilindustrie in Zwickau nicht nur wegen des Verlustes der Lebensgrundlage, und der damit einhergehenden Ungewissheit besonders hart, sondern auch weil die Arbeit und das Automobilwerk eine zentrale Rolle in allen Lebensbereichen und sozialen Beziehungen spielten. Mit dem Verlust des Arbeitsplatzes fielen sie auch aus den damit verbundenen Sozialsystemen und Unterstützungsnetzen heraus. Mit dem Übergang zur Marktwirtschaft mussten sich die Arbeiter:innen von einem sozial eingebetteten *Arbeitsplatz* auf einen flexiblen und oft temporären *Job* umstellen. In ihren Erinnerungen an die überwältigende Unsicherheit der 1990er Jahren bedienten sich viele dieser Arbeiter:innen eines Narrativs des ‚unternehmerischen Selbsts' und stellten sich im Vergleich zu den arbeitslos gewordenen Menschen als anpassungsfähig, flexibel und fleißig dar. Anfang der 2000er Jahre wurde dieses Narrativ weiter verstärkt, als der Neoliberalismus in Form der Hartz-IV-Reformen ins deutsche Sozialsystem Einzug hielt, die finanzielle Lage von Arbeitslosen erschwerte und ihre Stigmatisierung verstärkte. Obwohl diese Neoliberalisierung zunächst auf Ablehnung in der breiten Bevölkerung stieß, wurde sie letztendlich akzeptiert. Ein Grund dafür war, wie ich argumentiere, die Einbettung der politischen Regelungen in Moralvorstellungen und Narrative über Arbeit und Wert.

Kapitel 4 dreht sich um die Wahrnehmung von Klasse und sozialer Zugehörigkeit zur Mittelschicht unter Werktätigen der Autoindustrie in Zwickau. Der Fokus liegt auf der Verflechtung von sozialer Klasse und gelebten Erfahrungen, die in der ehemaligen DDR, wie Mau (2019: 174) argumentiert, als ein „Land der kleinen Leute" ihren Ausdruck fand. Ich erläutere die Trennlinien zwischen den Arbeiter:innen und den Angestellten sowie die im Sozialismus existierenden Arbeitergruppen und die gemeinsamen Erfahrungen und Beziehungen, die die Bildung einer Klassenidentifikation förderten. Neben den Begegnungen innerhalb des Automobilwerks wurden sowohl horizontale als auch vertikale Beziehungen zwischen den Automobilbauer:innen durch den informalen Tausch von Waren wie Bier, Autoteilen, Möbelstücken usw. gestärkt. Mit dem Übergang zur Marktwirtschaft und zum flexiblen Kapitalismus durchliefen die Klassenbeziehungen und Trennlinien einige Veränderungen: die Trennung zwischen befristet und unbefristet Beschäftigten, zwischen der Zuliefererindustrie und dem VW-Werk sowie zwischen der Autoindustrie und anderen Bereichen verstärkte sich trotz der Identifikation vieler Arbeiter:innen, Ingenieur:innen sowie einiger Führungskräfte mit einer homogenen „Mittelschicht". Gleichzeitig ist eine unerwartete Allianz zwischen einem Teil der Angestellten und den prekär Beschäftigten entstanden, die ähnliche politische Ansichten und Meinungen über die Gewerkschaften vertreten.

Kapitel 5 nimmt die Fragmentierung der Arbeiterklasse in den Blick und legt eine Analyse der industriellen Beziehungen und Arbeitskämpfe in der Automobilindustrie in Zwickau vor. Ich erläutere die geänderten Strategien der Gewerkschaft und des Betriebsrats sowie wie diese Änderungen von den Arbeiter:innen wahrgenommen werden. Bezugnehmend auf das Konzept der ungleichmäßigen und kombinierten Entwicklung beschreibe ich basierend auf Ergebnissen meiner ethnographischen Feldforschung, wie regionale und räumliche Ungleichheiten in lokale Hierarchien übertragen werden, und wie diese die Positionen und Strategien der Gewerkschaften beeinflussen, deren Handlungsweise sich in den letzten Jahren von konfrontativ zu kooperativ gewandelt hat. Beschäftigte bei Volkswagen, dessen Belegschaft zu 90% aus Gewerkschaftsmitgliedern besteht, und deren Gehälter über dem regionalen Durchschnitt liegen, genießen den Status einer „Arbeiteraristokratie". Arbeiter:innen in der Zuliefererindustrie oder bei anderen lokalen Arbeitgebern waren allerdings weniger privilegiert. Dies trug nicht nur zur Fragmentierung der lokalen Arbeiterklasse bei, sondern auch zum Erhalt des allgemein geringeren Status der Zwickauer Arbeiter:innen im Vergleich zu Arbeiter:innen in Westdeutschland.

Im zweiten Teil der Dissertation verschiebt sich der Fokus von der Arbeit zu den breiteren Kontexten der Macht, des Werts und der politischen Einstellungen. Nach der deutschen Wiedervereinigung erlebten die Sachsenring-Arbeiter:innen, wie das Automobilwerk, der Trabant – sowohl seine Produktion selbst als auch ihre Arbeit – als unwirtschaftlich und technisch rückständig abgewertet wurden. Ihre ehemalige Arbeitsstätte sowie die Produkte ihrer Arbeit wurden sowohl symbolisch als auch buchstäblich wie Müll behandelt. Meine Unterhaltungen mit Gesprächspartner:innen in Zwickau, die die Wende miterlebt hatten, führten vor Auge, wie ostdeutsche Produkte entwertet wurden, und welche Auswirkung diese Entwertung auf die Menschen hat, deren Identitäten damit verbunden waren. Durch die Praxis der Verteidigung ostdeutscher Produkte – hier des Autos, mit dessen Herstellung sie zum Teil zwanzig oder dreißig Jahre ihres Lebens verbracht hatten, der Fabriken, in denen sie gearbeitet hatten, und der Technologien, die sie benutzt hatten – versuchten sie, den Wert ihrer Erfahrung, ihrer Arbeit und vielleicht auch den eigenen Wert zurückzugewinnen. In ihrer Ablehnung der vorherrschenden Kategorien von „wertlos" und „wertvoll", die vom neuen ökonomischen und sozialen System auferlegt wurden, stellen die Arbeiter:innen der Zwickauer Autoindustrie – so mein Argument – dieses System in Frage. Dies geschieht durch die Anerkennung von Werten außerhalb der Bereiche des Konsums und der Produktion, und durch das Wiederbesinnen auf soziale Zusammenhänge. Obwohl ein Großteil von Kapitel 6 den verschiedenen Aspekten der Materialität der Produktion in

Sachsenring (Fabriken, Infrastruktur, Produkte) sowie dem Umgang mit ihr nach der Wende gewidmet ist, wird diese Materialität vor allem als ‚medium of value' (Graeber 2001: 75) verstanden. Als ein Medium ist sie von großer Bedeutung und lässt sich von den sozialen Beziehungen, die sie repräsentiert, nicht trennen. Gleichzeitig ist Wert in sozialen Beziehungen und Machtverhältnissen, und nicht in den Objekten selbst verankert. Die Betonung liegt deshalb auf Prozessen der Anerkennung, Aushandlung und Zurückgewinnung von Wert durch die Menschen.

Politik und politische Sichtweisen sind zentrale Themen der Dissertation und tauchen immer wieder in den Kapiteln über Arbeit, Klasse, industrielle Beziehungen und Wert auf. In Kapitel 7, dem letzten ethnographischen Kapitel, wird das Thema explizit aufgenommen und tiefergehend analysiert. Die politische Landschaft in Zwickau ist durch starke Polarisierung gekennzeichnet, die zuweilen in Gewaltausbrüchen mündet. Die Aufarbeitung der Aktivitäten des Nationalsozialistischen Untergrunds (NSU) in Zwickau verstärkt diese Spannungen. Die Arbeiter:innen sind in Fraktionen geteilt, die entweder die traditionellen sozialdemokratischen Bündnisse oder rechtspopulistische und alternative rechte Bündnisse unterstützen. Viele fühlen sich weder von den einen noch von den anderen repräsentiert. Beide Seiten bedienen sich dabei nicht des Klassenvokabulars, sondern berufen sich auf ein undifferenziertes „Volk", in dessen Namen politische Ansprüche formuliert werden.

Zusammenfassend lässt sich festhalten, dass ich in der Dissertation zeige, wie das Automobilwerk und der von ihm erfahrene industrielle Wandel in die sozialen, ökonomischen, moralischen und politischen Räume der Stadt eingebettet sind. In dieser Hinsicht ist eine Fabrik nicht nur ein Ort, an dem konkrete Waren gefertigt werden, sondern es werden auch soziale Beziehungen über die Werkstore hinaus produziert und reproduziert. Als Ausblick gibt es vor allem zwei Bereiche, die mir für künftige Forschungen zu diesem Thema besonders vielversprechend erscheinen: zum einen Fragen des Klimawandels und des Umweltschutzes im Rahmen der Wende zur Elektromobilität, und wie diese Themen von den Arbeiter:innen in der Autoindustrie aufgenommen werden. Zum anderen wären Fragen zur Ungleichheit im Kontext der Auswirkungen der Pandemie auf die Arbeiter:innen in der Autoindustrie eine weitere interessante Forschungsrichtung.

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Note on the text

Translation

All translations from German are my own. In some cases, the original German terms are given in square brackets.

Names, anonymity

The names of the research participants have been changed to protect their anonymity. In some instances, a few personal details have been changed not to reveal the identity of my interlocutors.

Photographs

All photographs were taken by me during my fieldwork in 2018-2019.

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Figure 1. The location of Zwickau

Chapter 1: Industrial transformations in the postsocialist context

Introduction

Thirty years ago, on 30th April 1991, the 3,096,099th and last Trabant rolled off the assembly line at the Sachsenring factory in Zwickau. A famous photograph from the day features the last hot pink 'Trabi' and two Sachsenring employees holding a banner over it which said: "*Last greeting. On the occasion of my death on April 30th, 1991, I ask you to send all expressions of condolences intended for me in the form of flowers and monetary donations to the 'dear old comrades': Honecker, Mittag, Tisch, Mielke, Voigt, Repmann and Hipp! I love you all! Bye-bye, your Trabi*".

This playful 'death note' marked the end of an era. Barely changed since its production started in 1957, the Trabi became a symbol of production in the GDR generally. The end of the Trabant was therefore seen as symbolic of the failure of the planned economy to compete with Western capitalism.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the economy in eastern Germany was hit by a massive wave of deindustrialisation. Only 20-25% of the jobs in its industries survived reunification. However, the prospects for Zwickau's automotive industry after the *Wende*[1] looked far less grim than the future of most industrial locations in the former GDR. Volkswagen planned to invest substantially in Zwickau's automotive industry, and already in December 1990, Volkswagen Saxony had been established. One year before the end of Trabi production, in May 1990, the first Volkswagen Polo from eastern Germany was produced in Zwickau. This way, rather than a break in production, there was an overlap, when Trabant and Volkswagen cars were both being made by Zwickau's automotive workers.

By 1990, about 11,000 people were employed at Sachsenring, wile the new production site at Volkswagen only employed about 1500. But even though only a small number of workers could immediately and seamlessly transfer to VW, there was hope of a bright future for the car industry in Zwickau. My interlocutor Rainer, an assembly-line worker, was one of the lucky ones. He once told me about his last days at Sachsenring: "*Before my farewell party, I was 'smuggling in' cans of beer for weeks. We drank beer endlessly in the last days. And there were empty beer cans on the tables everywhere, and as the cleaning lady came, she said 'Oh, shit!'*". He talked about his last day at Sachsenring in

[1] *Die Wende* ('the turning point') was the process of socio-political change 1989-1990 that led to the end of socialist rule, the turn to parliamentary democracy and the reunification of Western and Eastern Germany.

a quite cheerful tone, and I could not help wondering if there was any sadness in him regarding the ending of Trabant production. When I asked him about it, he shook his head: '*No, no, I was glad I could start here [at Volkswagen]. Actually, there were no sad days in the 1990s if you landed here [at VW], not at all. There was an optimistic mood.*'

Compared to other east German industrial towns, Zwickau is a prime example of a successful transformation. However, like many other east German towns, Zwickau's population has been ageing and shrinking steadily since 1989. Despite numerous incorporations of rural areas around Zwickau in the 1990s, the population of the town fell from 114,632 in 1990 to 88,091 in 2020. Deserted and decaying residential houses and empty store windows in the very centre of the city hint at the sense of decline. Politically, the population of Zwickau shows strong support for the right-wing AfD party, which in the latest European and communal elections received the largest share of the vote. Right-wing voting patterns are often associated with deindustrialisation and the so-called 'losers in the transformation'. Since Zwickau does not seem to fit this postindustrial narrative, it might lead to the assumption that the mistrust in the political elites or hostility towards others is better explained by means of a 'culturalist' perspective rather than economic development. I argue, however, that formal measures of inequality and economic success are not sufficient to explain the effects of industrial transformations on the lives of people on the ground. I am therefore interested in subjective experiences of dispossession, disenfranchisement, social decline and the feeling of being 'left behind'. Just like disinvestment and capital retrenchment, capital expansion can sharpen class opposition and generate social hierarchies and divisions.

By focusing on the car industry in and around Zwickau and the socio-cultural relations it produces, I aim to investigate how the transformations of the automotive industry in the region, including the post-socialist transformation, the commodification of labour and more recent challenges, such as the change towards electro-vehicle production, shape social life in Zwickau. While the first three ethnographic chapters deal with the experiences of automotive workers, the last two chapters focus on the social fields that are influenced by car production, which also go beyond the realm of production, such as experiences of modernity, backwardness and political life in Zwickau.

Society and (*vs)* the market

Mistrust in political institutions in the *Neue Bundesländer*[2] may be attributed to any number of causes: a long-term cultural tradition, the post-socialist legacy, or a global trend related to the post-industrial condition or the expansion of the market. Rather than offer a monocausal explanation, I argue for a focus on scale. In my fieldsite, several processes are taking place simultaneously. Only by recognizing them all as they intersect can we grasp what living and working in Zwickau means for local people on an everyday level. First, it makes sense to begin abstractly with the general relationship between the market and society, in order to be able to consider social, economic and political developments in Zwickau as an aspect of global struggles.[3]

Theories of the market and society are often discussed in anthropology through the prism of formalist and substantivist[4] traditions of thought. While the formalist tradition studies economic behaviour as a separate domain of human action that follows natural, universal laws, the substantivist tradition, which has found more recognition in anthropology, views economic behaviour in the wider sense of 'provisioning', which is also embedded in society and its institutions (politics, religion, kinship, etc.) (Graeber 2001: 10-11). Adam Smith is considered to be one of the most influential representatives of formalist thought and a proponent of free markets. According to Smith, 'primitive man' has a natural propensity to "truck, barter and exchange one thing for another" (Graeber 2001: 10), thereby laying the basis for the free market as a natural form of societal organisation. Therefore, for Smith, the free-market economic system is set in motion by self-regulating, profit-maximising *Homo economicus,* who, although driven by self-interest, acts in a way that benefits society as a whole.

Unlike many of his followers, Smith still saw the economic system as an integral part of the society, rather than having a separate life of its own. Some argue that Smith's ideas are progressive rather than neoliberal (Boucoyannis 2013). Karl Polanyi, who is generally

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[2] The new federal states of Germany, or the *Neue (Bundes-)Länder*, is a common name for the former states of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), namely Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The 'old states', or *Alte Bundesländer*, are the ten West German states, which belonged to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) before German unification in 1990.

[3] In this chapter, 'market' is a cover term for economy and society in relation to the political community, including the state.

[4] In this sense, the terms 'formalism' and 'substantivism' were introduced by K. Polanyi in 1944 in *The Great Transformation*.

critical of Smith's ideas, especially regarding 'primitive man', saw Smith as a transitional figure among political economists, as Smith still saw the economic sphere as subordinate to society and its moral laws (Polanyi 2001: 117; Dale 2010: 65). Polanyi also noted that Smith himself did not claim that the interests of the capitalists necessarily align with the interests of the society as a whole or its groups. While Smith still saw man as a social and moral being, his followers exaggerated the role of self-interest and the invisible hand of the market and proclaimed them as governing laws for society (Dale 2010: 53). Ricardo and Malthus played an especially important role in naturalising the free market and the inequalities it produces by popularising a theory later known as the 'Iron Law of Wages'. According to this 'law', wages tend to settle on subsistence level in the long term. Based on Malthus's demographic theory, the population of labourers will increase if wages rise above the subsistence level and decrease if they fall below it. This logic naturalises minimum wages and deems welfare policies unnecessary, as they interfere with the demographic-economic self-regulating mechanism and prevent the labour market from establishing an equilibrium. The development and popularisation of this idea were seen by Polanyi as major steps towards creating an ideology that puts the laws of the market above human laws (Dale 2010: 54).

Contrary to the views of the classical political economists, Polanyi (2001) saw nothing 'natural' in the way the free market operated. In *The Great Transformation* he demystifies the idea of the free market spontaneously appearing out of the 'natural' inclination of men to barter and trade. Polanyi contrasted the other principles of economic behaviour – reciprocity, redistribution and householding – with the markets (Hart & Hann 2009: 3).[5] While the first three principles dominate in traditional societies, he saw the overwhelming dominance of the market principle as relatively new and as associated with Western civilization. Therefore, for Polanyi, there is in fact nothing less natural than an economic system based on self-interest in which social relations are embedded in the economic system rather than the other way around (Polanyi 2001: 257; 60). Polanyi also contradicts Smith by claiming that markets needed to be carefully orchestrated and guarded by the state in order to function, whereas the response from society, namely to guard itself against market expansion, appeared naturally and spontaneously. This could also be seen

[5] Hann (2009) suggests putting the *market* not in opposition to, but alongside three other forms of integration. This approach allows disembedding to be seen as a process which can happen due to the exaggerated expansion not only of the market but also of any other of the four economic principles.

very vividly in a modern example like the east German case, where the introduction of the market was carefully guarded and facilitated by state institutions in the early 1990s.

According to Polanyi (2001), disembedding economies from social institutions and commodifying 'fictitious commodities' (land, labour and money[6]) results in the devastation of nature and human communities. These commodities are 'fictitious' because they are not produced for sale, so treating them as mere commodities to be sold on the market inevitably leads to what he called a *countermovement*, a resistance to the spread of the market rule to all spheres of life. At the same time, for Polanyi the idea of the existence of a completely disembedded self-regulating market is a utopia, one that can never be fully realized, since the market needs the state to impose its rule. Like the tension between society and the market, Polanyi also saw the relationship between capitalism and democracy as antagonistic. For Polanyi, the collapse of liberal civilization and the market system brought about fascism rather than the other way around. The liberal utopia of a self-regulating market generated an unsustainable rate of change and the disembedding of the economy from the social fabric, which in turn resulted in civilizational collapse (Dale 2010: 70). Similarly Streeck (2011: 7), referring among others to Polanyi, noted that as democratic capitalism is ruled by two conflicting principles (protecting the free market and protecting the individual), crisis is a normal and predictable state it regularly finds itself in, rather than an anomaly.

What Polanyi did not anticipate, perhaps, was a resurgence of the free-market ideology, as he believed that the disaster the self-regulating market brought upon the people was a well-learned lesson, one which would not need to be repeated (Burawoy 2010: 307). Block and Somers (2014: 2) dedicated their book to the rebirth of these "free market ideas that were widely assumed to have died in the Great Depression". They therefore focus on the resilience of what they call "market fundamentalism", highlighting the religious-like dedication of free market advocates. The religious quality of a faith in self-regulating markets, persisting despite empirical evidence against it, has also been pointed out by some other authors (Loy 1997; Foltz 2007). One of the integral aspects of this market fetishism of the market is the idea that, if the 'natural' market is suppressed and interfered with by artificial mechanisms of protectionism the consequences would always be devastating. This idea was developed by Friedrich von Hayek in *The road to serfdom*, published the same year

[6] Some authors suggest extending the list of fictitious commodities. For example, Jessop (2007) and Burawoy (2014) add *knowledge* and Guyer (2009) *risk* as fictitious commodities as well.

as *The Great Transformation*, and it became a guiding principle for the political right, including Margaret Thatcher's reforms.

In the past few decades, Hayek has been much more prominent than Polanyi, as the neoliberal mythology enjoyed hegemonic status. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc played an important role in this process. The Cold War was over, and in ideological terms neoliberal capitalism emerged as its winner (Sowa 2012: 156-157). As some scholars pointed out, saying 'We are all postsocialist now', the postsocialist condition spread beyond the confines of particular states and regions and had an impact on the capitalist world as well (Fraser and Alldred 1999). One such influence was the ideological defeat of leftist alternatives and the need for a certain 're-branding' of the Left, as it strived to set itself apart from Marxism-Leninism, now widely associated with an undemocratic, totalitarian and economically inferior system. This has led some to proclaim the "End of history" (Fukuyama 1992) and the triumph of Western liberal democracy as the only viable form of social governance. The leftist political alternative became increasingly associated with the ideas of the New Left, which has abandoned the strategies of class struggle, distribution and material equality to focus on new social movements, recognition and identity politics instead (Müller 2019; Fraser and Alldred 1999). These changes and social developments went in line with the paradigmatic shift within the social sciences towards postmodernism and the increasing interest in particular cultural and fragmented realities, which conveniently served the neoliberal preoccupation with individualism.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc brought about the ideological defeat of the socialist alternative. Perhaps even more important than the collapse of the system itself was the explanation for its decline: a state-regulated planned economy, as the popular narrative goes, could not compete with a free-market economy (Sowa 2012). In this sense, the failure of the socialist bloc became the basis for the establishment of the hegemony of the neoliberal ideology, as it promoted the view that, however flawed the free market was, there was no viable alternative to it. However, the recent economic, political and social crisis of capitalism, which has led to the rise of right-wing politics and the climate crisis, calls for a critique of capitalism and a search for alternatives, partly resulting in a recent wave of renewed interest in Polanyi.

While the collapse of communism caused reputational losses for Marxism, Polanyi's ideas have been rediscovered as an alternative to Marxism. Both lines of thought share, among others, an important feature, as both are concerned with the critique of capitalism, although they go about it in different ways. According to Marxist models, the economy

shapes social relations by dividing people into classes, which stand in different relationships to the means of production. Whereas Polanyi concentrates on markets and commodification as the forces to which society stands in opposition, classical Marxists focus on different aspects of capitalism, namely the production and exploitation which arise from it. Although Polanyi's indebtedness to Marxism has been widely accepted, the question of whether he could be considered a Marxist thinker was subject to debates, especially given Polanyi's rejection of historical materialism (Burawoy 2003; Dale 2010; Parry 2009). Polanyi criticised Marxist thought for being compromised by the "economistic fallacy" – the belief that human society is fundamentally shaped by the needs of the economy (Block and Somers 2014: 30). While classical Marxists see classes as a driving force of social transformation, Polanyi is talking about society as a whole rather than any particular classes in this regard. To link the two strands of thought, it can be argued that a class needs to win over other classes to be able to establish a successful countermovement. In other words, to achieve social change, a class needs to stand for something larger than its narrow class interests (Parry 2009: 176). This aspect of Polanyi's ideas is important for my analysis of automotive industry workers in Zwickau, where the focus is both within and outside this particular group. What is particularly important to take into account in this regard is the ability of the automotive workers to gain the moral support of others in Zwickau for their struggles.

Some authors have attempted to combine Polanyian and Marxist perspectives to close off the gaps that exist in both lines of thought. Burawoy (2003), for example, merges Polanyi and Gramsci under a single approach he called 'sociological marxism'. For a sociological Marxist, society, in the sense of both Gramscian 'civil society' and Polanyian 'active society' (Burawoy 2003: 198), presents a multi-class coalition that can resist the *market and its commodification* but not *exploitation*. Whereas exploitation is associated with the working class, the market, Burawoy argues, is disadvantageous for every class, thereby providing a basis for inter-class solidarity in protection against market forces.

As Burawoy (2003) and Parry (2009) both note, bringing the Gramscian perspective into dialogue with Polanyi might prove fruitful in this sense: whereas Polanyi did not elaborate on the constraints and obstacles that exist in the quest for 'taming' the market (Parry 2009: 177), Gramsci did not pay enough attention to the possibilities of resistance to its hegemony. While Gramsci focused on how the consent of subalterns is achieved, Polanyi emphasized the inevitability of countermovements. In this way, their contributions might be seen as complementary (Burawoy 2003), even though there are rather significant differences in their approaches, including in their affiliation or otherwise to Marxism, as well as their

visions of society. The Gramscian notion of hegemony can help us understand what happens when countermovements fail to mobilize.

While Burawoy (2003) treats Polanyi as an essentially Marxist thinker, Dale (2010) suggests a different approach, in which he recognises both commonalities and divergences between Polanyi and Marxism. Dale identifies as Polanyi's weak points his insufficient theorising of exploitation, conflict and power in general. He is also sceptical of a vague notion of society's 'protection' against the market, since the protectionism of the state sometimes reinforces the market rather than constraining it (Dale 2010: 86). For Dale, this flaw in Polanyi's theory can be overcome by adding the Marxist notion of class struggle to the equation. Adding exploitation, alongside commodification, into the analysis can help distinguish among the variety of movements that can be labelled countermovements.[7] Polanyi, in turn, provides a great example of scholarship engaging with the big picture on the one hand and the historical and comparative focus on the micro-scale on the other.

However, in order to apply Polanyi's model in the modern world, certain adjustments need to be made. First, we need to expand the notion of countermovements to include forms of protest, other than popular resistance from the Left, such as nationalist protectionism and its accompanying jingoism (Hann 2010: 196). For example, Hann (2018) showed how, in provincial Hungary, deeply rooted moral values have been used by political actors to justify first, the workfare schemes, mainly focused on the Roma population, and secondly the later aggressive anti-immigration campaign (Hann 2018). Similarly, in Slovakia, the new neoliberal welfare policy under the slogan 'work pays' was justified to the public using the 'moral panic' surrounding the so-called 'Roma riots' (Makovicky 2013). Just as countermovements do not always take the form of anti-market leftist protests, so neoliberalism's 'disembeddedness' from social relations cannot be taken for granted either. On the contrary, creatively mediated by the political entrepreneurs, neoliberal practices might be made attractive to wider audiences and receive popular support precisely by using their moral appeal (Mikuš 2016). This is what Somers and Block (2005: 155) call the "ideational embeddedness" of the market: the fact that "markets, even free markets, are always embedded in rules, theoretical assumptions, and institutional arrangements". In this sense, it can be argued that every economy is an embedded economy, since its existence in

[7] Dale uses an example of the state's role in enabling the markets. Welfare policies can provide protection against the market, but they can also function as a way of exerting social control for the purposes of capital accumulation.

isolation from social norms and values is impossible, and it inevitably embodies and reproduces certain values.

The trope of ‘market versus society’ is especially evident in the recent anthropological literature on neoliberalism and the class struggles it entails. As Mollona (2009a: xxv) points out, “the contemporary context of blurred boundaries between ‘the economy’ and ‘society’ does not entail the ‘re-embeddedness’ of the former into the latter, but new (some would say, worse) forms of inequality and stratification”. We should be wary, however, for reasons mentioned above, of reifying the ‘society versus the market’ opposition and of thinking about the market as a solely de-humanizing and demoralizing force, with a countermovement as its necessarily morally superior opposition.

Recent studies using Marxist optics can help understand how countermovements, which arise as resistance against the expansion of the market, can promote nationalist and also, somewhat paradoxically, neoliberal rhetoric. Following Kalb and Halmai (2011: 12) and Kalb (2014: 198), I argue that, despite being mediated by national arenas and local histories, the rise of right-wing populisms around Europe is deeply intertwined with global neoliberalisation processes and the new class polarizations and inequalities they bring about. This point of view stresses, most importantly, that despite being framed along ethno-nationalist lines, right-wing populist projects capture and utilize the class conflicts at their core. In other words, Kalb (2009: 207) suggests, the rise of neo-nationalist sentiments in Europe should be seen as a “set of defensive responses by working-class people to the silences imposed by liberal rule”. These ‘defensive responses’ can also be formulated in Polanyi’s terms as ‘protection’ against the expansion of the market and the devastating effects of the further ‘disembedding’ of the economy from the social fabric. Some of the more recent developments in this ‘disembedding’ include, for example, the further commodification of labor in the form of temporary and precarious employment and the financialisation of the household.

Other studies based in Central Europe also show how existing discontents and the moral values of fairness and work as a virtue are successfully employed by the political elites to justify both nationalist sentiments and the implementation of neoliberal policies (Makovicky 2013; Hann 2018). What is important to note here is that Germany’s popular right-wing party, the AfD, apart from its nationalist appeal, includes neoliberal reforms in its economic program (such as increasing retirement age, privatizing unemployment insurance and taxation policies to benefit first and foremost the high-income earners). Therefore, following Makovicky (2013: 79), I hypothesise that postsocialist, populist

nationalist essentialisms emerge "*both in opposition to and in collusion with*[8] liberal hegemony".

Recently, several quantitative studies on the rise of right-wing populism in Germany have contested the centrality of the economy in this process and criticised the so-called 'losers of modernisation' hypothesis, which states that the success of the right-wing populist parties is based on the pressures of modernisation, such as unemployment, growing inequality and fear of social decline. For example, in their study of electoral behaviour and right-wing populist voting, Schwander and Manow (2017) conclude that the success of the AfD in certain districts of Germany can be explained in terms of a specific "political culture" and a "tradition of radical right voting", rather than economic development. Cantoni et al. (2019) found out that patterns of voting for the AfD in the federal elections of 2017 could be correlated with voting for the NSDAP in 1928-1933, the conclusion therefore being that the recent rise of right-win populism can be explained in terms of the long-term cultural persistence of right-wing ideology. One has to be wary, however, of giving this correlation explanatory power in this regard.

Based on a survey conducted in 2016, Lengfeld (2017) also argued that socio-economic deprivation did not affect the willingness to vote for AfD. Lengfeld's study was widely discussed in the German media. However, his findings were debated by Lux (2018), who questioned whether the data he used were suitable for drawing such conclusions. Using a different set of data than Lengfeld (2017), Lux argued that potential AfD voters are more likely to be found among those who had low average incomes, were relatively dissatisfied with their socio-economic positions (subjective deprivation) and came from the working class. Lux explains that the reason 'modernisation losers' are not the largest group among AfD voters could lie in the fact that this group, often defined as 'modernisation losers', is relatively small in Germany generally. As Lux (2018: 263) points out, the so-called middle class makes up the largest part of the electorate of every big party in Germany, including the AfD. However, compared to other parties, the AfD is characterised by its higher percentages of voters from the lower-income groups (Lux 2018: 263). The heated debates over the reasons for populist right-wing voting in Germany point to the complexity of the issue itself and its political implications, the dangers of relying on single-factor explanations, and the challenges that emerge due to the limitations of certain quantitative top-down methods of social research.

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[8] Emphasis by Makovicky.

To conclude this section, I would like to return to the relevance of the big questions concerning the market and society for my research in the industrial town of Zwickau. While the reunification of Germany, democratization and the introduction of the West German currency, as well as the increase in the possibilities of consumption, were widely welcomed by the east German population, the wave of unemployment and the devaluation not only of the east German economy, way of life and products, but also of east German labor and the citizens themselves came as a shock to many. The transition from a socialist to a market economy was abrupt and rapid, as the political elites intended. The post-socialist transformation was an unprecedented process of rapid change, and, as it was going on, another wave of commodification in the form of the decline of Fordist work practices was starting to take place. Therefore, I argue that viewing recent socio-political developments in eastern Germany, in particular in Zwickau, through the lenses of commodification and countermovement can be seen as a reaction to the expansion of the market. My goal, however, is not to offer any single-reason explanation for political trends in my field-site. Rather, I intend to shed light on the individual experiences and life trajectories that underlie the statistics of economic development and transformations and formal measures of inequality.

Imagining the postsocialist other

Eastern Germany is a unique post-socialist society. As Eidson (2001: 6) noted, unlike other socialist states, socialism did not coincide with industrialization in the GDR. On the contrary, the GDR inherited a fully industrialized society. Though often compared to other post-socialist states (Cooke 2005: 4), the economy of eastern Germany was at a higher level even before the *Wende*. Unlike other post-socialist countries, however, it ceased to exist as an independent state and became a part of a wealthy Western country. Despite these and other significant differences, studies of postsocialism in other regions can shed some light on the political and economic processes in eastern Germany that led to the current positioning of the working class and its political orientations.

Ever since post-socialist countries opened their doors to Western researchers in the early 1990s, the issue of otherness has been manifesting itself in research on post-socialism. Hann (2014: 35) addressed this issue by looking at the dualism of ‘we’ and ‘they’ (‘the other’) which exists in the literature on post-socialist societies. For anthropology, a discipline that has been preoccupied with otherness, the socialist other presents a particular challenge, being not quite ‘us’ and not quite the Other. However, if anthropology is defined as the study

of 'other cultures', the question arises whether the (post)socialist subject is distant enough to be considered 'Other' by the anthropologists, or whether this a case of 'anthropology at home'. Strathern (1987: 17) offered the following answer to the question of 'where is "home"'?: *auto-anthropology* is anthropology carried out in the social context that produced it. Her definition was supposed to eliminate relativity – for Strathern, the personal background of the researcher should not influence whether her fieldsite is considered 'home' or not. She also defined home in a way that eliminates different degrees of being at home: one is either doing anthropology at home or one is not. The problem with Strathern's definition is that anthropological knowledge increasingly comes from diverse geographical locations and institutional contexts, so it is difficult to point out which social context 'produces' anthropology today.

In the 1970s, anthropology found itself in a crisis of legitimacy due to allegations of racism (following the publication of Malinowski's diaries in 1967) and its role as a 'handmaiden' of colonial rule. The crisis drew attention towards issues of power, domination and the production of anthropological knowledge. In line with this 'reflexive turn' in anthropology, Talal Asad (1973) urged anthropologists to treat critically the way in which the world around us and its power imbalances affected the discipline and also questioned the anthropologists' claim to political neutrality. Said's (1995) *Orientalism* continued the work of bringing together questions of knowledge and domination. In an attempt to decolonize anthropology, more and more anthropologists turned to research within their own 'cultures', which was also supposed to help them overcome their role of outsiders, of "objective" observers. However, turning towards 'home' did not necessarily bring about a conceptual shift. What it often meant was finding one's 'Others' within: minorities, marginal groups or focusing on small 'islands and isolates', such as villages and institutions (Hockey 2002). However, the 'majority culture', often in the form of working-class communities, often remained outside the scope of anthropology at home. This also has to do with the integrity of anthropology as a discipline, which heavily relied on its exotic subjects, along with its determination to separate itself from other social sciences, mainly from sociology.

In many post-socialist countries, local traditions of anthropology at home often stayed outside the theoretical framework of western anthropology. Local anthropological scholarship, sometimes differentiated as ethnology, has been defined through its focus on rural communities and folklore and was often left out of studies produced by Western scholars. Buchowski (2004) criticised this failure of Western scholars to include local anthropological scholarship in their references. He also pointed to the division of labour

between local and Western anthropologists and the one-way flow of information, which he described as a "hierarchy of knowledge" that promotes the intellectual domination of western scholarship in the post-socialist context.

Some authors (Chari and Verdery 2009; Cervinkova 2012) suggest that one of the ways to overcome this academic division of labour and dismantle the resulting hierarchies of knowledge is to bring research on post-socialism into dialogue with postcolonial studies. According to Chari and Verdery (2009), much can be learnt from the intersection of these two fields. For example, one of the parallels between the two is that both initially focused on responses to Eurocentric models of linear development: 'transitology' in the case of post-socialism, and modernisation theory in the case of postcolonial studies. Chari and Verdery (2009) suggest uniting postsocialist and postcolonial scholarship within a single global field of post-Cold War studies. One of the advantages of using the post-Cold War lens, they argue, is being able to transcend the division of the three worlds, according to which the West belongs to the First World, post-socialist countries to the Second World and postcolonial countries to the Third World (Chari and Verdery 2009: 12). Overcoming this division should also help abolish the division of labour among these disciplines, in which the First World was studied mainly by sociology and economics, the Second World by political science, and the Third World was reserved for anthropology and development studies (Chari & Verdery 2009: 18). In Germany, anthropology carried out within and outside Europe was also traditionally divided into two separate disciplines: *Volkskunde* (now more often called European Ethnology) and *Völkerkunde,* although this division has been slowly fading away. *Völkerkunde*, or more classical social anthropology, focused on studying distant cultures, whereas *Volkskunde* was concerned with Europe and could be characterized by a more history-oriented approach.

The tensions which exist around the notion of 'otherness' within anthropology as a discipline have found their way into the anthropology of post-socialism in terms not only of methodology but also of theory. The issue is pronounced in the case of the former East Germany, which seems to occupy an ambiguous position between east and west. Thelen (2011) criticized some Western researchers for failing to recognize post-socialist societies in their own terms. She argued against the prevalence of economistic explanations of (post)socialist reality dictated by the neo-institutionalist approach, which is closely associated with the work of the Hungarian economist János Kornai. As an example, she cites the depiction of personal relationships in socialism as purely instrumental, as a way of

overcoming shortages. Seen like this, these relationships seem quite different from the allegedly more 'genuine' friendships found in the West (Thelen 2011: 48).

Thelen also argues that Western scholars have focused too much on concepts such as the shortage culture and fuzzy property rights, which assessed the efficiency of socialist economic and social life according to the standards of the capitalist West. This inevitably leads us to conclude that the socialist other is deficient. And while during socialism this deficiency was likely to be explained by the failures of defective socialist institutions, after 1989, when most institutions were aligned with western institutions, the deficiencies of (post)socialist subjects themselves were used to explain the shortcomings of the neoliberal dislocation (Hann 2014). Thelen's (2011: 54) solution to this problem is to "take otherness seriously and move beyond normative analysis derived from economic perspectives".

One of the Western researchers criticized by Thelen is Elisabeth Dunn, who conducted her research in a baby food factory in Poland. According to a version of 'transition theory' adopted by the managers of the American Gerber company, which came to Poland to privatize the Alima factory, the factory was a case of 'arrested development' (Dunn 2004: 3). To them, both followed the same trajectory as the United States, except that Alima was about eighty years behind the US. Therefore, they believed in quick success by simply duplicating the processes and structures they used in the US, which did not go as smoothly as they expected. According to Dunn (2004: 7), people's history, religious backgrounds, concepts of gender and kinship, and ideas about social relationships ensured different reactions to the pressures the capitalist system placed on Poland.

Some authors (Braverman 1974; Mladenov 2017) have argued that, as forms of work, capitalism and socialism were merely variations of the same thing. One of the arguments they use is the popularity of ideas associated with Fordism and Taylorism in socialist countries. Indeed, at first sight paradoxically, Lenin was a proponent of Taylorist scientific management for socialist enterprises.[9] In her study of a Hungarian village, Martha Lampland (1995) traced the shifts in the notions of labour, time and money among the villagers. She argued that labour became commodified in Hungary during socialism, as the socialist state brought former rural dwellers into wage labour on the one hand and encouraged various forms of private agriculture on the other. Lampland (1995) concludes that the socialist legacy with regard to work relations conformed with the capitalist values of utilitarianism,

[9] However, as argued by Devinatz (2003), Lenin himself was not uncritical of Taylorism and saw it rather as a temporary measure in the transitional stage to socialism.

individualism and economism, as well as with seeing labour as an alienable activity to be sold as a utility. As also argued by Mladenov (2017), state socialism and early capitalism shared the same principle of the commodification of labour, according to which the only way to sustain oneself was increasingly becoming wage labour. This commodification of labour led to the spread of productivism, a cultural-material mechanism that reduces humans to resources (Mladenov 2017: 1120).

Although, based on her research in Poland, Dunn (2004) admitted some continuities in terms of the work organisation of both systems, she argued that there were also some essential differences. In her view (2004: 14), what made the actual experience of industrial labour in the socialist system different was the Plan. She argues that the planned economy and its shortages created different types of workplaces with a different distribution of power. Like other scholars criticized by Thelen, Dunn puts the economy at the centre of all other social relations. However, Dunn does not argue that post-socialist persons are 'deficient'. Rather, she emphasizes cultural diversity as an alternative to Western 'culture':

> "It is utopian to think that the practices of a few shop floor workers in a baby food factory in Poland might add up to a liberatory ideology. But it is possible to imagine that people in the United States and Western Europe, like Alima-Gerber's workers, might use these ideas to find a form of subordination that suits them better." (Dunn 2004: 164)

When it comes to research on socialist legacies, nationalism in post-socialist countries is also often observed through this lens. Verdery (1996) argued that the social organization of socialism in Romania enhanced national consciousness and resulted in a strong nationalistic discourse after the collapse of socialism. Although the newly introduced market economies with their uncertainties became a catalyst for this process, the main roots of rising nationalism in post-socialist states are seen as path-dependency and the legacy of the Cold War. Among the main features of socialism affecting nationalistic predispositions, Verdery cites the shortage economy, which tightened ethnic networks that favored using ethnicity as a competitive advantage in the situation of scarcity. However, one might question, with Thelen (2011), whether such practices of ethnicity-based favors and nepotism are indeed inherently socialist or post-socialist and so different from the informal economy in the 'capitalist West'. Another important point that Verdery (1996: 94) stresses is that the communist parties constructed their identities by setting themselves apart from an enemy (class enemies, capitalist west, dissidents) and that, when the party rule collapsed, a new enemy had to be found and a new "us" and "them" had to be established. Partly drawing on

Verdery, Petrovici (2011) uses the term 'indigenism' to describe the origin of nationalist sentiment among the working class in Cluj, arguing that the socialist organization of production facilitated the segregation of particular neighbourhoods, resulting in a heightened sense of local belonging.

Although I agree that looking at the organization of social relations under socialism can help us understand some of the continuities that provided 'fertile ground' for right-wing populism, we should be careful not to presume that there are very different kinds of 'nationalisms' in post-socialist countries compared to the rest of the world and also to contribute in this way to the construction of a 'post-socialist other'. In this regard, I would rather argue with Kalb (Kalb and Halmai 2011; Kalb 2009) that west and east European popular nationalisms have broadly similar social roots and comparable constituencies and are occasioned by related processes of neoliberal globalization and class restructuring, although their dynamics and symbolism derive from very different national histories. Moreover, since Verdery's essay, which I reference here, some changes have occurred in the social and political climate in the West. The illiberal turn and the rise of populism in the West revealed the problematic tendency of anthropologists to assess the 'non-liberal' tendencies among our informants against the liberalism of the 'civilized world' (Mazzarella 2019). Anthropologists have for too long taken hegemonic liberalism for granted.

Kideckel (2002) has also challenged the view that the problems and inequalities in the post-socialist countries were caused by the persistence of practices and inefficiencies of socialism that would gradually vanish over time. On the contrary, he argues that 'the problematic of the region is not too slow a movement to capitalism but too fast; not too little capitalism but too much' (Kideckel 2002: 115). Rather than 'post-socialist', he suggests the term 'neo-capitalist', which he treats as even more inegalitarian than its Western version. In the same vein, as noted by Cooke (2005: 6), the rapid implementation of capitalism in eastern Germany left it with a social system resembling more *laissez-faire* neoliberalism than the protective social-market economy of West Germany. In other words, eastern Germany became the country's 'avant-garde' (Cooke 2005: 7), or the *tabula rasa* (Swain 1996) in the processes of capitalist globalization. In this neo-capitalist system, post-socialist workers are being marginalized, and depicted as backward, lazy and passive (Stenning 2005) and as unfit for the capitalist system: in other words, they have become the new 'others' (Kideckel 2002: 128) of the transformation. Kideckel's account, it seems, calls for us to escape the boundaries of post-socialist area studies and pay attention to the wider context of global inequality and dominance.

Similarly, in post-socialist Poland, Ost (2005) observed what he called ‘the defeat of Solidarity’ among the working class, referring not only to the Polish Solidarity movement but to solidarity as a more general concept. In his book, he pays special attention to anger as a driving force of solidarities, which can have both positive and negative outcomes for democracy. Ost (2005) argues that, in the context of a decline in left-wing values and workers’ class consciousness alike, the anger is mobilized towards exclusionary solidarities that target society’s most vulnerable members, rather than inclusionary ones. In other words, when the (economic) anger of labour fails to organize around economic interests, it tends to be channelled into conflicts over identities, which inevitably produces right-wing political outcomes (Ost 2005: 179). For Ost, it is somewhat paradoxical that, although the anger of the workers was to a great extent caused by the capitalist transformations, the workers did not see themselves as anti-capitalist at all. He also stresses especially the unique positioning of the post-communist societies, where the demise of communist ideologies left a significant political, moral and indeed emotional void, ready to be filled with right-wing populist rhetoric. However, it must be noted here that anger is utilized by political entrepreneurs from the West quite as actively as within post-socialist contexts: as Mazzarella (2009) puts it, any social project must be affective if it is to be effective.

Contrary to Ost, and based on his accounts of populism in south-east Poland (Buzalka 2008) and Slovakia (Buzalka and Ferencova 2017), Buzalka argues that the concept of class was never that central in these eastern European contexts in the first place, as it was always kept subordinate to the concept of ‘the people’. Therefore, they suggest looking at populism in eastern Europe within a longer time frame, seeking its roots in pre-socialism and following its development under socialism. The authors also suggest recognizing the relevance of the struggle between ‘the elites’ and ‘the people’, rather than pitting the proletariat against global capital in this region. They argue that most of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) only broke from an agrarian structure relatively recently, that is, with the advent of modernization under state socialism, which had the unexpected effect of reproducing and even strengthening what they call ‘post-peasant’ values: the central importance of kinship, the cohesion of small-scale communities and the importance of national and religious conservatism (Buzalka and Ferencova 2017: 159).

This argument presupposes certain crucial differences between the roots of populism in eastern and western Europe respectively. There is then still the question of whether any of these assumptions would hold true for eastern Germany. At least two important differences between the CEE countries and eastern Germany can be pointed out here. First,

the latter was highly industrialized even before socialism. Second, religion does not play such an important role there as, for example, in Poland. Although one should be careful not to essentialize when using terms such as 'post-peasants', I find the call to take the local contexts seriously and to look at them from a *longue durée* perspective rather useful.

As I already discussed above, the concept of post-socialism or, specifically, the way it is applied has received a fair amount of criticism. Its ability to contribute to larger discussions beyond the spatial boundaries of the former socialist bloc has been scrutinized. Apart from the 'territorial trap', the relevance of post-socialism as a theoretical framework has been questioned for several reasons: its focus on the 'vanishing object', its tendency to privilege ruptures over continuities, its inclination to present socialism as a singular and homogeneous experience, and finally, its tendency to become an orientalising concept (Müller 2019). It is for these reasons that some scholars have called for the term to be dropped altogether. Although I agree with some of the above-mentioned critiques, I still think that post-socialism is a useful term for highlighting certain similarities across the former socialist countries, as well as for addressing the experiences of abrupt changes to their populations. It is true that by using the term we privilege ruptures over continuities and specific events over other, perhaps no less important events (European integration, the financial crisis of 2008, etc.). However, as it definitely was in my case, for the people themselves post-socialist change was indeed seen as a crucial turning point in their lives, which affects at least two generations: those whose working biographies were interrupted by change and their children. I therefore argue, along with Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008: 320), that post-socialism enables us to notice what they called 'the price of transition' and what I would prefer to call the persisting relationship of subalternity between the 'capitalist West' and 'post-socialist East'. I agree with Müller (2019: 7) that the explanatory power of post-socialism should not be overestimated and suggest to seeing the post-socialist transformation as only one (albeit a very important one) of the processes shaping people's lives in my field site today, along with neoliberalisation, globalisation, post-Fordist transformation, etc.

To conclude this section, I would like to agree with Thelen (2011) in her conclusion that for the research in post-socialist contexts to go beyond the confines of area studies, the generic binary opposition of socialism versus capitalism should be dismantled. I also hope that my position as a 'semi-native' anthropologist, which I will discuss further in this chapter, might help in overcoming such limitations. However, I would agree with Hann (2014) that striving to understand (post)socialism in its own terms, as Thelen (2011)

suggests, might reduce research on post-socialism to cultural relativism and exceptionalism and prevent us from generating more general ideas applicable outside the post-socialist context as well. Moreover, she argues that the approaches of Dunn and Verdery promote the 'capitalist vs socialist' dichotomy. In contrast, applying more general categories[10] would encourage more productive and complex comparisons (Hann 2014: 51) and serve to find a spectrum of pluralities where we tend to see a binary. According to Hann, the reason behind this dichotomous approach lies within the insistence on defining anthropology as the study of 'other cultures'. Therefore, if we keep relying on such a definition of anthropology, 'othering' would be inevitable one way or another. There are other equally important concerns for anthropological study, such as the question of what it means to be human and focusing on the everyday and the mundane, as well as the exotic. In this research project, I work towards that goal by acknowledging the local specificities (including post-socialist legacies) as well as placing my field within the wider framework of global working-class struggles.

Research on the socio-economic transformation in eastern Germany

Eastern Germany has been often 'singled out' by researchers working on post-socialism and deemed incomparable to other post-socialist contexts, as if 'the act of swallowing of the former GDR whole by its Western "big brother" had miraculously erased its communist past' (Buchowski (2004: 6). The specificity of the East German case should be taken seriously. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German *Volkskunde* was doomed: its theoretical base was dismissed as simply serving the ideological demands of the state, and the major academic positions in scientific institutions were given to West German scholars (Brinkel 2012: 240). It was in part due to this dismissal that, in the first years after reunification, social studies in Eastern Germany were dominated by Western scholars and focused on viewing the transition from the western perspective. One research project which especially stood out was the book *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz*[11] by the West German historians Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von

[10] Hann (2014: 49-50) suggests using Polanyi's "forms of integration" as one such useful category. Hann argues that Polanyi's perspective that all economies are best approached as mixed economies is what makes his approach fruitful in overcoming the socialist/capitalist dichotomy.

[11] 'The People's Experience: An Archeology of Life in the Industrial Province'. The name of the book includes a play on the word 'volkseigene', which is also found in the term *Volkseigener Betrieb* (VEB) or 'publicly owned enterprise', the most popular form of legal ownership in the GDR.

Plato and Dorothee Wierling, which consisted of thirty biographical and oral history interviews. The goal of the book was the 'interpretation of individual and collective memory of the GDR' (Niethammer et al. 1991: 71) as well as understanding the sociality and culture of the GDR.

What makes the book special is that the majority of the interviews in it were conducted in 1987, before reunification and when the fall of the Wall was not yet in sight. As Niethammer (1991: 68) himself noted, remembering is conditioned by the particular context in which it takes place, which changed dramatically in 1989, making the material of the book even more valuable, as it provided insights into how people in the GDR saw the world before the *Wende*. Throughout the book, the interviewees are presented through their relationship with the state, as the authors strove to understand the kind of personhood, created within a specific historical and social context, which persisted after the state itself had disappeared. However, the book's interpretations of its interview materials are not always convincing. For example, after interviewing Frau Grothaus, a retired steelworker, one of the authors comes to a conclusion that can also be found elsewhere in the book: the older generation of workers enjoyed a degree of social progress and mostly conformed to the state's ideology, though by doing so they were forced to make moral compromises. From the interview segments presented in the book, Frau Grothaus's moral regrets are far from clear, hence the conclusion seems to be based rather on the researcher's moral judgement. On the one hand, the authors were successful in what Thelen (2011) argued for – 'taking the differences seriously', but on the other, the reader cannot help but notice the patronising tone in which the interviews were discussed, East German social institutions being judged deficient due to their differences from Western institutions. This has been the problem with many studies conducted in the early 1990s by Western sociologists, historians and political scientists.

With its focus on everyday life and its inherently populist methodological stance (Mazzarella 2019: 46), anthropology should be well equipped to uncover the narratives of the people 'on the ground' as opposed to the official discourse of the transition. However, surprisingly, in the case of eastern Germany, with a few exceptions, political scientists, sociologists and historians seem to have taken the lead in the public discussions. The relative invisibility and limited influence of anthropologists in public debates concerning the transformation and inequalities in eastern Germany cannot be explained by the lack of anthropologists' interest in the topic. Anthropologists have been at the forefront of opposing the neoliberal and Western-dominated discourses around reunification.

Many ethnographies concerned with transformation in eastern Germany dealt with the societal changes that accompanied the transition from socialism to capitalism. Some have focused on deindustrialisation, unemployment and its consequences more broadly (Jancius 2006), while others have highlighted the transformations of gender roles and family relations that happened with the shift to a market economy (Rudd 2006; Thelen 2006). A significant body of social research in eastern Germany has been concentrated on religion and secularity throughout the transformation and during the socialist period (Peperkamp and Rajtar 2010). Although religion is far from the focus of my research, it would be impossible to disregard this topic completely, especially given the role of the Protestant church in the Peaceful Revolution of 1989.

Material culture has been one of the most popular topics for anthropologists and social scientists doing research in eastern Germany. In particular, much research has been dedicated to consumption and 'East German things' (Bach 2002; Bach 2017; Berdahl 1999b; Berdahl 2000; Berdahl 2005; Veenis 2012). The topic of material culture often overlaps with those of post-socialist memory, space, identity and national belonging in eastern Germany (Borneman 1992; Berdahl 1999a; Ten Dyke 2014; Rubin 2016; James 2012; Gallinat 2017). A significant body of research into the social life of the former GDR after reunification has been dedicated to the study of nostalgia for the socialist past, which in the context of eastern Germany acquired a special term – *Ostalgie*.[12] Studies concerned with *Ostalgie* are of particular interest for my research since they capture the relationship between East Germans and the market at an early stage after reunification.

As Bach (2002: 550) argued, East German products went through a complete transformation, from being an *Ersatz* (a substitute) for the real thing (the Western product, such as Coca-Cola) towards being *Echt* (real), when, on the contrary, East German goods were considered to be more authentic after the *Wende*. Following the phase of rejection of GDR-produced goods in favour of Western ones in the early 1990s, 'East German things' experienced a come-back as they turned into sentimental objects of nostalgia and longing for something which had been lost forever. Right after the fall of the Wall, old Trabis were sometimes abandoned on the streets as East Germans rushed to buy second-hand Western cars – Volkswagens or Mercedes. Towards the mid-1990s, as it became harder to find a still-functioning Trabi, it 'came back' as an object of desire and became a fetishized symbol of *Ostalgie* (Rubin 2009). The Trabant was made fun of in unified Germany as a slow,

[12] A play on the words 'Ost' (East) and 'Nostalgie' (nostalgia).

backward, inefficient embodiment of East German production, compared to modern fast West German cars. However, as one of Berdahl's (2010) interview partners stated, many East Germans waited for years to be able to buy such a car and dreamt about owning it. And just like the Trabant itself, the whole former lifeworld of East Germans became laughable in the dominant post-unification narrative. As Berdahl (2010: 38) put it, "the perceived backwardness of East German products was often projected onto the bodies of East Germans themselves" in the discourse of Otherness in the West. Although East Germans themselves willingly joked about the quality of these products, it was different when outsiders, mostly West Germans, devalued them.

Separated from the context of shortage, East German things acquired whole new meanings, evoking feelings of longing, resentment, anger, relief, redemption and satisfaction – often within the same individuals (Berdahl 1999b: 203). On the one hand, they contained the taste of *Heimat*, the country which disappeared forever, as some East Germans 'emigrated' without leaving their homes, and hundreds of thousands literally moved to the West. On the other hand, rediscovering East German products provided a form of cultural resistance, or a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott 1985), as the people tried to reclaim the value of GDR products and, by extension, their labour and themselves in a situation in which they were often ridiculed and devalued as inefficient and non-modern. The closure of East German enterprises meant not only the disappearance of specific products but also of the labor of those who made them. Nostalgia can therefore be seen as a longing not only to consume specific products but also to produce them. A similar dynamic has been described in a study of a small English town, where the supporters of Brexit were preoccupied with surrounding themselves with "Made in Britain" products as a tribute to their industrial past (Balthazar 2017).

Berdahl (2010: 186) noted the irony with which the nostalgia for the socialist past was itself commercialised and integrated within the frame of capitalism as nostalgia became a business with cafes and tourist attractions, and some 'nostalgic' GDR products even being produced in the West or being sold by West German online businesses. During my fieldwork, I stumbled upon a rather cynical example in a book about the history and peculiarities of the Trabant published in 1998, which I received as a gift from one of my friends in the field. As I turned the first couple of pages of the book, I saw a very colourful page, which contrasted with the mostly black-and-white or muted colours of the rest of the book. In the centre of the page was an image of a winking fox holding a package of *Spee* washing powder. The text on the image read: 'Instead of nostalgia: [Spee Megaperls]

Smarter than ever!'[13] I was surprised to see advertising in a book in the first place, but the irony of the situation amused me even more. The washing powder *Spee* (derived from the German *Spezial-Entwicklung*[14]) was one of the few eastern German products that won popularity in the West as well. Berdahl (1999b: 201) writes how some East Germans took pride in the fact that this product came from East Germany and continued to use it after the *Wende*. The factory which produced it was *VEB Waschmittelwerk Genthin* in Saxony-Anhalt. After 1989, Western German *Henkel* signed a contract with the state of Saxony-Anhalt to invest in the industrial site, and the production of *Spee* continued. However, in 2007 Henkel relocated the whole production to Düsseldorf and took the *Spee* brand with it. I found *Spee* to be a peculiar symbol of both post-socialist nostalgia and deindustrialisation.

From the example above, another meaning of post-socialist nostalgia emerges: Ostalgic practices as 'mourning for production' (Berdahl 1999b). The devastating effect of the unification process for the industrial working class was undeniable – 4.5 million jobs were lost between 1989 and 1992 (Müller 2007). Rushed by fears of mass out-migration from East to West Germany, monetary union was introduced on 1st July 1990 at an unrealistic exchange rate of 1:1[15]. Monetary union contributed to the swift collapse of the East German economy, as enterprises became unable to pay their workers overnight. Due to the policy of shock therapy, real unemployment has been estimated as reaching 40% in the early 1990s (Turner 1998). As Mau (2019: 151) put it, the society of the *Werktätige* (working people) turned into the society of the *Untätige* (idle/unproductive people).

After 1989 the fate of about 12,000 of the GDR's enterprises was placed in the hands of the *Treuhandanstalt* (short *Treuhand*), a 'trust agency' established in 1990 with the purpose of privatizing the former East Germany's publicly owned enterprises (*VEB*). While in West Germany the history of the *Treuhandanstalt* fell into oblivion, it continues to play an important role in the public discourse in East Germany. Some recent studies suggest that the right-wing and anti-elite tendencies in eastern Germany are deeply rooted in the collective memory of socio-economic and socio-cultural experiences of being overpowered associated with the *Treuhandanstalt* (Goschler & Böick 2017: 117). Due to its role in the liquidation of East German enterprises and numerous suspicions associated with *Treuhand*, the organisation has become the 'Bad Bank' of German reunification (Böick 2020), where

[13] 'Statt Nostalgie: [Spee Megaperls] Schlau wie nie!'

[14] Special development.

[15] 1 East German mark = 1 West German mark (Deutschmark).

all controversies and conflicts regarding the traumas of re-unification and East-West oppositions met.

The discussions around the east-west relationship and inequalities are still very emotionally and politically charged. Those bringing up the inequalities between east and west or post-unification problems in Germany are accused of reproducing such divisions, promoting the 'victimisation'[16] of East Germans and, by doing so, even 'helping' right-wing populists justify some of their rhetoric. *Ostalgie* is also disregarded as a purely cultural phenomenon – 'mere nostalgia' (Berdahl 1999b). One of the arguments used in support of such 'mereness' is that nostalgia is associated with simply romanticizing the past as the time when its subjects were young (the grass was greener, and the beer was tastier). However, what such explanations miss is the imbalance of symbolic and material power in the East and West. In other words, dismissing nostalgia as merely romanticising the past means overlooking the discourse to which nostalgia emerges as a response.

As noted by Pine (2002: 111), when people evoke the 'good' socialist past, they do not deny the realities of corruption, shortages and intrusions by the state, but rather choose to emphasize other aspects. I argue that this is particularly true in the case of East Germans, since many felt that the other, 'dark' side of socialism was already sufficiently represented in the public discourse. In this sense, the silences of East Germans can be explained as a reaction to a certain over-articulation on the part of the *others*. In social research, silences are often associated with avoidance, suppression and political subjugation. Contrary to this narrative, which implies that silences are inherently submissive, I suggest a different perspective on silences as a type of resistance. Boyer (2006) argues that *Ostalgie* has nothing to do with wanting to bring back the old GDR times; rather, it is a means of protecting one's dignity and identity as an East German at a time when the dominant narratives strive to devalue everything connected with their GDR past. Thus, he sees nostalgia as a response to the uncompromising campaign since 1990 to erase public symbols and signs of the GDR from the lived environment of the new federal states (Boyer 2006: 372-373). As one piece of evidence for this, Boyer uses the statement of one of his interlocutors that the greater trauma was not the collapse of the GDR itself, but the discovery that post-unification narratives reduced GDR to a prison camp and its citizens to the helpless victims of this camp

[16] Außer Klagen nichts zu sagen? Was am Opferdiskurs der Ostdeutschen falsch ist. *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 21, 2019 (accessed 17.04.2021). https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/ausser-klagen-nichts-zu-sagen-was-am-opferdiskurs-der-ostdeutschen-falsch-ist/25131744.html

(2006: 377). Apart from resistance to devaluations of the experience of East Germans, nostalgia has been a way of manifesting social criticism and offering alternative projects of the future. As argued by Bartha (2014: 309), “nostalgia for socialist regimes functions as a means and claim of the ‘little man’ to express social criticism”. In line with Berdahl (1999b) and Bartha (2014), I argue that nostalgic memories of the socialist past cannot be dismissed as ‘mere’ nostalgia, but rather should be discussed in relation to the present.

Ostalgie research, it seems, has been gradually losing relevance due to its vanishing object. Bach (2002) distinguished between modernist nostalgia and ‘nostalgia of style’ in East and West Germany. The former had to do with the longing for something lost – the home country, the actual past and the ‘future-in-the-past’ (the longing for an unrealized socialist utopia). The latter was free of actual connection to the past and rather embodied certain free-floating postmodernist symbols and took form in a fascination with East German things as kitsch and camp-style objects. As argued by Bach (2002: 554), as there are fewer people who experienced life in the GDR and as direct memories of the GDR fade, ostalgic practices become more performative and less connected to the past, as they also turn increasingly into a nostalgia of style. However, I argue that the work of *Ostalgie* researchers is still relevant for the study of contemporary socio-political developments in East Germany for at least two reasons: 1) there are a lot of parallels between the way *ostalgie* and right-wing tendencies are framed as ‘problems’ of the East; 2) discussions around nostalgia are a way of working through (*Aufarbeitung*) the past, which in itself is a political process, as the interpretation of the past has implications for projects for the present and the future. In her recent book, Gallinat (2017) analysed how this memory work shapes the understandings of democracy and citizenship in the present. In the German context, the *Aufarbeitung* of history (or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung – ‘coming to terms with the past’*) has a special importance in the public discourse due to its coming to terms with the horrors of national socialism and then its extension to working through the GDR’s past and the history connected with *Stasi*[17] activities.

More recently, efforts have been made to work through the history of reunification and the *Treuhand*. As one of my interlocutors ironically noted, “We Germans like to work through [*aufarbeiten*] everything”. The German historian Kowalczuk recently called for the

[17] Ministry for State Security

‘Working-through of the working-through’ (‘*Die Aufarbeitung der Aufarbeitung’*),[18] by which he meant revising how working through history has been done until now, as he shows how it has been twisted and used strategically to make political claims. In his essay, he also poses the question of to what extent the existing politics of *Aufarbeitung* have contributed to right-wing voting patterns in the east so far.

In line with the current trend to rethink the transformation process, the sociologist Steffen Mau (2019) has produced an exceptional study based on his research in the *Plattenbau*[19] neighbourhood of Lütten Klein in Rostock. The author grew up in Lütten Klein but moved away to study in Berlin after the *Wende* and returned to the neighbourhood to conduct his research. Mau also incorporated his own biography into his analysis of the transformation. By using long-term data, he argues that the main reason behind the discontent and the subsequent revolution in East Germany was the decrease in social mobility and the lack of opportunities for personal advancement. According to Mau, the transformation strategy failed in the east not only because of the existing social ‘fractures’ in the GDR and the mistakes of the post-unification period, but also due to the contradictions that existed within western Germany itself by the time of reunification. The unification therefore did not solve and in some cases even intensified the fractures that had existed in East German society. One of the reasons for this has been the transfer of elites. On the one hand, in many cases, mid-level power after unification landed in the hands of the former socialist elites. On the other hand, the highest positions were taken by Western managers who relocated to the east as a career move. Mau (2019: 169) also talks about the general rise of living standards and wealth gains (*Wohlstandzugewinnen*), combined with the general fall of East Germans within the hierarchy of social positions (*Unterschichtung*), as a particularity of a German-German unification process.

Mau borrows the term ‘fracture’ from medical discourse and, continuing with the analogy, talks about East German society as a society with multiple fractures, both visible and invisible (Mau 2019: 13-14). Healing the fractures may be successful but may also lead to deformities and make the body (or society) less adaptable and less able to withstand pressure. According to Mau, this is what made the population of the East more vulnerable to economic strains, dissatisfied and susceptible to right-wing populism. In his analysis, by

[18] "Die Aufarbeitung der Aufarbeitung - Welche Zukunft hat die DDR-Geschichte?", Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, in: *Deutschland Archiv*, 24.7.2019, Link: www.bpb.de/294350

[19] Prefabricated housing

focusing on fractures, Mau (2019: 14) deliberately devotes much attention to the problems of reunification, without, however, denying the positive gains.

During my fieldwork, I found a lot of parallels between Mau's analysis and the experiences of the people I talked to, many of whom would enjoy his book. In this thesis, I adopt a similar approach to my data, consciously privileging the everyday experiences and memories of my interlocutors over the 'official' narratives of the transformation. I would also like to borrow Mau's approach to the East-West German relationship in that, rather than juxtaposing the two and naturalising this dichotomy, he looks at the simultaneous development of both to see how they intersect and influence each other, without denying their differences and divergencies in history. The lens of uneven and combined development (Kasmir and Gill 2018) can be fruitful in achieving this goal.

In the following chapters, I will also be drawing on the literature concerning the transformation of the role and social position of workers in East Germany before and after the *Wende,* most of which has been produced by historians and sociologists rather than anthropologists (Engler 1999; Bartha 2013; Friedreich 2008; Turner 1998; Hofmann 1995; Lüdtke 1994; Kohli 1994; Hoffmann 1999, Wierling 1996 etc.). Among these studies, research on workers in socialism is prevalent, whereas the three decades since reunification have been somewhat neglected. Bartha's (2013) comparative study of workers in the Rába factory in Györ (Hungary) and the Carl Zeiss works in Jena is a notable example. Bartha (2013) specializes in social history, but her work is as essential for the anthropologists who work on the region as it is for historians. Drawing on archival research and life-history interviews, Bartha (2013) presents a rich history of labour during socialism and analyses the relationship between the worker and the 'workers' state'. Her main argument (2013: 249) is that the social compromise between the workers and socialist regimes was achieved in both countries up until the late 1980s by means of welfare dictatorships. By appeasing the workers and attempting to fulfil their materialist desires, the state depoliticised the workers, replaced working-class consciousness with an orientation towards consumerism and leaving little room for any leftist alternatives. By choosing to base their legitimacy on consumption, however, both regimes in Hungary and East Germany failed to deliver on their promises and compete with western capitalism based on material satisfaction. As a result, the dissatisfaction of the workers grew and their trust in socialism was destroyed, which led to the collapse of the regimes.

At the end of her book, Bartha (2013) briefly discusses the different outcomes of the collapse of socialism and the establishment of the market economy for the mentality of

workers in the two countries. While in Hungary the difficult encounters with globalisation and western capitalism led to nationalism, in eastern Germany they led to the renewed appeal of post-materialist values as an alternative to capitalism. Bartha's analysis ends with the first years after the *Wende* and therefore does not cover the more recent economic and political developments in eastern Germany. Although these developments oppose some of Bartha's conclusions concerning the present, I find her take on the collapse of the socialist regime, as well as her comparative perspective, rather compelling.

Among ethnographic studies concerning the transformation of work in East Germany, Müller's (2007) work is especially relevant to the focus of my study. Based on her ethnographic fieldwork in three East Berlin enterprises before and after the *Wende*,[20] Müller (2007) analysed the changes that occurred to workplace relationships with the transition from the planned to the market economy. She focused on power relations, autonomy and the responses to power, such as compliance and evasion. By doing so, she attempted to determine whether the workers actually acquired the freedom they had supposedly expected from the market economy. As for Dunn (2004) and Verdery (1996), for Müller (2007) the shortage economy mainly serves as an explanatory frame for the problems of transformation to the new economic system. For example, she argues that East German enterprises were not concerned with demand in the GDR. Due to the scarcity of goods and materials, customers had to 'seek out' the producer rather than the other way around. With the shift to a market economy, the tables were turned, and the enterprises' management and employees had to actively market their products to their customers, which they were not used to doing. This 'adaptation discourse' prompts a rather black-and-white division into losers and winners, into those who succeeded and those who 'failed to adapt'. In line with Thelen's (2011) critique of this sort of approach, I argue that it leads us to assume that the failures of individuals and enterprises within the market economy can be explained with reference to the ideologies and attitudes of the post-socialist subjects. Although they are not intentionally called 'deficient', this becomes implicit in the narrative of 'losers and winners'. While such concepts might commonly appear as emic categories among research subjects, they need to be taken more critically in our analyses. That said, it should be noted that Müller's field research was conducted during the early stages of the transformation, in a social and political context that might have affected the book's focus. However, Müller's

[20] Only one of the three enterprises survived in the market economy.

sceptical view of how the transformation was implemented could be seen as rather controversial at the time.

Despite the criticisms mentioned above, Müller's ethnography provides rare material on the processes of economic and political transformation within workplaces at the time of the *Wende*, some of which are far less common today. For example, the essentialising narratives around being an *Ossi* or a *Wessi*[21] are harder to come by, even though they have not disappeared completely. The *Wessis*, whom many easterners encountered as their new managers, came to be associated with the imposition of the market economy and were often depicted as arrogant, greedy and materialistic. As Müller's (2007: 153) '*Ossi*' subjects told her, 'The *Wessis* live to work, and we work to live'. Although these divisions surface less often in everyday communication now than at the time of the *Wende*, they still play an important role when it comes to talking about East/West inequalities. For example, Shoshan's (2017: 52) informants in East Berlin were still concerned with how the *Wessis* get everything on a 'silver platter' (meaning, for example, inheriting a flat from their parents). On the other side, the Easterners are often described by the Westerners in terms of political backwardness, nationalism and an inability to function in democratic ways. As a result, the 'democratic deficit' of the east has often been explained in the media and the public discourse as a result of a longing for a more authoritarian state and the lack of democratic competence on the part of the easterners.

Ossis have been stereotypically depicted as naïve and foolish,[22] especially when it comes to their relationship to the market. Significant efforts after the reunification were put in 'teaching' East Germans how to function within the capitalist system. Some of my interlocutors in Zwickau noted with irony the uselessness of multiple career-coaching courses and seminars in the first years after the *Wende*, when there were 'simply no jobs'. Hamilton (2014) observed a similar dynamic in the case of the 'Ich-AG'[23] project's

[21] *Ossi* and *Wessi* are colloquial terms for East Germans and West Germans respectively and the perceived cultural differences between them. There are a number of derivatives that are associated with the existing tensions between the two groups (e.g. '*Besserwessi*' ('know-it-all-wessi'), '*Jammerossi*' ('Whining-Ossi')).

[22] One of the ways in which the *Ossis* were ridiculed – for example, in comedy shows – was through the use of exaggerated Saxon accent, which was associated by many Germans with 'low-class' culture.

[23] Ich-AG [Me, Inc.] – [unofficially] refers to the start-up grant that was paid to the unemployed in order to help them start their own businesses in Germany. The subsidies were available as part of the Hartz II legislation that came to into force in January 2003 and was repealed in 2006. Implementation of the subsidy

implementation in the town of Halle, which was designed to mould eastern Germans into so-called 'business types' and promote self-employment after the rather neoliberal Hartz IV reform. These discourses on 'selling one's self' were not always readily accepted in the east. As Wieschiolek (1999a) observed in her ethnography of an East German enterprise through the *Wende*, there was a widely shared belief that to succeed in the market economy, one must be involved in immoral activities and dishonest behaviour. In other words, 'one has to be a pig' in capitalism (Wieschiolek 1999b: 194). Apart from learning how to 'sell themselves' in a labour market, East Germans had to learn how to be proper consumers in the market. Berdahl (2005) discussed the importance of consumption for national belonging and citizenship in the case of workshops for consumers, such as Mary Kay cosmetics image seminars. By teaching East Germans to consume, these practices contributed to forging national belonging and shaping 'the nation of shoppers' (Berdahl 2005: 238).

Ossis were also made fun of for being 'seduced' by western goods and their fancy packaging as they engaged in a 'consumer frenzy' (Berdahl 1999b). This view was supported by images of East Germans queueing outside the banks to exchange their GDR currency or receive the so-called *Begrüßungsgeld*.[24] It is this short-lived euphoria related to the expanding opportunities of consumption after the *Wende* that Müller (2007) refers to as 'enchantment', followed by the realisation of many workers that the market economy came at the price of redundancies and inequalities – 'disenchantment'. Assessing whether the 'enchantment' was real is rather difficult based on the recollections of the research participants, since it might be embarrassing to admit to having been 'fooled', and memories of the past are closely connected to the experiences and attitudes in the present.

Dale (2006) attempted to provide an answer to this question by looking at statistics. He argues that the majority of East Germans, rather than engaging in uncontrolled buying, and apart from a few purchases, preferred to window-shop and save the money for the future. The savings rate among easterners climbed from 12.7 per cent in 1989 to 14 per cent in 1991, before stabilising at 11 per cent (Dale 2006: 184). Dale (2006: 185) also argues that the

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was also accompanied by educational activities, such as book publishing and seminars designed to promote entrepreneurship among the unemployed.

[24] 'Welcome money' was financial support given to eastern Germans traveling to the Federal Republic of Germany. It had existed since 1970 and amounted to thirty Marks granted twice annually and later increased up to a hundred Marks once a year. It was not until the opening of the German-German border in 1989 that it gained particular importance and mass character. The 'Welcome money' had been abolished by the end of December 1989.

desire for the Deutschmark and unification cannot be seen solely through a materialist lens. The Deutschmark was more than just a currency – it was connected with the desire for emancipation and for recognition of one's labour. In a similar vein, the desires connected to self-actualisation, such as freedom to travel, having a wider range of possible careers and educational paths, and access to more different movies, music and books cannot be equated with the desire to have a choice of ten brands of washing powder.

Concerning the alleged fascination with western products, one might add that, apart from the desire to try western goods which had not been available before, easterners often did not have an opportunity to buy East German products. The East German journalist Dahn recalled in her recent book how eastern products disappeared from the shop shelves of her village *Konsum* overnight: "No more usual toothpaste, no more tomatoes from local farmers, the new ones were a bit pale, but after all, they were from Netherlands" (Dahn and Mausfeld 2020: 92). The same experiences were shared by some of Berdahl's interlocutors: 'it wasn't just that we only wanted to have the nice western products. Rather, there were no eastern products to buy' (Berdahl 1999b: 195). Although the extent to which East Germans were seduced by western-style consumerism is difficult to assess, I would argue that we need to engage more critically with the trope of naïve Easterners being blinded by shiny Western capitalism before the *Wende* and in the first years after it.

Among more recent works, Felix Ringel's (2018) ethnography focused on the outcomes of post-socialist, demographic and post-Fordist transformations in an East German urban context. The book is based on extensive fieldwork in Hoyerswerda (Saxony), once a model socialist city, now known as Germany's fastest shrinking city. Ringel's work analyses how an urban community relates to its future and the 'loss of the future' in a context of post-industrial shrinkage and deindustrialisation. Issues of knowledge, temporality and visions of the past, present and future are at the centre of Ringel's enquiry. Within the framework of the anthropology of the future, Ringel considers not only how the future is shaped by the past and the present through contestations and planning, but also how the past and the present are constructed by ideas about the future. Ringel's book includes some outstanding ethnography on urban planning, negotiations of the future, and the hope and fears of local residents regarding the town's future. He chooses to see Hoyerswerda in the context of shrinkage, which he sees as a native category, rather than post-socialism, globalisation or deindustrialisation.

Although Ringel (2018) focuses on knowledge and affective responses, the material economy is not given enough attention in his book, despite the term 'post-industrial'

appearing in its title. This approach means favouring agency and resistance over path-dependency, material constraints and structural limitations. While I am sympathetic to Ringel's disposition towards a more empowering perspective, I find that the material economy deserves more attention, as it not only sets a limit to possible futures through material constraints, but also influences how different groups of people envision their future. As a result, the fields of power might be undertheorized within Ringel's approach: for example, the West's dominant position might be overlooked. Nevertheless, in the context of eastern Germany, where scholars are especially inclined to think with different 'post-' categories, I find the shifting of perspective towards the future refreshing and thought-provoking. I will come back to Ringel's book in Chapter 6, where I discuss discourses of modernity and backwardness in Zwickau.

As I was finishing my fieldwork in 2019, a lot of events, exhibitions and discussions were being devoted to the 30th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution. A new wave of films and books appeared dedicated to life in the GDR and after. A similar tendency to re-work the history of the transformation can be observed in social and historical research. Special attention has been devoted in recent years to the issues of privatisation in the 1990s and the activities of the *Treuhandanstalt*, in particular by Hoffmann (2020). Some of this interest can be explained by the expiry of the thirty-year period of protection imposed on the federal archival materials, which were freed and became accessible for research. However, I suggest that another important reason is that this topic fits the general agenda of current research in eastern Germany, which is concerned with emancipation by giving a voice to East Germans. For example, the historian Bernd Gehrke, who previously wrote about the role of the GDR's working class in the Peaceful Revolution,[25] now has an upcoming book[26] dedicated to popular protests against the *Treuhand* in eastern Germany.

The urgency of the influence of economic development in eastern Germany, post-socialist transformation and reunification on social and political life in Germany is also evident in the number of non-academic publications on the topic. A notable example is the book *Integriert doch erstmal uns*, written by a Social Democratic politician, the Saxon State

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[25] *Der betriebliche Aufbruch im Herbst 1989: die unbekannte Seite der DDR-Revolution*. 2001, with Renate Hürtgen, 2001.

[26] Bernd Gehrke: "Es ging um einen Kampf gegen die Deindustrialisierung". *Die Zeit*, November 26, 2020 (accessed 20.04.2021). https://www.zeit.de/2020/49/bernd-gehrke-mauerfall-streik-ostdeutschland-geschichte

Minister for Equality and Integration (2014-2019) Petra Köpping (2018). The title of the book ('Integrate us first!') was inspired by Köpping's discussions with people in East Germany, who complained that more efforts were directed at integrating the refugees than at smoothing out the disparities between East and West Germany. These discussions persuaded her that the roots of today's problems in the east (mainly the support for right-wing parties) lies in the frustrations and humiliations of the post-unification period. She mentions the pensions, the *Treuhandanstalt*'s activities, the transfer of elites and the devaluation of professional education as some of the reasons for this discontent. She then offers concrete solutions for improving the East-West relationship in Germany. The main focus of this book comes quite close to what the sociologist Mau (2019) observed in his academic book.

I suggest that the intersection of academic and public debates on the transformation process is a distinctive feature of the East German case. Some popular books on the topic have been written in cooperation between journalists/writers and cognitive researchers (Dahn and Mausfeld 2020), sociologists (Hensel & Engler 2018) and migration researchers (Foroutan & Hensel 2020). However, discussions on the topic are not limited to journalists, authors and social scientists – on the contrary, there is also significant interest on the part of the general public. While I was doing fieldwork in Zwickau, Köpping's book appeared in prominently in Zwickau's *Thalia* central bookshop. Some authors, such as Bernd Gehrke, also visited Zwickau and participated in public discussions on the topic of the post-socialist transformation. In 2019, Aleida Assmann, a researcher and a cultural anthropologist with a focus on cultural and communicative memory, also held a public talk in one of Zwickau's schools on the topic of memory. With one of my friends from the field, I also went on a trip to Leipzig one evening to hear Marcus Böick talk about his new book on the *Treuhand*. Each discussion I attended was well-attended and sparked a lot of questions from the audience and often heated discussions, which showed me once again the importance of the issue for the people on the ground.

I argue that anthropology has contributed surprisingly little to contemporary discussions rethinking the post-socialist transformation in eastern Germany and the continuing inequalities between East and West. I suggest that the reason for this is that most ethnographies of and in eastern Germany were conducted at the time of the *Wende* and/or were mainly concerned with the period of reunification. Therefore, they emphasized the dichotomy between socialism and capitalism and exaggerated the extent of the rupture before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In contrast, little attention has been paid

to global processes that affect both East and West Germany, like the rest of the world, such as post-industrialism, the precarisation of work and uneven development. Consequently, what has happened during the thirty years *since* the *Wende* is often overshadowed by the moment of transition of the early 1990s. Although some ethnographies have succeeded in bridging this gap (Ringel 2018), I argue that the links to the material economy need to be articulated more clearly. Moreover, the specific ways in which the global processes mentioned above play out within the local context of an industrial post-socialist East German town deserve more attention.

Doing fieldwork in Zwickau: methods and challenges

In this thesis, I am drawing on the ethnographic data I gathered during one year of fieldwork in Zwickau in 2018-2019[27]. My research in Zwickau has been focused on the transformations in its automotive industry and their influence on the town's social fabric. Due to its rich history of industrial development, Zwickau has proved to be a fruitful site for research into socio-economic transformation and for observing the relationship between the factory and the town diachronically. What makes Zwickau stand out from many other industrial towns in eastern Germany is that it managed to keep its industry running after the *Wende*. Despite its declining and ageing population, Zwickau does not fit the stereotypical image of a deserted, gloomy post-industrial East German town. However, Zwickau's population was still greatly affected by the post-Fordist and post-socialist transformations in the form of post-reunification unemployment, flexible production, the precarisation of work and its peripheral status. The recent introduction of electric vehicle production also poses some new challenges for the production site and the town's local residents.

During my fieldwork, I was interested not only in the experiences of automotive industry workers, but also in how what happened within the factory walls affected the town and social life outside the factory. Following Mollona (2009a), I see the factory as a social and socially embedded space rather than merely a technological and productive space. In my fieldwork, I decided to conduct my research mostly outside the factory walls, as I attempted to follow relationships rather than particular locations. In other words, I was interested in what was happening in social, rather than geographical spaces. The strength of my approach is in capturing the relationships between various spaces, people and institutions. The weakness of this style of fieldwork was the difficulty in defining the limits of my

[27] My field research was finished a few months before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore was not affected by it.

ethnography and, perhaps, in attaining the thickness of ethnography, which could be reached when bound to a more concrete location. However, it gave me a more holistic view of the social implications of industrial transformations not only for those directly employed in the factory, but also for the social and political development of the whole town. Focusing on the wider scope of industrial transformations, rather than on particular changes in work procedures on the shop floor, is also in line with my research question, which is concerned with the wider implications of industrial transformations on the social life of the town and the region. I believe that, by approaching my field from various entry points, I was able to immerse myself fully into the social field of Zwickau and its automotive industry. Moreover, being able to talk to workers outside the factory and not being affiliated with it were important in making my interlocutors feel safe in sharing their stories with me.

My main research methods were participant observation and in-depth interviews. Sometimes, I would prepare a loosely formulated list of topics that I wanted to cover during an interview. However, the purpose of this list was to prompt conversation rather than to limit it. Therefore, I was willing to give up some of my previously prepared questions for a deep conversation. I define participant observation rather broadly, as an optic rather than a specific method of data collection. Following Ingold (2017: 23), I define my approach to observation as "participating attentively" and "a way of learning" from my interlocutors in the field. Taken in this sense, participant observation is a way of *corresponding* with people (Ingold 2017: 23), or, as Bestor (2018: 21) described it, "participant questioning". Therefore, I do not contrast interviews with 'actual' observations because I see asking questions as a facet of participant observation. I also agree with Hockey and Forsey (2012: 75), who suggest treating the interview as a form of "participant engagement". Like Hockey (2002: 220), I also see interviewing as a culturally appropriate and experience-near method of ethnographic research in Western settings.

In the first weeks of my fieldwork, I established contact with the development association (*Förderverein*) of the August Horch car industry museum in Zwickau, the members of which were mostly higher-ranking former Sachsenring employees. Thanks to this, I came into contact with other former Sachsenring employees for interviews and worked in the museum's archive. I have learned a lot from the museum's employees and the materials they provided, such as the old factory newspapers. With the assistance of the *Förderverein,* I could also talk to some former Sachsenring employees. The museum itself is located inside one of the former Sachsenring buildings, and the whole area around it is surrounded by reminders of this industrial past (street names, decaying factory buildings, the

former industrial railways, the former factory clubhouse, the *Poliklinik* and the abandoned workers' dormitories). I used this proximity to take a few walks with my interlocutors and talk about these sights and evoke their memories of them.

2019 was a year of municipal and European elections, as well as the Landtag (state parliament) elections in Saxony, which made the political space of the town especially interesting during my fieldwork. I attended various political and public discussions, round tables and public events in Zwickau during my fieldwork. Some discussions were dedicated directly to the town's industrial development. Listening to people's questions to their local politicians and public figures gave me insights into some local 'hot topics'. I often approached people after the event and started a conversation, especially if their questions were connected to my research topic, and some of those people later became my informants. Through these events, I also established contacts among the local politicians and managed to interview some of them. I have also conducted various observations during right-wing rallies, demonstrations and municipal celebrations and events. Extensive help in finding informants and in providing some valuable local knowledge came from the IG Metall metalworkers' union in Zwickau. I interviewed active trade-union members from various automotive industry enterprises and also obtained further contacts through them and was able to find some interview partners among their colleagues. I also attended several of the union's events and round tables.

While in Zwickau, I lived in a multigenerational house, where both pensioners and students lived. I posted a short advertisement in my building, introducing my research and encouraging the people who used to work in or were connected to the car industry to reach out to me. I found several of my key informants in my house this way. I also joined a cooperation project, which encouraged the younger tenants of the building to help the elderly in a variety of everyday tasks like grocery shopping, having a walk, conversation or (most often) help with their computers. With some of them, I carried out more structured interviews, as well as informal chats while having a coffee in a café downstairs or their apartments.

I also met many of my interlocutors by merely living in Zwickau, sometimes in some rather surprising settings. For example, I joined a hobby club (*Verein*), a community that would gather once a week. These sessions were initially planned to be a pure leisurely activity, but after a few sessions I discovered that about half the men there were Volkswagen shop-floor workers, some of whom used to work in Sachsenring. The group would often meet informally, and after a while we became friends and also had a few formal interviews

and visited each other's homes. Building up these social networks took some time but proved to be crucial for my fieldwork, even though the practical use of these contacts for my research were not always immediately obvious. In this way, I sometimes 'let the field find me'. This was possible due to the great significance of the automotive industry for the town.

Lastly, I contacted a local journalist and managed to publish a short article about my research in both online and printed versions of the local *Freie Presse* newspaper. Through this article, I was contacted by a few people who made great informants and whose experiences were very different from those I had encountered previously. This also encouraged some of my previous informants to share more of their stories, as we discussed the published article. Most of the steps I took during my fieldwork were highly situational, but they have all provided me with the essential pieces of the puzzle. I believe that, by letting the field lead me towards the data, I was able to obtain viewpoints from various angles and acquire a holistic picture of the relationship between industrial transformations and people's lives in Zwickau.

Positionality

My positionality as a researcher explains some of the problems that exist in making studies of post-socialist contexts in general. If we focus on the 'otherness' of the (post)socialism, the question arises: other to whom? Who is the 'us' to the post-socialist 'them'? Although strongly influenced by the anglophone literature on post-socialism, the reference point for me is hardly the 'capitalist West', as I have never actually lived outside the post-socialist world. My older interlocutors would often recognize this proximity themselves by adding '*It was probably also like that there where you come from*' to some of their memories of the socialist past. Some of them also spoke a few words in Russian, my mother tongue, which they learnt at school, and enjoyed the opportunity to show off their language skills in our conversations. Therefore, the boundary between 'us' and 'them' was rather fluid for me, and it was impossible to rely on any kind of exotic 'otherness' when conducting my ethnographic research in eastern Germany. In this sense, my field in Germany might be seen as close to 'home'.

However, to me, born and raised in Belarus and having received my master's degree in Slovakia, it did not feel like 'home': I had to improve my German language skills and learn to understand the Saxon dialect, and adapt to life in a small East German town, which I had only visited once before the beginning of my fieldwork. I even had to learn some of the basic rituals, such as greetings. In one of the communities with which I was interacting

closely, there was a certain established way to greet one another by shaking one's hand and moving closer as if to kiss another person on the cheek. It was not until the end of my fieldwork that I learnt to offer the correct side of my face for this greeting and stopped feeling awkward whenever such a greeting was about to occur. I present this account rather ironically and in no way to deny the cultural proximity between me and my informants, but rather to emphasize the relativity of notions of 'otherness'. Also, coming from a post-socialist setting myself and hearing my parents' recollections of the socialist period, I was familiar with some aspects of everyday life in socialism. To my parents, who come from Bulgaria and Belarus, the GDR was seen as more 'western' in certain matters. For example, they would consider goods produced in the GDR as superior to local goods. Therefore, my field was culturally familiar to me in two ways: first, because it was a part of Europe and the 'industrialized West'; and second, because of its socialist past.

My difficulties in explaining my research focus varied greatly from one person to another. Some of my interlocutors from the car-industry museum shrugged their shoulders and told me that the topic of Zwickau's car industry has been so well-researched that they did not see the point of yet another study. When I pointed out that I was interested in the subjective experiences of transformations, some doubted the seriousness of my approach. For example, some of the former Sachsenring managers advised me against looking for shop-floor workers to talk to, as they could not tell me much about 'how it really was'. Some of them also complained about previous researchers (often emphasizing that they were *Wessis*) who had conducted social or historical research in Zwickau, accusing them of not portraying the real picture, especially regarding Sachsenring's past. However, when I asked what exactly these researchers had got wrong, I did not get a concrete answer. It seems that the overall tone was the main problem. Some VW workers also recalled the negative experiences they had with the sociologists 'from over there'. A lot of them were involved in the initial stages of optimisation of work processes and working in teams. Some workers felt they were being observed and controlled, and others told me that it felt as if the researchers were there to find out which workers were 'unnecessary' and how the employer could cut costs.

From the complaints of some of my interview partners about '*Wessi'* researchers, I got the feeling that, despite being affiliated to a large institution such as the Max Planck Institute, and perhaps also thanks to my thick accent, I was not perceived as a sort of 'powerful outsider' or a '*Wessi*'. This, however, does not mean that I was always trusted and not treated with suspicion. As a young woman, I was also rarely seen as an expert on cars or

industrial labour, which was perceived as a more masculine field of study. I readily accepted this categorization and approached my interlocutors with conscious naivety and even ignorance in some matters. My ignorance was also partly genuine, as I sometimes noticed that by asking 'naïve' questions I often got the answers I did not expect. The rare moments in which I offered my business card and tried to establish more authority in the way I spoke usually happened when I approached people in more dominant positions, such as local politicians or top managers. Veenis (2012: 36), a western anthropologist doing fieldwork in the East German town of Rudolstadt, described similar experiences in feeling that it was better not to 'stick out', or induce envy, sometimes even having to belittle herself to 'fit in'. These experiences, paired with some indirect hints from her interlocutors, led Veenis (2012: 37) to doubt whether the society of the former GDR could be seen as a 'warm and harmonious society'. However, based on my fieldwork experiences, I have certain reservations about this claim. First, I believe that most anthropologists face suspicion and mistrust during their fieldwork, as the people doubt the stranger's agenda and try to figure out what she is looking for. This might be even more noticeable in a small town. And second, the locals' previously negative encounters with the social researchers, journalists and other outside 'visitors' should also be taken into account. For example, before meeting me some of my interlocutors had been interviewed by local journalists or researchers and felt that they had been misrepresented in the final publications. Some workers also had experiences with sociologists working to improve the factory's 'work organisation', especially in the early 1990s, and were then often left with the impression that these studies resulted in redundancies of 'unnecessary' workers or work intensification.

Explaining my field of study was also a challenge. While *Anthropologie* was a very foreign concept to my research participants, the term *Ethnologie* was more familiar, but seemed to evoke more questions than answers, as they did not associate the study concerned with industrial production 'at home' as a suitable subject for an *Ethnologin* (i.e. 'female ethnologist'). As Godina (2003: 482) pointed out, most of the literature analysing fieldwork excludes cases where a non-West European anthropologist works in a West European field. There has been a certain unspoken division of labour, according to which the task of 'native anthropologists' is research within their own or other non-Western societies. Godina (2003: 483) argues that the reason for this lies within the location of anthropological knowledge and the identity of the 'one who knows', who is predominantly West European. Although at the time I could not quite articulate it, I also experienced this feeling of a lack of 'authority to speak' in my fieldwork, mostly coming from within, but also sometimes induced by my

informants in the field. I agree with Godina (2003: 484) that practising this variant of fieldwork (where the anthropologist from a less developed country conducts research in a more developed one) can be fruitful in "the redefinition of the West European anthropologist as only *one*[28] of those who know, even when the West European world is under consideration". I would also argue that this type of fieldwork helps us move towards a more cosmopolitan anthropology, one that does not focus on strict divisions between anthropology at 'home' and 'abroad'.

Dissertation outline

This thesis touches on a variety of themes related to industrial transformations (post-socialist, post-fordist, transformation towards electromobility) in the car industry and how they influence the lives of the people on the ground. While in the first chapter I had provided the theoretical grounding for my dissertation, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the socio-economic and historical context of automotive production in Zwickau and the town's industrial development. In Chapter 3, I explore the theme that is central throughout the whole thesis – the topic of work. I discuss the changes in attitudes and values regarding work through the transition from socialism to capitalism by focusing on the connection of work and employment and feelings of worth and worthlessness. I then move on to discuss the neoliberalisation of the social system in Germany and how it was embedded in some deeply rooted moral values concerning work. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the notion of class among Zwickau's car workers. By focusing on three stories of transitions in workers' biographies, I explore some of the obstacles to the formation of a common working-class identity, such as the growing "middle-classness", socio-spatial fragmentation, changes in "working-class culture" and divisions between precarious and permanent workers. In Chapter 5 I discuss how the challenges of capitalist work organisation, including those discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, are confronted by the labour unions. I also consider the obstacles that stand in the way of workers' mobilisation by looking at the socialist legacies of the labour unions and the modern dynamics of uneven and combined development. In Chapter 6 I move slightly away from the topic of labour, as I focus on consumption and the materiality of socialist production and the way it was devalued in the capitalist system. Through the lens of waste and value, I discuss how the materiality of Trabi production was seen by the workers themselves and how they experienced its decline. In my last ethnographic chapter, Chapter 7, I focus on

[28] Original emphasis.

Zwickau's political scene and its connection to the town's industrial development. Although the topic of political orientations runs through the whole thesis, in Chapter 7 I elaborate these ideas further, as I look at Zwickau as a scene of political contestation. The concept of 'the People', or '*das Volk*' is especially significant for this chapter. In Chapter 8, I bring the strands of my argument together, summarize the findings discussed in the previous chapters, discuss the socio-political implications of my research, and map out possible future directions of research on this topic.

Chapter 2: Zwickau and its industry: from medieval *oppidum* to post-socialist shrinking city.

Zwickau is a German city located in West Saxony, about 45 kilometres from the Czech border. It is the fourth largest city in Saxony after Leipzig, Dresden and Chemnitz. Zwickau lies at the foot of the Ore Mountains and in the valley of the river Mulde. The first mention of "territory Zcwickaw" dates back to 1118 and referred to an area of Sorbian settlement with its centre in the village of Osterweih (now the Northern suburb of Zwickau). According to one theory, the name Zwickau (or 'Cvikov'/'Svikov') has Slavic roots. The coal seams must have been visible on the banks of river Mulde, and the Slavs probably already knew how to use coal for making fire. Therefore, the name 'Zwickau' might come from the name of a Slavic god of fire, Svarozič, and thus meant 'the valley of the god of fire'. According to another theory, the roots of the name are German, being a combination of the words Zwic (piece in-between) and Aue (river floodplain), due to the settlement's position between three streams. In the 10th century, after the Sorbs were defeated by Henry the Fowler (Heinrich I), the local population was Christianised, and the territory was inhabited by German settlers, mainly farmers from Thuringia and Main Franconia (Bavaria) (Meier 2002: 8).

The first mention of Zwickau as a town can be found in 1212, when it was described as an *oppidum* (Latin: fortified town). The city gained in status due to its position on several important trade routes, especially the crossroads of the Bohemian track, leading from Prague to Halle and Leipzig, and the Polish track, which connected Krakow and Nuremberg (Meier 2002: 11). In 1316, the mining is first mentioned near Zwickau, marking the beginning of more than six hundred years of mining tradition in the region. In 1470, silver was found in Schneeberg near Zwickau. The ore was brought to Zwickau, processed, and used for silver coins. The town became wealthy, which also stimulated the flourishing of arts and culture. Its prosperity also resulted in a building boom, with the construction of new houses and churches, often sponsored by the local merchants, who had come to their fortunes through silver mining, such as Martin Römer. In 1520, Zwickau's population reached seven thousand, twice its population throughout the 15th century (Scott 1989: 18).

Apart from silver mining, Zwickau's economy depended heavily on weaving cloth. Although Zwickau was considered a rich town, its economy built on weaving wool and mining silver was rather unstable and depended largely on fluctuating demand. Zwickau was then characterised by a large gap between rich and the poor (Bräuer 1999:46). With the

advance of early capitalism, tensions also arose between the larger manufacturers, many of whom invested in silver-mining, and the individual clothmakers and craftsmen. By 1530, one-third of Zwickau's population made their living from cloth-making (Bräuer 1990: 98). Between 1522 and 1525, the clothmakers' guild built the cloth hall (Gewandhaus), which is now one of the most famous Zwickau landmarks. The cloth-making industry and the social differentiation which existed within it was a scene of conflicts and tensions between the individual clothworkers, craftsmen and wage-labourers, and the richer cloth-masters, manufacturers and merchants. The clothworkers even gathered into a fraternity, which vaguely resembled a trade union and which attempted to provide some social security and a safety net for the clothworkers. The social tensions in Zwickau and the discontent of large parts of its population made it a fruitful soil for various rebellious ideas.

Zwickau became a famous site of the German Reformation when Thomas Müntzer, a Protestant preacher and an important figure in the German Peasants' Revolt of 1525, came to Zwickau in 1520 at the recommendation of Martin Luther to preach in St. Mary's and later in St. Catharine's church. St. Catherine's parish housed many of Zwickau's weavers and was associated with some rebellious religious figures, such as one of the radical Zwickau prophets, Nikolaus Storch, who rejected the mediation of the priesthood and believed that God revealed himself to believers directly in dreams and visions (Scott 1989: 21). Later, Müntzer supported the peasants' uprising and was executed after its defeat. In 1522 Luther, conversely, came to Zwickau to preach in front of fourteen thousand people, trying to pacify the growing protest (Meier 2002: 28). During the GDR period, Müntzer was praised as a fighter for social justice and a martyr (Lehmann 2003). It has been suggested that Müntzer's preaching might have been influenced by the tense socio-economic situation in Zwickau at the time and his ties with the Zwickau prophets (Scott 1989). Karant-Nunn (1987: 56) also argued that "the general economic decline exacerbated the tensions that were already mounting between patricians and craftsmen", which resulted in the drama of religious change. According to Karant-Nunn (1987: 84), Zwickau's economic decline at the time was caused by inflation and over-reliance on one product, wool cloth. The examples of the cloth-making industry and silver-mining and their influence on the Reformation, which went far beyond the city of Zwickau, illustrates the impact the town's industrial development had on the social, economic and cultural life of the whole region early on.

Industrialisation in Zwickau

In the 17th century, the city was almost destroyed during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1650), and its wealth was drained through war losses and reparations. After the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the whole of Saxony, including Zwickau, was in a state of total devastation. Once an important economic centre and a prosperous town, Zwickau became a bleak shadow of its past. However, partly thanks to the Saxon economic miracle (also known as *rétablissement*) and partly to the increasing use made of steam power, Zwickau was raised from the ashes and became an important industrial centre. The textile industry was still extremely important for Saxony and the Zwickau region in the 18th century. About three quarters of Saxony's textile production was exported abroad. To keep up with competition from the British textile industry, Saxonian manufacturers introduced the use of spinning mills for textile production, which marked the beginning of industrialisation in Saxony. The boom in the textile industry also stimulated industrial machine production in the region.

The region of Chemnitz-Zwickau had become highly industrialised by the end of the 19th century. The neighbouring town of Chemnitz was often called 'Saxonian Manchester' not only because of the number of factories there and the smoke and pollution levels, but also because of the developed textile industry in the region. Around Zwickau, the Werdau-Crimmitschau-Glauchau triangle was one of the leading producers of fabrics. Production in the towns of Crimmitschau and Werdau was carried out exclusively with the use of steam power based on black coal from Zwickau (Wächtler and Wagenbreth 1989). In Zwickau itself there was a curtain factory, opened in 1889 and specialising in luxurious tulle curtains. After years of success, it was expropriated in 1949 and continued production as the 'VEB Zwickauer Tüll- & Gardinenfabrik' (from 1952 'EB Gardinen- und Dekowerke Zwickau') up until its privatisation and closure in 1991. Some of the buildings of the factory still stand and are in use for a club, a small craft brewery and a cultural centre called 'Kulturweberei' ['Cultural weaving mill'].

As the example of the textile industry shows, the industrial boom in and around Zwickau was heavily dependent on coal-mining. Zwickau's machine factory, rope factory, the most important ironworks in Saxony, 'Königin Marienhütte', and the emerging automotive industry all owe their existence to he coal from the *Zwickauer Steinkohlerevier* [Zwickau coal mining district] and the neighbouring *Lugau-Oelsnitzer Steinkohlenrevier*. Although the first mention of black coal near Zwickau dates back to 1348, coal-mining on an industrial scale only began after the 1830s. In 1822, the ban on exporting coal from Saxony was lifted, which finally launched coal-mining near Zwickau. In 1837, its twelve

mine owners founded the Zwickau Black Coal Mining Association (*Zwickauer Steinkohlenbauverein*), the first coal-mining enterprise in Zwickau (Meier 2002: 63). The mining industry then absorbed many of the unemployed workers, who were pushed out of the textile and other factories by industrialisation (Wolf 1971). The rest of the workforce was recruited from the former miners, including silver miners, former farmers and workers moving to Zwickau from Bavaria, Silesia, Thuringia and Vogtland. Due to intensive industrialisation, the population of Zwickau grew from 5124 in 1824 to 77,121 in 1914 (Wolf 1971: 84).

Rapid industrialization in Saxony in the 19th century made it a region where the tensions of early capitalism were particularly noticeable. The impoverished working class became associated with various 'social ills', such as alcoholism, criminality, prostitution, child labor and high child mortality. (Jensen 2005). At the same time, some literature appears which can be roughly considered early working-class ethnography, influenced by social democratic ideas, e.g.: '*Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter und Handwerksbursche: Eine Praktische Studie*',[29] written by the priest and Christian Socialist Paul Göhre in 1891, who went on to work in a factory in Chemnitz for three months and described his experiences; and '*3 ½ Monate Fabrik-Arbeiterin*'[30] by Minna Wettstein-Adelt, published in 1893.

With its growing urban working class, Saxony thus became a cradle for early workers' movements. In 1889, the first major strike of miners took place in Saxony. More than ten thousand workers, including miners from Zwickau, took part in the strike, demanding higher wages and shorter shifts. The textile industry around the Chemnitz area also played an important role in industrial relations in Saxony. The five-month strike of textile workers in Crimmitschau (a small town north of Zwickau) in 1903 for the shortening of working hours is especially noteworthy. Although ending in a defeat for the workers, the strike had some long-lasting effects on industrial relations in the region and resulted in the creation of employers' associations. Saxonian Social Democrats won power, as in the Reichstag elections of 1874 six representatives of Social Democrats from Saxony were elected. After the 1903 Reichstag elections when the Saxonian Social Democrats won 22 of the 23 constituencies, the land became known as the 'Red Kingdom'.[31]

[29] 'Three months a factory worker and craftsman: a practical study'.

[30] '3½ months a [female] factory worker'.

[31] 'Rotes Königreich'.

Birth of the automotive industry

In 1902, August Horch, a former welder and an engineer who used to work for Carl Benz, moved to Reichenbach and started the production of cars in Saxony. In 1904, he moved to Zwickau and established his new automotive manufacturing company, 'Horch & Cie. Motorwagenwerke AG', as a share company (*Aktiengesellschaft*). Horch's decision to move the production to Zwickau was based mainly on two factors. Firstly, his first investor and friend, the entrepreneur and automotive enthusiast Paul Fikentscher, lived in Zwickau. Secondly, as discussed in the previous section, the town was a booming industrial centre at the time. After the move to Zwickau, production at Horch developed quickly, from 18 cars in 1903 to 94 cars in 1907 (Kirchberg et al. 1997: 15). In 1904, the factory employed about a hundred workers, whereas in 1918 the number of workers reached 1800 (Kirchberg et al. 1997: 19).

The plant began by being successful with its four-cylinder cars, but Horch's experiments with a six-cylinder car ended in failure. In June 1909, after some quarrels within the board of directors, Horch left the company that carried his name. Only one month later, he founded another factory in Zwickau just a few hundred meters away from his first factory. However, he lost a legal dispute with his previous investors and was not allowed to use his name in the name of his new company or cars anymore. Instead, he decided to use the Latin translation of his name – *Audi* (the imperative 'horch!' – 'listen!'). The first success came to Audi after multiple wins by Audi drivers, including Horch himself, at the Austrian Alpine Rallies in 1913 and 1914. The new factory grew rapidly: in 1914 753 cars were produced by Audi, and the workforce grew from 33 workers in 1909 to 543 in 1918 (Kirchberg et al. 1997: 28). Audi became the first car manufacturer to produce cars with a left-hand steering wheel. Compared to its competitors, including Horch, Audi remained relatively small up until it was bought by DKW's owner, J.S. Rasmussen, in 1928. In 1931, Rasmussen decided to assemble his small DKW cars in the Audi plant in Zwickau (Kirchberg et al. 1997: 63). The production went a few steps back at the time, and the number of workers went from 370 in 1925 to only 169 in 1930 (Kirchberg et al. 1997: 69)

Since August Horch established his Audi factory in Zwickau, there were two major automotive manufacturers in Zwickau and two groups of workers: '*Horcher*' and '*Audianer*'. As one of the former Sachsenring employees, who still remembered when there were two separate factories, told me: "*There were Horcher and Audianer, and it's not that they fought each other, but each had a certain arrogance, and it was also, of course, stirred up*". The two plants continued to compete throughout the 1920s, when most of the German

car manufacturers started producing on an assembly line, and the number of cars produced per day dramatically increased. In 1920, Horch produced six models of private cars and three models of trucks. In 1926, the Horch factory introduced its first eight-cylinder car, the Horch-303 (later known as the Horch-8), at the Berlin automobile exhibition. The car was a result of the efforts of the chief engineer Paul Daimler, it was more expensive than the alternatives of its competitors, and it was considered a luxury car. In 1932, Horch's new eight-cylinder straight engine became a great success. It was easier and cheaper to produce than its predecessors and could provide up to 90 hp. Between 1922 and 1932, about 15,000 Horch cars were produced, and the number of employees reached about 2,400.

In 1932, Horch, Audi, DKW (a car and motorcycle producer from Zschopau) and Wanderer (specifically, its car division in Chemnitz) joined together as the Auto Union, which is how Audi got its four-ring logo. Shortly afterwards, The Great Depression hit Zwickau: about twelve thousand people were unemployed, wages were reduced for more than eight thousand workers, and employees of the coal mines and thousands of people became homeless (Meier 2002: 83). On 8th March 1933, the Nazis took over the police in Zwickau, which marked the beginning of severe repressions of the Jews in the town. Due to the rise in military production, the car industry in Zwickau was booming. By 1937, one-fourth of the whole of German car production belonged to the Auto Union (Meier 2002: 86). The Horch luxury cars played an important role in supporting the image of the *Führer* and those who were close to him. Although Hitler himself was rather fond of Daimler-Benz, as a present for his future wife Eva Braun he chose an eight-cylinder Horch (Bormann and Tiedtke 2010: 6-7).

The symbolic meaning of the car industry in political representation in Germany became undeniable. At the opening of the International Automobile and Motorcycle Exhibition in Berlin on 11 February 1933, Hitler launched a program called 'Volksmotorisierung' ('Motorisation of the people'), which emphasized, among other things, the promotion of motorsport and the building of roads (Bormann and Tiedtke 2010: 1). The famous Volkswagen Beetle also partly owes its creation to Hitler and his desire to fulfil the need for a 'people's car' (*Volkswagen*), which would be relatively cheap and mass-produced. The directors of Auto-Union recognised Volkswagen as a threat to their small car series and tried to resist the realisation of the people's car project (Bormann and Tiedtke 2010: 8). In 1938, Auto Union achieved more than 80% of civilian motor vehicle production (Bormann & Tiedtke 2010: 10). However, from 1940, Audi and Horch discontinued the production of cars for private use and produced solely for military purposes instead. From

the beginning of the war, Audi focused on the production of trucks, guns and air weapon parts. Horch produced military jeeps, air weapons, torpedoes, tank engines and tanks. About 13,600 unfree labourers worked in Auto Union AG plants in Saxony. Some of the prisoners at the concentration camp at Flossenbürg were forced to work in military production in Zwickau. Some forced labourers were stationed in barracks directly on the Horch factory's grounds. In February 1945, 966 workers from sixteen nationalities were imprisoned in the subcamp in Zwickau (Lang 2007: 11). In October 1944 and March 1945, the American Air Force bombed Zwickau, targeting the Auto Union factories, and destroying significant parts of the Horch factory. At Horch, 12 per cent of the buildings were irreparably destroyed by the bombing, and at Audi 15 per cent[32] (Kirchberg 2005: 24).

Producing cars in socialist Zwickau

In June 1944, Soviet troops took over the Audi and Horch factories. The plants were dismantled, and more than 95 per cent of the Horch machines were transported to the Soviet Union as war reparations (Lang 2007: 12). The dismantling of the factories for reparations left them with almost empty walls, and even some doors, windows and light switches were taken away as reparation payments. What was left of the factories became the base for a new beginning of car production in Zwickau. In July 1946, the remaining factories were transferred to Industrial Administration 19 – Vehicle Construction, from which the Industrie-Verband Fahrzeugbau (IFA)[33] later emerged. The first orders after the War came from the Soviet Union for the repair of various vehicles and the production of spare parts. Apart from the repairs, the former Auto Union plants produced various consumer goods, such as stoves, kitchen scales, cupboards, lighters, toys for children, motorless toy wagons and transport trolleys (Lang 2007: 14; Kirchberg 2005: 31). The goods were partly distributed among the employees and exchanged for other goods and food.

In 1948, the IFA, an association formed from individual publicly owned automotive enterprises (VEBs[34]), was created. IFA consolidated several groups of industrial enterprises (*Kombinate*), one of which was VEB IFA-Kombinat Pkw Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz),

[32] In comparison, another enterprise of Auto Union, the Wanderer factory in Chemnitz, had 75 per cent of its buildings destroyed by the bombing. Wanderer never recovered from the damage and never resumed production (Kirchberg 2005: 24).

[33] Industrial Association for Vehicle Construction.

[34] VEB (Volkeigener Betrieb) – the most popular form of ownership of industrial enterprises in the GDR and a result of the nationalization of private property.

which included, among others, the VEB Barkas Werke in Chemnitz, VEB Automobilwerk Eisenach (former BMW) and the Audi and Horch plants in Zwickau. Among other things, the association of combines (*Kombinate*) was supposed to help build supplier networks, which had been disrupted by the war, the division of Germany and the Cold War (Kirchberg 2005: 118-120).

In 1947-1948, the Horch factory started producing passenger cars again with the Horch 930 S model. From 1947 started production of the H 3 transporter trucks, a large number of which were handed over to the Red Army, while others were left for local needs. The planned economy started at the Zwickau automotive plants from 1949 with the first half-year plan, which included the development of the Horch 920 S car, the "Pioner" tractor and engine production (Lang 2007: 23). The Horch 920 S was based on the previously successful Horch models of the 1930s but never went into mass production. Audi concentrated its efforts on resuming the production of front-wheel-drive vehicles, which it had started before the war. In 1947, Audi was given permission to produce a few DKW F8 cars and tried to get the F9 ready for production (Kirchberg 2005: 70). The 2-door DKW F8 went into production as IFA F8 in 1949 and was produced until 1955. The next model, the three-cylinder IFA F9, which was produced shortly afterwards, was very close to the DKW F89, produced by the Western Auto Union in Düsseldorf. The similarity came from the fact that both cars were derivations of the same pre-war prototype, the DKW F9. From 1953, production of the IFA F9 was transferred to Eisenach, where it was later renamed the EMW 309[35] and became a predecessor of the Wartburg. This shift marked a division, according to which Zwickau produced more affordable cars, whereas Eisenach produced more expensive, higher-class vehicles.

In 1954, Horch's engineers started development and testing of the Horch P240, which finally went into series production in 1957 (Lang 2002: 88-95). The six-cylinder Horch P240 was a high-quality, modern, luxury sedan, which was supposed to be suitable for export. Although the plan was to have the car ready for Walter Ulbricht's[36] 61st birthday, its development constantly stalled due to material shortages, in particular of steel (Kirchberg 2005: 169). After 1957, when the western Auto Union objected to the use of the name

[35] Due to a legal dispute with BMW (West), the cars produced in Eisenach could not retain their BMW brand and were therefore renamed EMW (Eisenacher Motorenwerk) and, shortly afterwards, Automobilwerke Eisenach (AWE).

[36] The First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party from 1950 to 1971.

"Horch" for any of the vehicles produced at the Zwickau factory, the P240 was renamed Sachsenring P240, after a motor racing track near Chemnitz. The car was discontinued in 1959 after a Comecon agreement made Tatra in Koprivnice, Czechoslovakia, the Eastern Bloc's luxury car production centre instead (Jacobs 2017: 108-109).

After the East German uprising of June 1953, it became clear that to tame the discontent with the state, higher living standards needed to be achieved. Investment in consumer products was one of the ways to accomplish that. Mass motorisation was one of the goals on the way to increasing life satisfaction through consumption. The competition (also ideological) with the German Federal Republic also intensified the need for a mass-produced car from the GDR, especially after the slightly changed post-war Volkswagen came out and proved popular with the public (Gatejel 2009: 24). This was true of East Germany in particular, as a traditional 'Autoland' ('car country') and a 'display window' for socialism. The ability to acquire a Trabant was also supposed to entice middle-class professionals to stay in the GDR.

Mass motorisation therefore had to start in East Germany, and the GDR had to come up with its own answer to the West German Volkswagen in the form of an East German 'People's Car'. According to a decision of the Council of Ministers of January 1954, the P50, later called the Trabant P50 (German for *Sputnik* (satellite)), was supposed to become such a car (Kirchberg 2005: 163). The decision stated that it must be a light (under 600 kg), simple and affordable family car which could fit at least a four-head family, would be relatively cheap (a factory price of 4000 Marks) and fast to produce (at least twelve thousand cars per year) (Röcke 1998: 33). The timeframe for the development of the P50 was estimated at 18 months. However, it took four years for the first P50 to leave the assembly line.

The model IFA F8, mentioned earlier, was a platform for further experiments, which in the end resulted in the creation of a plastic car body. Experiments with plastic car bodies, however, had started long before that, as Auto Union had even carried out the first crash-tests in the history of the automotive industry with the plastic car body in 1937-1938 (Kirchberg 2005: 152). In 1953, the first plastic body car was created at the research and development plant in Chemnitz, which became a prototype for the subsequently developed P70 and P50 (Kirchberg 2005: 153). Despite the central planning, early car production in the GDR in the 1950s can be characterized by its relatively loose control by the state, which was concerned to revive the car industry by all possible means (Friedreich 2008: 58-59). The result of the 'blind eye' that the state turned to automotive research and development at the

time was the creation of the P70,[37] the first GDR car with a *Duroplast*[38] body and a wooden frame. The engines for the P70 were manufactured in the Barkas Werke in what was now called Karl-Marx-Stadt (formerly Chemnitz).

Experiments and research for the P70 were made without official permission from the state, which made it a *Schwartzentwicklung*,[39] since all effort was supposed to go into the development of the P50 (Kirchberg 2005: 150). However, the engineers wanted to develop a model that could be produced sooner than the P50 in order to keep the production running. Apart from that, the engineers from Zwickau were extremely sceptical of the P50. The idea behind the P70 was to create a transitional model and gather experience for the future P50 model, particularly regarding the use of Duroplast. Despite the relative freedom of the 1950s, the whole project was quite risky for all those participating. However, just as Eisenach workers fought for their Wartburg outside the legal limits, Zwickauers also took this risk, which luckily paid off. The car swiftly went into series production in 1955, and a total of 2193 cars were produced in the same year.

In May 1958, the Horch and Audi factories were united into the VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau. Although the two plants were already working together on the production of previous models, their fusion was meant to make mass production of the Trabant possible. The former Horch factory became 'Werk 1' and Audi 'Werk 2', while the former plant of Fahrzeugbau Schumann nearby became 'Werk 3'. By 1959, when the number of Sachsenring employees was approaching 8312[40] and the combined number of the two P70 models produced in 1959 reached 3616, production of the P70 was terminated (Jacobs 2017: 109). Already in 1958, Sachsenring commenced the production of P70's successor, the East German answer to the VW Beetle – the Trabant P50 (Trabant 500) with a two-stroke engine. Like the P70, the P50's body was made of Duroplast, but this time the frame was made of steel. The Trabant P50 mostly corresponded to the initial plans: it was only 20 kg heavier than the planned 600 kg and 10 km/h faster than planned.

[37] The letter 'P' stands for '*Personenkraftwagen*' (passenger car). Another common abbreviation is PKW.

[38] *Duroplast* was a material, developed by the East German engineers as a substitute for steel. Duroplast consisted of cotton fibres reinforced with phenol resin and pressed under high temperatures. The cotton fibres came from the Soviet textile industry and phenol resin came from the coal processing. See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion on *Duroplast* and its socio-cultural significance.

[39] Literally, 'black/shadow development'.

[40] Economic chronicle of VEB Sachsenring (1957-1990). *Chemnitz State Archive (Nr. 31076).*

However, it failed to fulfil expectations regarding the price: instead of the planned 4000 Marks, it was more than twice more expensive at 8360 Marks (Röcke 1998: 46). However, compared to other models produced in both East and West at the time, the Trabant P50 fulfilled the criteria of a modern car.

About 300,000 of the first version of the Trabant P50 and its short-lived successor, Trabant 600 (P60) were produced until it was discontinued in 1965 (Jacobs 2017: 109). In 1964, a new era began at the Sachsenring factory when the first Trabant 601 went into series production. It was quite similar to the previously produced P60, but was optically different due to its new car body, devised by the engineer Lothar Sachse (Kirchberg 2005: 399). The new car body looked more modern and was cheaper to produce, due to the reduction of the sheet metal material used in the car frame and a more efficient use of the Duroplast material (Kirchberg 2005: 399). The car was also supposed to be quieter on the inside, compared to the previous model. The Trabant 601 was a small two-door, four-seat, front-wheel-drive car with a maximum speed of 100 km/h. Although the outer design was rather modern, the two-stroke engine and the small size put it at a disadvantage compared to other cars, which already mostly had four-stroke engines. The gap between the Trabant 601 and other cars produced at the same time increased rapidly as time went by due to the lack of changes in its construction and design. The car remained essentially the same for the next 25 years until 1990. The small changes implemented during this period were highly praised and exaggerated by official propaganda and mostly laughed at by the Trabi's workers and consumers. The constant demands for 'innovator movement' (*Neuererbewegung*) were to reduce the material costs, reduce the use of the materials and lower the time used for the production of each car, which often came at the expense of the quality of the vehicle (Kirchberg 2005: 401).

According to the plans, the Trabant 601 was meant to become an intermediate model, a slightly improved version of the P60, until it was supposed to be replaced by a newer model after 1970, which, however, never happened (Kirchberg 2005: 400). The backwardness of the Trabant 601 was a reason for constant unrest among Sachsenring engineers and managers. Its outdated two-stroke engine, with its power output of only 23 hp, was the main concern. In 1966, demands for the successor to the 601, the Trabant P603, were formulated as follows: a three-door sedan with a steel frame and Duroplast body, front-wheel drive and the possibility to use a four-stroke Škoda engine (Kirchberg 2005: 414).

The start of series production for the P603 was planned for the end of 1969 or beginning of 1970. By the end of 1968, nine prototypes had been built, and the preparations

for series production were advanced. However, the project was stopped by the secretary of the Economic Commission, Günter Mittag, because the P603 project went against the party line in two respects. First, it did not include the Eisenach factory in any way, which went against the plans to produce a single passenger car[41] in the future (Kirchberg 2005: 415). Secondly, it went against the government's preference for smaller changes that did not require large investments and substantial changes to production equipment. The subsequent attempts to introduce new models (P760, P610) also failed, causing millions in losses. However, the P610 project resulted in the building of a new cardan shaft plant in Mosel near Zwickau in a joint venture with the French Citroën. The French producer invested in the building of the plant in Mosel and provided the know-how in return for compensation in the form of supplies in the future and hoped for an extension of its business relationships with the East German site. The Stasi were also highly involved in the project not only to 'protect' the locals from the influence of the thousand western employees who arrived in Mosel, but also to gather information about the French manufacturer (Herrmann 2005: 63).

The joint project with Citroën was crucial in that it put a start to the industrial development of Mosel near Zwickau, which was better equipped to become a modern industrial area because it was spacious and was located outside the town and any densely populated areas. This location also made it possible for a future factory like Volkswagen to be built there and have its suppliers nearby, as is important in just-in-time production. However, contrary to some depictions in the media and literature, this was no lucky coincidence. As a former Sachsenring manager who actively participated in the project told me, Mosel was already intended to become a location for the new car plant during the GDR: "The cardan shaft plant was a key to the opening of the industrial site [*Standort*]. There was only village after village there. One single house was standing there, a stream went through – an idyllic landscape, almost lost in a dream. And we wanted [to build] a factory there." The way the cardan shaft plant was built left plenty of space for another car plant as well. The first joint venture project with a Western partner (Citroën) opened the door for Sachsenring to go to the next collaboration, this time with Volkswagen. Agreements with Western partners, which presupposed payments in the form of production rather than money, were preferred by the GDR leadership.

[41] The Comecon-car (P760), produced in collaboration with the Czechoslovak Republic, which was supposed to replace the Škoda, Wartburg and Trabant.

By 1980, it had become clear that the number of cars being produced had to be increased since the plant had already not been able to satisfy the demand for many years. By 1984 car ownership in the GDR had only reached 189 vehicles per thousand residents[42] (Kirchberg 2005: 719), compared to 412 in the Federal Republic the same year (Geißler 1993: 17). Waiting times for a Trabant could reach over ten years, whereas the number of vehicles produced each year changed only slightly, from 111,250 in 1977 to 145,600 in 1988 (Jacobs 2017: 110). In June 1983, *Politbüro* signed a decision "on tasks and measures for an immediate increase of production of passenger cars Wartburg and Trabant until 1988 and after" (Kirchberg 2005: 562). However, at 122,000 cars a year, the Zwickau plant had already reached the limits of its capacities, and the number of over 145,000 was only reached by 1989 thanks to the introduction of a third shift in the final assembly shop and additional investments (Kirchberg 2005: 563). The new final assembly and paint shop were planned to be built near the cardan shaft plant in Mosel with a capacity of an additional 50,000 Trabants a year, still not enough to satisfy the demand.

Volkswagen was looking for a partnership in the East and had had its offers turned down in Romania, the Soviet Union and Poland, where agreements had already been reached with Renault and Fiat (Kirchberg 2005: 564). According to an agreement from November 1977, Volkswagen sent 10,000 Golfs to the GDR and received a Zeiss-planetarium for Wolfsburg and press-shop machines in return (Kirchberg 2005: 564-565). This agreement was a first step in the larger-scale cooperation with VW which followed. Although engineers from Eisenach, Chemnitz and Zwickau had been working on projects for the production and use of much-needed four-stroke engines, the plans never got the permission to be realized. Instead, the politicians in Berlin reached an agreement with Volkswagen, according to which it would provide used machines for the engine plant in Chemnitz and licenses for the production of four-stroke engines as a credit in return for 100,000 engines a year to be produced for VW (Kirchberg 2005: 565-566). From 1988, VW-Polo engines went into production in Chemnitz.

The whole cooperation project turned out way more expensive for the GDR than expected, since significant investments were necessary for the supplier industry, apart from the engine plant itself. As a result of the high costs, there were few funds available for the

[42] The car ownership rate in the GDR was still much higher than in the other states in the socialist bloc. For example, the density of car ownership in the USSR amounted to 45 cars per thousand residents in 1985 (Siegelbaum 2013: 9).

development and production of the new model of Trabant. Therefore, the new car body prototypes developed by Sachsenring engineers were rejected, and the new Trabant 1.1 was a combination of an only slightly changed Trabant 601 with a four-stroke VW engine. Due to the more expensive four-stroke engine and the high costs of the production, Trabant 1.1 had to cost at least 23,000 Mark, but due to a political decision, its price was set at 18,000 Mark, the shortfall being subsidized by the state (Kirchberg 2005: 622-623). Due to a poor decision to leave the old design of the car body almost intact and the collapse of socialism, which happened shortly before the car went into mass production, the car was only produced for one year and was often referred to by my informants as a 'stillborn child'. The failure of the Trabant 1.1 contributed to the inglorious end of the Trabant era.

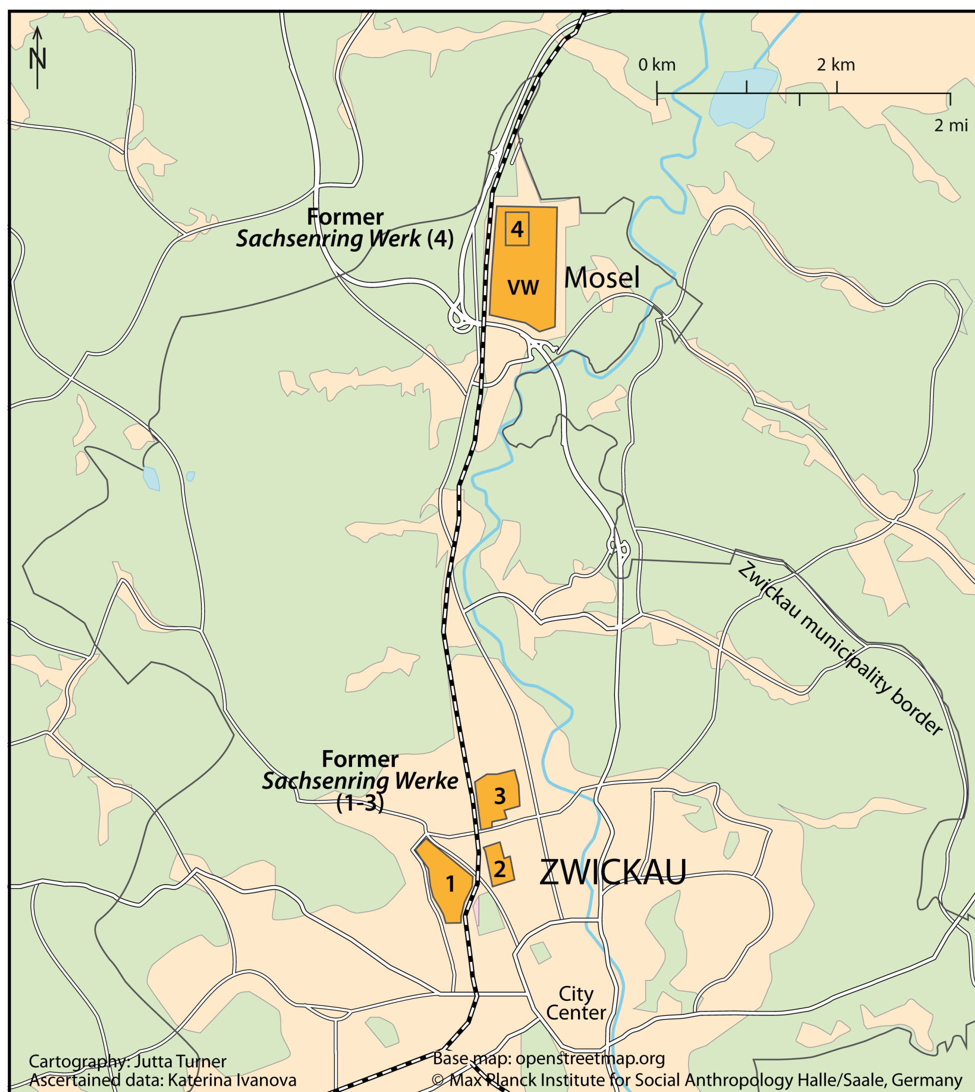

Figure 2. The location of Sachsenring and VW plants.

New beginnings: Volkswagen in Zwickau

After the Reunification of East and West Germany on 3 October 1990, the automotive industry in Zwickau, just like the whole economy of the former GDR, went through a massive restructuring. The *Treuhandanstalt* (Treuhand),[43] created in March 1990, became the legal owner of East Germany's publicly owned enterprises (VEBs) in June 1990 and adopted a strategy of the rapid privatization or liquidation of these state-owned companies (Swain 2002: 76). Sachsenring was no exception to this policy. The former *IFA PKW* combine, consisting of the Sachsenring plant in Zwickau, AWE in Eisenach, the Barkas plant in Chemnitz and 27 other smaller suppliers, employing altogether 195,000 people, was transformed into *IFA-Personenkraftwagen AG*, entirely owned by Treuhand (Swain 2002: 81-82). In 1990, Sachsenring employed 11,237 people.[44]

Thanks to the previous cooperation between VW and Sachsenring on engine production, VW was quick to set foot in eastern Germany after the *Wende*. Initially, the cooperation of the 1980s was considered a complete failure due to exploding costs and the poor evaluation of the Trabant 1.1 with a VW engine. However, my interlocutors referred to it in a positive way because it secured Volkswagen's investment in Zwickau after the *Wende*. Already in December 1989, Prof. Carl Hahn, a Volkswagen director with roots in Chemnitz, offered and signed an agreement for the joint venture *VW-IFA-Personenkraftwagen AG* with headquarters in Wolfsburg (Kirchberg 2000: 52). According to the joint venture project, Volkswagen took over Sachsenring's (then owned by Treuhand) most modern facility in Mosel with its 1250 workers (Swain 2002: 81). The Trabant 1.1 and Volkswagen Polo were assembled next to each other in Mosel starting in May 1990.

In March 1990, *IFA Vertrieb* (IFA - sales), which previously dealt with the sales (or rather distribution) of the IFA's vehicles was liquidated, which meant that the car producers found themselves in a new situation, where they had to sell their cars on their own for the first time (Kirchberg 2005: 673). After the opening up of markets and the subsequent availability of Western cars (mostly used), the demand for the Trabant and Wartburg fell dramatically. For the car producers from Zwickau and Eisenach, export to the east was the last hope, which was lost shortly after the currency union, since buyers from Central and Eastern Europe could not afford the prices in D-Marks (Kirchberg 2005: 673). Due to the

[43] See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion on Treuhand and its place in the history of German reunification.

[44] Economic chronicle of VEB Sachsenring (1957-1990). *Chemnitz State Archive (No. 31076).*

low demand, and despite the initial willingness of the FRG government to subsidize car production until 1993, the *Treuhand* chose the strategy of ending production of the Trabant and Wartburg and privatizing or liquidating IFA PKW AG (Swain 2002: 81). The last Trabant 601 was produced in June 1990, and in April 1991 the last Trabant 1.1 left the assembly line (Friedreich 2008: 469).

VW-IFA-Pkw AG was privatized as a wholly owned Volkswagen subsidiary – Volkswagen Sachsen GmbH, which included the Zwickau and Chemnitz factories. The former Sachsenring plant in Mosel turned into the Sächsische Automobilbau GmbH (partly owned by VW and partly by the *Treuhand*). Both enterprises were managed by Volkswagen (Kirchberg 2000: 52). From 1994 Sächsische Automobilbau GmbH also became Volkswagen's full subsidiary. The *Treuhand* agreed to subsidize the losses of the joint venture in return for a major investment in the area from Volkswagen to avoid the local automotive workers becoming unemployed. According to the plans of VW and the *Treuhand*, the Mosel factory had to start production of the VW Golf by 1994, employ 5800 workers and produce up to 1200 Golfs a day (Swain 2002: 83). Volkswagen then bought the grounds adjacent to the first car plant in Mosel to build a new production site (Mosel II), the original site becoming Mosel I. Mosel II was built on a greenfield site and covered an area more than twice the size of Mosel I. Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor at the time, came to Mosel on 26 September 1990 to lay the foundations of the new plant (Mosel II). The symbolic and hopeful meaning of breaking ground for the new Volkswagen plant in the east amid massive deindustrialisation should not be underestimated.

The start of Golf production in Mosel was problematic because the plant needed to be customized for its production. The paint shop in particular had to be rebuilt for painting steel, as it had been designed for painting the Duroplast car body. Therefore, already painted Polo car bodies came to Zwickau from Wolfsburg by rail. From February 1991, the Golf was also produced in Mosel: the car body was produced in the old Sachsenring plant in Zwickau, transported to the Audi factory in Ingolstadt for painting, and then came back to Mosel for final assembly (Kirchberg 2000: 54). This complicated process was followed until August 1991, when the new paint shop was ready for production in Mosel and the cars had to travel only the short distance between Mosel and Zwickau. From September 1991, the plant in Mosel stopped producing the Polo to concentrate on the Golf. In 1992, the VW plant in Mosel produced 1600 Golf II for the German postal service (Kirchberg 2000: 60).

About 20 per cent of VW's total investment was subsidized by the *Treuhand* and other state agencies on the condition that VW would create enough jobs to avoid mass

unemployment of the car workers (Swain 2002: 83). The subsidies that VW received from Saxony led to a battle between VW, the state of Saxony and the European Commission, which claimed that the subsidies broke the EU competition law. The conflict was resolved with a compromise, but despite the subsidies, the factory only became fully functioning in 1997 and employed fewer people than initially intended. This was connected to the recession in the West and VW's priority to keep the workforce in Wolfsburg safe over hiring more people in the east (Turner 1998: 70) since both plants were involved in the production of the Golf.[45] In 1996, the plant also started producing the Passat. Without the offered subsidies, Passat production might have been moved to Slovakia.[46] By using production facilities which made possible the production of both the Passat and the Golf, the factory became more flexible and could react more quickly to fluctuations in the market and increase the factory's capacity. Thanks to this, after four years of stagnation and even a slight decrease in the number of employees in both Chemnitz and Zwickau (Mosel) between 1992 and 1996, Volkswagen Saxony went from about 3000 employees to almost 7000 in 1998 (Hessinger et al., 2000: 164; Kirchberg 2000: 105). In 1999, Mosel and the its VW plant were incorporated into the city of Zwickau.

The possibility of producing two car models (Golf and Passat) in parallel was not the only innovation in the organisation of production that VW tested in Zwickau. More importantly, the Zwickau Mosel plant became a field for experiments with the lean production[47] method. After being privatised by General Motors, the Eisenach plant likewise became a site for experiments in lean production. Lean production goes hand in hand with the just-in-time production method, which means that the factory is surrounded by suppliers, which together build and pre-assemble certain components of a car (modules), such as whole cockpits, seat groups, wheels and exhaust systems. All these modules arrive in the final assembly shop 'just in time' and 'just in sequence',[48] which means that the factory can avoid storing the components because they arrive only at the time and point of production. The supplier chain then becomes a part of the factory's organisational structure. Only 25 per cent of the value chain was to take place within the VW factory itself, whereas the rest was to be

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[45] For more on the relationships between the different Volkswagen plants, see Chapter 5.

[46] VW-Streit mit EU spitzt sich zu. *Die Welt*, August 1, 1996 (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article658770/VW-Streit-mit-EU-spitzt-sich-zu.html

[47] For more on lean production and the teamwork model, see Chapter 5.

[48] These English words are used also in German language by my interlocutors.

delivered by the suppliers (Swain 2002: 86). For the just-in-time principle to be implemented without any delays and interruptions, the suppliers needed to be in geographical proximity to VW. The greenfield site in Mosel allowed enough space for some suppliers to open up production right next to the car plant, while other suppliers are located nearby in Zwickau or Meerane (about 20km from Zwickau). Many of the suppliers only work for VW and do not have any other clients. Today, Volkswagen claims to have created about 15,000 jobs in the supplier industry in the region. The lean production method also had implications for the organization of work, which was created according to the Japanese model pioneered by Toyota and based on teamwork.[49]

Zwickau's (Mosel) vehicle production plant belongs to Volkswagen Saxony GmbH, established in 1990 as a full subsidiary of Volkswagen AG.[50] Along with the Zwickau factory, VW Saxony owns an engine plant in Chemnitz (since 1992) as well as the Transparent Factory in Dresden (since 2002). The plant in Mosel employs about 8000 people, in Chemnitz 1700, and in Dresden 400. The Transparent Factory is used to produce Phaeton luxury cars and allows visitors to observe the production process. The car bodies for the Phaeton were produced in Zwickau and then sent to Dresden for final assembly up until 2016, when VW discontinued production of the model due to low demand and the crisis following the emissions scandal.[51] Around 400 of the Dresden workers were then transferred to Zwickau and Chemnitz. Due to the emissions scandal, the end of Phaeton production and its taking on some colleagues from Dresden, the Zwickau plant also faced large-scale lay-offs in 2016, which affected mostly the temporary workers (700 temporary contract workers lost their jobs). Apart from Phaeton, the Zwickau plant produced car bodies for other luxury cars in the renovated plant in Mosel I: Bentley (from 2001) and Lamborghini (from 2017). However, this is just a small part of the production. After production of the Passat ended in

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[49] Volkswagen press materials (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.volkswagen-sachsen.de/content/dam/companies/de_vw_sachsen/dokumente/pressemitteilungen/Unternehmenspräsentation.pdf

[50] In 2021, VW announced that VW Saxony would be incorporated into Volkswagen AG in the next few years. Some implications of this decision for the workers are discussed in Chapter 5.

[51] The Volkswagen emissions scandal ('Dieselgate', 'Abgasskandal') erupted in 2015, when the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of violation of the Clean Air Act to the Volkswagen Group. The agency had found that Volkswagen had intentionally programmed turbocharged direct injection (TDI) diesel engines to activate their emissions controls only during laboratory emissions testing.

Zwickau in 2018, the main products of the VW plant in Zwickau were the Golf and Golf Variant. The plant also has a large press shop, which produces parts not only for the cars produced in Mosel, but also supplies other VW plants around the world. The press shop in Zwickau is the second biggest press shop within the VW group after Wolfsburg.[52]

In March 2019, the European Parliament agreed stricter climate targets for cars, according to which greenhouse gas emissions of new passenger cars are to be reduced by 37.5 per cent between 2005 and 2030, and light commercial vehicles by 31 per cent (Sujata et al. 2020). One of the measures which is being prioritised for meeting these goals is state support for electromobility. In Germany, buyers of e-cars can count on a subsidy from the state (the so-called '*Umweltbonus*' and '*Innovationsprämie*') of up to €9000. Moreover, electric vehicles registered by 31 December 2030 are exempt from vehicle tax for ten years. The existing state-support scheme will expire by the end of 2022, after which the new Economy and Climate Protection Minister, Robert Habeck (The Greens), plans new support measures, but only for those electric vehicles which have proved to have positive climate effects.[53] So far, the number of newly registered electric cars in Germany increased by about 83% from 2020 to 2021.[54] According to some prognoses, the total number of electric passenger cars in Germany will increase from 372,265 in 2020 to 904,571 in 2022 and 3,426,330 by 2025.[55] The share of electric vehicles in total car production in Germany is expected to reach 30% by 2025 (Olle et al. 2019: 6).

VW is also committed to becoming climate-neutral by 2050, and it was announced that Zwickau would become the first Volkswagen production site to switch fully to electric

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[52] Volkswagen press materials (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.volkswagen-newsroom.com/en/press-releases/press-shop-expansion-volkswagen-reduces-the-number-of-truck-journeys-to-zwickau-e-location-by-9000-7088

[53] Habeck will Förderung von E-Autos ab 2023 neu ausrichten. *Handelsblatt*, December 13, 2021 (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/klimaschutz-habeck-will-foerderung-von-e-autos-ab-2023-neu-ausrichten/27888086.html?ticket=ST-5213147-abZkgoYiggBFwdytzPL1-ap3

[54] KBA. (7. January, 2022). Anzahl der Neuzulassungen von Elektroautos in Deutschland von 2003 bis 2021 [Graph]. In *Statista*. (accessed 01.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/244000/umfrage/neuzulassungen-von-elektroautos-in-deutschland/

[55] Horváth & Partners. (1. September, 2020). Prognostizierte Anzahl der Personenkraftwagen mit Elektroantrieb in Deutschland von 2020 bis 2025 [Graph]. In *Statista*. (accessed 01.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1076854/umfrage/bestand-an-bev-und-phev-in-deutschland/

cars. Starting from 2019, the car industry in Zwickau has been going through its most significant transformation since the *Wende*. This transformation has to do with the production of electric vehicles. Volkswagen was set to overcome its dark image after the emissions scandal and turn into an environmental leader in Germany by betting on electromobility. It therefore set a target that by 2025 about 25% of its sold vehicles should be electric (Olle et al. 2019: 16). Zwickau has been a pioneer on other occasions regarding ecological issues: for example, in 2017 the plant was completely transferred to green electricity. In November 2019, Chancellor Angela Merkel visited the VW plant in Zwickau for the beginning of its electric car production.

While some welcomed the massive investment in electromobility (1.2 milliard Euro[56]) and saw it as a big chance for Zwickau, others were sceptical about the idea and considered it to be too risky. Most of all, the sceptics doubted VW's ability to sell so many electric cars due to the lack of charging infrastructure and high prices. To counter these concerns, the car producer guaranteed employment at the Mosel vehicle plant until 2029.[57] The production of electric cars is less labor-intensive and requires 20 to 25 per cent less workforce (due to a less complex design and higher automation levels). However, VW planned to keep the employment numbers stable by increasing the production capacities from 1350 to 1500 cars per day.[58]

Volkswagen employees have not been in the riskiest position to begin with, as most studies emphasize instead the vulnerable position of supplier companies and their employees, because electric cars need fewer and often different components. For example, exhaust systems, combustion engines and pumps are not needed in electric cars, therefore these and other production branches are at risk. Within the powertrain production branch, up to 65% of its parts and component groups can be eliminated through the transition from a combustion engine to an electric motor (Olle et al. 2019: 6). However, the forecasts also highlight opportunities for growth for a total of 60% of Saxon automotive suppliers, especially those working in the electric/electronic production areas (Olle et al. 2019: 7).

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[56] Die Zwickauer Wende. *Die Zeit*, July 8, 2019 (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2019-07/automatisierung-volkswagen-vw-arbeitsplaetze-roboter-elektromobilitaet-werk-zwickau

[57] The guarantee means that the employees cannot lose their jobs until 2029 due to the restructuring.

[58] Kleidertausch bei VW. Deutsche Well, December 16, 2019 (accessed 13.01.2022). https://www.dw.com/de/kleidertausch-bei-vw/a-51653587

Some recent studies (e.g. Sujata et al. 2020) offer more optimistic forecasts, which suggests that the transformation towards electric-vehicle production will result in an increase in employment opportunities in most automotive branches, except for the production of powertrains and chassis. It has also been suggested that the negative effects of the electro transformation on employment would be balanced out by the positive effects in the long run. Although some jobs would be lost, others would emerge. Also, about 60% of automotive-industry employees in Saxony work in companies that are in a low-risk category when it comes to the effects of transformation (Olle et al. 2019: 37). However, the situation is challenging because the lost and created jobs are rather different in terms of qualification: many of the jobs in metal-processing would disappear, whereas employment in electronics, software development and textile processing would gain in significance (Olle et al. 2019: 8).

What changes dramatically in these circumstances is the qualification requirements for the workers. As part of the 'Upskilling' efforts, Volkswagen has established an "E-Mobility" training centre and trained 3000 workers for basic e-mobility skills, using Virtual Reality and Virtual Assembly training; 3500 workers have gone on product and process-training courses, including topics such as new operational concepts, testing sequences and driver assistance systems; 160 employees have received a high-voltage training (HV); 1400 employees have received high-voltage safety training; and 60 employees were about to receive thorough training of up to 24 months to become specialists in electronics/electrical systems.[59]

The (re-)qualification of workers in the supplier industry, who might not be able to receive training and stay in the same company or even in the same production branch, presents a greater challenge in this regard. Generally, Zwickau is rather exceptional within the automotive industry in Saxony, since the share of low-skilled 'helper' jobs is rather high there (43.4%, compared to 40.4% of skilled jobs) (Sujata et al. 2020: 19). To compare, the percentage of low-skilled jobs in the German automotive industry as a whole is 14.8% and in the Saxonian automotive industry is 19.5% (Sujata et al. 2020: 19). This, however, does not necessarily mean that Zwickau's workers are unskilled since Zwickau has one of the highest proportion of employees in Germany who are overqualified for their actual occupation (19.2%, also the highest in Saxony) (Sujata et al. 2020: 18; Weyh et al. 2020: 51).

[59] Volkswagen press materials (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.volkswagen-newsroom.com/en/stories/the-largest-training-camp-in-the-automotive-industry-5533

Already in November 2019, production of the electric ID.3 began in Zwickau, at first in parallel simultaneously with production of the Golf and Golf Variant, but the Golf production was phased out as planned. The last Golf with a combustion engine left the assembly line in Zwickau in summer 2020. The plant finally switched completely to electric cars with the start of production of ID.5 and ID.5 GTX. Along with these two models, the Zwickau plant produces the ID.3, ID.4, Audi Q4 e-tron, Audi Q4 Sportback e-tron and Cupra Born. In total, about 300,000 electric cars per year leave the assembly line in Zwickau. The effects of the pandemic on electric car sales are difficult to predict, but there seems to be a consensus over a generally positive development in the long haul. On the one hand, the whole car market is going through a difficult time due to the general economic depression. However, the interest in individual transportation is growing, as people try to avoid public transportation due to the risks connected with COVID-19. Moreover, as total sales in the car industry have been falling in Germany since 2019,[60] the number of sold electric cars has increased very rapidly.[61] Ironically, due to the effects of the pandemic and the high demand for electric cars, cars from Zwickau are once again being delivered with long waiting times. The waiting time for an ID.3 can currently reach up to one year.

The end of the Sachsenring era

Apart from the joint venture, and employing some of the former Sachsenring workforce, VW had no interest in taking over the old Sachsenring plants in Zwickau. The workers, however, stayed optimistic, as at first they believed that Volkswagen would not only take over the Mosel I plant, but also the whole enterprise, including the 'old' plant in Zwickau. These hopes did not come true, and Sachsenring was instead separated into its profitable parts, which were privatised, and its unprofitable parts, which were liquidated. As argued by Swain (2002: 85), the *Treuhand*'s privatisation policy focused on creating relatively small but interconnected enterprises and facilitated lean production, as it created a 'clean slate' for constructing a new model of production.

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[60] VDA. (7. Januar, 2022). Anzahl der Pkw-Neuzulassungen in Deutschland von 1955 bis 2021 (in Millionen) [Graph]. In *Statista*. (accessed 02.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/74433/umfrage/neuzulassungen-von-pkw-in-deutschland/

[61] KBA. (7. Januar, 2022). Anzahl der Neuzulassungen von Elektroautos in Deutschland von 2003 bis 2021 [Graph]. In *Statista*. (accessed 02.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/244000/umfrage/neuzulassungen-von-elektroautos-in-deutschland/

The direct successor of VEB Sahsenring was not VW but Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau GmbH (SAZ), owned by the *Treuhand*. From 1990 to 1993, the former production director of VEB Sachsenring was also managing director of the newly created GmbH. He also worked with the *Treuhand* on the privatisation of the enterprise and its parts. He described his work with the *Treuhand* as a constant battle, since the latter's goal, according to him, was to liquidate as many enterprises as possible. From June to August 1990 the number of employees fell by 12.5 per cent, from 10,722 to 9,376, most of the lay-offs being among foreign and older workers, the latter being sent into early retirement (Friedreich 2008: 480), some of them retiring at an age as young as 55. In August 1990, 6000 more workers were sent to *Kurzarbeit.*[62] After workers' protests in May 1991, the management established the *Sächsische Afbau- und Qualifizierungsgesellschaft*[63] (SAQ) against the will of the *Treuhand*, although it later supported the SAQ financially (Swain 2002: 89). SAQ was a temporary measure to avoid mass unemployment: the workers were transferred from Sachsenring to SAQ (Sachsenring's subsidiary), provided with training or given temporary employment for around 2000 people, for example, in dismantling the former Sachsenring workshops.[64] Such methods of providing a 'bridge' to the next employment were often used during post-unification deindustrialisation in the east. My interlocutors described them simply as 'measures' (Maßnahmen), as opposed to 'real' employment.

After a couple of years successfully producing car components for Volkswagen, in early 1992 SAZ was experiencing severe difficulties once again, as VW announced that it would transfer some of the processes to its new plant in Mosel (Swain 2002: 86). Since sales to VW amounted to 85 and later 99 per cent of the company's turnover, this change proved fatal to SAZ. In December 1993 the company was liquidated, and part of it was transferred to Sachsenring Automobiltechnik GmbH and sold to the brothers Ulf and Ernst Wilhelm Rittinghaus, engineers and entrepreneurs who had come to Zwickau from western Germany.

[62] *Kurzarbeit* is a social security measure, including a reduction in working hours, which is meant to prevent lay-offs and allow companies to keep their employees even in a difficult financial situation. The money to make up for the missing working hours is paid by the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit).

[63] Saxon Development and Qualification Company.

[64] My interlocutors often referred to the training provided by SAQ as useless, but appreciated the fact that it prevented immediate unemployment and gave the workers some time to find a way back into the labour market. For more on the role of SAQ, see Chapter 3.

Many new enterprises that formerly belonged to Sachsenring became Volkswagen's suppliers. For example, the cardan shaft plant (*Gelenkwellenwerk Mosel*), previously part of Sachsenring, was sold to the British automotive company GKN Driveline[65] and then became VW's supplier. Some of the former parts of Sachsenring were also bought by Siemens and Dr. Meleghy. The former construction and development department turned into *Fahrzeug-Entwicklung Sachsen* (FES), which took over 120 of its 330 employees. The company is located on land which previously belonged to Sachsenring in Zwickau and works on automotive research and development and the construction of prototypes, where FES is still rather successful.

Sachsenring Automobiltechnik GmbH (SAG) became a medium-sized company for vehicle production technology. The Rittinghaus brothers bought it for 23 million DM, 15 million of which was granted to them by the *Treuhand* as a loan, out of which 8 million were later waived (Friedreich 2008: 514). The risk was therefore not as high as it was often presented by the Rittinghaus brothers in the media. In 1993 the company employed around 350 people. The former managing director was laid off shortly after the Rittinghaus brothers took over the new company. Although Rittinghaus were inexperienced in the automotive industry, they decided that Sachsenring Automobiltechnik GmbH should become a systems supplier for automotive manufacturers. The company achieved success rather quickly, becoming a showcase for entrepreneurship in the *Neue Bundesländer*. By 1997, the enterprise was already employing 1350 people (Kirchberg 2005: 678), almost four times more than it did in 1993. Another sign of its success was that the enterprise was not only dependent on one customer: it produced doors for Audi, steering systems for Opel and frames for VW.[66] The company also fitted well with the demands of lean production in that it produced entire units, rather than small car components. In 1995, when it came to the knowledge of the directors of SAG that one of the Turkish importers still had 444 Trabis he did not need and could not sell anymore, they bought the Trabis back and sold them under the brand of 'Last Edition'. In 1996, the enterprise introduced a prototype of a new eco-

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[65] This was not the first attempt by GKN to establish a connection to the cardan shaft plant in Mosel. Before that, GKN also competed for the joint venture, which was finally established by Sachsenring with Citroën in 1978.

[66]Wunder von Zwickau. *Der Spiegel*, 46. 1998. (accessed 12.02.2022). http://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/8030774

friendly car, which was supposed to have a hybrid diesel-electric engine and the recognizable Sachsenring "S" logo on its front – Uni 1. However, Uni 1 never went into production.

The Rittinghaus brothers were highly praised in the media for their entrepreneurial spirit and even received 'The Entrepreneurs of the Year' award from Ernst&Young in 1998. Rittinghaus described themselves as 'social capitalists' and held one-on-one dialogues with almost every employee. Interestingly, contrary to Friedreich's (2008) interlocutors in the early 2000s, my interlocutors in Zwickau mainly described the Rittinghaus brothers in a negative light, as shady businessmen rather than "naïve idealists" (Friedreich 2008: 516). This might reflect the attitudes of particular informants, but it could also be explained by the influence of the information which came out later on. The company was constantly growing, and in 2001 it already employed 1422 people. In 1997, it was transformed into a share-selling AG (*Aktiengesellschaft*) and went public. The strategy was to use the money from selling its shares to buy smaller companies and grow Sachsenring bigger. As a result, Sachsenring made a few wrong deals, and the strategy proved to be a fatal mistake. The success story of Sachsenring Automobiltechnik ended in 2002, as fast as it began, with Sachsenring AG's bankruptcy. After that, the Rittinghaus brothers were accused of the falsification of financial reports, intentionally delaying their bankruptcy and embezzlement. According to the accusations, Sachsenring was already insolvent in 2000, but the two managers falsified the reports, lent the company more than six million Euros and, the as main shareholders, received unjustified dividends.[67] In addition, the two brothers were accused of illegally financing the CDU's political campaign and a possible subsidy fraud. The process went on for a few years until the Rittinghaus brothers were finally sentenced to three years imprisonment in 2009 and had to pay a fine to Sachsenring AG's insolvency administrator.

After four turbulent years of insolvency managers coming and going, Sachsenring was finally sold to the HQM group from Leipzig in 2006. Under the name HQM Sachsenring GmbH, the company employed about 170 people and produced components for some Golf and Passat models, as well as some parts for other car producers. In 2013, Sachsenring filed for bankruptcy once again. By that time, the company was employing 240 regular workers

[67]Prozess-Beginn gegen Ex-Chefs von Sachsenring. *Sächsische Zeitung*, October 8, 2008 (accessed 14.02.2022).

https://www.saechsische.de/plus/prozess-beginn-gegen-ex-chefs-von-sachsenring-1980863.html

and 50 temporary workers.[68] The new investor Tube Technology Systems (TTS) took over a big part of the company for producing car-braking systems and managed to keep 170 employees on board.[69] The car body construction plant was sold separately and became *Sachsenring Karosseriemodule GmbH,* taking over 31 employees and producing car parts. However, this company also went bankrupt in 2017. Its investor at the time also owned the bike producer *Mifa Bike GmbH* (a former GDR bike manufacturer) in Sangerhausen and renamed it as *Sachsenring Bike Manufaktur GmbH*, also using the "S" logo of Sachsenring. With that move, Zwickau finally lost its connection to the Sachsenring brand.

Zwickau after 1989: between a success story and a shrinking city

If one hops on a train in Leipzig, which goes roughly every hour, one can reach Zwickau's main station in about an hour and fifteen minutes. The main station greets visitors with a rather melancholic look, partly because of old age and partly because it seems rather empty due to its disproportionately large size. The station was first opened in 1845, and the current station building itself dates from 1936. Apart from being an important junction for passenger transport, Zwickau railway station also served the transportation of goods. However, after the end of coal-mining in Zwickau in 1978 and the shrinkage of the town's population, the station has lost its former significance. Until 2000, some long-distance trains used to stop at the station, but now it is only used by regional services. The figures of a miner and a car mechanic in the main hall of the station still serve as reminders of the towns' industrial past and present.

The street which goes down from the station to the city centre is haunted by ghosts of the past. Many of the buildings are empty, the windows and doors boarded up and covered with graffiti. The large abandoned building of the 'Wagner' hotel, which was first opened in 1866, stood empty on this street for almost thirty years and was in a rather depressing state of decay.[70] Many of the shop windows on the first floors of the buildings are empty, but in some one can notice life-size papier-mâché sculptures of people looking out of the windows.

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[68] Sachsenring meldet Insolvenz an. *Handelsblatt*, May 17, 2013 (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/industrie/autozulieferer-sachsenring-meldet-insolvenz-an/8224780.html?ticket=ST-3977008-jMe31LEOrfun2lvLy9dw-ap3

[69] Insolventer Autozulieferer: Rettung für Sachsenring. *Autohaus*, August 26, 2014 (accessed 14.02.2022). https://www.autohaus.de/index.php/nachrichten/autohersteller/insolventer-autozulieferer-rettung-fuer-sachsenring-2735791

[70] The hotel was finally demolished in 2021.

These sculptures were part of the project ‘Life-size everyday figures in the city’, which was designed to help the unemployed in the area find their way back into employment by also making the empty shop windows more attractive. The empty and abandoned housing (‘*Leerstand*’) presents a challenge for Zwickau and is the most obvious sign of its shrinkage. The building vacancy rate in Zwickau is 12.4 %.

Figure 3. Empty houses on Zwickau's Leipziger Straße.

Zwickau began to shrink, like many other former East German cities, after the *Wende*, although the pace of the shrinkage has slowed down somewhat compared to early in the 1990s. The reason for the city’s shrinkage was the unprecedented out-migration (especially of young professionals) and subsequent ageing of the population. Zwickau’s population went from 121,749 in 1988 to an all-time low of 98,840 in 1998, despite the incorporation by Zwickau of the nearby settlements of Hartmannsdorf, Rottmannsdorf, Crossen and Schneppendorf. In 1999 also Cainsdorf, Mosel (with the VW plant), Oberrothenbach, Schlunzig, Hüttelsgrün and Freiheitssiedlung were incorporated into Zwickau. Nevertheless, by 2020 the population shrunk to 87,516. In 2020, the population of Zwickau shrank a further 0.94 % compared to the previous year and according to some forecasts it will shrink by 20% more by 2040.[71]

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[71] Statistisches Bundesamt. (8. November, 2021). Die 20 kreisfreien Städte und Landkreise mit dem größten Bevölkerungsrückgang in Deutschland im Jahr 2020 (im Vergleich zum Vorjahr) [Graph]. In *Statista*.

The city was determined to counter the shrinkage actively by developing an attractive living environment and revitalising the city centre in particular. The historical buildings in the old town were renovated, and a new modern building was built for the library. One of the problems in the city centre was (and to a certain extent still is) the lack of shops and grocery stores in the inner city. In my talks with the locals, this was still seen as a concern. In 2000, a mall called 'Zwickau Arcaden' was opened in the city centre, but this was still not enough to counter the developments of the late 1990s when a lot of large retail businesses opened on the edges of the city (Pallagst et al. 2016: 57). Contributing to the bleak picture in Zwickau's city centre were two major historical department stores in the inner city standing empty: the beautiful Joh department store in Art Nouveau style (closed down from 2013) and the famous Schocken (empty since 1999).

Apart from the centre, the areas with numerous pre-fabricated housing (*Plattenbauten*) constitute a challenge for the shrinking city. The part of the city called Eckersbach became the biggest suburb of Zwickau with prefabricated housing from 1959 to 1988. At its peak in 1988, the suburb had about 32,000 residents. Although at some point considered to be modern and desirable housing, by the time of the *Wende*, the pre-fabricated housing had become rather unattractive for the population of Zwickau. As part of "Stadtumbau Ost" (Rebuilding the City – East), a federal program concerned with the downsizing of east German cities, which started in 2002, approximately 6960 housing units were demolished in Zwickau. Eckersbach then became a showcase for a successful transformation. The new buildings of Zwickau's only university – the university of applied sciences or Westsächsische Hochschule Zwickau (3300 students) – was also located in Eckersbach. Apart from other topics, together with the Volkswagen Bildungsinstitut, opened in 1990, the university also provides education in automotive engineering. Another suburb with pre-fabricated buildings, Neuplanitz, was less successful in its revitalization: the district is known for having had more and more of its buildings demolished. Every second resident in Neuplanitz is over sixtyt years old, and the district is shrinking very rapidly.

(accessed on 14.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1274741/umfrage/kreise-groesstes-wachstum/

Figure 4. A Trabi parked in one of the Zwickau Plattenbauten neighbourhoods, Neuplanitz.

All in all, despite the shrinkage and deindustrialisation (mainly in the textile industry), Zwickau is still often cited as a success story of industrial transformation. After all, it did not shrink as dramatically as some other east German cities, such as Hoyerswerda, and the main industry of the city, its automotive production, managed to stay afloat through collaborations with Volkswagen. The median wage in Zwickau was €2,697 at the time of my fieldwork in 2019,[72] which puts it in the fourth position in Saxony after Dresden, Leipzig and Chemnitz. The unemployment rate in Zwickau was 4.3 % in 2021, which is below Saxony's average and one of the lowest in Saxony.[73] 17% of all people employed in the Zwickau region are employed in the automotive industry (Sujata et al. 2020: 17), with other

[72] *Der Spiegel*. (21. Juli, 2020). Bruttolöhne von Vollzeit-Arbeitnehmern in Sachsen im Jahr 2019 nach Landkreisen bzw. kreisfreien Städten [Graph]. In *Statista*. (accessed 01.02.2022). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1134921/umfrage/bruttoloehne-von-arbeitnehmern-in-sachsen-nach-landkreisen/

[73] Arbeitsmarkt nach Ländern - Länder (Monatszahlen). Bundesagentur für Arbeit. (accessed 01.02.2022) https://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/SiteGlobals/Forms/Suche/Einzelheftsuche_Formular.html?nn=24280&topic_f=analyse-arbeitsmarkt-laender

employers including logistics and pharmaceutical production. The city's marketing strategy is to emphasize that Zwickau is 'Robert-Schumann-stadt' and 'Automobilstadt', whereas the city's coal-mining past seems to have been deliberately left out. Especially in summer, the town attracts many tourists both thanks to the automotive industry museum and the historical old town, though they rarely stay for more than one day.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed described the town of Zwickau, its history, population, industrial development and traditions of automotive production. My goal was not only to set the historical and socio-economic context for the topics to be discussed in the following chapters of my dissertation, but also to make several important points about the city and its industry. Firstly, I have shown that industrial development and transformation in Zwickau have had an enormous impact on the social life of the whole region. This trend is still in place: the influence of industrial transformations in Zwickau goes far beyond the city itself. Second, by presenting the history of the car industry in Zwickau, I have intended to emphasize its rather non-linear development and the interconnectedness of the past and the present. This interplay of the past, present and future regarding the car industry in Zwickau can also be observed in the minds of the people, to whom I will return in the following chapters. Thirdly, I would like to emphasize the city's position as both a shrinking and ageing city, one that was also strongly affected by its deindustrialization, and simultaneously as a highly industrialized automotive hub with the prospect of becoming the largest in electric car production. It is only by grasping both aspects of the town's development that one can engage with the individual life-worlds of the local people.

Chapter 3: "I have never been unemployed": narratives of work, worth and worthlessness in an East German town

"I have never been unemployed" was a phrase often heard from my interlocutors in the field. This phrase was often said with a certain pride, associated with the fact that one had managed not to fall out of employment, especially in the turbulence of the early 1990s. Among my interlocutors in Zwickau, the ability to maintain one's status and avoid breaks in employment became a marker of self-worth, and the story of the post-socialist transformation was often reduced to a matter of personal strength of character. This can also be explained by the unwillingness even of the victims of neoliberalism to be associated with an ultimate 'loser in the transition' – the post-socialist working class, often depicted as demoralized, lazy and unadaptable. In her ethnography of a post-socialist eastern German enterprise, Müller (2007) discusses and contrasts the careers of two managers, Oswald and Wolpert, in the market economy. Wolpert fully complied with the company's code and adapted to the ethics of effectivity and market economy, whereas Oswald stuck to the norms and values of the planned economy. Wolpert's adaptation and Oswald's refusal to adapt to the new market-driven ideology resulted in two different outcomes: Wolpert was respected by his Western bosses and managed to have a successful career, whereas Oswald was asked to resign before his retirement. In this example, Müller showed how compliance with the new rules of the game meant success, whereas resistance brought failure. My ethnographic data show a slightly different picture. The willingness to accept the ideals of an 'enterprising self' (Makovicky 2014) did not always automatically bring success to my interlocutors in the field.

In this chapter, I look at the narratives and experiences that contributed to the lack of resistance to the neoliberalisation of eastern Germany. In particular, I focus on questions of worth and worthlessness, as they "serve to both obscure and reveal the relational mechanisms of alienation, dispossession, and de-valuation of labour upon which capitalist valorisation is based" (Kalb 2013: 14). The post-socialist transformation of eastern Germany is often framed in both media discourses and by people on the ground as a test of worth, which divided people into winners and losers, i.e. those who succeeded in the new system and those who failed to adapt. Buchowski (2006: 467) suggests the term 'neo-orientalism' to describe this discourse of 'losers and winners' of transformations. According to the neo-orientalist way of thinking, the former distinction between the Orient and the Occident transcends the geographical boundaries of East and West and finds otherness in post-socialist

societies. The subalterns, workers and peasants have been created as the "new others" of transitions, as the "spatially exotic other has been resurrected as a socially stigmatized brother" (Buchowski 2006: 476). This dominant discourse of an enterprising self transforms the workers into 'orientalised others', supposedly lacking courage, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit, and having been spoiled by poor work discipline under socialism (Kideckel 2002).

Based on her study of a Polish factory after privatization, Dunn (2004: 7) argues that the historical experience of socialism and its cultural system allowed Polish workers to contest, modify and reinterpret many of the initiatives of multinational corporations. In other words, they were able to be more critical of the capitalist organization of production thanks to their experience of working under socialism. Similarly, in her comparative study of east German and Hungarian workers, Bartha (2014) argues that the former were more likely to explain the anomalies of capitalism through structural reasoning than the latter. Nostalgia (or *Ostalgie*), she concludes, became a means of legitimate social criticism of capitalism for the workers in Jena. By the same token, Dale (2006: 220) suggests that German unification produced renewed social movements, which 'have placed debates over the viability and desirability of capitalism back onto the political agenda'. However, in my field-site, this observation was not always true. Many of my interlocutors, white-collar and blue-collar workers alike, have adopted a version of Social Darwinism, according to which social and economic change became a mere catalyst for the 'survival of the fittest'. In this chapter, apart from presenting my ethnographic data, I also follow the official narratives, policies and political economy of neoliberalisation, which provided grounds for blaming the workers for their inability to adapt and avoid falling into unemployment.

Workers in the "workers' and peasants' state"

In the post-war years, the economy of the SBZ[74] and the later GDR retained some of the elements of the Nazi wartime economy, such as the workbook (*Arbeitsbuch*), fixed wages and forced labour (*Arbeitseinweisung*). Tough working conditions, high pressure on the workers and the constant raising of work norms caused dissatisfaction and unrest among the workers in the GDR. Despite the 'New Course' policies, newly accepted in June 1953, which were supposed to reduce the pressure, a workers' uprising exploded on 17th June, which was forcefully suppressed. As a result of the uprising, surveillance and control over the workers

[74] SBZ - Sowjetische Besatzungszone – Soviet occupation Zone.

was severely increased. However, the uprising succeeded in the sense that it caused the state to take the dissatisfaction of the workers on the shop floor more seriously, as it also undermined the image of the GDR as the workers' state. The uprising also prompted the state to do more to satisfy the material needs of the workers in order to silence the dissatisfaction.

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. Work was not only a constitutional right but also a duty (Jancius 2006; Rudd 2006). This guarantee provided a strong sense of security among the workers and placed a major responsibility for the distribution of work places on the state. In the new market economy the circumstances have changed, and the new state is unable to fulfil the promise of work given by the GDR. However, the moral implications of (un)employment persisted. Globalisation, the rise of precarity and post-industrialism have transformed the workers' lives on a global scale, but shifts in the experience of work under modern capitalism have been even more marked in post-socialist contexts than they were in the west (Stenning et al. 2010: 81). As Bartha (2014: 309) puts it, the workers in post-socialist countries faced "the double challenge of the decline of the political weight and the significance of the working class and the devaluation of production work in a postindustrial society".

The economy of Zwickau was mainly based on mining, the textile industry and automotive industry until, in 1977, after almost 800 years of extraction, coal-mining ended due to the exhaustion of resources. Sachsenring was assigned to take over the workers, retrain them and provide them with employment. This case was often cited by my interlocutors in the field as an example of the way the state took care of workplaces and avoided unemployment, even when an enterprise was restructured or closed: "*The people, the workers, they were taken care of. It was guaranteed that they don't become unemployed, like many people these days*". One former Sachsenring engineer, while we were talking about how work had changed after the shift to the market economy, drew my attention to the difference between two concepts: '*Job*' and '*Arbeitsplatz*' (workplace):

> "In Sachsenring, they all had a workplace [Arbeitsplatz], now they all have jobs [Jobs]. A workplace for me is a territorially defined space with a chair, a wardrobe, or a toolbox; this is a workplace. And a job is… well, a translator comes, she hangs her bag on the door and translates, then she says 'I have to go to the next job in the city', takes her bag and goes. She doesn't have a workplace anywhere. Do you understand? There is a bit of philosophy there. And the difference you can see in the young people at VW. 'Cool, now we get 4700 Euros

> and an end-of-year bonus'. But they have *jobs*. I don't think that they are connected more strongly to their factory than our people were to our old factory [Sachsenring]."

For him, the very precariousness and flexibility of a job meant disconnecting it from the worker himself, who thus became disposable and interchangeable. *Arbeitsplatz* also went beyond what a person did directly and was connected to a factory as a social system. Spittler (2009: 173) argued that the dichotomy between 'embedded' work in non-capitalist societies and 'non-embedded' work in capitalist societies is far less clear than scholars often suggest. However, I would argue that for the car workers in Zwickau the contrast was indeed very pronounced. For them, the sudden commodification of labour and its emergence as a 'fictitious commodity' (Polanyi 2001) in a competitive market was rather vivid.

The factory in the GDR would expand 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, it was also a symbolic space of social membership and national belonging. "*Our factory was our family*", many former Sachsenring workers would say to me. As discussed in some studies (Friedreich 2007; Kohli 1994), strong workplace relationships and informal relationships within the socialist brigades also strengthened the bargaining power of the workers at the shop-floor level. 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 in Hungary or in the Erzgebirge. These advantages, which went far beyond monetary compensation, constituted the so-called '*Zweite Lohntüte*' or the 'social wage'.

The prestige and symbolic status of the workers in the case of automotive workers in Zwickau was an important contributing factor for satisfaction at work. Despite the criticism of the product they produced, the workers could maintain a certain pride in their work. As also discussed in other studies (Lüdtke 1994), the ability to produce *at all* under poor working conditions, within the shortage economy and the slow, inefficient decision-making of the centralised economy, was often a source of particular pride. As one of the shop-floor workers told me proudly,

> "At 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, at 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) the 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 labour excesses after 1989 especially painful.

The high symbolic status of the workers was also supported by the 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 using forced labour to do so. '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 the later years, this source of legitimacy was not as pronounced, but certain parts of the discourse persisted. Here is how Andreas (60), a former Sachsenring shop-floor worker who transferred to Volkswagen from one day to another, described this to me:

> "So in the Sachsenring it was always said – 'boys, watch out, we have to build more cars for the peace again today [laughs]'. And we did it, we built one more car for the peace. Although we had the timing out of sync, but 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 sociological study carried out in the 1970s shows, the advantageous 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 given to workers in the GDR, the latter has been called an '*arbeiterliche Gesellschaft*' (a workers' society) (Engler 1999), or, as my informants often said, not without a certain irony, an '*Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat*' (Workers' and peasants' state). However, the symbolic and ideological primacy of the workers did not necessarily bring privileged status in terms of access to material goods or political power. As we were discussing the

events of the Peaceful Revolution, one of the former Sachsenring shop-floor workers, 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 money. For him, the whole process was humiliating. Perhaps it was also the gap between ideological pathos and praise of the worker on the one hand and the lack of freedom and political power on the other that largely contributed to the dissatisfaction. However, in the case of the car industry in Zwickau, the automotive workers enjoyed some better opportunities (in terms of education or holiday spots, for example) and rather good salaries compared to others.

The Aftermath of 1989 and the East German Labor Market

By the end of 1994, the *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 either to speed up the privatization 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 enterprises, like Sachsenring, went through a long cycle of new investments and bankruptcies. In some cases, the enterprises were sold for a symbolic amount of one German mark. As a result of the 'shock therapy', more than a million people lost their jobs after reunification, and the real unemployment rate has been estimated as reaching 40% in the early 1990s (Turner 1998). As Mau (2019: 151) put it, many of the *Werktätige* (working people) turned into *Untätige* (idle people).

Unemployment did not hit every group in society equally. The damage varied according to qualifications, age and gender (Trappe 2006). For example, among those who were between 50 and 65 at the time of the *Wende*, more than a million were forced into *Vorruhestand* (early retirement) (Mau 2019: 155). Early retirement as a middle-class aspiration may be desirable as a matter of personal choice, but during the *Wende* it was rather a forced measure often leading to material, social and cultural dispossession. Due to the premature ending of their working biographies, the pensions of the early-retired were low, their social networks broke down, and their sense of self-worth was threatened. As a result, many of the early-retired saw themselves as the actual losers in the transformation (Mau 2019: 155). It is also essential to consider the dimension of gender concerning work in eastern Germany, especially compared to the pre-unification West. Post-reunification unemployment affected women disproportionately more than men, which also resulted in some changes to their position in the family and household duties. In 1989 the participation

of women in the economy as a labour force in the East was extremely high (one of the highest in the world) at 89%, compared to 92% for men. In West Germany, in the same year, only 56% of women had jobs, compared to 83% of men (Rosenfeld, Trappe, Gornick 2004). The difference could be explained through both ideology and state policies.

In East Germany, women also had more ways of combining family and childcare with work. For example, at Sachsenring, the kindergarten was right next to the factory gate, and the workers' children were guaranteed a spot there. Most of my female interlocutors in Zwickau, who had some experience of working in socialism, were proud of their independent status compared to Western women. The car industry has traditionally been more male-dominated, especially when many of the processes were still done manually and required physical strength. Still, at the end of the 1980s, about 30% of Sachsenring staff were women, whereas the percentage of women working in Volkswagen Sachsen today is about 11%. None of my female informants who used to work in Sachsenring and had traditionally "manly professions", such as machinist, welder or locksmith, continued doing the same job after the *Wende*. Most of them changed their qualifications.

The fact that the new society they became members of tolerates unemployment came as a shock to many (Rudd 2006). The state found itself unable to fulfil the promise of '*blühende Landschaften*'[75] as it became clear that the disparity between East and West would persist for many years to come. This failed promise, the sell-out (*Ausverkauf*) and closing of enterprises, as well as activities carried out by the *Treuhand* in general, sparked many protests and factory sit-ins all over eastern Germany (Böick 2011). Some of the protests took place symbolically on Mondays, continuing the tradition of the '*Montagsdemos*' of the Peaceful Revolution that took place in 1989-1990 before German reunification. The topic of post-reunification protests is still hardly discussed in the media and public discourse. Many people in Zwickau I spoke to were rather critical of these protests. They saw the workers who participated in them as lazy and simply naive, who expected to get Western salaries and consumer goods without risking their security on the labour market.

This image of bitter and disillusioned East Germans is also often invoked to stress that firstly, they were naive and not aware of how the market economy works, and secondly, that they had poor a work ethic and self-discipline. This narrative also delegitimizes the

[75] 'Blooming landscapes' - a phrase often used by Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of Germany at that time, which reflected his vision of how the new German states would develop in the three to four years after reunification.

protests of the early 1990s, hinting that these people were always dissatisfied and that is 'just how they are'. However, none of my interlocutors admitted having such illusions before the *Wende*. When I asked them about their expectations for the outcome of the Peaceful Revolution, most of them would confess that they had no idea about what was coming, but they knew that politically it could not go on like that. They also did not confirm having any illusions about the perfect and shiny West. It was always 'others' who got fooled. None of my interlocutors admitted either that they had been blinded by the consumer choice they suddenly acquired. "*Well, we didn't have bananas, but we just ate apples then, so what? We were actually healthier back then because we would only eat the fruits and vegetables which were fresh in this season*", one of the former Sachsenring engineers told me. Contrary to the narrative of naïve easterners being blinded by western consumerism, many East Germans preferred window-shopping to this consumer frenzy and concentrated on saving instead because of the uncertainty regarding their futures (Dale 2006). It is also possible that some of my interlocutors might have been downplaying the consumer boom as a form of resistance against the narrative of the 'naïve Easterners' who were enchanted with this influx of consumer goods.

Apart from the unemployed, almost two million workers were put on '*Kurzarbeit*' (short working time) with an average of 50% of the working time lost.[76] The *Kurzarbeit* is a social security measure that is meant to prevent lay-offs and allow companies to keep their employees even in a difficult financial situation. The pay for the missing working hours is paid by the federal employment agency (*Bundesagentur für Arbeit*). However, in post-reunification eastern Germany, *Kurzarbeit* was hardly seen as a way of sustaining employment. Instead, it was seen as a temporary measure that sooner or later ended in the closing of the enterprises. That was especially true for those employees who were put on '*Kurzarbeit Null*', which usually meant that the employee did not work at all and was sent to the *Transfergesellschaft* (transfer company), where he could also acquire another qualification. For the workers, however, it mostly meant that they had additional time to look for a new job, the hope of coming back to the same enterprise after *Kurzarbeit Null* being almost non-existent.

[76] Völkel, Brigitte (1997). Kurzarbeit in den neuen Bundesländern (Short-time work in the new federal states) in Mitteilungen aus der Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB), Nürnberg [Institute for Employment Research, Nuremberg, Germany], vol. 30(1), 127-149.

The newly established SAQ agency provided re-training programs for the workers and was supposed to help them find subsequent re-employment. Many of the training sessions concentrated on labor-market skills, for example, writing a good CV or a job application, and many prepared people for work in sales or marketing. Thus, it can be said that this training was mostly supposed to educate people about the market economy and what one should do to become successful in it. The teachers were mostly university professors or teachers '*von drüben*' (from 'over there', Western Germany). Parallels can be drawn with Berdahl's (2005) research on consumption and citizenship, where she focuses on consumption and 'consumer training' practices and their importance in the context of belonging. Like the seminars that were meant to teach eastern Germans to consume (in Berdahl's example, beauty products for women), SAQ and similar job training programs offered instruction in selling their own 'fictitious commodity' – their labor. Berdahl's observations on consumption and citizenship can be extended to labor-market behavior as well. If East Germans were to become 'deserving citizens', they had to accept the rules of the game and learn how to behave in the labor market to be successful, that is, to learn how to 'sell themselves'.

The attitudes towards SAQ among my research participants in Zwickau were quite ambivalent. Active union members from IG Metall would say that its role was crucial in mobilizing the workers and pressing for their re-employment. The managers and engineers mostly dismissed it as a useless organization that simply promoted the inactivity of the workers on the labor market, and that it had a demoralizing influence on them and did not really help them find new jobs. Almost all my interlocutors would agree that the training programs that SAQ provided were rather pointless in terms of employment and were mainly meant to keep the workers 'off the streets'. Keeping them off the streets meant preventing both immediate unemployment and protests on the streets. Some also told me that they felt SAQ and other similar measures were being used to reduce the unemployment statistics. "*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, former accountant at Sachsenring, to me.

Employment at SAQ by those who were not employed in it was mostly seen as useless, a sort of mock labour (Rajković 2017). Some sympathized with the goals of SAQ, but in general being at SAQ was associated by those who were not part of it with being weak and not being able to make it on one's own without some external support or paternalistic

measures. Some of my interlocutors even went so far as to say that SAQ was used as a scheme for subsidy fraud. Suspicion and mistrust were in general very prominent when people talked about the period of the *Wende*. And the suspicion was often hardly groundless. For example, many of the former Sachsenring workers who stayed in the enterprise after privatization had to go through the scandal involving its new owners –the Rittinghaus brothers.[77]

The workers who went through training at SAQ mostly neither praised nor condemned it. Elke, who had just finished her apprenticeship at Sachsenring in 1990 and ended up being employed at SAQ, saw it as a rather positive development. It not only helped her in some practical matters, as she got pregnant in the meantime, but it provided a sort of bridge, a safety net. She explained that it was very important for her psychologically that she did not just start drawing unemployment benefit but still had a feeling like she was working that allowed her to stay embedded in her social networks at work. In the case of Serbian state-subsidized firm discussed by Rajković (2018), a similar form of 'on-paper' employment without actual work demoralized the workers and brought them shame and doubts about their deservingness. The case of SAQ was very different in this regard, as it was designed as a temporary measure rather than a permanent solution, which, however, did not always justify it in the eyes of outsiders. The ambivalent attitudes towards SAQ were informed by people's class positions, values and life experiences. In line with Palomera and Vetta (2016), Hann (2018) and Mikuš (2016), this case illustrates how moral reasoning can be employed not only to protect people against the forces of the free market, but also to condemn these protective measures. In this sense, those advocating rather neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility are also entitled to their moral economy.

Coping with the *Wende*: unemployment and 'enterprising selves'

"I wasn't one of those disappointed [die Enttäuschten] during the Wende", emphasized Mr Baumann,[78] as we talked about unemployment, sitting in the common room of the retirement home where he lived. "I didn't fall into a hole, like many other people, most of the people. You know, when they don't tell you what to do every day, and you don't know where to go and what to do." He then used another example (which was supposed to be 'closer to home' for me) and described his trip to post-socialist Bulgaria and how he would see the farmers smoking and chatting instead of working on the fields. "They couldn't

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[77] See Chapter 2 for details.

[78] Pseudonyms are used throughout.

deal with this freedom! They needed to be told every day what to do", he said. The same was true for Mr Baumann and for many of the workers in the GDR as well:

> "They were told every day 'You do this, you do that'. Showing initiative, being involved, staying active…The GDR citizen didn't have to do all this. […] They thought it would go on like that with all this social stuff…Like a child is held by its mother – that is how they were held by the state in the GDR".

Unlike Bulgarian farmers and some workers in the GDR, Mr Baumann thought of himself as having been well-prepared for the transition – he had received his higher education in the GDR, he had read Marx, and he knew that capitalism comes at a price. He seemed to be taking pride in his adaptability during the transition, as he contrasted himself to those who were too lazy, lacking initiative and flexibility:

> "And then came the 'Wende', and everyone said that we'll have freedom now, and we'll have this and that. And now they were all suddenly unemployed. Yeah, the 'shitty West'... You said the 'shitty East', and you went out on the streets, now you are saying 'shitty West'. What do you want then? You want only the best from both systems. But you don't want to work. When they were told that they had to sweep the streets because of the high unemployment, do you know how many of them declined those jobs? Why is such a man sent home and gets his money anyway? That's unfair."

Listening to Mr Baumann, I found his ability to combine citing Marx with blaming the workers for their misfortunes in the capitalist system in one monologue quite fascinating. But what I found even more puzzling was how his very own work biography suggested a completely different attitude to unemployment and the unemployed, as he himself had experienced a sudden and unfair fall into unemployment in the new labor market. I would therefore have expected him to attribute unemployment rather to structural reasons and the deficiencies of the market economy than the individual inabilities of the workers. After all, Mr Baumann's education, adaptability and moral values did not prevent him from experiencing unemployment and falling into the same situation as the lazy, sluggish workers he condemned. Yet this experience did not change his very negative attitudes towards the unemployed, as he believes that the reasons for their misfortunes are very different.

Mr Baumann was born in 1943 into a family of bakers in a rural area of the Erzgebirge, not far from Zwickau. During the GDR period, he received a higher education and worked in the distribution of eastern cars – IFA Vertrieb. In the early 1990s, a Western investor came to the region to build car dealerships, and Mr Baumann got a job as a local

manager. For years, he worked on establishing contacts and building branches in the area. He especially emphasized the respect and status he enjoyed: “They didn’t buy from this Wessi asshole, they bought from Baumann! I was their confidant here at the company”. However, one day in the early 2000s, Mr Baumann was driving in his car on business when he suddenly had a heart attack. Fortunately, he had the time to pull over, was transported to a hospital on time and managed to survive the incident. However, fourteen days into his REHA (rehabilitation) his working contract was terminated, and he was laid off. As his health slowly recovered, Mr Baumann turned to a labor court to complain about the unjustified termination of his contract, which brought him nothing, as the judge decided that no violation had occurred. In our conversations, he stressed that his employer, the labor court judge and his lawyer were all ‘Wessis’ (western Germans).

Mr Baumann’s early retirement at 58 had a deteriorating influence on his physical and psychological health, as he went through some long periods of sitting at home and having trouble communicating even with his own family. “Can you imagine something like that? From 180 tempo to zero? I couldn’t sleep at night when I came back home [from the rehabilitation]”, he said emotionally. With time, Mr Baumann found himself various social, cultural and voluntary tasks to keep him busy again, and he gradually started to feel better, and at the time of our encounter was leading a very active social life. As we arranged our meetings, he would often stress how busy his calendar was. Mr Baumann was 76 when we met, and he lived together with his wife in a small two-room apartment in a retirement home. He became relatively famous and respected in the city for his work in the archives and his involvement in studying the town’s history. He sang in a choir, played several musical instruments, and took an active part in almost all the events happening at the retirement home and beyond.

While telling me his story, he was very concerned that he did not sound like he wanted to complain: “Do I sound as if I’m complaining? I don’t want to because I’m doing fine”. In 2017, before the beginning of my fieldwork, he had attended a public discussion with a politician and a member of the Saxon Landtag and shared the story of his dismissal from work there. “She didn’t believe me at first, you know! But there were my former colleagues there who supported me and said: ‘Mr Baumann tells the truth’”, he remembered. Shortly after this, his story was featured in a newspaper article devoted to this discussion. He showed me the article, where he had crossed out the information that he found inaccurate with a black pen. One quote from Mr Baumann, regarding the unfairness of how he was treated by the court, included a warning to others to ‘stay alert’, not trust anyone and not to

wait for ‘presents’ from above. He thought these words were taken out of context, and the article made him look like he was whining (*meckern*) and blaming the system. “I felt so embarrassed when I saw the article!”, he exclaimed. The shame and embarrassment that Mr Baumann felt were probably to a great extent dictated by his fear of being associated with the ‘lazy’ and ‘disillusioned’ workers he himself condemned: “I would say, if you want money from the state, then you should please sweep the streets, or windows, or you 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”.

For Mr Baumann, not working was morally wrong and unfair to other members of society. In this sense, the duty to work was a social and moral duty, rather than an individual duty. Mr Baumann also saw work as an instrument of moral growth and redemption. He also approved of the institution of the *Jugendwerkhof* [youth workshop], a corrective facility for youth in the GDR, which has a rather negative reputation connected with exploitation and the abuse of child labour. He argued, however, that work had a purifying influence on those people:

> “They learnt a profession [*Beruf*] there, so they didn’t get any funny ideas, they were completely exhausted [*fertig*]. They worked, and some of them became good people [*ordentliche Menschen*]. And now they say those kids have to be rehabilitated and compensated…[…] There comes the West and says “you bad GDR people, you locked up the children then’”.

Being sympathetic to the employment system in the GDR in many ways, Mr Baumann also supported some neoliberal narratives while condemning the ‘nanny state’. He showed a certain belief in a fair world, where everybody gets what they deserve: if you show initiative and work hard, you will be rewarded regardless of the political and economic system. In his eyes, those who had to go through unemployment after reunification and blamed it on the new capitalist system, or the West, were always complaining and would never be satisfied, as the real reason for their misfortunes was laziness. To support his argument, he gave me the example of his former fellow students, whom he continues to meet once a year: “All of them went on, without complaining, also after the *Wende*. Not one of them was falling behind. They were all smart people, and they coped with the *Wende* without any problems. None had any gaps, none of us got unemployed”. Here, Mr Baumann even said he had no gaps in employment and was not unemployed. What he meant by that was

probably that he was never unemployed because of the *Wende* and that he could cope with the transition just fine, even though he too lost his job later on.

Mr Baumann saw his unemployment experience as unfortunate, but also thought that his experience was completely different from those who could not find their place because of the *Wende*. Rather than blaming himself, or blaming the system, he blamed his former boss, but often slipped and contradicted himself as he would say that what happened to him was no exception within the system. As he told me about his dismissal, he asked me: "What do you think? Was this humane [*menschlich*]?". Without waiting for my answer, he answered his own question: "Well, society is not humane anyway. It's every man for himself [*jeder ist sich selbst der Nächste*], like we say". So, although he hinted that society was not always fair or humane, that is just how the world is. Mr Baumann's moral values regarding work could be one more contributory factor in his emotional difficulties following the loss of his job. On the one hand, he considered hard work and entrepreneurial spirit as his strong moral virtues. On the other hand, they did not save him from failure. However, he has managed to accommodate both moral judgements (e.g. that he was treated unfairly and should not have been fired, or that the unemployed are to blame for their own misfortunes), framing his case as separate from all the others, as an individual, rather than blaming the structural situation, firstly by placing the blame on the individuals – his former employer, in particular – and secondly by having an emancipating self-narrative. In his personal narrative, he found his way out of his depressive state through work, which took the form of volunteering.

Unlike Mr Baumann, another retired car industry employee, Jens, never experienced unemployment in his work biography. Both his parents were injured in the war, so he had to leave the school after the eighth grade to help keep his family. He started his job at the railways, where he also received vocational training (*Berufsausbildung*). Due to better payment and more convenient work times, he soon decided to leave the railways and started working at Sachsenring, where there was a constant demand for workers. He then worked on the shop floor on bodywork (*Karosseriebau*) from 1975. He was later offered other vocational training, for which he had to study after work for two years, after which he got a welder's license and was qualified to perform a variety of welding tasks. He was highly skilled and, as he said himself, also received a good salary.

Although Jens was a shop-floor worker and Mr Baumann was an engineer with quite a high position before the *Wende*, I found that both had a very similar self-image as an 'enterprising self' (Makovicky 2014), and both took great pride in being highly skilled, hard-

working and adaptable. More importantly, they saw their own work as a virtue not only for the sake of work itself but also for the challenge that it created. Jens also contrasted himself with other workers, who were 'happy doing the same thing every day' and was proud that he was ready to take on challenging tasks and try new things. The way he handled the risk of losing his job after the *Wende* served for him as evidence that he indeed had the virtues of a hard-working man, as well as a kind of adaptability and 'entrepreneurial spirit':

> "I am a person who never leaves anything to a chance. When I have a problem, I always have a plan A and a plan B. And that's what I did. I stretched myself in every direction and looked for a job. And I found a job in the same branch, and I had to do what I knew how to do already. I had my wages and bread again, I earned well. Thirty days holiday, Christmas bonus, holiday bonus…But you have to work for that, it doesn't come by itself! I have never been unemployed. In the GDR there were no unemployed, but after the *Wende*, you had to take care that you have a job and you had to do it on your own. And not everyone could do it. Some sat at home, unemployed, waiting for somebody to come and take them."

Jens' working biography can be considered rather successful, and he saw it as a success himself since after the *Wende* he found a new job in the supplier industry while still working at Sachsenring. He also got a new job with the help of some contacts he had made through his life-long hobby – motorsport. Jens took pride in his ability to make use of his connections as well. Those who did not manage to come out on top after the Wende were, for Jens, undeserving, since they were not ready to put in the necessary work to find a new job: "I was never unemployed. In the GDR there were no unemployed. But after the Wende, you had to take care yourself that you have work. And that was a transition [*Umstellung*] and a lot of people didn't get it. They sat at home and thought 'nobody is coming to take me'. You had to move forward on your own".

For Jens, the social and moral value of work seems to find its embodiment through taxes and access to public welfare. Only those who work deserve this access, and those who work more also deserve more. As we talked about the tensions between East and West in Germany, one of the first things he mentioned was the difference in pensions among western and eastern German women: 'Here women used to work, for example, in the textile industry in three shifts. In the West, women stayed at home, took care of the children and cooked. My wife worked at the same enterprise as me, we did different shifts. Three shifts at work, bringing up the children…And they get around the same pensions, if not less.'

In both Mr Baumann's and Jens' stories we see the importance of hard work and adaptability for their narratives of the self. One might also argue that in their cases the ability

to keep one's employment and sustain one's family is also connected to their sense of masculinity. However, for many women I spoke to, their ability to get ahead in life through hard work and being able to keep their employment throughout their lives was as important for their sense of self-worth as it was for men. Like men, they often used the post-socialist transformation and the challenges it created in their lives as a reference point in their narratives of the self and as a point of comparison with others.

My neighbour Mrs Schulze was an accountant at Sachsenring. Mrs Schulze's life was closely connected to Sachsenring, where she had worked for almost twenty years before the *Wende*. Apart from accounting, she also ran a gymnastics course at the enterprise, through which she also met her husband, an engineer working on the development of the Trabant. By the time of the *Wende* she had a child, and her husband was already retired. As was often the case during my fieldwork in Zwickau, many of my conversations revolved around the time after reunification. Due to the differences in the tax systems, Mrs Schultze had to go through a requalification at that time. She then found a job as an accountant in the new office of a small Western company in Zwickau, where she worked until retirement. In retirement, like Mr Baumann, she kept herself busy, actively engaging in volunteering in the field of art. She never experienced unemployment and was proud of the way she had overcome the challenges after the *Wende*:

> "I have never been unemployed, but these people, many people, who were thrown around from one training scheme (*Maßnahme*) to another… It is bad to be unemployed when you are young, but if you don't have enough money when you are older, there is a certain shame and wounded pride in having to go to the unemployment office. I am glad I didn't have to go through this. I saw in 1990 in our company, in Sachsenring, how it was falling apart. And I quit on my own before I would be thrown out on the street. I made an effort to find a new job, and I found it. Of course, I spent three years on the school bench at the age of forty-five, I studied to be a tax specialist. They all could have been my children, my classmates…One has to be able to do such a thing. Not everybody can."

Mrs Schulze's career can be considered successful in the sense that she managed to avoid unemployment up until her retirement, and her success became a part of her personality, as she seemed to derive her sense of self-worth from it to a great extent. What she also emphasized was the virtue of being humble, which helped her move forward after the *Wende*. In her own narrative, her humility allowed her to go back to studying again at a mature age. Mrs Schultze took pride not only in the fact that she was able to land back on

her feet after the change to a market economy, but also because she had no illusions about capitalism and was not naïve like she thought many others were:

> "Millions, millions were unemployed [after the *Wende*]. And there were no jobs. But some also exploited the state in the GDR times. For example, with working time. We had the punch cards, and many of the workers punched their cards there where the accounting was. They should have worked until four pm, but sometimes they were standing there a quarter of an hour before. 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' fly in our mouths without having to work for it. They didn't expect that one has to really work [*rabotten*] in order to live. And those people were the first on the street, unemployed. Some people were naive [*blauäugig*], they let themselves be blinded, the main thing – Western money. And then they were on the streets."

Although being gentler in her expressions, Mrs Schultze also, like Mr Baumann and Jens, indicated that the reason for many to be unemployed after the *Wende* was rather the individual lack of motivation or an inability to work (or *rabotten*). She condemned the naïve workers who had false ideas of what was going to come. In contrast to those workers, she told me that she knew what to expect – like Mr Baumann, she has studied Marx: "We were taught the theory [of capitalism] before, and then we had the practice. There is this certain brutality, a dog-eat-dog society (*Ellenbogengesellschaft*). And then the strong person, who, thank God, I am, comes through, but the weak or sick person is left behind". On the one hand Mrs Schultze admitted the flaws of the capitalist system, but on the other hand she saw overcoming these challenges as a virtue. People's failure to do so was associated with laziness or weakness. When I encountered Mr Baumann, Mrs Schultze and Jens, I found it rather remarkable how their criticisms of capitalism and of structural explanations for unemployment were intertwined with individualizing narratives that implied that the unemployed only had themselves to blame for their situations.

The views of former Sachsenring workers Elke and her husband Paul were quite different from the views of many of my other interlocutors. They could not say with pride, "I have never been unemployed", as they both had some gaps in employment and problems finding continuous employment. When the *Wende* came, Elke was finishing her vocational training at Sachsenring. Her vocational training gave her an Abitur, a diploma that gave her the right to apply to university. She was thinking about going for higher education before the *Wende*, but was taken aback by the sudden change and was not sure what kinds of qualification would be in demand. After taking some training in making job applications at

SAQ, she was supposed to receive re-training as a salesperson. However, Elke got pregnant with her first child and could not go through with the re-training. When she returned from her parental leave, the SAQ's training programs had already finished, and she was laid off. She was unemployed for a while until she started working for the "Meals on Wheels" ("Essen auf Rädern") service, which delivered food to older people or people with disabilities. She then got pregnant with her second child and could not do the job anymore. When she returned from her parental leave, the service provider had moved elsewhere and subsequently stopped operations. Elke was unemployed again. She then decided to take a three-year training course to become a physiotherapist and eventually found a job and stayed in this occupation.

Elke's husband Paul also received is vocational training in quality control at Sachsenring with a plan to go on and study in Leipzig, enter higher education and work at IFA Vertrieb (IFA Sales), where Mr Baumann also worked. However, after his training was over he went to the army, and soon after he came back in 1988, the *Wende* came. He said he felt as if the situation was too unstable, and he also felt insecure in starting studying at that moment, so he started working at Sachsenring, but his department was one of the first to be closed after the *Wende*, and he became unemployed. By chance, one of his acquaintances told him that a new firm from West Germany was opening a plant in the area and urgently needed technically skilled workers. He applied and got a job there. The firm was the infamous FlowTex, which was later found to be fraudulent, mixed up in a large-scale financial scandal. After a year, the physically demanding construction work outside was starting to have a negative effect on Paul's health, and he decided to look for another job in the automotive industry again. He was then employed at a plant in Mosel in 1991, which, compared to his construction work, was paid at half the rate (down from ten to five Marks a year). This work was also below his qualification as a skilled worker (*Facharbeiter*), but it was stable and less harmful to his health than his previous employment. In 1997, with the expansion of the VW plant, he was finally transferred to quality control, which was what he was qualified to do. In the end, both Elke and Paul were satisfied with their careers and incomes. However, they described the *Wende* as a certain breaking point (*Knick*) in their biographies. They were also two of the few people among my interlocutors for whom unemployment mostly had structural reasons, as Elke phrased it: "Many people 'fell into a hole' back then. It's not that they didn't want to work or learn something new, it's just that there were no jobs. And that's also why many left for the old states, but I didn't want to leave".

Both Paul and Elke held rather Social Democratic views, which is one of the contributory factors to their views on unemployment. But apart from that, I believe that for them the *Wende* came at an extremely vulnerable stage in their lives (becoming adults, getting higher education, starting a family) and had a tremendous effect on their life trajectories. Their periods of unemployment, due to their timing and character, also became part of the collective experience of mass unemployment, which could also contribute to their views. It should be emphasized that the loser-winner narrative regarding unemployment went across the lines of class, and even beyond the personal experiences of unemployment. A manager who lost his job unfairly shortly after the *Wende*, a worker who managed to retain his employment, and an accountant who had to go back to school to be able to continue her career after the *Wende* – all adopted this narrative of "the survival of the fittest". Conversely, a couple of skilled workers who went through the experiences of unemployment during the *Wende* and then ended up with careers they wanted did not blame the unemployed for their misfortunes. Perhaps, above all, it was the unwillingness to be stigmatized as a 'lumpenproletariat' or 'losers in the transition' that made some white-collar employees, as well as blue-collar workers, side together in condemning those who 'failed to adapt' to the new economic and political realities.

Unemployment and neoliberalisation in eastern Germany

Eastern Germany is often singled out among other post-socialist states for presumably adopting a more 'humane' version of capitalism – the West German social-market economy. However, such perspectives can miss the ways in which neoliberalism crept into German social and economic life through German reunification in the 1990s (Gook 2018: 44), as well as through the neoliberal reforms of the labour market in 2003-2005, which I will discuss in this section. Instead of adopting the robust industrial relations agreements that existed in the West, the east German labour market became a testing ground for more precarious production regimes (Buck and Hönke 2013). With the rebuilding of its economy and its weaker unions, eastern Germany was seen as a perfect laboratory and a *tabula rasa* for trying out new work practices.[79] From the negative discrimination of eastern Germans as lazy, passive and as '*Jammerossis*',[80] the discourse shifted towards constructing East Germans as perfect neoliberal subjects: flexible, innovative and adaptable actors in the labour market, and role models for smug, stagnant and high-maintenance western workers

[79] For more on the new modes of production, such as lean production, see Chapter 5.

[80] A pejorative term which can be translated as 'whinging easterners'.

(Buck and Hönke 2013). As the narrative goes, the experience of transformation enabled east Germans to develop the competence to deal with abrupt changes (*Umbruchkompetenz*). The willingness of east Germans to put up with longer working hours, worse working conditions, lower wages and long commutes earned them a reputation as '*Ostdeutsche Arbeitsspartaner'* ('Spartans of work') (Behr 2000).

Economic growth and investments in eastern Germany increased rapidly after reunification, as many investors came there first and foremost to enjoy the benefits of its labor market, with its skilled workers ready to work for much less money than in the west. Businesses also came looking for workers to take with them to work in the 'old states' (*alte Bundesländer)*. Those who went complained that their western colleagues often showed their hostility towards them because they felt that this cheap labor from the east would undermine their position on the labor market. As one of my informants, who commuted to work in Baden-Württemberg shortly after the *Wende*, remembered, "*We were then third-class citizens, not even second-class. First were the Wessis, then the Turks, and then us*". In the east, they often could not find a job, while in the west they experienced both the disruption of their family life (due to long commutes or moving away from the family) and hostility from the locals. Some other car industry workers I have met had to commute to Bavaria two days a week, which means three hours of driving both ways. Under these conditions, many stayed in the west, but many returned, as jobs slowly reappeared in the east, even though the salaries were still much lower.

The next crisis after the *Wende* was caused by the neoliberal reforms of Agenda 2010, connected with one of the most substantial cuts to the social security system in German history. Agenda 2010 was launched in 2003 by Chancellor Schröder, who was extremely committed to the reform, which was part of the Lisbon strategy – a plan for making EU states' economies more competitive and knowledge-based, as well as providing better jobs. Agenda 2010's measures caused the substantial withdrawal of the state from the social security system, which was received mostly negatively not only by the population but also by the members of Schröder's own party – the Social Democratic SPD. The reform included such neoliberal measures as the erosion of job security and a reduction in the employer's social costs at the expense of the employees. "We will reduce the state's benefits, promote

individual responsibility and request a greater personal contribution from each individual"[81] is how Schröder himself described the reform.

The most contested part of Agenda 2010 were the regulations concerning unemployment and unemployment benefits, otherwise known as the Hartz IV reforms, from Peter Hartz, a former VW board member, who led the commission that devised the reform. The adoption of Hartz IV meant that the benefits of the long-term unemployed would be equated with social benefits, would be significantly decreased and would amount to around 300 euros. Hartz IV was seen as a betrayal of its voters by the SPD, and support for the party dramatically declined. As one of my informants, 49-year-old trade unionist Stefan, told me: "*They lost people's trust. I was an SPD voter, now I am not, now I vote for the Left, but many others have no idea who to vote for now. Once I came to work and asked my colleague who he voted for. And he said FDP,*[82] *FDP?! Can you imagine a shop floor worker who votes for the FDP?! That is how confused people are*".

In 2004, the reform sparked protests against *Sozialabbau* (social cuts) all over Germany. The protests were carried out on Mondays and acquired the name of *Montagsdemos*, which was criticized by the government for being an inappropriate analogy with the Monday demonstrations during the Peaceful Revolution. The demonstrations were initially organized by the MLPD party (*Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands*) but later dropped their connection with any political party and were simply directed against Hartz IV. The east was once again in the vanguard of the protests, which was often discussed in the media as the longing of eastern Germans for a more paternalistic state. The negative discourse around the Hartz IV protests was aimed at constructing eastern Germans as lacking in initiative and independence. In contrast, many of my interlocutors in Zwickau thought that the eastern Germans, or sometimes more specifically the Saxons, were politically more active and more sensitive to undesirable changes. Another explanation for this stronger response from the east is, of course, a much higher unemployment rate there (18.4% compared to 8.5% in the West in 2004),[83] which meant that the population in the east was disproportionately affected by the reform.

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[81] „Wir werden Leistungen des Staates kürzen, Eigenverantwortung fördern und mehr Eigenleistung von jedem Einzelnen abfordern müssen." (From Deutscher Bundestag Sitzung 14.03.2003: Plenarprotokoll 15/32. Stenografischer Bericht).

[82] FDP (Freie Demokraten) – the liberal party, standing in the middle to mid-right of the political spectrum. In the latest Landtag elections in Saxony in 2019 the party failed to achieve the threshold of 5%.

[83] Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA): Arbeitslosigkeit im Zeitverlauf 02/2014.

According to some formal criteria, the results of Agenda 2010 are considered a success because unemployment in Germany did gradually fall from 10.5% to an average of 5% in 2019, and the economy has been steadily growing since then, although causality is not transparent in this case. The unemployment rate mostly went down in the east, which could 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 also led to stronger stigmatization of the unemployed in the public discourse and caused a boom in temporary employment (*Leiharbeitsfirmen*). People preferred temporary employment even with poor working conditions to becoming a Hartz IV recipient, which was both morally and financially disastrous.

According to the study ‘Fear in the social state: background and consequences’ (Betzelt, Bode 2017), the liberalisation of the social security system is to blame for today’s social crisis and political polarization in Germany. The authors argue that the pullback of the welfare state and the subsequent ‘re-commodification’ of employment have led to feelings of fear and insecurity among the population. This 'spiral of fear' has resulted in social and political tensions and the success of the extreme right. Stigmatization and the delegitimization of unemployment has also resulted in a more precarious situation among the workers: precarious workers accept their positions just so as not to become a ‘Hartzer’, and the regular workforce is ready to subject itself to more flexible conditions and more intense exploitation to secure their employment in the future. My ethnographic data also support this thesis. Bernd, a 51-year-old Volkswagen shopfloor worker, expressed this connection very clearly, while also taking pride in his readiness to be more flexible than others:

> “It doesn’t matter what kind of luxury you have, at some point you are full and you want more. When you lose a relationship with reality… But when I look at someone who works in a small firm, all that he has to do for half of the money I get here! Then I say it doesn’t matter to me if I have to work a bit faster, or if I have to do a bit more. But there are people who… As I said, I have never been unemployed, but there are people who came to us from unemployment in 1997, in my team…And five years later they forgot how it was [to be unemployed]!”

In my field-site in Zwickau, the protests against Hartz IV were initially quite strong. They started in August 2004 and during some of the protests over 4000[84] people gathered on the main square. The protests continue even after fifteen years, as every Monday at 5 pm the local MLPD leader stands in front of the shopping mall Arcaden in the old town of Zwickau with about seven to ten other people. When I first encountered the protesters, they were holding a poster saying 'Wir wollen Arbeit, von der wir leben können! Keine Almosen! Weg mit Hartz IV – das Volk sind wir!'[85] Later their leader, a history professor who migrated from West Germany, told me that they started the demonstrations together with the trade unions. However, the trade union almost immediately separated itself from MLPD, and since then there were two separate Monday demonstrations in Zwickau. In November 2004 the trade unions stopped the demonstrations under some pressure from SPD. The MLPD demonstrations continued with their few but persistent protestors. At the time of my fieldwork in 2018-2019, I witnessed a few of their demonstrations in town and asked some of my informants what they thought about them. The reaction was mostly indifferent or sarcastic, as they made fun of the protesters and their leader. This shift from a mainstream protest to a marginal group is representative of greater patterns in eastern Germany, left-leaning protest being undermined and pushed to the margins by the neoliberal hegemony.

In March 2019 I attended a 'conversation at the kitchen table' (*Küchentischgespräch*) in Zwickau organised by SPD, the party which was primarily responsible for Hartz IV, as part of a campaign for the Landtag elections. The title of this event was 'What comes after Hartz IV?', and the party's clear suggestion was '*Bürgergeld'*, or basic income. The format of this discussion allowed the public to sit at the 'kitchen table' together with the politicians and ask them questions. Although it turned out to be a series of politicians' monologues more 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 shame

[84] 'Proteste verlieren an Kraft - Schröder sucht Verbündete'. *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, September 6, 2004. (accessed 10.10.2020).https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/hartz-iv-proteste-verlieren-an-kraft-schroeder-sucht-verbuendete-1176540.html

[85] "We want work, from which we can make a living! Not charity! Away with Hartz IV – we are the people!"

that she was subjected to. ‘We are not all lazy or incapable. There is a story behind every one of us’, she said with her voice shaking.

Since its peak in 2005 (20.6%)[86], the unemployment rate in eastern Germany has been steadily declining, generally repeating the patterns in the west. As of October 2019, the unemployment rate in eastern Germany was 6.1%, compared to 4.6% in the west. Saxony is in the very middle of all German states, with 5.1% unemployed. Therefore, unemployment is not framed by the media as a central problem anymore in Saxony. On the contrary, the state of Saxony is on the verge of experiencing an extreme shortage of skilled labor. According to IHK-Fachkräftemonitor,[87] the Saxon economy will be short of 82,000 qualified workers by 2025.

The shortage of labor has been widely used in political discussions in Saxony in the last few years. It has also been used as a tool to promote neoliberal views on both the East-West divide and migration. Before the Landtag elections of 2019, the current leader of the liberal FDP, Christian Lindner, held a speech on one of Zwickau’s old town squares, where he emphasized the need for migration to cover for the rising shortage of workers. He was particularly in favor of accepting educated people from ‘Belarus or Bangladesh’, whereas unskilled refugees whose lives were not in danger should be sent back. Considering the party’s low level of support in Saxony, the turnout for his speech was quite impressive, probably first and foremost due to his reputation as a spectacular speaker. The reaction to his speech was quite mixed, but his take on migration and the labor shortage managed to earn him some enthusiastic applause from the audience.

The head of an employment agency in Zwickau cited the declining number of unemployed ‘clients’ as one of the reasons for moving into another, more compact building. However, the current and predicted future shortage of workers is not only caused by the booming industry, but also by the migration of educated professionals to the west and the ageing population. It can also be explained by the low quality of the jobs on the market, with their low salaries and precarious status. Moreover, the shortage is most urgent in such

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[86] Arbeitslosenquote in Deutschland nach Bundesländern. Bundesagentur für Arbeit. In *Statista*. (accessed 01.10.2019). https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/36651/umfrage/arbeitslosenquote-in-deutschland-nach-bundeslaendern/

[87] IHK-Fachkräftemonitor: 2025 fehlen 82.000 qualifizierte Arbeitskräfte in Sachsen. Industrie- und Handelskammer zu Leipzig, April 25, 2019 (accessed 10.10.2020). https://www.leipzig.ihk.de/ihre-ihk/aktuelles/archiv/details/artikel/ihk-fachkraeftemonitor-2025-fehlen-82000-qualifizierte-arbeitskraefte-in-sachsen-3597/

specific branches as health-care and care for the elderly. In other branches, it is mostly highly educated engineers who are needed. Another reason for the shortage of labor is that companies in the east often represent pure manufacturing plants (*verlängerte Werkbänke*) whose research and management departments are in the west. Industrial labor, as described by those of my informants who are themselves industrial workers, is difficult, monotonous and physically demanding, not to mention the negative sides of shift work as such. One of the supplier industry's companies I visited was especially glad that the temporary employment agency had assigned them a few refugee workers, despite the conflicts that it caused within the existing team. He complained that they could hardly find the workers locally to do this heavy work. '*Young people don't want to work at on the conveyor belt*', said one of the shift managers as he showed me around. Nevertheless, the labor shortage is used as a convenient argument to frame unemployment in Saxony as an individual, rather than a structural problem.

Conclusion

Coming back to my ethnographic data, Mr Baumann's opinions on unemployment seemed to me extremely disconnected from his own life story, in relating which he was torn between the feelings of shame and pride. Knowing Mr Baumann's story, it is hard to call him a 'winner' in the transition, even though he takes pride in making the best out of this situation. As he himself admits, despite his entrepreneurial qualities and willingness to work hard, he was unemployed too early before his retirement. However, desperately resists being put in one box with those 'losers in the transition' who failed to adapt to the new system. He makes sure that he separates himself from them as he describes his independence, individualism and diligence. "*I did everything on my own. I felt like a businessman*", he said when he described his work at the car dealership.

As previous research in the anthropology of post-socialism shows (Bartha 2014; Dunn 2004; Dale 2006), lived experiences of socialism provide legitimate grounds for the people to question and contest the viability of modern capitalism. In this chapter, I have tried to explore the opposite process – the prevalence of the neoliberal hegemony, which is hardly contested even by those who might be expected to be more critical of it. Following Kalb (2014: 198), I look at neoliberalism "not as a culture that produces a particular personhood but as a hegemony that exerts specific pressures and sets certain limits on the possible paths of personal becoming". By looking at the moral reasoning regarding unemployment without focusing solely on the leftist counter-movements, I have attempted to shed light on why

people do or do not mobilize against the forces of the market (Palomera and Vetta 2016: 426). In agreement with this view, in this chapter I have discussed the processes that contributed to the establishment of a neoliberal hegemonic narrative of unemployment.

Chapter 4: '*Automobilbauer*' in Zwickau: from workers' state to 'middle class' and 'second class'

The study of industrial workers is often associated with debates over the significance of class analysis for understanding social life (Kasmir 2018: 2). During my fieldwork in Zwickau, despite my focus on an industry dominated by skilled blue-collar labour, I would rarely hear the term 'class' from my informants. Although they would use other words from the class-related vocabulary, such as 'exploitation', and often emphasized the intensification of labour under capitalism, they would hesitate to identify with the working class, or even talk about social classes as such. If anyone did, however, identify himself or others through work, it would rather be more specific: *Leiharbeiter* (casual worker), *Automobilbauer* (car maker), *VW-ler* (Volkswagen worker) or *Sachsenringer* (Sachsenring worker).

The vocabulary of class, according to Thompson (1980), appears with and after the struggle itself. In other words, when one can think of oneself in terms of class, it is a sign of a 'class for itself' developing, i.e. of class consciousness emerging at a certain stage in a struggle. In line with Kesküla (2015: 96), I see class "not as a social category but rather as a process of constructing social relations through active practice over time, formed as a result of common experiences" (or also the lack thereof). Therefore, class can be seen in a wider sense than the labelling of social groups, that is, rather as experiences of classness, which might not always be framed in class terms by people on the ground. The lack of a vocabulary of class in this sense rather reflects processes that obscure class, rather than the lack of significance of class in everyday life. Adopting a wider notion of classness also means moving beyond the binaries of manual/non-manual, blue-collar/white-collar, or industrial/service (Stenning 2005: 993).

The criteria of whether one belongs to a certain class or not have been eroded with the decline of Fordist labour and the divergence between ownership and control (Carrier 2015; Friedman 2015). The manager and the owner are rarely the same person or group of people. Moreover, the owner of the means of production might be physically on the other side of the world. The real beneficiaries of growing inequality and class polarization are not necessarily the owners of the means of production but the owners of financial capital (Friedman 2015: 194). Contributing to the disappearance of class from the agenda is also the proclaimed 'end of work' (Rifkin 1995), or the decline of Fordist labour. While the word 'class' was mostly associated with the Fordist working class, its decline was often seen as the end of class itself (Kalb 2015: 3). Within the German social sciences, the turn to

investigating lifestyles, milieus, and 'horizontal inequalities' has also been very pronounced since the 1980s (Geißler 2014), when the theory of the dissolution of classes (*Auflösungsthese*) and extreme individualisation became popular as analytical tools that have dominated social research until recently.

Another challenge to the perspective of class is the so-called embourgeoisement thesis, according to which the growing affluence of workers is 'conducive to *embourgeoisement* which itself leads to political conservatism, or at any rate to political apathy, within the working class' (Goldthorpe et al. 1967: 13). In other words, the affluent worker abandons 'working-class concerns', such as stopping exploitation and alienation in production. Although challenged by Goldthorpe et al. (1967), the thesis of the embourgeoised 'affluent worker' has found recognition even among some organic intellectuals 'on the ground'. As Narotzky argues (2015: 58) in her study of Spanish trade unionists, the desire of some workers to be associated with the middle class has driven a wedge between different generations of workers, as the 'old-school' trade unionists condemn the new 'middle-class workers', calling them '*desclasados*' (de-classed). Narotzky (2015: 58) also emphasises the role of the increasing tendency for self-identification through consumption (often made possible through credit and debt), rather than ones' role in production, in the rise of workers' into the middle classes. It is worth noting, however, that the opposite processes are also taking place, in which more and more technical engineers are becoming increasingly aware of their proletarianized status (Narotzky 2015: 60). As Kalb argues (2021: 322-23), although many workers and technical managers prefer to see themselves as middle class, they too are feeling "the inescapable and often degrading force of the law of value in many aspects of their lives".

As has been argued by Stenning (2005: 990), the place of the post-socialist working class can be explained by a combination of wider social and economic shifts, mentioned above, and the particular expression of these trends in a post-socialist context. The particularity of the eastern German case is related to some of the specifics of the German reunification process. In his recent book *Lütten Klein: Leben in der ostdeutschen Transformationsgesellschaft,* Steffen Mau (2019) points out these particularities concerning the development of a post-socialist social structure. Like my informants in Zwickau, his interlocutors in Rostock were not likely to use class- or strata-based self-categorisations spontaneously. In everyday contexts, they would rather describe themselves as 'normal people', as opposed to 'those up there', or the elites. When directly asked, however, they

would also use the term *Mittelschicht*, i.e. 'middle class', or more literally 'middle strata', to describe their class position.

The trend towards this growing 'middle-classness' represents a significant change in the subjective identification of eastern Germans within the past thirty years. According to data gathered in 1991, 3% of East Germans considered themselves as belonging to the 'underclass', 57% to the working class, 37% to the middle class, and only 2% to the upper class.[88] When the same question of class belonging was posed to them in 2016, the answers were rather different, with the most evident changes within the middle and the working classes: 35% answered that they belonged to the working class and 54% to the middle class. With these changes, eastern Germany came closer to the social structure of western Germany, in which the middle class dominate and which has remained almost the same for the past thirty years. Mau (2019: 169) describes this rise of middle-classness and wealth gains (*Wohlstandzugewinnen*), combined with the general fall within the hierarchy of social positions of East Germans (*Unterschichtung*), as a particularity of German-German unification. This process, however, should not be reduced to subjective feelings of deprivation caused by the shift of the reference group.

By the time of reunification, western Germany had become dominated by white-collar employees, and for that reason is often referred to in the literature as an *Angestelltengesellschaft* (society of (white-collar) employees) whereas the former GDR could be characterised as a skilled-workers society or *Facharbeitergesellschaft*.[89] Since then, the number of skilled workers in the east has shrunk, and the difference is no longer as significant. This pattern reflects the general trend of convergence of the social structures of east and west throughout the past thirty years. However, this trend has mostly been going solely in the direction of east to west. Mau (2019: 166) compares German unification to an unequal marriage, in which one partner must adjust entirely to the other partner, whereas the 'wealthy' partner does not need to change anything. The positive developments in the east,

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[88] Bünning, M. (2018). *Sozialstruktur und soziale Lagen. Auszug aus dem Datenreport 2018.* (pp. 255–289). Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). (accessed 22.02.2022) https://www.destatis.de/DE/Service/Statistik-Campus/Datenreport/Downloads/datenreport-2018-kap-7.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

[89] Bünning, M. (2018). *Sozialstruktur und soziale Lagen. Auszug aus dem Datenreport 2018.* (p. 257). Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). (accessed 22.02.2022) https://www.destatis.de/DE/Service/Statistik-Campus/Datenreport/Downloads/datenreport-2018-kap-7.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

such as greater equality of opportunity (lower correlation between one's class position and the position of one's parents), have also decreased as they approached downward trends in the west.[90]

Many East Germans also entered the newly unified society as have-nots, as capital ownership was significantly lower in the east than in the west, and the differences between them persist.[91] As Mau (2019: 175) puts it, 'The East Germans were supposed to become participants (*Teilnehmer*) in the market, not partners/shareholders (*Teilhaber*)'. This was also reflected in many conversations with my interlocutors in Zwickau. Many would complain, for example, that whereas the 'Wessis' could buy some East German enterprises for the symbolic amount of one German Mark, the locals, who had sometimes even been involved in managing these enterprises formerly, experienced major problems in trying to acquire them. Thomas, a temporary worker in the automotive industry, whose experiences I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, described the shift from workers to consumers with the following insightful comment:

> "In the new states (well, here in Saxony maybe a bit better), there are not so many big employers, and the more you move towards the coast, the fewer big employers you will find. But at the same time, there are more and more shopping malls, car dealerships. You can buy yourself everything, but to have more companies here – rather not."

The data[92] show, that whereas in the west the correlation between social background and social class position fell between 1976 and 2016, in the east it has been growing steadily since reunification. Moreover, as Mau (2019: 174) observed, easterners have been hit by the general petrification of the social structure in Germany: "The East Germans arrived in the Federal Republic, when the elevator or the escalator, which went upwards, has just stalled". This might have been one of the reasons why East Germans across all social classes see their

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[90]Ibid., p. 269.

[91] For example, real-estate ownership in the east has grown from 25 to 40 per cent since the *Wende*, but the number is still much lower than in the western states, where the ownership rate reaches up to 60 per cent. (Immobilien machen reich - vor allem im Westen. *Der Spiegel*, September 29, 2020 (accessed 22.02.2022). https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/immobilien-und-vermoegen-in-ost-und-west-wo-deutschland-noch-geteilt-ist-a-64bd85cc-ffe0-45bc-82af-e9e699abd34b)

[92] Bünning, M. (2018). *Sozialstruktur und soziale Lagen. Auszug aus dem Datenreport 2018.* (p. 267). Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). (accessed 22.02.2022) https://www.destatis.de/DE/Service/Statistik-Campus/Datenreport/Downloads/datenreport-2018-kap-7.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

living standards as fair far less frequently than westerners. They also tend to see their positions in the social hierarchy as much lower and express pessimistic views of the future more often than people in the West.[93]

I did not ask my interlocutors in Zwickau about their class identity directly on purpose, as I did not want to suggest they had one in the first place. But with some workers I got close to, I did ask if they could identify with any type of class. My interlocutors would often take a moment to think about it and then answered that the middle class was probably the best description of their position in society and their lifestyle. On rare occasions they would use the word '*Klasse*' (class) in the sense of social hierarchy, using, for example, the phrase '*second-class citizens*' to describe themselves. Mostly, they would refer to East Germans having an inferior position compared from the West.

Sometimes the phrase 'second-class' (*Menschen zweiter Klasse*) would be used to describe ones' position on the job market. As one precarious worker told me once, some colleagues treated casual workers as "second-class citizens who have no rights". In this sense, the word 'class' describes rather a position in the social hierarchy than a social class in Marxian understanding. In this chapter, I will focus more on this entanglement of one's class position and lived experiences, which reproduces what Mau has called the 'country of the little people' (Mau 2019: 174) in the former East Germany, which actively separates itself from the elite-dominated discourse. Anthropology is well-equipped for studying this intertwinement, as it investigates the particular ways in which class is *lived* and in which it is gendered, ethnicized, or presents itself in the forms of particular national realities. (Crehan 2002: 195). In the following sections, I will explore the way class was lived among the automotive workers in Zwickau before and after the *Wende*, as well as the changing lines of division and fragmentation within the working class.

Class and *Automobilbauer* before the *Wende*

As argued by Stenning (2005: 993) the accounts of the socialist and post-socialist working class often concentrate on the phrase 'working class' connoting a problematic 'culture of poverty', a condition in need of alleviation. Contrary to this approach, in this section, I will talk about the social spaces in which the working-class community of the automotive workers in Zwickau was cultivated before the collapse of socialism through common experiences and social relations. Sachsenring plant, with its three large workshops,

[93] Ibid. (p.260)

was located in Zwickau's suburb of Pölbitz, easily accessible by public transport and surrounded by four- to five-story houses, pubs, a kindergarten, a policlinic and a large workers' dormitory. To emphasize how 'embedded' the factory was within the surrounding area, one of the former Sachsenring workers told me, as we strolled around Pölbitz, that the Trabants' steel skeletons were transported in open trucks from one part of the factory to another (*Werke*) through the streets of Pölbitz and were a usual sight for the locals to see. This formed quite a contrast with the modern VW factory, which was surrounded by thick walls. A little more to the north of Pölbitz and further away from the city centre lies the quiet suburban neighbourhood of Weißenborn, with its one- or two-family houses on to three floors, neat backyards and front lawns. The western side of the area is occupied by a large forest and a park. This large green area nearby and the nice houses make Weißenborn a desirable place to live in, despite the proximity of an industrial area.

Despite the neighbourhood's troubled recent history,[94] it leaves an impression of a clean and quiet middle-class settlement. Its connection with car production is nonetheless often talked about. According to some locals, the vision of the neighborhood as a pleasant place to live for the Horch-car factory workers and their families was introduced by the Horch works council chairman and a Social Democrat politician, Arno Seidel. In the GDR period, some of the Sachsenring managers and engineers used to live in the neighborhood, but some regular workers also lived in the semi-detached houses in the area. However, most of the workers and engineers lived in *Plattenbauten* in the Neuplanitz or Eckersbach areas and still commuted to the factory from other parts of town or from out of town by tram or bus. Public transport was much praised by my informants, especially when they compared it to its present-day state.

While waiting for the bus after a shift, some Sachsenring workers would hang out with colleagues over beer. One of the meeting spots was a restaurant inside the clubhouse, which had the nickname '*Weltniveau*' ('world-class'), presumably an ironic play on the superlatives that were typical of GDR propaganda (Friedreich 2008: 332). The Sachsenring clubhouse is still standing, mostly being used by various clubs and dance schools. Apart from a beer after the shift, there were more formally organised gatherings, such as the brigade night (*Brigadeabend*), which was enjoyed and hardly ever missed by the workers,

[94] From 2008 to 2011 the NSU (National Socialist Underground) trio used to live on the first floor of a house at Frühlingstraße 26 in Weißenborn.

not least because it was paid for from the enterprise's funds, usually including a meal, a drink and often a musical band for entertainment.

The vertical relationships at the enterprise also included a lot of personal elements. The position of foreman was often regarded by my informants as rather difficult at Sachsenring, as they were 'pressured both from up and down' and 'hardly received any respect from the workers'. As one of the former Sachsenring engineers, Rolf, described it, "the engineers and technical staff were the beggars in relation to the workers, they had to beg to get something done". Some of the young engineers and office workers were paid less money than a shop-floor worker. Coming from a family of workers, Rolf told me that this was rather frustrating for him, that he would get less money, even though he had had to study for fiveyears: "*And suddenly you weren't treated as a workers' child [Arbeiterkind] anymore, suddenly you were 'intelligentsia'. This was so contradictory!*".

Remuneration varied depending on the worker's qualification. Jens, a former Sachsenring shop-floor worker, told me his salary was comparatively high, especially because he was a 'jumper' (*Springer*), which means that he had multiple qualifications and skills and was able to 'jump in' and work at various stages of production. His qualifications were appreciated and rewarded accordingly. Here is how he described how he was asked to 'jump in' to work at a particular working station:

> "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."

The way Jens was asked to perform some specific tasks rather than just being assigned to them reflects the position of some middle managers at Sachsenring. Due to the lack of any ability to enforce sanctions, they often had to rely on other sources of authority (Löden 2003: 213). One such source was proximity to production. The former Sachsenring managers I talked to took a lot of pride in their ability to work on the shopfloor and in the fact that they would often 'go down' to the production floor to talk to the workers and make sure they were satisfied with everything. Most of them also had practical education as welders, locksmiths, etc. and could also demonstrate their legitimacy through their practical skills. Many of the former engineers and middle managers also had the experience of working directly on the shop floor, as they were 'delegated' for further study after receiving

vocational training and working on the assembly line first. Some former white-collar managers would also use their practical skills to explain the difference between their management style and the 'new' managers in Volkswagen, who, according to them, had no idea what practical (manual) labour was like. The workers also echoed this attitude, saying they felt as if the younger managers at VW lacked a practical understanding of the processes on the conveyor belt and therefore lacked legitimacy as leaders.

Rolf, who was a Sachsenring engineer and after the *Wende* found a middle-management position with an automotive supplier, also described to me the change in management style and said that it was difficult for him to adjust to the new hierarchies: "*The Wessis had very different views on what it means to be a boss and what a boss should look like. I couldn't go to work like before, I had to wear a tie now to work*". In terms of the divisions among the workers and between the workers, management and engineers, one of the former Sachsenring engineers contrasted the management style in Sachsenring with that in the Wartburg plant in Eisenach, where he was delegated to work for several months. He told me that in Eisenach the workers were more disciplined and the hierarchies were stronger, whereas in Sachsenring they "*melted together*". He saw the reason for this in the fact that the Eisenach plant was holding on to BMW's former capitalist working culture, whereas in Sachsenring this was not the case because the old divisions had been phased out with the merger of the Audi and Horch plants in 1958. However, he also admitted that the older Horch workers were still more arrogant, as working at Horch was considered more prestigious.

Despite a degree of collegiality, which workers, engineers and middle managers mentioned in our conversations, the vertical relationships in the Sachsenring were burdened with a lack of political freedom and the ideologization of the workplace. Uwe, a 57-year-old worker who worked most of his life in car-body construction, first in Sachsenring and then in Volkswagen, felt that he was treated unfairly back then:

> "Every year there was a so-called end-of-year bonus to motivate working people in the GDR. To get the full bonus you had to be in the party, the FDJ,[95] in the GST,[96] the German-Russian

[95] Freie Deutsche Jugend – Free German Youth – a youth organisation under the wing of the Socialist Party.

[96] Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik – 'Sport and Technology Association' – one the mass organisations in the GDR.

> friendship [organization] and so on. […] On our list for the bonus, at the very top stood the party members (*die Genossen*), then the rest of the people, then there was a line. And I was always one of the first names under the line. I always did the extra shifts (*Sonderschichten*), I did everything I could. But since I wasn't in the party and wasn't politically involved, there was no bonus for me."

Later in our conversation, Uwe also told me how happy he was about the change of the political system, as well as about reunification, precisely because of the political freedom they provided. He did not hide his contempt for some of the former managers and party activists, or, as he called them, "*die Bonzen"* (fat cats). Jens also gave me an example of the abuse of power by the *Genossen* (comrades), not in Sachsenring but in a textile enterprise in Zwickau. One of its directors had built a house by stealing factory resources and using the enterprise's transporters: "*the small worker would never even come close to all these things [that were stolen]*".

In our conversations, Uwe would often repeat that he was happy he could express his opinion openly now, in contrast to his GDR past. However, he also appreciated the fact that the management at Sachsenring showed a degree of solidarity, even though this was very limited by 'the rules of the game'. The workers could avoid engaging in politics and becoming members of various organisations, but had to accept the consequences in form of a lack of material bonuses and career opportunities. One could have problems even becoming a *Meister* (foreman) without joining the party:

> "If you didn't stand there the whole day complaining about the system and you did your job well, but you weren't in the German-Soviet friendship, or GST, or FDJ…But if you did your job well, they [the management] accepted that. Of course, those who were always loud against the system, they got problems. Because there were 'rubber ears' ['*Gummiohren*'] everywhere, the Stasi." (Uwe, 57)

Regarding the division between white-collar and blue-collar workers, as one former accountant remembered, most of the social-wage benefits, such as holiday spots, were also distributed among the blue-collar workers first. The same accountant remembered that the contacts between her department and the production workers were rather rare. The celebrations, such as on 8th March, often took the whole week, since the factory was so large and there were not enough spaces for everybody to celebrate simultaneously. Therefore, at these celebrations too, the office employees and the workers rarely had contact with one another.

However, as we discussed the issue further, she recalled that every employee from her department had to go to production for at least fourteen days in a year to provide what she called '*sozialistische hilfe*' ('socialist help'):

> "So you appreciated then what kind of hard work it was. For example, I was producing seats. I had to take the seat frame and put the foam material on it and attach it…And you got an insight too into how monotonous their work often was on the conveyor belt, what they had to do, and you also understood it better when they complained".

Apart from this measure, which was also called '*Angestellte in die Produktion'* [(white-collar) employees in production], the opposite processes also took place sometimes. For example, at times, when the salary had to be counted and packed in the envelopes (as employees were paid in cash), the workers would come up to the offices to help the accountants do this more quickly, which also contributed to transparency over the individual workers' salaries.

Workplace relations were also strengthened and extended due to constant shortages of consumer goods. As one of the former Sachsenring white-collar employees told me: "*Today it's the vital things, for which you need the connections (Beziehung), to find work, for example. In the GDR times, it wasn't the vital things for which you needed connections, but the things that made life sweeter*". As an example of such relations in the workplace, two former Sachsenring workers told me about the practice of enlarging the Trabi's fuel tank. The capacity of an original Trabant 601 tank was only 26 litres, whereas the similar model of its Western German 'brother', the VW Beetle, was around 40 litres. It does not come as a surprise that many car owners tried to enlarge their fuel tanks. For that, one needed to buy a tank from the factory's *Sonderverkauf* (special sales), or as some called it *Betriebseigener Verkauf* (in-house sales), or find a way to 'get it' from the person in charge. Some tanks were discarded from production because of their poor quality, for example, if a tank had a dent. The tank was then cut into four parts, one of which was welded together with the original Trabant tank, giving another two to three litres tank capacity. The other three parts of the damaged tank could be exchanged for various goods, such as spices, pickles or sausages. My interlocutors called this exchange '*Tauschgeschäft*' (barter) and were convinced that it played an important role in fostering relationships between co-workers, even though it sometimes looked rather instrumental.

Once the tank had been successfully enlarged, the car owner needed a new petrol tap (*Benzinhahn*[97]), which they could only get from a colleague in the pre-assembly because of the constant shortage of spare parts for cars. The workers called this colleague by his nickname of *der 'Benzinhahn',* since he had worked on tank pre-assembly for many years, one aspect of which to attach the petrol tap (*Benzinhahn*). "*So we went to Benzinhahn. And we asked him, 'Do you have one today? Can you get us one*?', one of the two workers remembered: "*Benzinhahn we called him. I don't even know what the man's name was*".

This example also indicates that many eastern Germans saw their Trabis as their own DIY projects and therefore made a lot of alterations and improvements on their own. Like the workers in Russia studied by Morris (2018), tinkering with one's car in the garage or outside was a way of performing an 'automobile'-related masculinity while simultaneously creating a certain sociality around cars. For example, Jens, the former Sachsenring shop-floor worker mentioned before in this chapter, was and still is a passionate fan of motorsport. It is through his motorsport buddies and their meetings that he knew got to know a lot about finding the right people to get the right car parts. Once he exchanged a car part for a beautiful mirror cabinet, and on other occasions too he used his privilege to acquire other scarce products. "*The lady at Konsum*[98] *had to put some extra salami for me in the bag behind the counter so that nobody in the queue would notice*", he told me proudly. He also told me that his son's teacher once asked him not to give his son tangerines and bananas at school because the other kids got jealous and told their parents about it: "*So I told my son, sorry, now you will eat your tangerines at home*". Beer was another popular exchange item. Jens's father, for example, worked in a brewery and was given some cartons of beer as part of his salary, which Jens used as a *Tauschobjekt* (exchange item). In exchange for beer, he could get, for example, car tires.

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[97] The *Benzinhahn* or petrol tap (petcock) is a car part which is used to control the flow of the fuel. It had an especially important function in Trabant cars, because they did not have a fuel pump and the fuel supply required gravity, for which the petrol tap was needed, as it had three positions – 'open', 'closed' and 'reserve'. The 'reserve' position let the driver use the last five liters of fuel to get to the gas station. This function was also extremely important for Trabant cars because most of them (except for some rare deLuxe models) did not have a functioning fuel gauge.

[98] Konsum was a cooperative retail chain in the GDR. The word *Konsum*, however, was sometimes used in East German slang to describe any grocery store of similar type, even those that did not belong to the cooperative.

This kind of interdependence was not only present horizontally but also vertically, having at times a kind of equalizing effect since higher-level employees were not immune from shortages either. For example, one worker, Andreas, mentioned that his bosses would also approach him if they needed a certain consumer good, especially because his mother used to work in Konsum and had access to some important products, such as laundry soap. In return, when he was about to get married, his boss and a party member asked him how much beer he needed. Andreas wanted to have ten boxes of Sternquell, a beer he considered relatively good, compared to the local "sewage water", called Mauritius. The same week on Friday evening his boss came in his Trabant Kombi and brought him the ten boxes of Sternquell. "*I never asked him where he had it from, it was just there*", Andreas remembered. The workplace and class divisions between workers and engineers, blue-collar and white-collar workers, as well as between the workers and middle managers at Sachsenring seem to be less sharp in the eyes of their former employees due to the various practices I have mentioned above, both within and outside of the factory. Nevertheless, as some examples showed, the higher *nomenklatura* still enjoyed certain privileges, which marked the vertical relationships in the factory.

'Aristocracy and precariat': three working biographies

To shed light on the various trajectories of automotive industry workers' working lives in Zwickau after the *Wende*, I will present short biographies of three my informants: Frank, Dieter and Thomas. Although their stories are rather common, these three characters are not ethnographic composites. However, some minor details have been changed in my descriptions in order to ensure their anonymity. Two of them are working at a Volkswagen plant in Mosel, one an assembly line worker with limited shop-floor management tasks, the other an engineer. Both working biographies can be seen rather as success stories because of their smooth transition into the market economy. They both illustrate the dream of 'seamless transition' (*nahtlose Übergang*), associated with the early investment of Volkswagen near to Zwickau. In contrast, the third working biography of Thomas, a skilled shop-floor worker, tells a story of multiple interruptions and changes in employment.

Frank: white-collar engineer

I met both Frank (59) and Dieter (51) at a hobby club (*Verein*) that we all attended. They did not know each other before joining this club, although they both worked at Volkswagen. Frank grew up in a small village in the Erzgebirge and received vocational

training with a high school diploma (*Beruf mit Abitur*).[99] He received technical education as a mechanic with a specialisation in steel construction. After one and a half years in the army, he worked as a mechanic near his home village with a Sachsenring supplier, where he acquired his first taste of working in the car industry and, like most other former Sachsenring white-collar employees, got some experience of working on the shop-floor.

After a few months he decided to move to Zwickau to study at an engineering school (*Ingenieur-Hochschule*). Zwickau was not his first choice, but another school had rejected him because of what he assumed was a bureaucratic mistake. He then met his wife and therefore wanted to stay in Zwickau and looked for a job in a large enterprise. Due to his interest in cars, as well as a suitable job opening, he soon started working in the office at Sachsenring as an engineer. When I asked him if he had any alternatives to the job at Sachsenring, he answered: "*For sure there were, there was no unemployment. But I haven't tried anything else. These days it's all a bit different – now you have to look for a job and apply. I know from my own family how many applications you need to send before something works out*". His memories of life and work in the GDR were mostly positive, although he also referred to the shortages in production: "*It was difficult, you had to improvise a lot*".

Together with his wife and later his child, he rented a flat in Neuplanitz, a newly built neighbourhood of prefabricated block buildings, that is, of socialist *Plattenbauten*. By 2018 a lot of the buildings in this neighbourhood had been demolished. Some of his colleagues lived nearby, but it was rather mixed up, and most of his direct neighbours were not his colleagues. Although the place where he lives now is a definite upgrade from the flat in Neuplanitz, he did not look down on his former dwelling at all. On the contrary, he emphasised that for that time his flat was a 'luxury': "*You had everything there – water, heating…The rent was really cheap – not more than 100 marks, all included. But the problem was to get the flat. You had to have connections. I knew somebody, so it worked out for me*". On top of other perks, there was also a direct public transport connection from Neuplanitz almost right to Sachsenring's factory gates.

According to Frank, he was quite satisfied with his living situation, he earned enough and spent his holidays in Bulgaria or Hungary on Lake Balaton. The holiday spots were also provided by having connections (*Beziehung*) in the right places. He was a member of the

[99] Berufsausbildung mit Abitur – vocational training with high school diploma, a form of education in the GDR, which included 3 years of training, upon which one received a skilled worker certificate and at the same time was eligible for applying to the university.

FDJ and even had a small post there but avoided joining the party: "*I always swam along (mitgeschwommen) a bit, just enough to stay away from trouble*". His strategy seemed to have paid off, since he never had any problems for not being in the party, although he thought he might have experienced some if he had tried to get ahead in his career. When Frank turned eighteen, he put himself on the waiting list for a Wartburg, a nicer, more expensive car than the Trabant and also harder to obtain. Ironically, he could have got one two months after reunification, that is, after almost ten years of waiting, but did not want it anymore, as he could buy a used western car instead.

After the *Wende*, he was soon invited to transfer to Volkswagen. Formally he had to apply for the job, but the transition was rather effortless for him since he was already working at Mosel on the joint venture between VW and Sachsenring and was offered a job at VW from the very beginning. Not much had changed for him immediately upon transfer, and he even got to stay mostly around the same colleagues, as they were also offered a job at VW. He has been doing essentially the same job throughout his working biography in both enterprises, which brought him more than thirty years of experience in this branch. However, not everyone within Frank's circle adjusted well to the new situation. One of his former colleagues from Sachsenring, his mentor, who transferred to VW, had to leave the factory shortly after they started working there. This colleague developed an alcohol addiction and was eventually fired: "*He couldn't cope. Somehow he fell into a hole, maybe he was overwhelmed, although the demands were not too high. VW is really a very social company and he wasn't thrown out immediately, but at some point he was fired because of his behavior*". Unlike his colleague, Frank adjusted well and was happy to work in VW. As he remembered, he was excited and had some 'respect' for the big Western company and the product itself, although with time he noticed that the western Germans "also only cook with water".[100]

Now Frank lives with his wife in a spacious two-storey house, which they also own. It is located on the edge of one of the nicest and greenest neighbourhoods in Zwickau, surrounded by single houses. His house has a well-maintained green lawn, parking spaces and an automatic gate in front of it. The back yard looked like a whole park, with a little paddock, a bench, a few trees and a large green lawn. Their house is a part of a block of semi-detached homes, which they share with a couple of other families, all related to each

[100] Die kochen auch nur mit Wasser – an expression meaning that someone is just like everyone else, is not superior to anyone else.

other and with their own separate entrances. Frank's son also lives in the same block of houses together with his girlfriend. He is an engineer and commutes to work in another town 4 four days a week. Later Frank told me that he was very happy he could keep his family around him, as that was very rare. Indeed, almost none of my other interlocutors in Zwickau had the luxury of having their adult children nearby. Frank's wife runs a small business by herself in the field of health-care.

Frank lives a life of what could be described as upper middle-class and has few connections with the shop-floor workers. Being a rare example of a VW employee who was not a member of the trade union, he expressed a somewhat similar attitude towards the union as he did for the party in the GDR. He managed to stay out of it, although he thought he would have come under a bit more pressure if he were new to the company. When we touched on the topic of the trade union and the works council, Frank became a bit anxious for the first time in our conversations. He also told me that he would not give me any details about that but said that he had a problem with some of the ways in which the works council interfered in some decision-making processes. In his view, the strong union abused its power: *"In principle, I am not against the union. Some workers' union is necessary, otherwise maybe the exploitation wouldn't have any limits. As long as they concentrate on their normal union tasks, but sometimes they intervene too much in the work processes".* Thus Frank did not support the idea of the 35-hour week being pushed by the union. In his view, it should be a matter of personal choice, as one cannot have both: you choose either the money or more free time.

Although I was interested in my informants' political orientations, I was cautious about starting this conversation, because I knew that the topic was rather sensitive. However, when talking about work, the economy and ones' position in the production process, politics would often come up naturally. One of the reasons the conversation about politics could sometimes become heated was the popular media discourse at the time, in which right-wing populism was construed as a particularly east German problem. This was also the case with Frank. He told me that since most of the people in his circle were well-educated and intelligent, he did not meet many people who were politically right-wing. "*It is, perhaps, different when you work directly on the assembly line*", he presumed. Frank once asked me provocatively if I had ever experienced personally somebody being unfriendly to me due to my being a foreigner in Zwickau. Indeed, I have not, I answered, although I doubted if I was the right person to be asked about that. He told me, rather convinced, that if an immigrant

were to come and try to 'integrate himself' and his work, he would never have a problem. For Frank, the topic was overblown in the media and focused too much on the east.

Dieter: an 'affluent worker'

I met Dieter (51) at a hobby club I joined at the beginning of my fieldwork. He and his wife were the informal leaders of the club and often took on the role of teachers, although it was a *Verein*, a non-profit association, rather than a case of putting on formal courses. He had a cheerful and warm presence about him, and although he did not speak loudly, everybody seemed to listen to him very carefully. As we stood outside the classroom, he would smoke an electronic cigarette and ask me curiously about my research. At first, I had trouble understanding him due to his heavy Saxon dialect and constant sarcasm, as I never knew whether he was being serious or not.

Dieter was an assembly-line worker with a few shop-floor management tasks at Volkswagen, where he has been working for the past 25 years. He was born and raised in Zwickau. Upon finishing school, he received vocational training and earned a high-school diploma as a maintenance mechanic. He then worked as a locksmith in the Zwickau steel industry, which produced tractors and other machinery for the brown-coal mining industry in Leipzig. Dieter's parents were members of the church, which caused some difficulties for his brother, who wanted to receive higher education and study medicine. Dieter's vocational training also gave him the right to apply to university, but, unlike his brother, he did not wish to pursue higher education. He always seemed to enjoy manual work to some degree. Dieter had got married and already had a child at the time, and he wanted to provide for his family. Dieter was satisfied with his income and decided that he would be better off as a skilled worker than a university graduate.

After the *Wende*, the prospects at his firm started to look bleak, as his colleagues were gradually put on reduced working time or laid off. His father-in-law, who used to work at Sachsenring, then started to work at Volkswagen in Mosel. It was he who informed Dieter that Volkswagen was hiring people for the third shift (formerly the firm used to work two shifts). He started working there in 1993 on an assembly line and after several years was promoted to the role of team spokesman, which includes both regular assembly-line work and some management tasks within his team.

In the beginning and middle of my fieldwork in winter 2019, many of the VW workers had to go on shortened working hours (*Kurzarbeit*), which is usually a sign of crisis for the company. In this case, however, the general public and the workers saw it rather as

just another phase in production. It was in February 2019 that I met for dinner with a few of the VW workers and their wives. At the dinner, there was chitchat and joking around their suddenly discovered free time and the ways to use it. I was surprised by the lightness with which those affected by the *Kurzarbeit* took the situation. Later in one of the interviews, I asked one of them if he was afraid about his future and his job. "*Not really*", he said; "*You know, we have an employment guarantee, and I think this is all temporary*".

At the factory in Mosel, *Kurzarbeit* was used throughout the year, as the workshops were closed one by one, to be rebuilt gradually to fit the demands of electric car production. Some workers had to take holidays or use the extra time they had on their 'time account' (*Zeitkonto*). Also then, my interlocutors took it rather easy and had some understanding of the necessity for such measures. "*It is a solidarity issue also. This week I am not working, the next one some other colleagues, and so it is distributed*", Dieter told me. Here is how Dieter contrasted the short working time at VW and in his former employment at the time of the *Wende*:

> "I had to take some holidays, but the *Kurzarbeit* in itself… I had maybe four days in December. That wasn't really a transitional solution, that was a financial solution. Since the law is like that, the company works around it, not to pay people, when they have nothing to do… That's just capitalism, right? [laughs] But in the old firm, when there was *Kurzarbeit* during the *Wende*, you knew things were going towards the end. They didn't pay the wages…It's not comparable. We earn enough money, and for a couple of weeks we can bridge over, since we know it will keep going afterwards."

Indeed, a couple of years after Dieter started working at Volkswagen, the company where he used to work went bankrupt, and his former colleagues were laid off. "*Although at first I said: 'Work at the assembly line – never!', I was glad later that I took this job [at VW]*", he told me. The new job was not challenging enough for Dieter, and he felt overqualified for it. "*The only criterium was that you are a metal worker. It was all the activities you could learn at the workplace. You don't need [to be a] skilled worker to screw some things together at the assembly line*". His case was typical in that in the first years after the *Wende*, social progress in career terms was very rare compared to the cases of careers declining in eastern Germany.[101] For him, however, the change was milder than for many

[101] In 1993, the percentage of social advance in eastern Germany was 23%, whereas social decline (loss of a job or worsening of professional status) reached 77% (Hofmann 1993)

others since he managed to find a new job. Comparing himself with his former colleagues was one of the reasons why he accepted his position at the time as a relatively good one. Moreover, the image of VW as a reliable and large company contributed to the workers' pride and general satisfaction. As Dieter told me, he was proud to work there in the beginning.

One of the reasons that many VW workers saw their jobs as the only decent option in the region was the lack of positive examples on the part of those who left the factory. Dieter also had some former colleagues who left VW voluntarily at a time when the company had too many employees and was offering severance payments:

> "It's not like for the managers, but if you were there long enough, maybe you'd get decent compensation. Some tried to become entrepreneurs, but it's not so easy. Only in a few cases did it go well. For example, one top skilled worker, he started his own business, and he now has some contracts with other companies. But as an ordinary assembly-line worker – what would you do? Either you look for a completely new job, [but] nobody is interested in what you learned to do before if you were there anyway for ten years… So almost nobody leaves voluntarily. In the end, we are happy to work there. Some are moaning a bit less, some a bit more, for some it's just their thing to be moaning a bit. But I always say Volkswagen is a microcosm, you can't compare it to the usual work path. Such conditions you won't just find easily."

In comparison, some automotive workers in Russia, studied by Morris and Hinz (2018), felt trapped in their conveyor-belt jobs with high salaries after increasing their living standards and taking out loans. In a way, this is echoed in Dieter's response as he emphasizes the lack of alternatives to a job at VW and the problems associated with leaving it. However, he hardly conveyed the sense of being 'trapped' thanks to his satisfaction with the tasks he performed and his relationships in the workplace. Dieter also noted that the VW factory in Mosel still carried over something of the positive legacy of the former production regime, which he found less formal and less oppressive:

> "BMW in Leipzig was built new at some point, now with completely Western structures. Here [*bei uns*] there is such a thing as common law [*Gewohnheitsrecht*], when the management doesn't interfere sometimes because the works council protects it because it has always been

https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ca4a4614-cbd1-caf8-34c8-c37403d01e86&groupId=252038 (accessed 27.10.2020)

> this way. You always hear here and there that here it's a bit simpler, the production is not as busy as it is there."

Proximity to production also was an important part of Dieter's satisfaction with the job. He enjoyed having 'the mix', so that he still worked with his team on the assembly line, but also had a few managing tasks: "*I have an advantage that I don't do purely assembly line work. I do the assembly line work so that I stay fit, but I also do some personnel things, who goes where, who teaches whom... I like the mix. But I am also someone who still always likes to work with my hands*". As he compared himself to the *Meister* or foreman, who was higher up in the hierarchy, but had no tasks directly on the assembly line, he emphasized that he still preferred his current job, since the Meister had lost his practical skills and his 'relation' (*Beziehung*) to the car itself.

Dieter was also the only one of the three automotive industry employees I discuss in this chapter who was a member of the IG Metall trade union and who identified strongly with its goals. On several occasions, he went to support his striking colleagues in other companies, including VW's suppliers, to show solidarity with them. He often voiced his regret that the inequality in the country was growing: "*Die Scheere geht immer weiter auseinander*".[102] He also saw the decline in security not only among the younger generation of workers at VW, but also for his own son. Dieter's son had received a higher education in the humanities. Compared himself with his son, Dieter said:

> "After his studies, he was unemployed for a while, couldn't find a job, [and] after that he only had temporary contracts. I mean, when you're 31 you want to plan your future already. In socialism, I could be sure I would have a job. Maybe it wasn't my dream job, but… Well, we in VW were also always secure, but that's rather the exception in today's world. And it's not always like that in VW anymore either."

Dieter wished for more solidarity and thought that the unemployment level could be half as high as it was in a rich country like Germany, if "*we really wanted to and not only saw this market economy, where you have to make a profit all the time*". He expressed some empathy for those workers who had come to VW from unemployment and protected them from other colleagues, who, he felt, were sometimes too hard on the newcomers, who needed more time to get used to the rhythm of the factory.

[102] The gap between the rich and the poor is getting bigger and bigger (lit. the scissors continue to diverge).

Dieter also expressed similar solidarities when it came to temporary workers. He was sure that the temporary workers did as good a job as his permanently employed colleagues, and that it "hurt just as much" when they had to leave the company following the decision to fire all temporary workers in 2016. On a practical note, he also mentioned that, without the temporary workers, more pressure was put on the permanent workers. As the precariously employed provided more flexibility and allowed for more fluctuation in production, without them, the burden of flexibility was passed to the regular workers, as they had to change tasks more often and were transferred to other teams when help was needed there.

He saw the Scandinavian model as an ideal of a more 'social state', whereas he thought that in Germany there was something of an 'every man for himself' mentality (*Jeder für sich*). He once complained to me about how this mentality showed itself on a small scale, as well in the *Verein* we were members of. He complained to me that nobody wanted to share resources there either: he would pay a lot of money to attend workshops with his wife and then brought this knowledge to the group, but the members of the club were not willing to chip in to pay for the workshop. He felt that this mentality had come 'from the west' and had grown after the *Wende*.

As another example, he told me the story of the house they lived in, which Dieter's wife Anja had inherited from her father. It was a nice single-family house on two floors in the same neighbourhood where Frank lived. An uncle of Dieter's wife, who went to live in the west after reunification but 'never achieved anything there', then returned to Zwickau to get his share of the house. However, Anja's father had already paid the uncle for the remaining share of the house but unfortunately did it without any official documents. Since they had no official proof, they were forced to pay out the uncle's share to him once again. Naturally, the conflict had divided the family and resulted in breaking off ties between its different parts. For Dieter, this was another example of a materialistic mentality, and it was unacceptable to him that money was put before family relations.

For Dieter, the lack of social solidarity was also one of the reasons for the popularity of right-wing politics. Unlike Frank, Dieter viewed the spread of such tendencies in the region generally, as well as in the factory, very critically. He did not deny that it was becoming a problem, as he mentioned a few colleagues in other teams who seemed to be hostile towards foreigners. For him, it was disturbing to see some of his colleagues sharing these views. But he also thought that the company had no choice but to put up with it among the shop-floor workers, although among the managers it should not be tolerated. "*I know a*

team speaker who is oriented in this direction, and two Meisters with high-school diplomas. You'd think someone who got a high-school diploma is already a bit…But I've no idea why they have such views. You can't blame it on the education, at least", he complained. It was, perhaps, a particularly sensitive issue for him, since one of the reasons his son did not stay in the region was that it was "*too brown for him here*", meaning that he did not like living there because of the strong presence of right-wing politics.

Thomas: 'precarious worker'

Thomas (49) is a skilled temporary shop-floor worker (*Leiharbeiter*) who was working at the BMW plant in Leipzig at the time I met him. Thomas comes from a rural municipality just a few kilometres away from the centre of Zwickau. He finished Polytechnic Secondary School, where he was trained as a skilled worker. After his military service, he started working at a small company producing motors for industrial and domestic appliances. After the fall of the Wall he experienced a career setback, as he was laid off due to his former workplace being restructured. He was forced to change his occupation completely and now worked as a construction foreman on the restoration of old buildings.

During his work in construction, Thomas went through a series of bankruptcies at the firm he was working for, which he described as a very difficult time for him. Not being able to find a job, he ended up serving ten years in the military, where he learned a new practical qualification. He then started work as a temporary worker at VW in Mosel, between 2010 and 2012, after which he took a one-year break because it was "too bad" there and he did not have any desire to carry on his work at VW. He felt that the pressure at VW was too high, and his relationships with his colleagues were rather bad. Ironically, despite his negative attitude towards VW as an employer, Thomas was the only one of the three who drove a Volkswagen car (a ten-year-old Golf).

Thomas had rather negative views of the workers' union at VW. Like Frank, he thought that it was abusing its power. For him, this was one of his reasons for leaving VW, along with the exhausting nature of the work. He felt too much pressure to join the union, although he did not want to due to his shaky status in the company. As he explained to me, being a temporary worker, he saw no sense in joining the union, since his allocation could change at any moment, and he could be asked to join another union in the next company he worked for, if, for example, this company belonged to a different branch. He wished there was a separate union for temporary workers and did not feel represented by the existing unions. After breaking his ties with VW, he earned an extra qualification from his temporary

employment agency in the field of quality control and took up a job offer from BMW in Leipzig, where he had been working for five years at the time of our conversation. The job offer was, like before, for temporary employment, which means that he is employed by a service company that provides BMW with its workforce, as opposed to being employed directly by BMW itself.

Among the temporary workers, long commutes are quite common, since their futures are difficult to predict, and buying or renting a home closer to work is problematic. Thomas works the 'normal shift' at BMW in Leipzig, which means that, despite working on the shop floor, he works during the day like his white-collar colleagues. However, he also experiences social isolation due to his long commutes to work. At first he rented a place in Leipzig, but he now lives in Zwickau in his inherited home together with his family and commutes to work every day, as they share rides with some of his colleagues. The long commutes were one of his main dissatisfactions with his job: "*This is exhausting. Not good for health too, too little sleep, three hours every day I spend commuting*", he told me. When he worked at VW the commutes were shorter, saving him time he could spend with his friends and family and in leisure. However, he felt he had sacrificed too much for this opportunity, since the work was too intense for him, work relations were difficult and, most importantly, he had to do a lot of extra shifts on Sundays. Due to Thomas' work schedule, it was also difficult for me to arrange a meeting with him, and it took a while for it to work. When I first met him at a meeting of local residents with a politician, he was still wearing his blue work overalls, since he had just arrived back in Zwickau from work.

Thomas was much more satisfied with his job at BMW than he was with his former employment at VW. And despite being dissatisfied with his temporary status, he did not blame BMW for it. Rather, he seemed to accept the situation for what it was, explaining to me that having temporary workers was necessary for the company to have sufficient flexibility. As a temporary worker, he could be fired from one day to the next: "*If BMW says they don't need me anymore, the company where I am employed will have to find me a new workplace. If they can't find it, they will not tell me that they're firing me, but that they don't have work for me*". The subtle difference between being fired and no longer having a job is also articulated in the language. Thomas used the word '*abgemeldet*' (reassigned), rather than '*gekündigt*' (fired).

Thomas did not have any illusions about eventually getting a permanent contract at BMW. He had tried many times before, but never succeeded: "*As a temporary worker, you have no chance*". Most job openings are announced only internally, and since Thomas was

employed externally, he could not apply. Despite his five years of experience working in the factory, he was still an 'outsider'. As an outsider, moreover, he did not have the right to a bonus from the company's profits (*Gewinnbeteiligung*).

The extra benefits and the 'social wage', as well as corporate car-leasing, were also not available to him, although his wage was almost the same as for the permanent workers. The only 'bonus' he received from being associated with the factory and having a factory ID card were discounts with a few retailers, home supplies stores and furniture shops like OBI or Porta. However, Thomas did not blame the management for his unfortunate position. On the contrary, he said his boss would gladly offer him a permanent contract but could not do so since the jobs were only advertised internally. He had a similar stand on labour intensification too:

> "They have to save every year such and such on costs, and it is the easiest to save on workforce. So they keep reducing the workforce, but then those who stay have to do more and more work. They have to increase efficiency. Even if the company is doing well, they have to fire the temporary workers. Even the management's hands are tied here."

However, it is not only uncertainty that comes with precarious employment for Thomas. He derived some sense of security from the fact that his temporary employment agency was invested in him staying at BMW as long as possible, since this way the agency received its share and did not have to look for new employment for him. He also saw his lack of attachment to one employer as the source of a certain autonomy: "*I can decide freely when I want to have my holiday. Yes, BMW has to allow it, but my agency would never say 'No, you can't do it', because why would they?*" Thomas also treated precarity as a rather relative condition, something not exceptional for temporary workers.

In a way, Thomas has embraced his precarious status as a variation of normality, as he focuses rather on getting better conditions within the existing system than on condemning it altogether. For example, he would like to see a union being created for precarious workers, rather than criticising the whole idea of precarious work. This does not mean, however, that he saw his position as deserved. On the contrary, when comparing himself with his permanently employed colleagues, he told me that the casual workers often did a much better job than the permanent ones, since they were also hoping to get a permanent contract. He did not think that the permanent workers were better qualified either. Here is how he described a close colleague who had a permanent contract:

> "He didn't have the extra education in the field of quality control [unlike Thomas], and when you know this man personally, you know who he knows, and then you understand how he got the job. I wouldn't want to talk about it, though… Many of the permanent workers in BMW have no idea what they are doing really."

Although there is some bitterness in Thomas's words here, he had friendly relationships with his co-workers and told me that most of them did not make a distinction between permanent and casual workers, except for just a few, who he thought were just not very "gifted mentally" and felt threatened by somebody who "knows what he is doing".

One of the reasons he did not feel represented by the union was his criticism of the new rules of the Temporary Employment Act (*Arbeitnehmerüberlassungsgesetz*), issued in 2017 and pushed by the union. Under this Act, temporary workers can only be employed by the same client company for a limited amount of time (18 months), after which the client company has to offer them a permanent contract. If the company has a collective bargaining agreement (*Tarifvertrag*) and a works council, for the majority of organized workers this period can be extended to 24 months. Also, according to the rules of 'equal pay',[103] after the 15th month of employment, the company has to start paying the temporary worker the same wage it pays its permanent workers in the same position.

According to Thomas, although the idea behind the Temporary Employment Act was a good one, it was far from reflecting the reality of temporary employment. In reality, companies tried to work around these rules by finding some loopholes, which in the end led to a worsening of conditions for the workers. For example, in order not to offer permanent contracts to the workers after 18 months, client companies could terminate their agreements with these workers just before the end of this period, wait for three months, and then offer the worker employment again, after the counting of the months had restarted. He now felt more vulnerable and stressed, since temporary workers were forced to change places more often than before. For Thomas, that was yet another case when the politicians took poor decisions, without knowing enough about the situation 'on the ground'. That was, perhaps, one of the reasons why Thomas, formerly an SPD supporter, started sympathising with the right-wing AfD.

Another reason for Thomas's disappointment with the elites was the lack of support he felt for the economy and people in the region. He was particularly annoyed with programs

[103] The English expression 'equal pay' was also used by Thomas and others.

that were supposed to attract those who had gone to the west after the *Wende* to return, in order cope with the shortage of skilled labor:

> "There are people who very consciously stayed here. Because we wanted to build something here, to move something here. I never wanted to go to any other state (*Bundesland*). Firstly, because I don't like the type of crowd [*Menschenschlag*] there. Most people in the West are materialistic, inhumanly oriented, the school system is absurd there too. And I wanted to stay here – why would I go? I have everything here. And now what do politicians do? They make a program for those who went to the West and now want to return here, but *what do they do for people who stayed here*?"

Automotive workers in Zwickau: socio-temporal fragmentation

Spatial and temporal disconnects also hinder the development of common identities and links between various groups of workers. Long commutes are a frequent reality for many workers, not only those working in Mosel, but also elsewhere in the local automotive industry. Due to deindustrialisation, the high unemployment rate and a shortage of well-paid jobs in the region, many are ready to sacrifice their time to travel to the plant from other villages and towns, and some workers even come the whole way from the neighbouring state of Thuringia. When the shift ends, the commuters rush to their cars to get home and spend some valuable time with their families. Even for non-commuters, the three-shift system puts a strain on relationships with family and friends, especially when one is cut off from one's colleagues spatially because social life is mainly structured around the common 9 to 5 work schedule.

The impact of the work schedule and the burden of work on family relationships was also obvious for those working in the supplier industry. As a worker and trade-union member took me on a little tour around the factory, I asked him about the shifts at the factory. His answer was full of disappointment:

> "It's hard, one week is so, and another week is different. Many people also commute and don't spend enough time with their families. The divorce rate here is for sure around 90 per cent. You can ask anybody here at the conveyor belt if they managed to keep their relationships. Almost everybody is divorced."

As I showed with the example of Thomas, for temporarily employed workers, long commutes and the resulting disconnectedness from local networks are especially common.

The physical dispersal of worker's places of living has also contributed to limiting social ties between them. At VW, for example, their short and censored encounters with one

another mostly take place only at work. However, as my informants from the VW factory told me, and as I observed myself during my visits to the factory, the opportunities for communication are scarce. The assembly-line workers, who have the luxury of lower noise pollution on the shop floor, can only throw a couple of phrases back and forth because of the need to concentrate and the time pressure. Since every car can be a little different, the screens and papers show the individual adjustments that have to be made in each case, and the workers have to stay focused to follow the instructions. Many of those working in the press shop (*Presswerk*) have more monotonous jobs and potentially can afford to stay less concentrated. However, they also lack an opportunity to communicate on the shop floor because of the noise, which is so loud that many of the workers wear ear-defenders or earplugs.

The breaks on the assembly line are mainly taken in little open kitchens right on the shop floor, looking similar to the kitchen boxes on display at the Ikea shops. As Dieter told me, these kitchens used to be isolated rooms, but they were then rebuilt as open-space corners (*Teamecke*). This is the only place where the teammates can have an informal chat. However, many there just want to 'switch off' (*ausschalten*) and focus on their meal or have light 'small talk', as Dieter told me. This was also pointed out to me as a problem by some trade-union activists: "*Nobody wants to talk about fighting for our rights [Arbeitskampf] in their free time, and at work, it's very hard to have a meaningful conversation with anybody*". Having lunch myself in the factory's canteen, I also noticed that the workers walked fast and were in a hurry to eat their meals, and that the space was very open, making it difficult for the employees to talk about work matters or express any critical opinions about the management or the works council. The conversation mostly revolved around the choice and quality of food in the canteen.

Once every few years, the Volkswagen factory announces a large celebration or 'family day' (*Familientag*). Its employees can then invite their families to the factory, and sometimes neighbours of the factory living in Mosel and Schlunzig are also invited. An entertainment program and activities are put on for the children, but the major entertainment, of course, is the visit to the production site itself and seeing how Volkswagen cars are made. The event, with around 50,000 visitors, served to improve the factory's external image and the employees' internal loyalty to the 'Volkswagen values'. However, a rare family celebration with food stands and concerts is far from the intimacy of a shared beer with one's teammates after the shift. These examples show how both the spatial and temporal organisation of work contributes to the workers' isolation from both the social fabric and

each other. The similarity with the case of the Saturn plant in Tennessee (Kasmir 2014) is striking. There, similar processes of the social and spatial isolation of labour, combined with geographical dislocation, also led to the disorganization of the workers and a decrease in union militancy, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed some of the features of horizontal and vertical relationships among automotive industry workers in Zwickau in the GDR period. I pointed out, how, despite a degree of spatial dispersal, workplace sociality and a work-based community of a kind were built up through various practices, such as going to *Weltniveau* for a beer after the shift, exchanges of goods and shared celebrations. Moreover, I have shown how connections were made between white-collar and blue-collar employees thanks to the greater significance and prestige of practical skills, barter exchanges and more fluid hierarchies. The loss of such common grounds might be experienced by some workers as social decline and *Deklassierung* (Mau 2019). However, this is not intended as an image of a harmonious picture of class relations at Sachsenring during the GDR period. As I have also discussed in this chapter, there were enough cases of abuse of power and political repression against the workers. However, a certain working-classness arose as a by-product of both ideological glorification and the concentration of social life around the workplaces.

In line with Kalb (2021: 322), I argue against the reduction of class simply to 'work' or income. By the same token, I also argue against reified notions of middle-classness by seeing it as a construct. In this chapter, I have sketched out some of the ways in which this construct is produced and maintained. By presenting the three stories of workers from different segments of the working class (seen in a broad sense), I have attempted to set out the similarities and differences in their work experiences, as well as their attitudes towards others. Contrary to some notions of the 'affluent worker', and despite his 'middle-classness' in his habits of consumption, Dieter was the one who identified the most with certain working-class struggles and showed solidarity with both the unemployed and precariously employed workers, as well as support for the trade union. Thomas's story, on the other hand, is one of a loss of stability and a certain class position, resulting in certain feelings of his not being heard, and seeing the world around him as divided between 'the people' and 'the elite'. The pervasive middle-classness results in a peculiar alliance between the precarious worker Thomas and the white-collar technical manager Frank, who share some views not only on the trade union, but also on some political issues.

Chapter 5: From militancy to cooperation: uneven development and labour struggles in Zwickau

After the rapid economic growth of the 1990s, the economy of eastern Germany has gradually stagnated since the turn of the millennium (Blum 2019). Contrary to the promise of 'blossoming landscapes' made by Helmut Kohl after German reunification, the unevenness between east and west persists in various forms, including but not limited to wage income. The recent pandemic and global economic trends are threatening a second wave of deindustrialisation in eastern Germany. One of the reasons why the crisis might hit workers in the east particularly hard is the lack of corporate headquarters in the east, as most enterprises there are merely involved in manufacturing, while headquarters, as well as research and development centres, remain in the west. The situation is aggravated by the weakness of the trade unions in the east compared to their western counterparts, which is particularly pronounced in Saxony.[104]

One line of reasoning for the lagging economy in the east is similar to the rhetoric of "hostile environments" for capitalist development, described by Loperfido and Pusceddu (2018) in the case of uneven development in Italy. The narrative of "hostile environments" in the case of the former GDR emphasises socialist path-dependency, lower productivity and demographic developments as the main reasons for stagnation, often concluding that the gap between east and west will eventually disappear with time and generational change. In this narrative, the lower productivity of former East German enterprises is often projected onto the workers, as they are constructed as inefficient and lacking in initiative, being 'spoiled' by the permissive work discipline of the socialist regime.

I would like to dismantle the dichotomous representation of East and West by focusing on their interrelation and using instead the lens of uneven and combined development. I argue that unevenness, being a 'lifeblood of capital accumulation' (Kasmir and Gill 2018: 356), is ingrained in the East-West relationship through processes of capital accumulation. It is due to the relationship of uneven and combined development that the gap between East and West persisted for over thirty years after German reunification and is likely to be sustained in the near future. By placing the emphasis on combination as well as unevenness, we can explain the differences in how a particular mode of production manifests

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[104] According to a study by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung, published in 2019, Saxony has the lowest rate in Germany of employees paid under a collective wage agreement (39%). See https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_wsi_studies_19_2019.pdf (accessed 11.12.2021).

itself in a given society. While focusing on unevenness places my field-site within the framework of global struggles, the focus on combination does justice to local contexts and particular combinations of people, places and pre-existing socio-political relationships in Zwickau. In this way, the interplay of unevenness and combination can help explain various amalgams of social forms, or, as Kasmir and Gill (2018: 357) phrased it, the “messy, actually existing social relations that ethnographers encounter in the field”. By zooming in and out of my field site and studying the confluence of local and global processes as ‘critical junctions’ (Kalb and Tak 2006), I aim to uncover the relationship of the local working class to larger fields of power.

In this chapter, I show how uneven development on a country-wide as well as a global scale translates into further fragmentation and reproduction of unevenness on the local level. The focus on combination alongside unevenness accounts for the more active role of labour (trade unions and workers in general) and allows us to investigate how production regimes are negotiated and transformed in the process of labour struggles. Not only capital alone, but also the state and labour participate in reproducing unevenness (Kasmir and Gill 2018: 364). To say that capital strives for fragmentation and that this results in the loss of solidarity among workers (or the rise of exclusionary solidarity alike) is to deny labour its agency and present the process of fragmentation as rather one-sided and non-dialectical. The unevenness approach, therefore, also focuses on the role of labour in creating and maintaining the ‘factory of fragmentation’ (Harvey 2001). One of the ways in which it does so is by promoting localism and particularism within the trade unions. The strength of the present analysis rests upon its focus on both capital and labour within the process of uneven and combined development. Following Kasmir and Gill (2018: 356), I see Trotsky’s notion of uneven and combined development as politically momentous. In the following sections, I discuss labour struggles in Zwickau’s automotive industry over time in order to understand the role of labour in the making of unevenness, after which I turn to the ways in which unevenness is experienced on the ground and, finally, sum up my findings in a brief conclusion. To account for the *combined* development, I will first turn to the labour struggles of the early 1990s and focus on the workplace relationships and socialist legacies, that the labour unions inherited from the past.

Post-socialist legacies and militant unionism in the 1990s

The VW factory has brought jobs and higher wages to the Zwickau region, facilitating its economic growth. Thanks to the 'just-in-time'[105] principle, VW has attracted numerous suppliers to the region because for the 'just-in-time' system to work the suppliers need to be within a close distance from the main factory in order to function as an extension of it. This prevented VW from becoming a so-called 'cathedral in the desert', which could have happened if the factory had used suppliers from the west. Most workers were happy to get a job at VW, with its new shiny halls, machines and uniforms, as well as its solid reputation as a good employer. Only a few of the now retired workers I spoke to refused to apply to VW out of principle: '*Zu Kommunisten gehen wir nicht!*' ('We won't go to (work for) the communists'). Their main concern was the transfer of old communist elites and *nomenklatura* (*die Bonzen*) into management positions at VW and their decision-making power in the hiring process.

Uwe, a 57-year-old shopfloor worker, who was seen by his bosses in Sachsenring as a sort of a troublemaker because of his criticisms of the system, told me that his former boss from Sachsenring found a management position at VW and had been personally opposed to hiring Uwe. Nevertheless, thanks to his qualifications and the support of other former colleagues of his, Uwe did manage to get a job at VW. This process of peer approval, however, worked the other way around as well: employees could also veto a manager in some cases. As Uwe's friend and colleague Andreas told me, once VW wanted to hire a former Sachsenring manager for a leading position, but the workers were very vocal about their disapproval of a decision to hire him due to his alleged involvement with the Stasi. "*And they listened to us, they didn't hire him, otherwise it could actually come to physical violence*!". VW's management also realized at the time that, as much as they wanted to treat the new plant as a 'clean slate', the social relations at work were not built from scratch, therefore VW hired social researchers to study those relations and their influence on productivity.

Some of the workers managed to keep and transfer their social networks from one workplace to another, from Sachsenring to VW, which also strengthened their bargaining

[105] The car industry in and around Zwickau is mostly organized to fit the rhythm of the Volkswagen plant in Mosel and must be able to supply on a 'just-in-time' basis, which means that the components from the suppliers have to be delivered right before they are used, and the supplier's factory has to be located within a reasonable distance from the VW plant.

power. As one of the VW workers who used to work in another branch before unification and then came to VW in the early 1990s told me:

> "The Sachsenring people were a closed group for themselves, they kept together. And they did things their way. Most of them also stayed in the same workshop. And it was a bit slower, a bit more relaxed there. But there were also others who wanted to transfer to another workshop, to meet other people and to learn something new."

As the previous statement shows, whereas those who transferred from Sachsenring to VW early on often saw themselves as active and ready to take risks, their new colleagues who did not come from Sachsenring often considered them inflexible and conservative. 'The early birds', however, had one more essential privilege, apart from keeping their old social networks – their years at Sachsenring were counted together with their years at VW, which meant higher salaries and pensions. Those former Sachsenring workers who came to VW later did not have this advantage, as their years working at VW were counted from their first day at VW.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the trade unions in the former GDR had to deal with a controversial legacy of socialism. Almost every employee in the GDR was a member of the FDGB union (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund[106]). The biggest branch of the FDGB, the steel workers' union, IG Metall, had 1.8 million members (Jensen 2010: 45). According to the official ideology of the GDR, there could be no conflict between the interests of the management and the interests of the workers. Therefore, the unions were seen as purely nominal institutions concerned with the allocation of holiday spots and packages, the organisation of cultural events and overseeing fulfilment of the annual plan, rather than actually representing the workers' interests. Apart from that, the unions were part of the political apparatus within the enterprise and had to follow the party line. The union leaders were therefore often perceived as part of the *nomenklatura*. One of the former Sachsenring managers, who was also a party member during the GDR period, remembered one of the former union leaders with a sense of contempt: "*From one day to another he turned into the biggest opponent of the GDR, he was a real Wendehals*[107]*! He was really stirring the pot:*

[106] Free German Trade Union Federation.

[107] *Wendehals* (a turning neck), based on a name of the wryneck bird, was used during the *Wende* to describe opportunists and those (mostly SED and FDJ cadres) who changed their views and attitudes according to the current political situation.

‘the management must leave!’ [he said]. And, by doing that, he secured his job in the trade union”.

As early as 1989, IG Metall East and West had already agreed to mutual exchanges of experiences and assistance. IG Metall West opened some offices in eastern German towns, and some western trade unionists were also deployed to the east. In May 1990, negotiations started over bringing together eastern and western IG Metall. However, contrary to the hopes of some unionists from the east, the negotiation was rather about the taking over of the eastern union than about the unification of the two branches on an equal footing (Jensen 2010: 59). By the end of December 1990, the east German IG Metall had decided to dissolve itself. The volunteers then went through the enterprises and tried to persuade the workers to join the new united IG Metall. 1.3 million East German workers decided to join straightaway (Jensen 2010: 61). VW management did not oppose the establishment of the works council (*Betriebsrat)* in Mosel in 1991. Moreover, it agreed to the suggestion from the workers and the trade union that an experienced works council member from Kassel (western Germany) be hired, so that he can be voted for as the works council chairman (*Betriebsratsvorsitzender*). The choice of a works council chairman from the west was explained to me by the trade unionists as a necessary measure to be able to use his experience to bargain with the management, which had also been imported from the west, on an equal footing.

The newly established IG Metall managed to use the insecurity and turbulences on the labour market to increase its membership in the east. From 1990 to 1991, Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau (SAZ), the heir of VEB Sachsenring, implemented massive layoffs. As the anxieties concerning layoffs piled up, the workers organized a protest to urge the *Treuhand* to set up an employment and training agency, or in fact to come up with any solution that would provide a safety net for the soon-to-be-laid-off workers. The *Treuhand* was reluctant to waste its funds on such an organisation, but after a sit-in protest by over a thousand workers in May 1991, the management of the plant agreed to establish the *Sächsische Aufbau- und Qualifizierungsgesellschaft* (SAQ)[108] as a bridge for the workers who had lost their jobs at Sachsenring, after which the *Treuhand* also finally changed its position and agreed to the establishment of the SAQ. The tension between the workers, the SAQ and the *Treuhand* during this process of restructuring cut across the lines of workplace relationships.

[108] See also Chapter 4.

One of my informants, Frau Fuchs, was appointed to work for SAQ after the *Wende*. She had formerly occupied a leadership position at Sachsenring and was well connected with both managers and workers. Due to her connections, she managed to help find jobs for quite a few of her former colleagues and subordinates. Meanwhile, her husband was working for the opposing side – the *Treuhandanstalt*. Although, as she told me, they managed to separate work and family relations and had no conflicts around the topic between the two of them, communicating with some of their friends and acquaintances became difficult due to tensions regarding the actions of the *Treuhand*, which continued long after the latter was dissolved. Many union activists I spoke to emphasised the role of the early victory of establishing the SAQ as crucial for building trust in the union in the region.

The IG Metall strike of 1993 marked the next milestone in the history of industrial relations in Zwickau's automotive sector. VW workers in the suburbs of Zwickau were employed by a Volkswagen subsidiary, VW Saxony, unlike their western colleagues, who were employed by Volkswagen AG. That meant that, while their western colleagues were paid according to a company-level agreement (*Haustarifvertrag*), Zwickau workers entered the Saxony metal industry's collective wage agreement. That is why Zwickau VW workers joined the 1993 strike, which was aiming to bring the east German metal industry workers (of which the automotive industry is part) up to the level of their western colleagues.

According to the collective wage agreement signed in March 1991 between the IG Metall union and the employers' association, Gesamtmetall, wage parity between east and west was supposed to be achieved gradually by 1994. However, already in autumn 1992, the employers' association attempted to break this agreement. IG Metall then called a strike in spring 1993 to protect the agreement (Wentzel 2018). As a response to the strike warning, VW's management offered an immediate pay rise of up to twenty-six per cent (as had been agreed earlier) in the form of a plant premium (an instant pay rise), as an alternative to the slow but steady process of bringing wages up gradually to the western level. This would create a rift between the workers at VW and other metal-industry workers, even though both groups of workers came under the same industry-wide collective agreement, since VW was reluctant to introduce a company-level agreement in Saxony. A large plant with strong union membership like the Volkswagen plant in the suburbs of Zwickau was considered extremely important for the success of the whole strike by IG Metall Saxony headquarters in Dresden. Therefore, the union made sure it communicated to the workers and the works council that the strike would bring better results in the long term than the plant premium offered by VW, which was of uncertain duration (Turner 1998: 70-71).

The strike went on for three and a half weeks, and about 2000 out of 2500 workers in Mosel took part in it. The results are still crucial for workers in the metal industry today, but back then they were not as great as the workers had hoped: VW's offer of a twenty-six per cent pay raise was no longer in place, and full wage parity between east and west was postponed from 1994 to 1996. However, the strike meant a lot for the solidarity of the workers, and the level of approval of the strike's results could also be observed in the rising IG Metall membership at the VW plant in Mosel, from seventy-four per cent before the strike to ninety-one per cent afterwards (Turner 1998: 72). The workers I talked to who remembered the strike of 1993 described it as a moment of great solidarity and took pride in the fact that it managed to protect the gradual adjustment of wages to the western level, despite that being delayed until 1996.

The 1993 strike, as well as certain other experiences of my interlocutors, showed that the first few years after the collapse of socialism were especially difficult for the union and the workers at VW, as they had to employ militant strategies and had to 'fight for every little thing', as one of my interlocutors described it. Many of my interlocutors noted that the first few years of VW seemed like a challenge, as the management tested the waters regarding how much pressure would be tolerated by the workers. Klaus, an active IG Metall member who became a VW shop floor worker after a few months out of work at the SAQ, told me about the militant unionism of the early years at VW:

> "In 1993 they tried to stop us from striking. They said, 'You shouldn't strike, we have to work, the customers are waiting for their cars, this will harm the site (*Standort*)' and they demonized us [the striking workers]. And they took in people to work illegally so that they could keep working. The western managers drove those replacement workers in their cars through the gates as we were striking. We tried to stop those cars and topple them, but one [bodyguard] held a gun in front of our faces and said 'Let me through'. This wasn't fun [*kein Spaß*] back then, but we did it right."

I could not help but notice the sense of nostalgia with which the unionists described this first militant phase of industrial relations in Zwickau to me. They also complained about the younger workers, who got everything 'on a silver platter' and did not appreciate the efforts of made by the older generation of workers. Despite the difficulties, there was a strong sense of empowerment behind these struggles, which seems to have disappeared with today's labour-management relationship, which is characterised by cooperation.

The struggle for a 35-hour working week

An unusual protest from the side of the union caught my attention during my fieldwork in May 2019. A group of IG Metall trustees (*Vertrauensleute*) gave the chairman of the board of management of Volkswagen, Herbert Diess, a promissory note (*Schuldschein*) for sixteen million working hours during his visit to the car plant in Mosel. A photo of Diess, standing next to the large-format promissory note but refusing to take it, appeared throughout the media the next day. Sixteen million was the number of hours which, according to the union, the workers in the east had provided 'as an advance', since they had worked three hours per week more than their colleagues in the eest since 1990. Those union trustees who were not wearing their work overalls wore red T-shirts with one of the 35-hour week campaign slogans: '*35 reicht – keine Zeit für neue Mauern*' (35 is enough – no time for new walls), referencing the gap between east and west.

The working time equalization campaign goes back to 2003 and represents one of the largest defeats in IG Metall's history, which marked the union's first strike failure in fifty years. Although the initiative for the equalization of work times had existed since the early 1990s, it constantly fell behind other agendas and was often postponed in the name of crisis and the importance of helping a local economy in transition. However, in light of the EU's 2004 eastern enlargement, IG Metall leaders believed that 2003 was the final opportunity to resolve the working time inequality (Raess 2006). The reason behind this judgement was that the union's position was in danger of becoming much weaker due to the expected labour competition from low-wage eastern Europe. Thirteen years after German unification, the union believed that the time was ripe to end the inequality between the workers in the east and west.[109] The employers, on the contrary, considered that the timing was wrong, especially because of the upcoming EU enlargement, as they focused on the ability of German workers to compete with Czech and Polish workers, who worked forty hours a week. Therefore, the main arguments against the 35-hour week were the costs and regional competition. A 38-hour week was presented as an advantage for the east, which was supposed to compensate for the productivity gap between east and west and make the location attractive for the employers. The productivity gap was also mentioned by Volkswagen management as an argument that it was too early for equalization between east and west.

[109] '*Die Zeit ist reif*' ('The time is ripe') was the campaign slogan of IG Metall during the strike of 2003.

The inferior working conditions in the east have also been used to weaken labour bargaining power in the west (Raess 2006). As a former politician and head of *Jenoptik*, Lothar Späth, famously said, 'the east is the anti-tank dog [*Minenhund*] of the west', emphasising that working conditions in the east and west would eventually equalize, but not in the way the unions anticipated. On the contrary, workers in the west would have to wave goodbye to their 'privileged' positions. There was a fear that the aggressive strategies of the employers' organisation would be tested in the east, with its weaker union power, and then be transferred to the west as well (Artus 2018). The union used the possibility of a worsening of conditions in the west as a driving force to promote support for the campaign among west German workers, who already had the advantage of a 35-hour week. However, the actual solidarity of works council members in the west German automotive industry was rather questionable (Höpner 2004). Due to the strike in the VW plant in Chemnitz and the strike in Zwickau/Mosel, where some parts for the manufacture of the Golf and Lupo in Wolfsburg were produced, the workers in Wolfsburg had to go on *Kurzarbeit*, as production stopped for two days shortly before the end of the strike in June 2003. At a meeting of the leading unionists in the car industry on June 23 in Frankfurt, the west German works council members, instead of showing solidarity with the strikers, expressed harsh criticism of the union because of the influence the strike was expected to have in the west (Raess 2006).

The Saxony employers' association, the VSME (Verband der Sächsischen Metall- und Elektroindustrie), played a major role in shaping public opinion through the media, which consequently contributed to the strike's failure. Not only did the association manage to portray the strike as irrational and as harming the 'site' (*Standort*), but it also worked out a strategy that ensured victory for the employers. VSME's strategy was focused on offering an easy exit out of the association for those companies that could not withstand the pressure of a strike (Raess 2006). For example, the drive-shaft plant GKN Driveline, which also previously belonged to Sachsenring, was under a lot of pressure, since it was on the verge of failing to supply its clients (mostly large automotive producers) if the strike were to continue. Therefore, instead of exerting pressure on VSME to comply with IG Metall's demands, it left the association rather unceremoniously and introduced a company-level agreement (*Haustarifvertrag*), a part of which was a gradual reduction of working hours down to 35 by 2009. Although the union members got what they ultimately wanted from GKN, the long-term results of the agreement were far less desirable. After the exit of almost a thousand GKN workers, collective bargaining (*Flächentarifvertrag*) in Saxony was further weakened, and the labour movement became even more fragmented.

In June 2003, the president of the IG Metall union, Klaus Zwickel, announced that the four-week strike had ended in failure. In 2004, VW Saxony left the employers' association, the VSME, as VSME's aggressive campaign against centralized wage agreements had discredited the company in the media[110] and went against the so-called Volkswagen model, which was based on codetermination and cooperation with the workers' union. The collective industry-wide agreements have proved more advantageous for large corporations like VW than for small and medium-sized enterprises like GKN. This is also the reason why VW opted out of the company-level agreement (*Haustarifvertrag*) in Saxony, which proved to be rather costly in Wolfsburg. Therefore, in contrast to GKN, which introduced a company-level agreement after leaving VSME, VW Saxony (with all three of its plants in Saxony: Zwickau, Chemnitz and Dresden) joined another employers' association in Berlin-Brandenburg, the VME (Verband der Metall- und Elektroindustrie in Berlin und Brandenburg), and stayed committed to the industry-wide agreement. As a result, the VSME lost one of its most important members. Also, however, the institution of collective wage agreements in Saxony was further weakened, which drew a line once again between VW's workers and other workers in the region and further 'disembedded' the plant and its workers from the local terrain.

As we sat with one of the works council's members in their office and discussed the current 35-hour-week campaign, a worker came in in his grey overalls. He asked to have a quick word with the chairman to discuss the availability of parking spaces at the factory. After a quick chat, the works council member returned to me with a smile. He then told me that this is the kind of request that he gets most often: parking spaces, the food in the canteen. '*Luxusprobleme*' (luxury problems), he said, and continued to compare such problems with the more universal struggles over the 35-hour-week, saying that it is often more difficult to unite the people over such a cause than it is over such everyday issues. He was not the first one to point out such differences in how the workers and the works council saw the job of representing the workers. This opposition can be explained through differences between 'community unionism' and 'business unionism' (Mollona 2009b). The first takes on the tasks of community activism, as it focuses on more universal issues which transcend the everyday reality on the shop floor, whereas the latter is concerned with more traditional workplace activism. According to Mollona (2009b: 664), however, the two forms are closely

[110] In Wolfsburg stehen bald die Bänder still. *Manager Magazin*, 25 June 2003, https://www.manager-magazin.de/unternehmen/artikel/a-254526.html (accessed 03.05.2020).

intertwined, and both are needed if the unions' representation of the workers is to be successful.

In my talks with Volkswagen workers (most of them also IG-Metall members), the 35-hour-week also rarely came up naturally. For many of them, it was hardly a crucial matter, as a team leader on an assembly line, 51-year-old Wolfgang, told me:

> "For me, it wouldn't be a big change. I work forty hours anyway, but I get the two extra hours a week written on my hours' account (*Zeitkonto*). If this changes, I will get five hours extra. It's nice, but I also don't believe that it will happen during my time in VW still, given the pace at which it is currently moving along".

His lack of enthusiasm about the 35-hour-week was echoed by many other workers, who, among other reasons, often mentioned that they already enjoyed many privileges compared to other workers in the region. Wolfgang's words also refer to another important issue, which is the age of the workers. The average age of the employees at VW Sachsen is 43 years,[111] and a thousand of the 7800 workers at the Mosel plant were going on early retirement (*Altersteilzeit*) in 2020. Age is one more factor explaining the lack of motivation of some workers in the fight for a 35-hour-week, since a significant number of them will not be there to enjoy it any longer, even if the equalization of working times were agreed upon immediately (since any agreement would be gradual, and the most recent offer from the union envisages full equalization only by 2030). As a result, the 35-hour-week, which already seems like an unreachable goal after thirty years, becomes even more detached from the workers.

Recent developments seem to have strengthened the disembedding tendency already mentioned in this section. In December 2019, a few months after the end of my fieldwork, another round of negotiations between the employers' organisation Gesamtmetall and IG Metall (Berlin-Brandenburg-Saxony district) concerning the shortening of working times ended without a result. The IG Metall leaders decided to end the negotiations, as the employers tried to take back some of the gains in the previous rounds of negotiations. At the beginning of March 2021, the union gave up the goal of a 35-hour week in the east for the time being, while it concentrated on a few selected companies in the automotive industry, including VW Saxony and BMW and Porsche in Leipzig, where the union had enough

[111] For comparison, the average age of the workers at BMW plant in Leipzig is 38 years.

members who were ready to strike.[112] Meanwhile, the works council of VW Saxony began negotiating for the inclusion of VW Saxony into Volkswagen AG in Wolfsburg, under which it would adopt a company-level agreement (*Haustarifvertrag*) separate from the rest of the industry in the region. What this means for the region and the industry is, first of all, the further separation of VW workers from other automotive enterprises and its suppliers, and secondly another stage in weakening the collective bargaining agreement in the Easte In the meantime, the gap between the VW workers and other workers in the region in terms of both job security and working conditions continues to grow.

New arrangements: labour-management cooperation

Up until the 1990s, the German automotive industry functioned according to the principles of 'diversified quality production', with a focus on stable and highly skilled workforces (Krzywdzinski 2021: 509). There was a hope at the time that the so-called German model could successfully compete with the Japanese model, represented by Toyota's 'lean production'. However, publication of an MIT study, 'The Machine that Changed the World'[113] (Womack et al. 1990), as well as the fall of the Iron Curtain and the threat of competition from lower-wage countries, persuaded the German automotive industry to try out the Japanese model (Krzywdzinski 2021: 511). The production facilities in the former GDR provided a convenient site for testing these new models. Moreover, by dividing Sachsenring into small units, the *Treuhand* prepared the perfect ground for lean production due to its reliance on external networks among firms, rather than a single large enterprise (Swain 2002). The Opel plant in Eisenach, formerly known for the production of Wartburg cars, along with the Volkswagen plant in Zwickau, became the first automotive plant in Germany to implement the new production regime.

Lean manufacturing, also known as just-in-time production, is generally oriented towards minimising waste in a very broad sense, which includes wasting of time, space and other resources. Lean management, as an integral part of lean production, includes such

[112] IG Metall gibt den Kampf um die 35-Stunden-Woche auf. *Der Tagesspiegel*, 10 March 2021, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/streit-um-arbeitszeit-ig-metall-gibt-den-kampf-um-die-35-stunden-woche-auf/26989688.html (accessed 19.03.2021).

[113] The study was focused on the future of the automobile and compared the traditional and lean production methods. It showed that European car manufacturers were falling behind their Japanese competitors (namely Toyota) and argued for the superiority of lean production. The study was crucial for the rise in popularity of the 'Japanese model' in the West.

aspects as teamwork, process optimisation, standardisation of work and performance management (Krzywdzinski 2021). Concerning the efforts to optimise processes, sociologists and other researchers participated actively in the factory in the early stages of lean production, handing out questionnaires and using stopwatches to measure the time taken for specific tasks. One of the workers who remembered the time told me with a sarcastic smile: "*We didn't like people like you, the sociologists, that much.*[114] *If they were measuring something, it meant that they were looking at whose work was not needed anymore or at how we could do things faster and intensify the work*".

What is also crucial in the case of the Zwickau automotive industry is that lean production relies on flexible labour. While VW itself does not employ precarious workers directly in Zwickau at the moment, flexibility is often outsourced to its supplier, such as those producing seats or wheels. All the additional services, such as the factory canteen, are also operated by external firms. In the VW plant itself, the majority of workers have embraced the variation of the Japanese work organization model offered by Volkswagen. Some of them saw continuities between the socialist work organization and the new model, for example, between the teams and the socialist brigades. One of the characteristics of the Japanese model is the participation of workers and strong labour-management cooperation, an example followed by GM's Saturn plant. Co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*) is also one of the main goals for the trade unions and the *Betriebsrat* (works council). The right to *Mitbestimmung* means that the employer may not take any significant measures that can affect the workers without seeking the consent of *Betriebsrat*[115] first *(*§87 BetrVG*)*. As with co-determination, the works council has a right to suggest certain measures to the employer (*Initiativrecht*) (§ 92a BetrVG). These rights are granted by law (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz, or BetrVG*), which regulates the relationship between the works council and the employer. Therefore, it is not surprising that the workers' representatives also welcomed the Japanese model, with its focus on workers' participation in major decisions and their initiative in problem-solving. Although the union managed to block some of the unwanted motions

[114] For the most part, this particular prejudice towards 'sociologists' did not pose a threat to my positioning in the field, thanks to the fact that I had no affiliation with the management and had established contacts with the workers through other channels.

[115] There are exceptions to this right. For example, in emergency situations the employer is allowed to act urgently without the consent of the works council. Also, if the employer and the works council cannot agree, the arbitration body (*Einigungsstelle*) will take the necessary decision.

regarding lean production, such as the outsourcing of some work processes, the ‘Zwickau model’ of implementing the lean production method was rather successful.

IG-Metall is more powerful at Volkswagen than it is, perhaps, in any other company in the region. In the case of VW, co-management, rather than co-determination, is often spoken of to highlight the decision-making power of the works councils, which goes beyond what is legally required from the employer. However, the works council became largely disconnected from the shop floor and took over some of the management tasks, as some of the works council members even compared their activities to those of the HR department. One of the things which contributed to this disconnect was the opportunity for more works council members to be exempted (*freigestellt*) from shop-floor work. On the one hand, some unionists wanted works council members to be able to concentrate fully on representing the interests of the workers. On the other hand, this contributed to the disconnect between the shop floor and the works council. Not only did informal ties become more difficult to establish due to the lack of common activity on the shop floor, but some shop-floor workers also covertly despised the works council’s members for being ‘idle’ and privileged, and were sceptical of the actual amount of work they had to do. The scandals involving the top works council chairs at VW as a whole in 2005[116] also contributed to the lack of trust in the works council and the co-management strategy itself.

The strategy of the management, which, after meeting strong resistance from the workers in the 1990s, began to shift slowly to a more peaceful model of coexistence with the union, was coming closer to that which existed in the west. The younger generation of workers was also less ready to strike and more prone to self-exploitation. And, as some of the unionists told me, they were increasingly interested in smaller day-to-day issues than in less immediate but more substantial problems, such as securing a 35-hour working week. Volkswagen’s ‘partnership approach’ to labour-management relations was also evident in the ways the more recent protests were carried out. The strikes seemed to lose their militancy and took on more of a performative character. One unionist described the more recent strikes to me as we were standing in the works council room at the VW plant looking out of the window:

[116] The scandal revolved around the top works council representative, Volkert, who was involved in corruption and received personal favours from the HR director, Hartz. See Dombois (2009) for a discussion of the implications of the scandal for the co-management model in Germany.

> "We dress in red, all of us *IG-Metaller*, and we stand here at the entrance, and we do the fighting. There is the high building: the management sits there and looks down on us, and sometimes they even come by and we greet each other. So, you are not afraid any more to take action. Because Volkswagen knows that we do it, and since 1993 it is obvious that when we go on strike, we secure our facilities so that nothing breaks. So that when the strike is over, we can go back to work seamlessly. It doesn't help the employer if his technical systems break down. So you wouldn't want to harm the employer and yourself, and that's why there is an agreement – we switch off collectively and in an orderly manner, then go fight, make some noise and show that we would be willing to do more, and then we go back to our workplace in an orderly manner."

It seems that, in return for a partnership, the unions have paid their price by taking conflict out of the equation, as the members of the works council become co-managers, often more concerned with the competitive potential of the *Standort* than with the immediate struggles of the workers. *"Economic efficiency [Wirtschaftlichkeit] and employment security [Beschäftigungssicherung] are two sides of one coin, these are two equally important goals here at Volkswagen*", said Jens Rothe, the representative of the works council of VW Saxony in the general works council of Volkswagen group.[117]

The proximity of the works council and management often sparks dissatisfaction among the shop-floor workers with both the works council and the union. One of my interlocutors, a former VW worker, associated the works council with the elites, who 'are there for their own interests' and who have lost touch with the everyday work on the shop-floor and its challenges. He also complained to me about the pressure to become a union member as soon as you become a VW worker: "*It's like it was with the Party [SED]. Before you had to be a member of the party, and now you have to be a member of the union. Especially if you want to move up in your career*". Partly due to this pressure, union membership at the VW plant in Mosel has reached almost ninety-eight per cent, but this number might not reflect actual support for the union at the plant.

In the case of the Saturn plant in Tennessee, where a similar labour-management cooperation approach was adopted, the unions were often accused of 'being in bed with management' (Kasmir 2014: 222). In Zwickau, similar accusations have been formulated by the workers, as the works council members were accused of *becoming* the management. These accusations were reinforced through certain associations with the former position of

[117] Cited in an interview in the book *Spurensuche – 25 Jahre Volkswagen Sachsen*, released in honour of the 25th anniversary of Volkswagen Saxony.

the trade union within the socialist system. This also involves rumours and complaints about family members of the council monopolizing certain job openings. A rather disturbing sign for the union happened in 2019 when for the first time in the elections to the works council a non-member of the trade union received enough votes to participate in the council. Although he was the only non-union member among the thirty-five works council chairmen, the fact that this had happened for the first time since the creation of the works council in 1991 marked an important shift within the plant and a diminishing of trust in the union.

One of the works council members told me that 'everyone knows' that this non-member of the union is also openly right-wing and is involved with the *Deutsche Patrioten* party[118] in Zwickau. It seems that the anti-elite sentiment of the right-wing populists tends to translate into anti-union rhetoric within the factory, reflecting political polarisation in the region as a whole. Right-wing movements that strive to construct exclusive solidarity and the challenges they pose to the unions in Germany have been recently discussed by some authors (Dörre et al. 2018). A new right-wing trade union, Zentrum Automobil, created in 2009 and based at Daimler in Stuttgart, is also threatening to compete with IG Metall in Zwickau. The union describes globalisation as a 'virus', condemns co-management, and has recently supported the *Querdenker*[119] movement. At the time of my fieldwork, the representative of Zentrum Automobil spoke on the stage at one of the central squares in Zwickau during Labour Day celebrations and accused the traditional union of being corrupt and betraying the interests of the workers in favour of the management.

Everyday experiences of unevenness

The unevenness among VW workers at different plants and locations is also reproduced on the mundane level, and not only in times of conflict as in 2003. Among other VW plants, the difference in treatment of the workers in Zwickau with those working for VW at other German locations was quite obvious from the start, even though some of them were smoothed out significantly over time. VW Saxony, being a full subsidiary of VW AG, did not automatically adopt the company-level collective agreements (*Haustarifvertrag*) that applied to the western '*Konzern*' employees in VW plants in Wolfsburg, Emden, Hannover,

[118] Awakening of German Patriots (ADPM); the party is considered to be a more radical branch of the AfD and uses the cornflower as its symbol (a secret symbol of Austrian Nazis in the 1930s). Its leaders are also predominantly former AfD activists.

[119] The *Querdenker* (lateral thinker) movement is a group opposing coronavirus-related restrictions and vaccination in Germany.

Salzgitter, Braunschweig and Kassel. There is another smaller Volkswagen plant in western Germany that does not belong to Konzern (AG) and is not included in the *Haustarifvertrag* – a plant in Osnabrück. As with Zwickau, VW 'saved' the jobs in Osnabrück by taking over the former Karmann manufacturer, which went bankrupt in 2009. However, the plant was rarely mentioned to me by my interlocutors in Zwickau. Rather, the workers emphasised the difference between those working for Konzern in the west and those employed by the subsidiary in Saxony. This is how Wolfgang, an assembly line worker at a Zwickau plant, described it to me:

> "We don't belong to the seven domestic [*inländische*] plants. We are always exploited a bit more than they are. They get, for example, a bonus for twenty years of work – we don't have that. Or the car-leasing option for employees, we didn't have that. We got it only because once a fax came from the west and they made a mistake. It shouldn't have come to us, but the secretary just took it and hung it on the wall outside the office. So many employees read it. But then somebody noticed that it doesn't apply to us and put it away. But the workers who read it went to the works council and asked 'What's that? They said it was so, but then suddenly not anymore'. And then the works council negotiated with the management, and they had to introduce it here as well. So, it's like everywhere else, they always try to … press … as long as possible. So, you have to fight for everything."

The rhetoric that the eastern German plants are still part of a symbolic '*Ausland*' (abroad) was repeated by some other VW workers from Zwickau as well. As Wolfgang complained to me, some managers who came from the west received a so-called '*Buschzulage*' (bush allowance): 'They received the Buschzulage as if they were going to China or England. They consider this here as if it was a foreign country. Still, even thirty years later, some have contracts like that'. The 'bush allowance' was a special bonus payment paid in eastern Germany in the 1990s to civil servants from the old federal states in addition to their western salary as an incentive to relocate to the east. My interlocutor, however, used the word less literally, to describe the bonus that VW managers received for relocating and working 'abroad', which he found rather humiliating.

Competition between the plants also divides the workforce in different locations. Golf production, which is crucial for VW, was located in three plants at the beginning of the 1990s: in Wolfsburg, Zwickau/Mosel and Brussels. Having the plant in Wolfsburg as an internal competitor has weakened the bargaining power of the works council in Mosel. The fear of job losses in the 'mother' plant in Wolfsburg ('*Stammwerk*') slowed down development of the Mosel II plant and meant its capacities in the early stages of the

investment were underused. The main motive among the VW managers at the time was: 'We can't let the children devour (*auffressen*) the mother!' (Hessinger et al. 2000; Turner 1998).

Apart from the different collective agreements, unevenness is perceived through the lack of control locally, since the main decisions are 'taken in the west'. Although the middle-level management has been increasingly recruited locally, the top management has always been appointed from the west. According to Wolfgang, only a few of them have any connection to the site (*'Verbindung zu dem Standort'*); among them was the first managing director of Volkswagen Saxony, Dr Gerd Heuss:

> "He had a nickname – 'Papa Heuss'. That shows a very different relation to the people here. When he came back from a work trip to Wolfsburg in the evening, and then the night shift was starting, as you went out of the dressing room, he would start a conversation with you and ask if there are any problems. And he would take care of that always. He walked around the shop floor talking to people. Today there is no such thing anymore. … Now they [the managers] are also trying to integrate somehow here, but you notice that they are here just to make a 'career jump'. They come for a few years, look at what they can optimize quickly, but they don't think about the long-term planning. Heuss used to say, 'I am not interested in today, I am looking into the future', and now it seems like the opposite. They come here so that they can get onto the Board of Directors someday."

Wolfgang's impression is also supported by the fact that some of the managers – for example, the one responsible for the transition towards electric vehicles – is rarely physically there, as he spends most of his time at the Wolfsburg headquarters: "*When a decision needs to be made, we have to wait for him to return. If they don't manage to decide within the time that he is here, then we need to wait another two or three weeks*". The feeling that 'all decisions are made in the West', together with the lack of trust in the local management on-site, makes the workers believe that nobody 'up there' is committed to the success of the plant in Mosel in particular. Most of the workers I talked to did not perceive the relocation of production to be a real threat in the near future – it would hurt the image of the company, and it had invested too much in the site already. However, many perceived the choice of the Zwickau plant for producing exclusively electric cars as 'outsourcing the risk to the east' and feared that if the demand for electric cars did not grow fast enough, the plant would have to downsize or close down.

While for direct VW workers the job guarantee and internal marketing of electric cars have weakened these fears, for the workers in the supplier industry and other local workers, the fear of the phasing out of car production in Zwickau due to low demand exists.

This threat is taken very seriously, especially given the lack of other large employers in the region. Although not at the level of VW workers, workers in the VW supplier industry still have a privileged position in the region, especially when it comes to wages. As in other domains of work organization, many of the suppliers also copied Volkswagen's partnership approach to labour-management relations. However, there it was often done without a strong union organization and in an even more non-conflictual manner. The cooperation in some enterprises was particularly close: the works council at the VW engine plant in Chemnitz, for example, opposed joining the 1993 strike and was excluded from the strike list by IG Metall (Turner 1998: 75). The idea of a crisis in the post-socialist transition has been used by employers to promote cooperation and a high level of involvement by the workers in the company's success. This also drew a line between the Volkswagen workers who could 'afford' to strike and their suppliers, for whom the danger of harming the enterprise was perceived as higher.

The level of labour organization in the supplier companies is always lower than at VW, including its subsidiaries. Some suppliers still do not even have a works council. Furthermore, at VW subsidiaries, the use of precariously employed workers (*Leiharbeiter*) could ultimately be prevented, but not in their suppliers. Thus, in 2016, due to the effects of the emissions scandal, which erupted earlier in 2015,[120] management at the VW plant in Mosel laid off all six hundred of the *Leiharbeiter* it had temporarily employed through the firm Autovision GmbH. This harmed the image of the plant's union, as it had failed to protect these contract workers from losing their jobs, and it cost the union many members. Since then, there have been almost no temporary workers at the plant in Mosel, which can be mostly explained by the lack of necessity for them, since there was an excess in the already existing permanent workforce at the plant. The works council at VW also tries to prevent situations in which those working side by side are paid under different wage agreements and have different working conditions. However, as I was told by some workers, this still happens on some parts of the line, where a few workers inside the VW plant are employed by a logistics company. Most of the supplier companies, by contrast, heavily rely on the flexibility of precarious labour to match VW's expectations of flexibility, and also to

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[120] The Volkswagen emissions scandal (*Abgasskandal*) erupted in 2015, when the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of violation of the Clean Air Act to the Volkswagen Group. The agency had found that Volkswagen had intentionally programmed turbocharged direct injection (TDI) diesel engines to activate their emissions controls only during laboratory emissions testing.

discipline and divide its workforces. The ability to strike is also weakened through the use of precarious labour, as contract workers are not able to strike against the company, as they are not employed there (their employer is a temporary employment agency). Whenever a strike happens, however, they are usually also cut off from their workplaces, but in contrast to the regularly employed, they do not receive strike money (*Streikgeld*). Instead, they either continue receiving their usual payments or are transferred to another client company, which is something most temporary workers prefer to avoid, since they would like to preserve the little stability that they have.

Despite being 'in the same boat' in terms of interdependence in production, workers in the suppliers are also often covered by a different collective agreement with their employers (*Tarif*), assuming they have a collective wage agreement at all. For example, the workers at the car seat plant are paid according to the textile industry's collective agreement and not that of the metal and electro industry, as with VW Saxony, which also means that their wages are usually much lower. As mentioned earlier, VW Saxony left the organization of employers in Saxony and joined the Berlin-Brandenburg association in 2004, which also sets it apart from the workers in the supplier industry, as they now negotiate their collective agreements separately.

Due to the total dependence of some suppliers on VW, the workers there can also hardly rely on secure employment. For example, the suppliers that produce seats and wheels 'just in time' for Volkswagen do not have any other clients. As one temporary worker who was formerly employed at VW but laid off during the 2015-2016 crisis told me:

> "You can also make good money at a supplier company, and you can get a permanent contract there, so you know you can do it your whole life. But the problem is, the supplier is depending on the producer. And the prices are negotiated every year. So, this year you may have the contract, and the next year they might find something cheaper. So, I'm not sure if a permanent job at a supplier company is much more secure [than temporary employment]."

The contracts are renegotiated every few years, and the outcome of these negotiations often depend on the 'grades' that VW awards its suppliers during the evaluation. Such a renegotiation happened at the time of my fieldwork at a seat-producing plant, and the workers were waiting impatiently for the results. When the contract was renewed for the next few years, they breathed a sigh of relief. In this case, once again, the conflict between management and the workers was obscured by the common interest in retaining existing contracts with the client company.

While unevenness exists among various groups of automotive and supplier workers in Zwickau, it is even more evident when the automotive workers are compared to the rest of the population working, for example, in services or care. Whenever VW workers go on strike, the local population of Zwickau is often annoyed: "*They're doing better than anyone else here! What else do they want?*" With their job security and above-average wages, Volkswagen workers in Zwickau have become a source of envy and bitterness for many local residents. One worker from a VW supplier company expressed the common view that "*their problems are luxury problems. They have everything, but people are never fully satisfied. If I had what they have, I'd be happy*". A taxi driver also once complained to me emotionally in our conversation as we passed the factory:

> "Where does all the money go?" He then answered his own question: "Not all to the workers … But still … Do you know, they get a huge bonus every year? It's crazy, nobody else gets such a bonus over here. But it's not because they care about the workers so much, no, no. It's because their bosses want to evade taxes, so they throw all the extra money at the workers at the end of the year."

The confrontation between VW workers and other locals is rarely overt, although sometimes it does result in open conflict. Because of VW's special car-leasing offer for employees, those who used the company's leasing have Wolfsburg registration plates. The three letters WOB on the car plates often provoked hostility among the local population. As I was told by trade-union activists and some VW workers, your car was much more likely to be scratched or otherwise vandalized if it had these three letters on its number plate. Dieter, another VW assembly-line worker, also complained to me about the negative image of the VW workers among outsiders of the factory:

> "When I started there [in VW] in 1993, I was still proud to work in VW. But at some point it changed. I don't know if it's because we [the plant] became so big … But it's also about the external image of the VW employee. Some say, 'I have so much money', and don't behave nicely towards others … And somehow it changed. You still like working here, but you don't necessarily want to mention it to others. Because you get a bit of envy from the people. Because we earn some money, it's very secure also. Here in Zwickau, everything which is not VW is very different."

At the time of my fieldwork, the average wages in Zwickau were slightly above the average in Saxony and amounted to around €2400 before taxes, whereas a shop-floor worker in VW earned around €3400. There were no precarious workers at VW and, as one of my

interlocutors noted, VW workers enjoyed a status almost like civil servants (*Beamter*[121]). Many of the 'outsiders' I met also admitted that the spending of VW workers in the region on 'cafes and fitness studios' made a crucial contribution to the local economy. Many, however, felt that the privileges of VW workers were not justified. This has also been aggravated by the fact that the factory has become a sort of a 'closed club' in the past years. One young VW worker told me that the only possible way to 'get in' was to be there from the start through an apprenticeship. Due to the emissions scandal of 2015 and, later, the factory changing towards electro-mobility, the plant has also hardly needed any 'fresh blood' and has put hiring on hold. The average age of VW workers in Zwickau is 43 years, and the number of older workers is rather high. In light of the restructuring of the plant for electric vehicle production, the workers at VW have received a ten-year employment guarantee until 2029. A moderate downsizing is then set to be achieved through retirement and early retirement of the workers.

Most of the automotive industry workers I came into contact with in Zwickau were male. Their wives, some of whom also used to work in a factory before the *Wende* (some even at Sachsenring), mostly transitioned to professions that are seen as more traditionally female: midwife, physiotherapist, accountant. Many of them were employed as carers. Naturally, these jobs were less stable and less well paid than the factory jobs of their husbands, but their wives saw them as more enjoyable. The adult children of the workers often went for higher education and left Zwickau in search of better jobs in Leipzig, Dresden, or in the old *Bundesländer*.

Conclusion

Amid the growing uncertainty and precariousness that followed the post-socialist transformation and deindustrialization in eastern Germany, the VW plant in Zwickau has emerged as an island of relative job security and a decent income, which it has remained over the past thirty years. With above-average wages and with more than ninety per cent of the workforce unionized, Volkswagen has positioned its waged workers to become the local 'aristocracy of labour'. By using the lens of uneven and combined development (Kasmir and Gill 2018), I have shown here how regional and spatial inequalities translate into local

[121] The status of a civil servant, or *Beamter*, in Germany is considered rather advantageous, especially in terms of job security. As a *Beamter*, it is difficult to get fired, but one can be relocated instead. The *Beamter* also earn rather high salaries due to the fact that they are exempt from social insurance contributions. In return for these advantages, *Beamter* are expected to show loyalty to the state and are not allowed to strike.

hierarchies that can be captured through ethnographic fieldwork. That is, by offering privileges to selected segments of the working class, VW contributed to the fragmentation of the local working class and to the lower status of the workers in Zwickau being perpetuated, compared to those working in the west. In line with Kasmir (2018), the aim of this chapter has been not simply to describe these inequalities, but to determine 'how distinctions among labourers are made, unmade, and remade, through ongoing struggles among workers, capital, and the state'.

Capitalism thrives paradoxically on the production of both difference and homogeneity (Harvey 2001). The homogeneity can be observed, for instance, between such distant places as Germany and India, where, despite their different manifestations, similar processes of the informalisation and precarisation of labour take place (Mayer-Ahuja 2017). In her analysis of insecure work from a global perspective, Mayer-Ahuja (2017) discusses this tendency towards the erosion of 'normal employment' (*Normalarbeitsverhältnis*) in Germany, as well as elsewhere in the world over time. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s discussions about 'normal employment' in Germany included issues of decent incomes and work times, collective wage agreements and the representation of interests, more recent definitions of normality have been reduced to any working relationship of more than twenty-one hours a week which includes unemployment, health and pension insurance (Mayer-Ahuja 2017: 275). As Breman and van der Linden (2014: 938) have argued, 'whatever their size and wherever located, the working classes are trapped in a trajectory of exploitation and forced together into a race to the bottom'.

However, this common downward tendency must not distract us from the unequal standing of different groups of workers in different places, but should rather draw our attention to the fact that the difference is not always produced by the introduction of neoliberal strategies or increased flexibility, as in the case of precarious labour. On the contrary, sometimes fragmentation and unevenness are promoted by offering privileges to certain groups who enjoy a 'Fordist' style of employment, with higher wages and job security. These types of advantage are then treated by capital as a privilege and a luxury, and not as a right. As Kasmir argues (2014: 206), 'capital captured for itself a greater share of the total social product not only through bald and sometimes violent attacks on labour but also by offering privilege to select segments of the national working class'. The maintenance of stable employment at the core is made possible by the use of precarious labour on the margins, which furthers exclusive solidarity and polarisation between different groups of workers (Mayer-Ahuja 2017: 290).

Mollona (2014; 2004) discusses how separation is forged within industrial capitalism between formal and informal, skilled and unskilled, casual and permanent labour, between the workshop and the home/neighbourhood, between production and reproduction. This very separation, which is often embedded in local cultural constructs and values, is misleading and obscures the interplay and the relations of mutual dependence that exist between these realms. That is why, according to Mollona (2014: 206), the political opposition between business and community unionism is self-defeating. In a similar vein, through the history of automotive labour struggles in Zwickau I have shown how, by using a cooperative approach, the union within VW managed to win certain benefits for the plant's permanent workers, which further reified the separation between the VW factory workers and the rest and led to weakened solidarity and union power within regional industry as a whole. In this regard, an approach that is focused on uneven and combined development has not only theoretical importance but also political potential, which can be put into use by the unions.

Eastern Germany in general, and the highly industrialized Saxony region in particular, has been hit by a sort of 'double crisis' (Loperfido, Pusceddu 2019) – globally, through the model of capital accumulation and the decline of the Fordist model, and domestically, in the uneven development between east and west. Both crises, I argue, are closely intertwined, strengthening each other. By focusing on combination as well as unevenness, I have attempted to show how wider global struggles are combined with local histories and contexts, such as, for example, the socialist legacy of the unions. Although the unions have been fighting for more equality between the workers in the east and west, even some unionists are concerned that the arrival of such equality will mean a lack of incentive to keep production in the east going. Therefore, unevenness and the exploitation of difference become the very premise for maintaining jobs in the region. As a result, the unions are confronted with a dilemma of choosing between the universalism of fighting for workers' rights and the particularism of local interests (Kasmir 2014; Narotzky 2016). The need to stay competitive globally then becomes a priority not only for company management but for the unions as well, making poorer working conditions and lower wages a competitive advantage and a necessity.

Chapter 6: Between waste and value: (de-)valuing socialist production

"Do you know why electric cars are made here in the east? It has something to do with Lenin. It's a joke. Do you know the phrase: 'Communism is Soviet power plus electrification'? Well, we almost had communism, now electrification is also on the way."

(Peter, 58, electrician)

One cold winter morning I was sitting in the car industry museum archive sipping tea and turning the pages of the old Sachsenring '*Kurbelwelle*' newspapers when Herr Fischer came into the room with an angry look on his face. He came up to me, holding a clipping from a newspaper in his hand. "Look at this! These are all lies!", he exclaimed, waving a carefully cut-out piece of paper as if it were garbage. The news article on the paper featured a black-and-white photo of a Trabi in a workshop being pulled forward by two smiling workers wearing working overalls. "*They say we pulled the cars by hand! Unbelievable!*". He went on to explain to me that this was never the case, and while a lot of things were done by hand in Sachsenring, this was not one of them: "*How do they even get this idea?! Three million cars pushed like that?!*" Herr Fischer was a former Sachsenring engineer and museum associate, and this was not the first time I would hear him complain very passionately about the inaccurate representation of Sachsenring history in the books and the media. In many cases, he objected to the way technologies and production processes in Sachsenring were ridiculed and presented as backward.

In April 2019, I followed him to a public lecture at a technical school in Leipzig, where he was supposed to talk about Sachsenring production. About fifteen people had gathered in the classroom to hear him speak from the podium about the development of the Trabant. Herr Fischer was wearing a suit and looked very confident and well-prepared. He had hand-written notes in his hand but mostly spoke from memory, very coherently and in a thick Saxon accent. After about an hour, when he had finished his speech, there was no shortage of questions, even though the audience was small. When one of the audience members inquired about the lack of changes to the Trabi's design over the years, a veiled reference to the car's backwardness, Herr Fischer got visibly annoyed but gave a rather long answer emphasizing the role of the embargo on sheet metal and the constraints it brought to

production.[122] In other words, he brought up the role of the west to explain the 'backwardness' of the East German car.

Herr Fischer also acknowledged the shortcomings of the planned economy, such as the lack of variation in color and constant shortages of materials. He talked about the inability of the factory to satisfy the demand, not because of low levels of efficiency but rather a lack of capacity. That is how he also explained the inability of Sachsenring to offer Trabis for export. "*The factory buildings were old, but the production techniques were not*", he said proudly, adding that from 1981 the factory produced its own machines as well. Thus, he also emphasized the creativity and inventiveness of Sachsenring engineers, which was necessary to deal with limitations and shortages. In this chapter, I analyse how people, places and objects are related together when it comes to constructing value and waste. I will discuss how perceptions of the remains of socialist production, such as infrastructure, buildings, monuments and memories, relate to narratives about the value of people and their labor.

Waste, value and post-socialist industrial materiality

During my year in Zwickau, I visited the local ReSales thrift store from time to time, browsing through racks full of relatively cheap second-hand clothes. There I often heard the excited voices of German, Arabic and sometimes Russian women who had managed to find the latest bargain. What constitutes a bargain (from the talk that I could understand) was a low price, high quality or a famous brand, combined with the fact that the item wasn't properly classified as valuable by the shop's employees. The items that were properly classified, for example, as 'vintage'[123] (as opposed to simply second-hand), would often cost more and not give the shopper the same thrill of finding a unique bargain. In this sense, the pleasure is derived from a certain way of cheating the system, or resistance to it. One can say that "one man's trash is another man's treasure" (Reno 2009) or, in other words, that waste is socially constructed. However, the relationship between waste, value and those who ascribe value is more complex and involves certain power struggles, as well as a certain materiality of waste and value.

[122] Due to the Western embargo on imports of sheet metal into the GDR, there was a shortage of raw material for the car body, which forced Trabi engineers and scientists to come up with an alternative solution in the form of Duroplast (a more detailed discussion on Duroplast follows in this chapter). The little sheet metal which could be obtained in the GDR was used for the higher-class Wartburg car.

[123] The word 'vintage', as well as 'secondhand', are anglicisms also used in German.

I used the thrift store example to understand better the transformation of value since this process becomes evident when we look at tangible objects such as clothing, which can also be easily circulated, unlike some less mobile forms, such as infrastructure. Moreover, what becomes evident from the thrift store example is the importance of proper classification for the construction of value and waste. As Thompson argued (2017) in his *Rubbish Theory*, rubbish is undifferentiated, as opposed to transient, valuable durables. In this regard, anthropologists concerned with issues of waste (Alexander and Sanchez 2018, Thompson 2017) come back to Douglas's (1966) notion of dirt as matter out of place. According to Douglas, dirt is necessary for the maintenance of socio-cultural boundaries. Therefore, what becomes 'matter out of place' can tell a lot about the social system that throws it out as such. By analogy, what is classified as waste in a certain social system can tell a lot about the system itself.

While agreeing with Douglas on the importance of waste for understanding social systems, Alexander and Sanchez (2018) suggest *indeterminacy* as a third term that challenges the binary classification of waste and value. The authors argue that both waste and value are aspects of Douglas's 'form', whereas indeterminacy is a third modality that can be understood as 'formlessness' and is inherently neither positive nor negative. What is recognized as valuable or worthless is a question of power, which means that indeterminacy can arise when there is a lack of recognition on someone's part. Apart from the lack of recognition, indeterminacy also appears in the forms of undetermined futures and resistance to totalizing systems (Alexander and Sanchez 2018: 2-3). Contributors to this volume engage with emic ideas of worth and what constitutes waste and value (or indeterminacy) in a given ethnographic moment by discussing various types of excess: excess infrastructure, excess housing, excess people, etc. For example, Ringel (2018) discusses the case of post-industrial excess in the (West) German town of Bremerhaven (urban infrastructure and housing) through the lens of indeterminacy and temporality. Indeterminacy is shown to be a product of contestation and of the social renegotiation of people's expectations about the future (2018: 69). The material infrastructure of Bremerhaven, once built in anticipation of a bright economic future, became an obstacle to the city's development. Ringel's ethnography follows how the excess housing suddenly found use again amid the refugee crisis; how the unnecessarily wide road in the middle of the city was endowed with trees and pedestrian and cycling paths; and how indeterminacy is maintained by keeping the *Schrotthäuser* (scrap houses) in a rather poor condition and therefore preventing gentrification and protecting their inhabitants from being pushed out. He does so by looking at the moments of indeterminacy,

or, as he describes them, 'the moments of surprise', when the future of the infrastructure opens up and the transition between waste and value is made possible, the moments when the various projects of the future are (re-)negotiated. Ringel (2018) suggests that whether something is constructed as value or waste depends on peoples' expectations of and projects for the future. Indeterminacy is thus not a context of human practice but its product (Ringel 2018: 85).

The case of Zwickau resembles Ringel's discussion of Bremerhaven: urban shrinkage, post-industrial ruins and excess housing. A major difference is in the context of how the post-industrial excess came into being. Whereas in Bremerhaven it was caused by a process of post-industrial decline that can be observed globally, material excess in Zwickau was the result of rapid deindustrialisation following the end of socialism and German reunification.[124] At the same time, Zwickau is unlike the post-industrial town of Hoyerswerda, studied earlier by Ringel (2017), in that it still has a flourishing automotive industry, creating jobs in the area. In Zwickau, post-industrial ruins and industrial sites co-exist side by side. It has also been argued by some researchers (e.g. Sgibnev and Rekhviashvili 2021) that the decaying post-socialist infrastructure and the nostalgia it evokes can be invoked to support the development of new large-scale infrastructural projects. Somewhat counterintuitively, seemingly opposite narratives of moving forward and catching up with the west pair well with the selectively employed modernization-through-infrastructure narrative of the Soviet era.

While Ringel (2018) focuses on undetermined futures and the human agency through which they are negotiated, in this chapter I focus on processes of recognition and resistance. I am more concerned with power relations and what the interactions with post-socialist industrial infrastructure and East German products can tell us about these relations. While Ringel (2018) places the emphasis on ephemeral moments of indeterminacy, when particular meanings and social projects are renegotiated and contested, I see indeterminacy as a protracted process of negotiation and reclaiming value. If waste is matter out of place, in the case of Zwickau's industrial infrastructure, its 'place' can be described as the social, economic and political context of socialism. Disembedded from the social contexts which produced it, post-socialist industrial infrastructure becomes waste.

With its robustness and often assumed backwardness, the leftover post-socialist industrial infrastructure has become an embodiment of socialist wastefulness. Socialism is

[124] I will discuss this process in more detail in the following sections.

often shown as more wasteful than capitalism in the media and academic discourse in at least in two senses: 1) in its lack of efficiency (waste of time, effort, labor, etc.); and 2) in a more ecological sense (as a regime which does not seem to care about the amount of waste, e.g. toxic waste, which it produces due to its 'backward' technologies). Gille (2007) challenges this assumption, which is likely to be a continuation of a certain Cold War narrative of wasteful socialism and efficient, supposedly less wasteful capitalism. She argues in favor of a more differentiated perspective by using the notion of 'waste regimes'. Talking about waste regimes enables us to determine the socio-cultural context of waste production, but also to keep the materiality of waste within sight, as the type of waste (chemical, metallic, etc.) and its characteristics also dictates certain ways in which it can and cannot be handled. She then recognizes three waste regimes that followed one another in socialist in Hungary: the metallic regime (1948–74), the efficiency regime (1975–84) and the chemical regime (1985–present). Whereas during the first period waste was hailed as a valuable resource for reuse, during the efficiency regime it was seen as a rather unwanted cost of production, and therefore it was preferably minimized in a preventive manner or recycled. During the chemical regime, the focus finally shifted exclusively to the negative side of waste, as it was seen not only as unwanted but also as harmful and dangerous. This resulted in a different approach to waste, which focused on incineration and disposal. This shift of focus from production to the disposal of waste outside production was convenient for the economic actors that appeared in Hungary after the end of socialism, the privatized factories, as well as lucrative waste incineration businesses. Therefore, in her analyses, Gille (2007; 2009) argues that 1989 did not mark the ultimate shift in waste regimes and approaches to waste.

Despite Gille's critique of this black-and-white approach, there is still a common perception in the media, one also shared by many of my interlocutors, that socialism was inherently more wasteful than capitalism. Accordingly, socialist industrial enterprises and what remained of them are primarily associated with wastefulness and waste. The robustness and stubbornness of socialist industrial infrastructure were seen as especially problematic in the context of the *Wende*, which promoted rapid change and flexibility. But despite the assumed durability of infrastructure, its existence still depends heavily on human agency, be it in the form of preservation, maintenance, repurposing or demolition.

How post-socialist industrial excess is treated, (de-)valued and talked about – whether it is imagined as waste or value – can tell us a lot about competing regimes of value. In her discussion of communities of Russian-speaking miners in Estonia and Kazakhstan, Kesküla (2019) shows how certain social groups related to 'backward' production can also

be treated as ‘waste’. Despite some ambiguities in their representations, miners mostly occupied a respected position within socialist ideology. They were seen as the vanguard of the revolution, as heroes who work in dangerous conditions, as the noble proletariat, the antithesis of fat capitalists (Kesküla 2019: 115). Contrary to this perception, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians and miners were both seen as an anachronism, as an unwanted Soviet legacy in both countries. Russian miners therefore lost their somewhat privileged position in terms of both their class and their ethnicity. By emphasizing the value of their labor and through the ritual of complaining, the miners tried to reclaim their worth. They also mourned the previous regime, in which their labor was valued as noble, dangerous and necessary for society. They were nostalgic for socialism and yearned for its return. Similarly, Yarrow (2017) observed how people living in the industrial ruins of an unrealized project mourned past projects for the future, rather than the past itself. By contrasting the unrealized utopia of the city they once hoped for with its actual modernity, people expressed criticisms of the present. The ruins thus contest existing reality by undermining the “self-deception” of modern representations of time as linear and progressive (Yarrow 2017: 585).

Classifying something as waste or value is an exercise of power. By negotiating the value of East German products, such as Trabi cars, and the factories where they were produced, people also negotiate the value of the social, political and economic systems that produced them, the people who participated in this system of production, and their labor. By contesting the devaluation of the Trabant and the sites where they were produced, people can reject or resist the classificatory systems which impose categories of waste on them. In other words, the (de-)valuation of East German post-socialist industrial infrastructure and East German products is political. Following Graeber (2001:30-33), I see the establishment of value as being mainly a matter of social relationships between people, rather than the objects themselves. Therefore, I do not focus solely on the material culture of Sachsenring production or the social biography of the Trabant. Rather, I emphasize the dynamic processes of value negotiation. First, I will focus on the former production sites and discuss how the selective museumification and ruination reorders memories of production by deeming some objects valuable while reducing others to waste. Second, I will discuss how the value of East German products, including the Trabant, is negotiated and reclaimed by my interlocutors. Third, I will explore how the materiality of production and production processes relates to the value of workers’ skills, labor and identities.

Remembering production: museums and ruins

Easily accessible by car, one of Zwickau's main tourist attractions, the August Horch Museum, lies a little way outside the old town and the city center in the area called Pölbitz. It takes almost thirty minutes to get there on foot from the city center, almost as long as it would take by bus or tram, since the connections are rather infrequent and public transport does not stop directly next to the museum. It is therefore expected that most visitors will come to the museum by car, as many tourists skip other attractions of Zwickau and only visit the museum before heading to their destinations elsewhere. A large parking lot on the other side of the street from the entrance also makes this possible. At the entrance to the parking lot, one can easily spot the solar-powered charging station for electric cars, a highly symbolic piece of infrastructure and the biggest concern for the advocates of e-mobility. Right next to the charging station one can see a stone sculpture of a Trabant and a family of three: a man and a woman resting by leaning against the car and a child sitting on top of its front. Constructed by an artist from Zwickau, Berthold Dietz, in 1998, this sculpture used to occupy a more prominent spot in the city centre in the square at Georgenplatz. In 2014 it was moved to the museum's parking lot, leaving the city centre free of any reminders of the history of its automotive industry. According to the city officials, the reason for moving the sculpture was repeated vandalism. After cleaning and restoration, the sculpture was moved away from the city centre to the museum. In the local media, this was described as putting the Trabi in a more appropriate, honourable place, but for some local residents, as they admitted to me, it seemed as if it was being banished from the centre of the city. One way or another, it was removed from the square and grouped together, as if quarantined, with the rest of Sachsenring's memory sights – the museum and other former Sachsenring buildings.

The museum itself occupies the building formerly known as Sachsenring Werk 2, which earlier belonged to Audi. During the Sachsenring era, Werk 2 was where the final assembly took place. The museum was founded in 1988, what was still the GDR period, in one of the unused Sachsenring dining rooms. At first, it only exhibited fourteen vehicles, including one Horch, one DKW and more modern Sachsenring models. After the *Wende*, the museum changed owner many times, until in 2000 it was bought jointly by Audi AG and the city of Zwickau, each still owning half of the shares. This investment was framed by Audi as a tribute to its roots in Zwickau, since that is where it was founded in 1909. Similarly, in 2021, when Volkswagen announced the decision to produce the electric Audi Q4 e-tron in Zwickau, the media headlines emphasized Audi's return to its roots. As the narrative goes, after more than 75 years, Audi was back in Zwickau, where it belonged. The 'natural' course

of history could be restored. This rhetoric of a return to normalcy frames socialism as a diversion from the linear trajectory of progress and as a setback to linear progress.

After the large-scale renovation and enlargement of the museum, it was reopened in 2004, now incorporating a former office building and the August Horch Villa. After another enlargement in 2017, the exhibition space reached 6500 square meters, showcasing the history of automotive production in Zwickau from Horch to Sachsenring and Volkswagen. Special attention is devoted to the persona of August Horch. During the GDR period, he was condemned for being a war profiteer and depicted as a villain, whereas today the museum celebrates Horch as a hardworking entrepreneur and the father of the German automotive industry. As one of the attractions the museum offers, one can even have a guided tour of the museum by August Horch (an employee with a long moustache and round glasses, dressed like August Horch and speaking in his name). A large part of the museum's collection consists of pre-war Audi, Horch, DKW and Wanderer vehicles, but the GDR era and the Trabi are also well-represented. A small corner is dedicated to the social life of the Sachsenring factory, featuring a few open brigade diaries behind the glass and some photographs of leisure and sports activities at Sachsenring, such as football games and exercise.

Apart from various Trabi models, the exhibition includes the only remaining machine for the production of *Duroplast*, which was saved from being scrapped in 1995 through the efforts of a former *Sachsenring* engineer, though it belonged to the museum. The machine takes up the central space in one of the rooms, and together with the production video projected on to the wall, it gives a clear impression of how *Duroplast* was produced. Finally, part of the exhibition is devoted to the Trabi and its place in the reality of everyday life in the GDR: a pile of *Westpakete*,[125] the GDR women's fashion magazine *Sibylle* and a Trabant with a roof-tent parked next to a "GDR bungalow", a small, genuine-size holiday home built within the museum hall and filled with GDR furniture, a TV and other items of nostalgia. All these objects and other "East German things" (Berdahl 1999) put together a common

[125] 'Western packages' were sent from West Germany to family and friends in the GDR, usually containing some scarce products, such as coffee, raisins, perfume, clothing and sheer tights. Sending such packages was also incentivised by the West German state. In return, East Germans would send *Ostpakete*, often containing self-made pies, crocheted handkerchiefs, or the classical Ore Mountain folk art wooden figures, back over the border (see Soch 2017).

image used in museums and commercial sites around Germany, one meant to evoke the sense of *Ostalgie*, mainly based on consumption.

The Sachsenring and Trabi part of the museum's exhibition ended with an interactive installation: the three doors, which symbolized the future of the car industry in Zwickau after the *Wende*. Visitors to the museum were invited to press one of the three buttons to choose one of the three doors leading to the future. Two of the doors lead nowhere and show pictures of an abstract empty hall and an industrial ruin behind them. Behind the third door, the only "right" way that allowed the visitors to continue walking through the exhibition, was a long blue corridor with some words written on its walls which read: "No standstill", "Hope", "Automobile manufacturing tradition", and "Jobs". The corridor ended with the first Volkswagen Polo produced in Zwickau, the logo of VW Saxony and the exit to the next room, displaying VW's more recent history in Zwickau after 1989. This representation can be viewed ironically when one remembers that there are industrial ruins within a hundred meters of the museum.

The August Horch museum was not always the only car industry museum in Zwickau. From 2014 to 2017 a mobile exhibition of about thirty vehicles was displayed in one of the buildings close to the Zwickau city center and next to the river Mulde. The exhibition was officially called "AUTOmobile Trabant exhibition", and unofficially simply "Trabant museum", and it was managed by volunteers from the Zwickau-based club (*Verein*) of Trabant enthusiasts, *Intertrab*, which states the preservation of the Trabant's cultural heritage (*Kulturgut*) as its primary role. The *Duroplast* production machinery mentioned earlier was also placed there for a few years after it was first removed from the August Horch museum due to the lack of space after the museum's takeover by Audi and the city but before it was taken back there in 2017. The exhibition was open from Wednesdays to Sundays, and the volunteers would provide guided tours through the small museum. The museum also had its own workshop, where the Trabant cars could be repaired and restored. However, when the August Horch museum reopened after its renovation and enlargement, it dedicated more space to the Trabi's history, and it was agreed between the museum and the *Verein* that it would have to find itself another exhibition space, since the two museum collections would be too similar, and there was only space for one car-industry museum in the town. Since 2017, *Intertrab* was on the lookout for a new exhibition space in the neighboring town of Meerane but did not manage to move the exhibition there so far. Once again, a piece of Trabi memory was reordered and grouped together, concentrated around the official museum.

The other two former Sachsenring workshops, Werk 1 (formerly Horch) and Werk 3 (formerly Karosseriewerk Schumann), were spread out within the same part of the city as the museum. Because of the long distances between the workshops, the cars had to be transported between them using the trucks – another manifestation of the socialist wastefulness of resources, some would argue. Werk 3 was used to produce car-body exteriors involving *Duroplast* production, painting and *Duroplast* plating. According to the workers, *Duroplast* production was the dirtiest, messiest part of the production, with lots of dust and hot air, which made Werk 3 the dirtiest Sachsenring workshop. In the words of the former Sachsenring workers, this workshop was also very susceptible to fire, since the cotton would often start to burn. The fact that much of the manual work was also concentrated in the production of *Duroplast* also makes it wasteful in the eyes of the outside observer.

Werk 3 was completely demolished soon after the *Wende*. The space was worth more as a *tabula rasa* for future investments. Many former Sachsenring workers, who were employed by the SAQ shortly after the *Wende* and were in desperate need of jobs, earned money by dismantling their own former workshops, as it was the only job they could find. The workshops were demolished, and the machinery was dismantled and scrapped. In other words, the value of their former workplaces was reduced to the value of the raw materials of which they consisted. The same situation happened in the offices. Here is what one of the Sachsenring office employees told me about the time, after she had some trouble remembering the year:

> "I always suppressed it because it was a terrible time. The people were fired, [and] the most important and largest machines were cleared out of the halls and brought up here to Sachsenring. The computer with all my stuff was taken away from me. In the end, I had nothing left, but at that time I still had the seven months' notice. […] I couldn't just stay at home, so I just sat in a small room with the manager and tried to pass the time."

A developer called *metaWERK* took over the space where Werk 3 used to stand and rented it to a few automotive suppliers and a plastic packaging producer for its workshops. One of the buildings next to the former area of Werk 3, also owned and managed by *metaWERK*, was a historic former cotton-spinning mill made of red brick. The mill was opened in 1896 and was nationalized and continued production throughout the GDR period until after the *Wende*, when it was transferred to the *Treuhand* and subsequently closed down. Ironically, the building was leased to the Employment Agency from 2006 until 2019.

Werk 1 is the only one of the three former Sachsenring workshops in Zwickau that was left unused and also was not completely demolished, as the preserved building stands is now protected as a historical landmark (*Denkmalschutz*). The giant workshop on four floors, each five meters high, was first built in 1914 on a site bought by August Horch from an old sailcloth-weaving factory. During World War II, as producers of war ammunition, the Audi and Horch factories became a target for bombing by the Americans, but they missed their targets almost completely, so that the damage could be quickly restored, and the factory buildings were left almost intact. During the Sachsenring era, the former Horch factory (then called Werk 1) was where sheet metal parts were pressed and car-body frames made from steel were assembled.

Today, the building stands empty and is sometimes referred to as the 'Horch ruin' by local residents, despite its relatively well-preserved façade and its few broken windows. On top of the decaying building, one could still see, painted over and hardly recognizable, the letters "Horch-Werke", reminding those passing by of its long history of automotive production, whereas the "VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau" sign and the Sachsenring logo are gone without any sign of their ever being there. Nature is slowly reclaiming the space where the former Werk 1 stands with a few trees growing on top of the building. Edensor (2005: 320) emphasized this hybridization of industrial ruins and nature as one of the ways in which a ruin challenges the *status quo* by "transgressing the assigned boundaries between things, and between objects and 'nature'". Unless one is intentionally strolling to take a look at the building, it is not so easy to spot. The are where the former Werk 1 was located belongs to FES, the company which emerged out of the former Sachsenring research and development department. Since there are also other buildings of the company's surrounding Werk 1, and the research and development is a highly secretive branch, access to the building is not possible for the ordinary passer-by. Although the building is visible from a few different places, it is separated from the street by a fence, and one cannot come closer to the building than about a hundred meters.

Figure 5. The preserved Sachsenring Werk I (former Horch) building.

In 2014, it was announced that the Saxon state exhibition (*Sächsische Landesausstellung*) would take place in Zwickau in 2018 within the Werk 1 (Horch) building in particular. The exhibition was called "Boom: 500 years of industrial culture (*Industriekultur*) in Saxony". For the purposes of the exhibition, a massive renovation of Werk 1 costing an estimated 15 million Euros was planned. Given the competition for the industrial exhibition, the moment of indeterminacy came, similar to the urban renewal project in Bremerhaven discussed by Ringel (2018). Despite having the status of a historical landmark, the building stood empty and was treated essentially as a sort of 'waste' for about 25 years. With the exhibition project now in sight, the industrial ruin had an opportunity to be transformed into 'value' once again.

In a discussion with one of the younger museum employees, Karl, he told me that he was quite hopeful about the *Landesausstellung* taking place in Werk 1, as it would finally make its future more definite and certain. He told me that there were plans for the building to provide an urgently needed space for the city archive after the industry exhibition. Karl liked this idea very much, since it would make the building accessible to the public and preserve some sort of connection to its history, as he was critical of industrial buildings being used commercially as offices, cafes or galleries, as was often the case in Leipzig. However, his hopes were dashed, as the building was declared unsuitable for the exhibition, and some other options were preferred. One reason for this was the higher than expected renovation costs due to the very poor state of the building and it being polluted with oil, which dripped

from the ceilings. As one of the local residents shared with me: "*There was a nice saying that we don't need any gas stations here in Zwickau. We just need to pump out hydraulic oil from the production workshops of Sachsenring, and then we'd have so much oil that we don't need the gas stations anymore. Because these old machines, you had to pour oil on them all the time, and it came out underneath.*" Another reason, not mentioned as often, was the lack of agreement with the owner of the building and the land (FES) about the building's future. The company objected to the idea of the archive being relocated to the building after the exhibition since the constant flow of visitors would endanger the confidentiality of its operational processes: it is where FES develops and tests prototypes for the automotive sector. The building has therefore been left to decay further behind its fence.

Whether something becomes a museum or ruin, a historical artefact or waste, depends on the dominant regime's value judgements, which deem the object worthy or unworthy of remembering. As I have tried to show in this section, the majority of the objects which used to remind the local residents of and the visitors to Zwickau of its Sachsenring past (such as a Trabi sculpture and the Trabi museum) were reordered, spatially relocated, classified and commodified to support the dominant narrative of value. As Edensor argues (2005: 833), ordered and regulated sites of memory, such as museums, consolidate the idea that there are places for remembering and places where memories and the past are irrelevant, where they are, in Douglas' terms, matter out of place. The consolidation of memory around the car-industry museum run by Audi and the city administration therefore appears as an attempt not only to preserve and share memories of automotive production, but also to order them and, by doing so, to sanitize the space from unwanted, unintentional memories.

Being large and spatially scattered, the former Sachsenring factory presented a challenge to this process of containment. Most of the Sachsenring buildings were demolished, and those that were left mostly had Horch or Audi pasts to make them appear more valuable and worth preserving. This leftover industrial infrastructure, as Edensor (2005) also argues, 'haunts' modernity with the 'ghosts' of a too swiftly buried past. Being a sort of unintentional monument to former production regimes and unrealized alternative projects of the future (Yarrow 2017), industrial ruins disrupt existing materiality and challenge the ordered forms of social remembering and the myth of linear universal progress that is driven by capitalism and technology (Edensor 2005: 316). In so doing, the ruins can become important tools of social criticism and challenge the existing order of things because they make unseen objects, production regimes, pasts and even people more visible again and show how materiality, production and social life could be organized differently. As Pusca

(2010: 241) puts it, in a post-socialist context, ruined industrial spaces often "became a testimony of change, as well as a testimony of the human ruination that followed". However, the realization of this important function of the industrial ruin often fails, since such ruins are often not accessible to the people, as was the case for Werk 1: active bodily engagement with the workplace was replaced by a passive gaze over the fence (Pusca 2010). This is not to say, however, that the former workers did not resist the dominant memory narrative of production, as I will show in the following sections.

Trabi and other 'East German things'

Shortly after the *Wende*, East Germans were determined to buy Western cars, even though they were often overpriced and in a rather poor state after previous use. Old Trabants not only lost their value but actually became a liability, since having an old Trabi scrapped cost about 500 Marks (equivalent of about 255 Euros), as it fell under the category of hazardous waste (*Sondermüll*). Due to the high disposal costs, Trabis were often simply left on the side of the street, to the irritation of local residents, since the cars blocked the street space. Trabis, which had remained almost unchanged since the 1950s, became a symbol of the wasteful, backward planned economy of the GDR and, as its relict, had to go for waste. Those who wanted to keep their Trabis had to deal with shortages of spare parts and repair shops, which almost disappeared after the *Wende*. Even filling up the tank became a problem, because the Trabis with the two-stroke engines need to be filled with a mixture of gasoline and oil, which used to be available in the GDR gas stations but disappeared after the *Wende*, so Trabi drivers now have to mix it themselves.

After the *Wende*, Trabant cars were not only discarded as backward, they were also were ridiculed and became the target of multiple anecdotes and punchlines. "*How many workers are needed to build a Trabi? Two – one folds and the other one glues*", goes one of the famous jokes about Trabant. The joke comes from the common description of the Trabant as a car made of cardboard (*Pappe*). What some called *Pappe* was the know-how of East German engineers, mentioned before, in using *Duroplast*. When not painted over, the material resembles cardboard with its wood-like brownish colour. However, contrary to the myth, *Duroplast* was not made from cardboard, but from phenol resin pressed together with cotton fibres under high temperatures. Playing in favour of the narrative that constructs Trabi as a waste car is the fact that *Duroplast* was literally made from waste: the cotton which was used for its production consisted of waste from the Soviet textile industry, while the phenol resin came from the brown-coal industry. *Duroplast* was developed mostly for the Trabant

and did not have many other uses, except for some suitcases and post-boxes. One of the former Sachsenring workers also described to me some other uses of the material with a chuckle and pride in his voice:

> "The outer shell, the roofs, were also made of this material [Duroplast]. You can still find them in many gardens today. We also have one at home, such a big Trabant roof. And there you can fill the earth nicely from the compost sieve. And we use that twice a year every year. And it's indestructible. The material also doesn't rust. It is, of course, not that good for the environment, but still...it was a genius invention".

The durability of *Duroplast*, which is reflected in its name, was especially praised by some of my interlocutors. It seemed to embody the highly valued durability and thriftiness associated with eastern products in particular:

> "If you had a car and a screw broke on the wheel, then the screw was replaced by some kind of technical trick. A new screw was welded on, a new thread was added. There is no such thing in the West. Everything is thrown away. It wasn't repaired somehow, you can see that on all these devices. They last three years, and then everything is broken. They intentionally built in these defects. After three years, the cable burns out, and then you need to buy something new. If you use a machine from the GDR, it will still hold. It was solid, robust, durable. If you had such a device, it just had to hold. Because you couldn't buy a second one, or there wasn't a second one."

Duroplast material had some characteristics which made it an alternative to steel: it was very light, durable and smooth, and relatively easy to press into the desired shape. Among its advantages compared to steel were that the material was essentially corrosion-free and cheap. However, the Trabant's frame was still made of steel and only covered with *Duroplast* panels on top of the steel skeleton. Despite Trabant cars being ridiculed (mostly in the West) as a car made out of plastic, the attitude towards *Duroplast* among my interlocutors and former Sachsenring workers was overwhelmingly positive. The use of plastic for the Trabant body was important in the context of the overall excitement about technological progress, which was central to the narrative of the eastern bloc (Rubin 2009: 34). Moreover, it was an important political symbol of independence from the West, as it partly replaced steel, which was embargoed.

However, the disadvantages of *Duroplast* were also mentioned by one of the engineers. Herr Mayer was an engineer who worked on the construction of the new factory part located in Mosel. However, his career took an unwanted turn when he refused to go to the Party school (*Parteischule*). As Herr Mayer was convinced, he was sent to the paint shop

(*Lackiererei*) as a punishment for his undisciplined behavior: "*There were only problems. There was no correct paint, but the cars had to be painted. This material, the Duroplast, the paint had to hold on top of it, but it just didn't hold! We tried to develop different methods, [but the management said:] – 'Oh, that's taking too long!'. But if that wasn't done, the paint would fall off*". Despite complaining about the unyielding nature of the material, he was still rather positive about it overall: "*Today you would use carbon and fiberglass because it's much stiffer, but in principle it was a corrosion-free material. The whole car couldn't rust, except for the frame. And we didn't have the steel then, like in the West, or the same facilities. They wouldn't deliver it to us, deliberately so!*"

The invention of *Duroplast* was also part and parcel of the narrative of the East Germans' inventiveness and creativity.[126] The narrative stresses self-reliance and '*Erfindungsreichtum*' (ingenuity), which helped East Germans find creative solutions to shortages and other problems of everyday life in the GDR. One former Sachsenring engineer described it in the following way: "*This material [Duroplast], I say, is a symbol of the talent for improvisation [Improvisationstalent], to which we were challenged. To do something out of nothing*". According to many of my interlocutors in the field, this creativity, cleverness and talent for improvisation not only helped them deal with everyday challenges during socialism, but also gave them an advantage compared to their western colleagues after the *Wende*.

Despite its many shortcomings, in the absence of other alternatives, Trabant was a rather desirable object for many East Germans. Waiting times for the Trabi could stretch to up to thirteen years, which stimulated the expansion of the used-car market and the black market. Due to the long waiting times, the price of a new Trabant was sometimes half the price of a used one, since buying a used car saved the buyer all the waiting. According to many of my interlocutors, joining the queue for a Trabant was also a very practical investment: "*It was a usual thing – you turn eighteen, and you get into the queue, whether you need a car or not. I didn't know back then if I would need it, but, in any case, I could sell it*", one former Sachsenring worker told me. However, even if one waited and finally

[126] This narrative is described in some literature with the word *Eigen-Sinn*, which Alf Lüdtke (Lüdtke and Templer 2018) defines as follows: "Eigen-Sinn: denoting willfulness, spontaneous self-will, a kind of self-affirmation, an act of (re)appropriating alienated social relations on and off the shop floor by self-assertive prankishness, demarcating a space of one's own" (2018: 313). The term helped shed light on the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*), as opposed to focusing on the state and the economic system. In this chapter, I will not go into a detailed discussion of this term.

received a brand new Trabi, the problems did not end there. As one former Sachsenring employee told me: "*The person who got his car after 10-12 years of waiting then had a problem with spare parts. There were none. So, if something broke, you would go to the neighbor [and say]: 'Can you help me? Do you by chance have this and that?'. And people helped each other like that, and from that emerged some personal [*menschliche*] relationships as well"*.

Repairing a Trabi by yourself was a common practice due to the lack of repair shops, but also because it was possible for even the most technically ungifted car-owners to do. The manuals were also very thorough: instead of just describing how to operate the vehicle, they explained the purpose of every small car part (Rubin 2009: 36). The car was also rather easy in its construction. One former Sachsenring shopfloor worker, Elke, also saw this as a great advantage of the car:

> "It was a very practical car. You could repair it yourself. There were also a few specialists and workshops, but in principle you could do it yourself, or people would help each other. There were many of these lifting platforms where you could lift the car and repair it. […] It was a sought-after item as well, you waited forever for the car. And they were well taken care of [gepflegt]. They were only taken out of the garage on Sundays; during the week you would take a bus instead. There was a different attitude to the car. It was taken care of, as if it was a woman [giggles]".

Figure 6. Trabant with a tent at a Trabi-Treffen in Zwickau in 2019.

For a few years after the *Wende*, Elke still drove her old Trabi, which was one year older than she was. The reason for this was mostly that she simply couldn't afford a new car and was, to some extent, also satisfied with her Trabi. The ability to repair the car on your own or with the help of informal networks, such as neighbors, meant a certain self-reliance and independence from the state and the market, in which Trabants reflected the overarching logic of self-reliance, which I mentioned earlier. A degree of independence and freedom of movement were also achieved with the help of a Trabi for trips and holidays, at least within the country, especially since the state put a lot of restrictions on movement in general. Going camping with a Trabi was an especially popular way of spending one's free time.

What was often mentioned by my interlocutors in Zwickau, both engineers involved in the development of the Trabant and the former shopfloor workers, was the fact that Sachsenring's engineers made many attempts to modernize the Trabant, without success. These statements were often accompanied by a sigh of regret about what could have been. The reason why the engineers' ideas remained on paper was the unwillingness of the political elite to let them be implemented. By emphasizing the 'objective' limitations of the socialist state's planned economy, my interlocutors separated the value of the product – the Trabant – from the value of the skills and labor of those who developed and produced it. As one former Sachsenring worker phrased it, "*The government didn't want to let the automotive industry grow strong. Comrade Günter Mittag*[127] *would prefer to have horses and carriages than what we built here…*". When the research and development department's employees went to the *Politbüro* in Berlin to discuss their new ideas, the answer from the politicians was almost always the same – there are no resources for investing in the automotive industry, and the Trabant was already sufficient for the needs of the GDR population as it was. Therefore, many projects suggested by Sachsenring engineers and researchers were simply discarded, or, as many of my interlocutors described it, 'hidden away in the drawer' ['in eine Schublade geschoben']. Instead of essential changes in design, new Trabi models had only very small tweaks made to them, the importance of which was exaggerated in official propaganda, but often laughed at by the Sachsenring workers and the population.

One of the most famous developments, which never went into mass production, was the prototype of the Trabant P603. In the mid-1960s the *Politbüro* took the decision to develop a successor to the Trabant 601. The prototypes, developed by Sachsenring

[127] The SED secretary who was close to party secretary Erich Honecker and was responsible for economic issues. After the collapse of socialism, he was often blamed for the failures of the GDR's economy.

engineers, included versions with a four-stroke engine from Škoda and Wartburg, while the car body would be made of *Duroplast*, like its predecessor. The prototype P603 was a three-door hatchback model, which at the time was new on the European market. The car's angular form looked modern for its time, and the first test drives around Zwickau were quite successful. However, following the direct intervention of Günter Mittag, the project was suddenly closed down in 1968: the prototypes had to be destroyed and the documentation sent to Berlin. The leading engineer of the project, Dr Werner Lang, attempted to save the project by driving the Trabant P603 prototype to Berlin and showing it to the ministers to prove the car had to be built. But Günter Mittag's decision was set in stone. As a punishment for his undisciplined behavior, the engineer was then sent to another automotive factory in Ludwigsfelde to help develop trucks.

Only a few years later, in 1974, the Volkswagen Golf I went into production. The design of the Golf I resembled the design of the P603 prototype, although the prototypes had already scrapped. From that circumstance a conspiracy theory emerged and became a sort of an urban legend, namely that the P603 blueprints had been sold 'to the West' and used as a close reference for the Golf I. As Elke, who was studying at the Sachsenring vocational training school at the time of the *Wende* told me, before the *Wende* nobody would talk about it, but around 1989 her teachers started to hint that this was what could actually have happened. The widow of one of the project's engineers told me that after the *Wende* her husband went to the archive in Chemnitz, where all the Sachsenring documentation ended up, just to find that the P603 documentation was not there: "*All other documentation was there, except for 603. He wanted to rebuild it with the students of the university here*". Many of my interlocutors in Zwickau, workers and engineers, told me this story very carefully, without adopting any definite positions and calling it mostly 'just a theory'. Nevertheless, many of them finished the story in lowered voices and with a mysterious smile: "*We will never know for sure*". Some of them added as they started to talk more confidently: "*But it is suspicious, don't you agree?*".

Perhaps the conspiracy around P603 and Golf I reappeared again and again in the conversations because it fits with the general narrative of resistance against the devaluing of the Trabant and other products made in the east. According to this narrative, although eastern products were and still are ridiculed in the west, they were actually in high demand in the west as well. Like the story of the stolen P603, many complained that the best products made in the east were sold in the west during the GDR period. One former Sachsenring worker used another example: "*For example, our women, they had such tights, nylon tights. They*

were produced here in the thousands, thousands! But here there were none. We also built the best machines, but they were all sold abroad, or to the west". Many others also complained that there were shortages of many of the consumer goods that were produced in the east because they were sold to the west very cheaply ('*Damping-Preisen'*) and parallels were made with the current brain-drain from the east. A retired former Sachsenring shop-floor worker, Frau Wagner, gave me a similar narrative to describe the interest in Trabis by some westerners after the *Wende*:

> "I only know that all the Wessis got themselves a Trabant. They were all hooked [*süchtig*] on the Trabant and the Sachsenring sign. I had some used ones [*Sachsenring signs*], and I gave them to my son-in-law. Even though they were derided over there [*drüben*], our Trabants, many bought themselves a Trabant. Otherwise here they all bought western cars and gave away their Trabants, and then they [*Wessis*] bought them and drove them".

Despite the many ways in which my interlocutors tried to reclaim the value of the Trabant, for most of them this did not mean claming the technical superiority of the Trabi compared to western cars. One Sachsenring technician, who after the *Wende* led a group of workers on a familiarization trip to Wolfsburg, described his feelings to me when he first drove an Audi car, which was given to him temporarily by VW in Wolfsburg to drive between the factory and the dormitory: "*An Audi! And a big one! I had no idea how to drive this car. You can't even imagine! There is no comparison! I don't know… it's like if you had a wall clock, and suddenly you get an electronic clock with everything. Or if you had an old phone with a cable, and suddenly you get a smartphone*". It is perhaps to the ridicule, especially early on after the *Wende*, that my interlocutors in Zwickau developed various ways of resistance: emphasizing the difficult conditions of production and the shortage of raw materials to legitimize the seemingly 'backward' construction of the car; stressing the social context in which Trabant's value was recognized according to different criteria; emphasizing the car's technical advantages and the 'inventiveness'; and finally pulling out the examples of their western relatives or friends, who, against the dominant narrative, could recognize the value of the Trabi. As Merkel argued (2009: 363), the discourse around the Trabant mirrors the problems of reunification, transformation and recognition of the East German experience.

My interlocuters also saw the Trabi's value in terms not only of its sheer use value, but also of the car's value within the whole of the GDR's social system. As most of my interlocutors also worked on production of the Trabant, its value was also seen through its

socio-economic significance in creating jobs and the social life which took place in and around the factory. Herr Fischer, an encounter with whom I opened this chapter, phrased it in the following way:

> "In my opinion, the Trabi was a good small car for its time, and I am far from seeing the Trabi solely from the point of view of an outdated two-stroke engine, or the air-cooled engine or something like that. I see it rather as a social good. To provide three million cars to the population, it changes the structure of this population. And ten thousand people earned good money here. And probably one-fourth of the bungalows, which stand here at the dams, were paid for by the car workers, or the garages, or flats".

Here, Herr Fischer mentioned another dimension of the Trabi: as a '*Volks-wagen*', a people's car, given the initial ambition to bring a car to the masses. This ambition was, on the one hand, never fully fulfilled, as the car still had its deficits, while on the other hand the idea of a car for the masses often prevented significant changes in its construction and design, as implementing them could slow down production. As Rubin argued (2009: 41), the Trabant was meaningful only within a system and as part of the social system. Outside it, it was seen as being weirdly out of place, which led to it being perceived as either 'waste' or as something comical, something sticking out from the 'normal', a joke.

Lastly, although the Trabi is still often ridiculed and dismissed as a 'rubbish' car, there has been a certain shift in its perception as an object of *Ostalgie* and later as a rare '*Oldtimer*'[128] car, as it gradually became scarce again. Trabant fan clubs started to appear, 'Trabant-safari' became a tourist attraction in Berlin, and many Trabi-Treffen (Trabi-meetings) are organized in different places all around Germany. Perhaps the most popular Trabi-Treffen takes place annually in Zwickau. In 2019, it was held at an aerodrome in the southeast part of the city, giving Trabi enthusiasts plenty of space to park their Trabants and camp right next to them. The place was brimming with both very young and more experienced visitors: sitting in front of their cars on a camping chair and sipping beer, shopping at the multiple stalls, tinkering with their cars, and discussing technical questions with other fellow Trabi fans.

[128]*Oldtimer* is a pseudo-anglicism, a word which is used in German to describe old collectable vehicles. *Oldtimer* status can be given to a car which is, among other things, well-preserved and, according to some classifications, at least thirty years old.

Figure 7. A stall selling GDR-era toys, including figures from a Czech cartoon, 'The Mole' (Krtek) and the GDR children's bedtime programme, 'Unser Sandmännchen' (Our little Sandman) at a Trabi-Treffen in 2019.

The Trabants' number plates revealed that the drivers came not only from Germany, but also from Hungary, the Czech Republic and other European countries. Here and there one could see GDR and FDJ flags attached on a pole, sticking out of the tents or waving from some Trabis' windows. Some *Ostalgie* objects, such as typical GDR plastic toys, baby strollers and folding chairs with typical GDR flower prints on them, were casually scattered in front of the tents, as if left there unintentionally by the owners, even though it was quite clear that every object had been carefully chosen and put in front of the tent as a part of a kind of an *Ostalgie* performance. Multiple sales stalls sold not only spare parts and Trabant manuals and books, but also typical GDR-era plastic products and toys.

The Trabant's value for the visitors to the Trabi-Treffen was, however, not solely based on the fetishism of *Ostalgie*. Although many newer Trabants had only officially obtained '*Oldtimer'* status recently, they had already been treated as rare old cars for some time. As some collectors told me, the Trabi was the most perfect first *Oldtimer* one could have: it was not as expensive as some older cars, and it was easy to repair yourself. In some sense, Trabant owners faced similar problems as the collectors of *Oldtimer* cars already long had, due to the shortage of spare parts and the general amount of care the car required. The Trabant has gone up in price within the past ten years, and a car in very good condition can set you back about 10,000 Euros. The recent growth in the Trabant's material and symbolic

value is often met with excitement from the former Sachsenring workers. Dirk, a former Sachsenring shopfloor worker and a Trabi enthusiast, shared with me his experience of one of the *Oldtimer* meetings he attended: "I was down in Stuttgart last weekend for an *Oldtimer* meeting, and there was someone there from Halle who came there with a Trabi. And we started a conversation: he understood immediately from the dialect where I come from. And he wanted to explain something to me. I said to him, '*What do you want to explain to me? I was building this car for nineteen years!' And this older guy was so excited: 'write down my number, we have to stay in touch!' And I have no problem with that. <…> I am not ashamed to say that I used to build Trabis*". Here, Dirk goes from discussing the value of the Trabant to his work at Sachsenring to the pride and shame that it brings. In the next section, I will focus further on this interrelation.

Working in a waste(ful) factory

In Chapter 3, I have already discussed worth and worthlessness concerning work, emphasizing its moral aspects. In this section, I come back to this discussion from a different angle, as I trace how the labor of Zwickau workers is valued and devalued in relation to the materiality of Sachsenring's production. Unlike the miners in Estonia described by Kesküla (2018), who felt they were being treated like 'waste' or 'cattle' and were dismissed as 'excess people', Zwickau automotive workers were not directly excluded in this way. Automotive workers were welcome in the reunified Germany, as car production had a special place in the national and economic narrative of both Germanies.[129] Although east German people themselves and their ability to work were not openly criticized, their past work experiences, the products of their labor and the life-world they identified with were dismissed. As Chari and Verdery (2009: 14) argued, privatization in post-socialist countries was often advocated on the grounds that what people were being dispossessed of had no value anyway. This put the workers in the position of having to abandon their previous work identities to become part of the new, modern world. Just as the former factory buildings were to be demolished to become a tabula rasa for the new production regimes, the minds of the people were to be refashioned and freed from past ideas and experiences to create a clean slate for becoming perfect working subjects in a market society. As Dunn argued (2004: 92), the employees had to change to "become privatized individuals – people cut away from entangling social connections who could sell their labor as a commodity".

[129] See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

One of Volkswagen's marketing efforts upon its establishment in Mosel near Zwickau was to emphasize the fact there was no standstill in car production in Zwickau. By promoting this narrative, Volkswagen established itself as a benevolent saviour of the local workers from unemployment. However, as I mentioned in earlier chapters, the transition was not as smooth as it was often claimed to be by Volkswagen and the media. But despite not always having a smooth transition in their work biographies, in contrast to the ridiculed Sachsenring factory, its technological processes and the Trabant itself, in the early stages of Volkswagen investment automotive workers in Zwickau were often publicly praised as skilled and hard-working. Carl Hahn, the former head of Volkswagen, who himself had Saxon roots, was often cited by my interlocutors in Zwickau for the way he praised local workers. As Herr Baumann told me: "*Professor Hahn told himself (he himself!), 'The workers from Wolfsburg could never work like the workers in Zwickau, never! So precise, so reliable.' Also, from the point of view of sick days, the Saxons are very reliable. And Hahn recognized this characteristic immediately, he appreciated it*". By showing respect and recognition to the local workers, Hahn became a key figure in ensuring that Volkswagen had a positive image in Zwickau, as, unlike most of his successors, he was well-respected by my interlocutors.

Despite enjoying a degree of recognition for their skilled and hard work, many of my interlocutors still felt that their former work experiences were being dismissed. If the factory, its machines and the objects produced in it were treated as waste, what was the value of the labor expended in their production? One dimension along which working in Sachsenring was devalued was connected to the dirty workplaces I briefly mentioned earlier. In this narrative, their dirt and pollution was transferred to the activities carried out in these places, which were then perceived as 'dirty work'. This concerned every part of the Sachsenring factory, but especially the production areas with high pollution levels, such as *Duroplast* production, as Peter, a former Sachsenring shopfloor worker told me:

> "It was hot and dusty there. A lot of former prisoners used to work there. In winter it wasn't uncomfortable there, but in summer… It was called socialist help [*sozialistische hilfe*]. I also had to go there. There were parts with strange shapes, which had to be cut out manually. And the dust from this material was flying around. And after two hours there you looked like a snowman. Yellowish…"

Working on *Duroplast* production was both dirty and physically demanding and did not have high prestige. The prestige some of my older interlocutors attributed to the work of

miners in Zwickau was connected to its typically 'masculine' character: it was dangerous and required physical strength. Working with *Duroplast* meant working with textiles, typically a 'feminine' occupation, but at the same time, it was physically difficult and dangerous. However, the danger was less obvious than in the case of the miners, as it was stretched out over time and took the form of long-term exposure to health hazards, notably breathing in the dust and hot air.

Although especially noticeable in the area of *Duroplast* production, dirt was associated with almost every part of Sachsenring's production in Zwickau's suburb of Pölbitz, not only by outsiders but also by the workers themselves. When asked about his experience of the transition from Sachsenring to Volkswagen, Andreas, a shop-floor worker at the time, started by describing the contrast in cleanness: "*You can't imagine how dirty it was in Sachsenring and how clean it is in such a factory here [VW]. When the visitors come, they see in what good conditions the cars are produced. The new automobile can't be dirty, even in places which I don't immediately see when I'm buying it*". Indeed, the shopfloor in Volkswagen was impressively clean. The cleanest part of the production – the paint shop – was closed to visitors, as it is crucial that no dust and dirt comes into the area and sticks to the paint, which is not yet dry. In Andreas's eyes, the cleanliness of the workplaces and wearing the proper clothing were crucial parts of good, dignified work, as opposed to the dirty workshops and sloppy clothing at Sachsenring:

> "In November the last Trabi was produced, and you saw reports on TV, how the people there [in Sachsenring] went into unemployment. And at the same time, we got our first working clothes here at VW. And they [the workers at Sachsenring] stood there in their ugly old overalls and shirts. Nothing changed there! […] In 1991 we already got overalls from VW. In Sachsenring everybody worked like before, they had work pants on or even jeans. […] [At Sachsenring] we all used to say: 'I'll wear what I want, I don't have to wear this'. Everybody wore sneakers or even sandals, nothing to do with safety at work! We were all well-dressed here [at VW] and ready for work, and they ran around like this… And you noticed then what a great difference it is, all that the employer from the west will give you if you have the job. But also, there was a risk of being unemployed. And you can't really say if it was better to run around like this for twenty or thirty years but to have your job and money, or if this was better".

However, as some of my interlocutors mentioned, the contrast was not purely between Sachsenring and VW, but rather between the new and the old factory workshops. The factory buildings located in Zwickau's quarter of Pölbitz were mostly the old ones inherited from the Audi, Horch and Schumann factories. Due to insufficient investment in

their maintenance and renovation, the buildings were rather old and dirty. In contrast, the new Sachsenring workshop at Mosel 1, which was opened shortly before the *Wende*, was new, clean and attractive for the workers: "*One colleague of mine who already worked there [in Mosel 1] made kind of an advertisement for it. How nice and clean it is there, no more physically demanding or dirty work. And I said to my colleague, 'Lutz, that would be something for us, even if we have to commute down there with a moped*'". In this regard, some of my interlocutors complained about the fact that the backwardness of Sachsenring's production was often judged from a modern standpoint against the standards of the 2020s rather than the 1990s, i.e. thirty years after the collapse of socialism.

Apart from being dirty within, the factory was wasteful for the town itself, producing smoke, polluting the air and painting the nearby houses black. In the case of the Estonian miners discussed by Kesküla (2018), one of the reasons for their marginalization lay in the fact that they were employed in an industry which was considered backward and environmentally harmful. The responsibility for pollution was then often put on the miners themselves in the media (Kesküla 2018: 117). In the case of Sachsenring, not only is the factory itself often associated with air pollution, but so are the Trabis, which are known for their thick blue smoke and strong recognizable smell. Like many other of my interlocutors, Dirk, a former shop-floor worker, admitted he was not thinking about it that much at the time when he worked at Sachsenring, and explained:

> "We were real polluters here. Environmental protection, nobody was interested in that. And if some environmental activists appeared, they were immediately locked away by the Stasi. […] When the Coking plant was producing smoke here or at Sachsenring, if I parked my car outside, it would be covered with soot. There was no environmental protection in the GDR!"

As Dirk mentioned, Zwickau had a large coking plant in the center of the city, which was responsible for most of the pollution. Compared to it, the Sachsenring factory and the Trabants driving around the city were perceived as rather insignificant contributors to pollution. In this regard, Zwickau was often called by the locals a 'miners' town' [*Bergarbeiterstadt*], which was supposed to explain their often mundane, almost fatalistic attitude to pollution: '*Es war halt so*' [That's just how it was]. Comparisons with the miners were often invoked in other respects as well, not least because, with the collapse of the mining industry, Sachsenring took over about five hundred miners and employed and trained them to work in the car industry. Although miners' work was respected in terms of its physical strength and dangerous conditions, it was seen as technically and intellectually

inferior compared to work in the automotive industry. This led to a certain amount of teasing when the former miners and car industry workers started working side-by-side.

However, when Sachsenring workers took up jobs in Volkswagen or with its suppliers, they experienced a similar disregard for their working skills. A few workers shared the experiences they had on their trips to Wolfsburg, on which they were supposed to be trained for production at Volkswagen:

> "So we were sent to Wolfsburg on buses. And there the Wolfsburg colleagues said: 'We will show you how to build cars. You sit here and look at what I do the whole day long.' And he had a small point-welding machine, and he welded. 'So today you look at this machine, tomorrow at this and on the third day at this one'. So, after one hour I told him, 'Let me see', and I did it all. And he asked me: 'Where do you know it from?' I said: 'Well, we used to build cars in Sachsenring, Trabants'. He says: 'But they are made of cardboard [*Pappe*]!'. Yes, the car body was covered with cardboard, but the car frame was almost the same."

Dirk, whom I mentioned earlier, told me a strikingly similar story:

> "Those who had no connection with the east, no family or friends, they had no idea how we lived. And there was someone like that with whom I worked in Wolfsburg. And he had no idea, and he thought maybe that we lived in holes under the earth or whatever. And he wanted to teach me spot-welding, which I did in the Trabi factory. And I said to him: 'Do you think we glued the Trabi together or what? Bring me steel sheets and a CO_2 welding machine and we'll weld together'. He didn't know we could weld. I said: 'Although we come from a primitive automobile shop, the welding we can do'. And since then we had a great relationship. I didn't take offence at that."

In both the stories told above, the perceived backwardness of the Trabant was projected onto the workers' skills and abilities. Both stories, although incredibly similar, appeared in conversations with two different workers who did not know each other and were not evoked by any of my specific questions. Telling these stories of being underestimated and then earning respect by showing they had skills was a way of reclaiming the value of their labor, so often considered 'primitive' due to the image of the Trabant itself. The devaluation of Sachsenring workers' skills and work was also often connected with the high proportion of manual labor, which was considered 'dirtier' and less intellectually stimulating than automated work. Technology therefore performs as a bridge, as a symbolic link between the world of people and the world of things (Mollona 2005: 177), connecting the value of things (Trabants and the tools which were used for its production) and the value of the labor of those who produced them. By emphasizing that, whether mediated by sophisticated

machinery or performed manually, their work and skills were similar at their core, allowing the workers to reclaim the value of their labor. By doing so, they also, to some extent, defied the technological fetishism (Mollona 2005; Harvey 2003) that was invoked to obscure the value of their labor. In a similar vein, the engineers emphasized that the backwardness of the old equipment and machinery was often compensated by their 'know-how', creativity and skill. In other words, the backwardness of the technology did not determine the value of their labor and skill.

In this chapter, I have deliberately not differentiated between value in the economic sense and values (in the plural), which usually refers in a broad sense to our ideas of what is important in life and is often of more interest to the anthropologist. I agree here with Graeber (2013: 224; 2001: 78), who argued that, on a hidden level they are both the same thing, and the fact that we use the same word to describe cultural, moral and economic value(s) is no mere coincidence. As was evident from my encounters with my interlocutors, from the emic point of view, if not the same, the two types of value are at least closely related. When talking about the devaluation of Trabis after the *Wende* (their exchange value), when they often had negative value, as they became waste, a liability, my interlocuters would also talk about the hard work and skill they put into the car (their labor value). When talking about problems with car maintenance and the lack of spare parts (their use value), they also talked about the community and mutual help. According to Graeber (2013: 225), value is the way our labor becomes real in some socially recognized form. It is therefore social recognition, the real or imagined audience, that makes value real (Graeber 2001: 87).

Whereas the Trabi's economic (exchange) value is easily established and compared through the medium of money, values (in the plural) resist comparison and evaluation. The dominant economistic approach treats objects as if they were sources of value, rather than important for the social relations and actions that these objects embody (Graeber 2001: 46; 65). The Trabi's value and the value of the factory that produced it is then seen as low, due to it being backward, made of cheap materials, not able to compete with western cars etc. The former Sachsenring workers in Zwickau object to such assessments, not because they consider the exchange or use value of the Trabi to be higher, but because they offer another approach to establishing what constitutes value in the first place: placing the emphasis on their labor and the social relations that existed around the production of the Trabant.

Conclusion

Although I have dedicated a significant part of this chapter to various aspects of the materiality of Sachsenring production (factories, infrastructure, products), I see materiality first and foremost as a medium of value (Graeber 2001: 75). As a medium, it is important and inseparable from the social relations it represents. However, value is rooted in social relations and power struggles, rather than in the objects themselves. Therefore, in this chapter, I have placed the emphasis on the recognition, negotiation and reclaiming of value by the people. After reunification, Sachsenring workers became witnesses to how the Sachsenring factory, the Trabants it made, the production process itself and their labor were devalued based on poor economic efficiency and technological backwardness. Their former factory and the products of their labor were treated as waste both symbolically and literally. My encounters with my interlocutors in Zwickau who experienced the *Wende* made me think about the devaluation of 'East German things' (Berdahl 1999) and what that means to those whose identities were inseparable from them. Through the practice of defending East German products, the car they produced in some cases for twenty to thirty years of their lives, the factories they worked in and the technologies they used, they tried to reclaim the value of their experience, their labor and perhaps themselves. I argue that, by opposing the dominant categories of waste and value that were imposed by the new economic and social system, Zwickau automotive workers challenge this system. They do so by recognizing value beyond the domains of consumption and production and by bringing the social context back into the picture.

Chapter 7: ‘Power to the people!’ The politics of an East German industrial town

Discussions have recently emerged over anthropology’s contribution to studies of populism or, more accurately, its limitations. The situation is puzzling because of the methodological and ideological commitment of anthropologists to the populist stance, to favouring the voice of ‘the common people’ (Mazzarella 2019; Hann 2019). One reason for this is the fact that anthropological fieldwork is often built on mutual trust and friendly relationships between the anthropologist and the subjects of her research. This often proves difficult to achieve, since the chauvinist, nationalist and often plainly racist opinions of our interlocutors are difficult for most anthropologists to digest. To overcome this obstacle, some authors suggest relying on empathy instead of sympathy when conducting research with such groups of people (Gingrich & Banks 2006). As Hann has noted (2019), this suggestion implies maintaining scholarly detachment towards our right-wing interlocutors, as we would when we study criminals, religious sects and other morally problematic groups. In other words, it is assumed that an anthropologist would feel disgust and condemnation towards such research subjects. Anthropologists often feel the obligation to include a certain ‘disclaimer’ saying that his own views and opinions are at the polar opposite to those of his interlocutors, as if to deal with his and his readers’ fears of contamination, even though the concern over ‘going native’ is certainly not groundless. In this regard, anthropologists often talk about studying ‘unlikable others’. However, as Mazzarella argued (2019), by labelling them unlikable, we reveal our own alignment with hegemonic liberalism, which has been taken for granted for too long. Or, as Harding (2021: 1) puts it, “when we deploy the terms ‘populist’ and ‘fundamentalist’, we are gazing at peoples and their organisations and actions through the lens of an updated Enlightenment liberalism.”

On one occasion during my fieldwork I met for a coffee with a local journalist and told her about my research. As we got on to the topic of populism, I voiced my opinion on the possible causes of populist success, such as economic reasons and the experience of reunification. The journalist was visibly annoyed by my answer, as it reminded her too much of the populist rhetoric which AfD used – the ‘*Opferdiskurs*’.[130] This was one of many situations in the field that urged me to reflect on my own rather affective political stances,

[130] ‘Victim discourse’. Such positions are very common in the current media; see: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/ausser-klagen-nichts-zu-sagen-was-am-opferdiskurs-der-ostdeutschen-falsch-ist/25131744.html

as I reacted to encounters with other points of view. Standing among the demonstrators at an extreme-right rally made me especially uncomfortable. When, at one demonstration, a woman approached me to hand me a leaflet and asked me a few simple questions, I felt anxious and made sure I gave short answers so as not to give away my accent. I also felt angry and upset at hearing speeches from the stage with which I could not agree. On the other hand, my experiences of interviewing some right-wing supporters were quite different. I mostly learned about their political views after at least an hour of conversation, or during our follow-up meetings. While I found myself disagreeing with some of my informants, I did not always think them 'unlikable'. Just like Pasieka (2019), I often found myself liking the 'unlikeable others'. In our conversations I mostly kept my opinions to myself, which was possible due to my position as a foreigner: rather than discussing politics, I let my interlocutors 'educate' me.

In line with Gusterson (2017: 210), I argue that, as anthropologists, instead of a view from nowhere, we are indeed looking from 'somewhere' whether we admit it or not. By not reflecting on our standpoint, we end up trying to understand either the irrational 'savage' beliefs of the populists or the structural factors that lead 'decent citizens' to have such immoral views. This in turn leads to simplified monolithic conceptualisations of right-wing collective action and a search for an ultimate 'flaw' to explain the motivations of right-wing groups, without acknowledging the differences in the political visions and levels of commitment of their members (Deodhar 2020). In the previous chapters of this thesis, in one way or another, I have been focusing on what Kalb (2021: 322) called the 'absent presence' and the 'present absence' behind the ascendancy of the neo-nationalist illiberal right, namely class. In this chapter, which is focused on Zwickau's political landscape, I am focusing on the level of articulation of political and economic contradictions, mapping out the city's political space and showing how the local people navigate the town's highly polarised political climate. Rather than focusing solely on the right-wing politicians and voters, I focus on the political tensions within the town, which are based on difference and sameness, affect, fear and aggression.

Populism and *das Volk*

The success of the right-wing populist AfD party in Germany, along with the victories of Trump and Brexit, has caused an increased interest among social scientists and anthropologists in populism and right-wing movements, often in an alarmist tone. Although some have argued for promoting some forms of populism, such as left-wing populism

(Mouffe 2018), in recent literature the term 'populism' is predominantly associated with its right-wing nationalist form and tends to be used negatively. Populism has been conceptualised as a certain political style (Moffitt 2016; Volk 2020), ideology or strategy, in other words, as a certain way of performing politics, than the content of such politics. This approach is at risk of dismissing populism (most often right-wing populism) as merely affective, empty rhetoric, simply a clever manipulation. As we know, however, affect, as well as the use of affective language rather than rational argumentation, is not reserved exclusively for populist projects. As Mazzarella (2009: 299) puts it, any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be "affective in order to be effective". In a similar vein, Shoshan (2016) also emphasises the affective nature not only of right-wing extremist rhetoric but also of the mechanisms of governance of right-wing extremist groups in East Berlin.

Among anthropologists, various authors seem to be talking about the same thing when they discuss working-class populism (Kalb & Halmai 2011), nationalist populism (Gusterson 2017), neo-nationalisms (Gingrich & Banks 2006), authoritarian populism (Hall 1985; Makovicky 2013) or nostalgic nationalism (Balthazar 2017), etc. The term 'populism' has been criticized for its vagueness and conceptual weakness, as it provides one name to over-wide range of social phenomena. However, as Gusterson (2017) argues, there are family resemblances between the agendas and styles of diverse nationalist populist movements. One of these common denominators is that populism opposes the people to the elites.

In German, the notion of 'the People', or *das Volk,* bears a more complex meaning, symbolism and context than 'folk', 'people' or 'ethnos'. Apart from the word *Volk* itself, it appears in many variations, and its omnipresence is hard to miss. During my fieldwork in Zwickau, I encountered the word' Volk' in multiple derivatives and combinations: Volkswagen, Volksbank, Volksfest, Volkshochschule, Volksverräter, etc. In the GDR, as was often mentioned ironically by my interlocutors, everything had to have the *Volk* in its name: Volkspolizei, Volkseigenebetrieb, Volksarmee. Today, the word *Volk* is still used in a variety of meanings and employed extensively in political discourse. Already in 1771-72 August Ludwig Schlözer, a German historian, distinguished three ways of defining *das Volk* according to the similarities that are taken into account when distinguishing who belongs to the Volk: 1) geographical, 2) genetic (historical), and 3) political (statistical) (Vermeulen 2015: 280). It is clear from this conceptualization that the phrase *das Volk* has had a plurality of meanings, and that different people might mean different things when they use it in

different contexts. The precise way in which the subjects understand *das Volk*, as well as who belongs to it and who is excluded from it, is also indicative of their world-views and serves for making various political claims.

Although not invented by the protesters during the Peaceful Revolution, the motto 'Wir sind das Volk' came to be associated especially with the events of 1989 and the democratic rights movement. On 2 October 2nd 1989 about 20,000 protesters joined a demonstration in Leipzig. As the police started announcing through a megaphone the words: 'Here speaks the German People's Police [*Volkspolizei*]', the crowd responded: 'People's police? But we are the People! [*Aber wir sind doch das Volk*!]'. In the process of the *Wende* the motto swiftly turned into 'Wir sind *ein* Volk' [We are one people]. The shift from *das Volk* to *ein Volk* was a significant one: whereas *das Volk* embodied the opposition between the people and the elites, *ein Volk* emphasized conformity and unity within one state and has nationalism in its core. Therefore, the shift was beneficial for the ruling elites, as *ein Volk* eliminated the tension between the rulers and the ruled, while at the same time increasing the tension between those who belonged to 'one people' and those who did not. In this way, the political dimension of class conflict was submerged under the call for national security and cohesion (Graf, Hansen & Schulz 1993: 228).

Shoshan (2016: 12) also underlines the role of German reunification in loosening the taboos around German nationhood that had existed since the end of World War II. Re-evoking national belonging was then justified by the need to integrate the Germans from the east. The national project, however, had to be free of the traces of National Socialism. The alternative of 'good' nationalism reinvented itself in the form of *Wohlstand* (prosperity) nationalism, structured around the tropes of material prosperity and economic competitiveness (Shoshan 2016: 13). According to Shoshan (2016: 267), due to gradual economic decline and the decline of welfare state, *Wohlstand* nationalism lost its appeal and was replaced by another national narrative, focused on the 'management of hate' and taming the inner demons: a cosmopolitan, tolerant German *Volk* against the extreme right-wing others. Borneman (2002: 94) also cites the word *Multikulti* as an attempt to remake the discredited concept of German Kultur.

While some vocabulary is traditionally more tied to a specific political agenda (such as 'solidarity' or 'Heimat'), 'das Volk' has been employed on both sides of the political spectrum as means of representative claim-making (Volk 2020). During the protests against the Hartz IV reform in 2004, the motto was used once again to reclaim the rights and dignity of 'the People' in slogans like: 'We are the People, not the slaves of Hartz IV!' and 'Down

with Hartz IV, we are the People!' The tradition of Monday demonstrations was also borrowed by the Hartz IV protesters from the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. Already, then, some far-right groups had joined the Left in the protests against Hartz IV, terrifying the latter with the appearance of such uninvited guests in their demonstrations. In Autumn 2014 the Dresden-based PEGIDA movement used the slogan '*Wir sind das Volk*' in their demonstrations against the government's refugee policies and the 'Islamisation of Germany'. By again using the Peaceful Revolution's memory discourses, PEGIDA also framed its activities as democratic resistance to totalitarianism and 'leftist dictatorship' (Volk 2022/2023 (forthcoming)).

As a response to PEGIDA's references to *das Volk*, Chancellor Angela Merkel offered another definition of the word by tying it to geographical unity: '*Das Volk* is everyone who lives in this country'.[131] What is noteworthy about Merkel's definition is that in this case she went beyond the constitutional understanding of *Volk* and beyond the citizenship criterium, as she did not talk exclusively about German citizens. A giant banner hung over a building being removated on Zwickau's main square from April to September 2019 featured the phrase '*Wir (alle) sind das Volk'* [We (all) are the people] in German and eleven other languages, representing the largest ethnic minority groups in Germany. The banner is a work of art by Hans Haacke, a German artist from Cologne and living in New York. Some of my friends voiced some doubts about how long the banner would be able to stay there without being vandalised and were sincerely surprised that it stayed there the whole summer as intended.

The German political scientist Jan-Werner Müller (2016: 187) defines populism as a political conception, according to which a homogenous, morally pure *Volk* opposes the immoral, corrupt and parasitic elites, who do not belong to the *Volk*. The elites are also accused of forging an unholy alliance with a parasitic underclass, who, just like the elites, do not belong to 'the people'. The actual motto of the populists is not '*Wir sind das Volk'*, Müller (2016: 188) argues, but '*Nur wir vertreten das Volk*'.[132] Thus, according to Müller (2016: 188), populism is not only anti-elite, but also anti-pluralistic. According to some authors, this representation of 'the People' as a homogeneous entity constitutes a direct threat

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[131] Angela Merkel zu Pegida-Rufen: „Das Volk ist jeder, der in diesem Land lebt". *Berliner Zeitung*, 26 February, 2017. (accessed 09.06.2021) https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/angela-merkel-zu-pegida-rufen-das-volk-ist-jeder-der-in-diesem-land-lebt-li.13185

[132] '*Only we* represent the people'.

to democracy (Müller 2016; Galston 2018). However, just as affect is not only reserved for right-wing populisms, also the undifferentiated, homogenizing notion of 'the People' comes up on both sides of the political spectrum. In the following sections, I will try to show how it contributes to political polarization in Zwickau.

Zwickau as a scene of political contestations

My fieldwork coincided with major political events of 2019 – the European Parliament elections, the Saxon state parliament elections (*Landtagswahl*) and the local elections (*Kommunalwahl*) in Zwickau. Plenty of events took place in public spaces and town squares, during which the town's population could meet the candidates, ask them questions and listen to their programs. In the summer before the Landtag elections, even some political 'celebrities' visited Zwickau and held passionate speeches in front of the audience. There was also no shortage of listeners: during a visit by a candidate from the Greens, Robert Habeck, the hall of the youth, democracy and cultural centre, Alter Gasometer, was completely full. When about 500 people showed up instead of the expected 250, Habeck astonished, turned to the audience and asked: "*Are you aware that you have come to the Greens*?", to which the audience responded with friendly smiles, chuckle and applause.

Whereas, despite minor disagreements, the tone of pre-election discussions remained mostly polite and civil, the real battle could be witnessed on the political posters, which were taken down and vandalised repeatedly. As a common perception goes, one can judge the popularity of a political party according to how high its posters have to be hung in order not to be vandalised. I was therefore surprised to notice that the ADPM far-right party's posters were hanging so low right in the centre of the town, where they remained right through the campaign (perhaps the visibility of the place played a role here). In contrast, the large billboards of the Left and the Greens next to the famous *Mocca* nightclub in the centre of Zwickau were torn up and pulled down on multiple occasions.

Figure 8. Posters ahead of the 2019 Saxony's state parliament elections on the main square of Zwickau (from top to bottom: AfD, FDP, ADPM)

The ADPM is considered a more radical branch of AfD and uses the cornflower[133] as its symbol. Its leaders are also predominantly former members of AfD's radical wing. André Poggenburg[134] founded the ADPM after resigning from the AfD in January 2019, following a speech in which he called German Turks 'a rabble without a fatherland', 'camel-drivers' and 'cumin-traders'. In August 2019, he urged the members of the ADPM to dissolve the party and support the AfD instead. The proposal was rejected, and he left the ADPM, after which Benjamin Przybylla became its new leader. The ADPM has a special place on Zwickau's political scene. One of its locally famous representatives is 75-year-old

[133] The cornflower was a secret symbol of Austrian Nazis in 1930s.

[134] Former chairman of AfD in Saxony-Anhalt. Together with Björn Höcke, who is known for his connections to neo-Nazi groups, he wrote the 'Erfurt resolution' – a founding document of the extreme-right faction of AfD – Der Flügel. The Flügel calls itself a "resistance movement against the further erosion of the identity of Germany". Since January 2019 the group is under intelligence surveillance as a suspected case of right-wing extremism.

Waltraud Pecher, the mother of one of the most prominent Zwickau SPD politicians, Mario Pecher. They had been caught up in a fight which had lasted for years and was followed by the tabloids, such as *Bild*. The conflict revolved around restaurant and bowling alley '*Zum Sternblick*', which the family-owned in Zwickau's suburb of Eckersbach. According to Waltraud Pecher, a loan was needed to keep the restaurant afloat, and her daughter became the official owner of the restaurant due to her having better chances to be granted a loan. After a 'devilish pact' made between her son and daughter, the SPD politician Pecher became the new owner and, after winning a court case against his mother, evicted his parents from the property. Mario Pecher himself never gave made any comments on the situation and called it a 'private issue'. The Zwickauer quickly picked sides, as most right-wing supporters sided with the mother, whom they saw as a victim. This irreconcilable conflict between a mother and her son seemed like a symbol of what was going on in Zwickau at the time on a larger scale.

In the European parliament election, the AfD won in Zwickau with 25% of the votes, leaving behind the CDU with 23%. The local city council elections ended up with the CDU and AfD winning eleven seats each, winning over the Left (eight seats) and other parties. Five of the AfD's city council representatives recently resigned from the council and the party, giving the radicalisation of the party as a reason. The situation in Zwickau became similar to that in some smaller Saxon communes, where the AfD won more places on the local councils than it could occupy due to the shortage of candidates. In the state parliament elections, the CDU won with 33.5%, leaving behind the AfD with 29% in Zwickau. Nevertheless, the AfD had shown an incredible gain of votes of 18 percentage points since the last elections in 2014.

In the Landtag, communal and European parliament elections, the Greens, although not winning the majority of votes in Zwickau, showed the most significant increase in votes after the AfD. One of the reasons for this could be the growing generation of voters concerned by the issues of climate change and the activities of the Fridays for Future movement in Zwickau. As some activists told me, Fridays for Future started rather late in Zwickau compared to other cities. Despite that, the success of the movement was very visible during my fieldwork in Zwickau, as one of the demonstrations mobilised more than 600 participants (mostly schoolchildren and those who supported them) in May 2019. Apart from climate-related slogans such as 'The planet is hotter than my boyfriend', the protesters wore rainbow-coloured hoodies and held 'Fck AfD' posters.

Figure 9. Zwickau youth demonstrating during the Fridays for Future climate strike in 2019.

Despite some angry voices shouting at the teenagers to 'go to school!', the demonstrations I attended mostly went smoothly and without major conflicts. Among politicians who came to support the striking youth were politicians from the local FDP (liberal democrats), the Left and the Greens. The city council member from the Left party seemed to have had the closest contact with the movement's activists. He was also repeatedly engaged on Fridays for Future demonstrations as a helper. During one such demonstration, the ADPM politician Benjamin Przybylla arranged a counter-demonstration, during which he let a huge old diesel generator run, without it being connected to anything. Recently, some of the Fridays for Future activists in Zwickau have spoken out about the harassment they have had to suffer from far-right groups, with threats, intimidation, and drawings of swastikas on their post boxes).[135]

The position of Mayor of Zwickau was occupied by Pia Findeiß (SPD) from 2008 until 2020. As my friend, a young mother and a schoolteacher, told me: "*She is a decent person. In such local elections it's never about the party, but about the personality. And she is very respected here in Zwickau*". Indeed, many of my informants shared her opinion. On the few occasions I have seen Findeiß personally from the audience, the public seemed to

[135] Sie wissen, wo er wohnt. *Zeit*, 3 June 2021 (accessed 8.06.2021).
https://www.zeit.de/zett/2021-05/fridays-for-future-zwickau-rechtsextremismus-klimaschutz

respond positively to her speeches. However, she has often been a target of harassment from the extreme-right. According to Findeiß, a few people knocked on her door and said: "*We know where you live. We are the people [Wir sind das Volk]*". The reason for these threats was the mayor's emphasis on fighting extreme-right tendencies in Zwickau.

What influenced Findeiß's policy was the 2011 discovery of the Neonazi (NSU[136]) terrorist trio, which had lived in Zwickau for eleven years, where they developed an image of friendly neighbours among the locals. The fact that the trio went undiscovered for so long and even developed friendly relationships with their neighbours came as a shock to many people in Zwickau. The building where they used to live partly burnt down and was demolished in 2012 due to a decision of the city council and Mayor Findeiß, one of the goals being to avoid attracting Neonazi groups, who might use it as a place of worship. The house disappeared, but the image of Zwickau was now connected with the NSU, despite some efforts of the mayor to resist such associations.[137]

Concerns over the city's bad 'image' were something I would often hear, given the link with the NSU's history. Indeed, for a town that also strives to attract foreign students.[138] the loss of image losses was significant. However, different groups seemed to have different visions on how to solve the problem. City council members tried to block some projects, such as a theatre play 'Undiscovered neighbours' about the life of the NSU trio in Zwickau, as they felt it would reinforce the connection of the name of the town to the NSU and further harm its image. The mayor said in one press interview that it was merely 'bad luck' (*Zufall*) that the trio had chosen Zwickau to live in.[139] Some of my interlocutors also tried to defend the image of their town by saying that the trio probably chose Zwickau exactly because it had no visible neo-Nazi scene, making it easier for them to stay invisible.

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[136] The NSU (National Socialist Underground) was a far-right Neo-nazi terrorist group and network responsible for the murders of nine immigrants and one policeman, 43 attempted murders, three bombings and fifteen robberies. The core trio, including Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe, initially from Jena, lived in Zwickau under fake names from 2001 until the unmasking of the group in 2011.

[137] Findeiß officially requested the Chancellor's office to stop calling the NSU trio the 'Zwickauer Terrorzelle' ('Zwickau terrorist cell').

[138] The Westsächsische Hochschule Zwickau (University of Applied Sciences Zwickau), located in Zwickau, Schneeberg, Reichenbach and Markneukirchen, is one of the leading universities in automotive engineering. About 16% of its students come from abroad, who come to Zwickau not only for the quality of its education, but also the cheaper living costs and study fees.

[139] "Zwickau ist kein Nazi-Nest". *Zeit*, 2 January 2018. (accessed 8.06.2021) https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2017-12/nsu-zwickau-rechter-terror-beate-zschaepe-prozess/seite-2

Figure 10. Antifa graffiti on the wall of one of Zwickau's central underground passages.

For years there was no memorial, nor in fact any project, devoted to ‘coming to terms’ with Zwickau’s NSU past. During one of the public discussions I attended on the topic, the activists blamed the town’s authorities for sweeping the NSU past under the rug. They demanded an NSU documentation centre be opened in Zwickau, something which has been discussed since 2012 but never came to life. The activists from the Alter Gasometer centre and the ‘Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance’ are those who organize public discussions and do the memory work related to the NSU. Alter Gasometer is where a lot of concerts take place, but it is also a meeting space for Zwickau’s liberal democratic circles. The building hosts multiple events every week dedicated to ‘promoting democracy and tolerance’. A social worker from one of Zwickau’s schools also organized a ‘history workshop’ with some of the school pupils in Alter Gasometer, dedicated to ‘coming to terms’ with the NSU history. It was only in the autumn of 2019 that the first memorial to one of the NSU victims, Enver Şimşek, appeared in Zwickau. Shortly afterwards, on the day of German Unity, a tree planted in honour of this NSU victim was cut down. Ten new trees for the victims of NSU

were planted in the same place again. The opening of a memorial was, however, criticized by the public, since the victims' names were written with mistakes, and their families were not invited.

An immense amount of effort from both the city officials and the Zwickau population seemed to be dedicated to proving that Zwickau was '*bunt*' (colourful) as opposed to '*braun*' (brown – the colour associated with neo-Nazis). However, the image of the town as a 'Nazi-nest' is not only associated with the events of 2011. One of my friends was especially disturbed by the presence of an *Eastwear* shop right in the city centre. The shop is known for selling brands of clothing mostly worn by neo-Nazi groups, such as *Thor Steinar* and brands originating from Zwickau – *Eastfight* and *Brachial*. My friend was not only annoyed by the very existence of the shop, but also by the fact that it was located in the city centre, which, in her eyes, harmed the image of the town. Despite multiple protests organized by the local Antifa groups, the shop was still open in its usual place when I left the field in 2019. A neo-Nazi national socialist party, *Der Dritte Weg* (The third path), also seems to find enough followers in Zwickau. On 1st May 2021 it attempted to organize a demonstration in Zwickau under the motto 'Destroy capitalism', but the event was banned due to the pandemic. Shortly before that, a countercampaign was carried out in Zwickau with colourful posters and billboards saying: "There are a lot of paths to make Zwickau even better. But the Third Path is not one of them".

Many of my liberal interlocutors in the field would place the extreme-right nationalist groups on one spectrum with AfD voters. For them, the difference was merely in intensity, not in the content of their political views. As one of my friends told me, "*they are masking themselves as 'concerned citizens' [besorgte Bürger] now*". The mixing of mainstream and extreme is something to be observed on multiple levels. Constant conflicts within the AfD between its more and less radical wings, and confusion within the media and public discourse of whether the AfD should be called populist, radical or extreme right are rather telling in this regard. At the *Querdenker* demonstration I witnessed on a brief visit to Zwickau after the end of my fieldwork, the helpers (*Ordner*) wore black-white-red bomber jackets – the colours of the Reich flag and a symbol often used by German Nazis and *Reichsbürger*.[140] However, *Querdenker* is not an extreme-right movement; rather, a recent study suggests it has a rather heterogeneous following, which includes esoteric groups, vaccination sceptics,

[140] Reich citizens, a movement which rejects the legitimacy of the modern German state. Instead, the members consider themselves citizens of the German Reich within its pre-World War II borders.

government sceptics, anti-Semites, leftists, Green Party voters and AfD voters.[141] A common narrative of many political liberals in Zwickau is that of the dangerous and unexposed encroachment of right-wing extremism into the centre of society (*Mitte*). When the new mayor of Zwickau, Constance Arndt, recently attended a *Querdenker* demonstration and spoke to the protesters, she received harsh criticisms. Some of my friends from the field shared the news on their social media pages voicing their disappointment, as they thought the mayor showed too much tolerance of the right-wing populists.

Labour Day versus Patriots' Day

It was a sunny morning in May, and the day was promising to be nice and warm as I took a walk towards the train station. These streets were usually quite busy with traffic and the large trucks, especially visible being the green trucks belonging to Schnellecke, the automotive logistics company. Pedestrians, on the contrary, were usually few. But on that day everything seemed a bit different. As I climbed up the hill leading to the station, I met a few families with children and, some teenagers as well as groups of men discussing something loudly, laughing and sipping beer from the bottle as they headed down the street towards the centre. This was no regular Wednesday but Labour Day[142] (*Tag der Arbeit*), and the centre of Zwickau was buzzing. Joining the flow of the people, I turned back to the city centre.

For weeks, the rainbow-coloured posters of the workers' union, the DGB,[143] all over town invited local residents to join the family celebration under the motto 'Unser Leben gestalten WIR' ('It is We who shape our lives') in the city's main square. The first part of the celebration was supposed to start at 13.00, but even an hour earlier the square was already covered with the many stands of the workers' union, political parties and companies (mostly VW and their suppliers). People were slowly arriving and stopping for a bite to eat at the stands with *currywurst* and fries and sipping beer out of plastic cups as they sat on the wooden benches, brought here especially for the festival. As I walked through the crowd, I saw lots of familiar faces from the trade union and the local parties. Even though there was

[141] Politische Soziologie der Corona-Proteste (accessed 10.06.2021): https://www.unibas.ch/dam/jcr:ba4b18d1-9c70-4764-9cce-e7252a26c351/Bericht_Umfrage_Coronaproteste_Soziologie_Uni_Basel_17_12_20.pdf

[142] Labour Day (1st May) is an official public holiday in Saxony.

[143] Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, or the German Trade Union Confederation.

also a stand there from Verdi,[144] the main focus of the event was on the car industry. One could look inside an electric car and see the robotics, and the children could paint on a car generously offered for this purpose by Volkswagen. As we sat down with my friend, we started a little chat with our neighbours at the table. The family with two children had driven all the way down from a village in Erzgebirge, having come to the event mostly for entertainment both for the children and the upcoming music concert for the adults.

At the CDU's stand one could enjoy the sight of a Trabi car with "*Zukunft braucht Erfahrung*" (Future requires experience) written on it, a slogan which echoed that written on Volkswagen's factory walls – "*Zukunft braucht Tradition*" (Future requires Tradition). A line of people queued up to take a picture with the Trabi. The stands of the other political parties, although less entertaining, still attracted a lot of people, who took the fliers and engaged in lively discussions with the local politicians in the wake of the upcoming municipal elections. The stand of the local MLPD (Marxist-Leninist party) was also surprisingly crowded. I gave up my attempts to say hello to their leader, so we waved to each other instead.

A famous SPD politician, Martin Dulig, stood near the stage talking to the local union leaders and the member of the Volkswagens' works council, whom I had a chance to interview earlier. However, Dulig's presence was unofficial, and he was only there as a visitor, not as a speaker. The Left, Liberal Democrats and Greens were also represented at the stands. There was only one major party absent: there was no stand of the right-wing AfD in the square. The unionists told me that the party always ignores their events. That is also what I observed at every event, dedicated to the Landtag elections in Saxony: the AfD candidate was often announced as a participant of an event or a debate but would cancel participation shortly before the beginning of the event citing various reasons, such as sudden health problems. On one occasion, however, after one of the pre-election discussions the IG Metall trade union organised, I asked the organizer why only the AfD candidate was not present at the event. "*Because we didn't invite him, of course! Why should we? We don't want to have anything to do with this party!*", he told me, visibly annoyed that I would even ask such a thing. As the local politicians of the Left and FDP and the unionists had a friendly talk and a cigarette outside, they told me, that even if they invited him, he would not come, as AfD representatives never show up.

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[144] Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (Verdi) - United Services Trade Union – part of DGB, second largest trade union in Germany after IG Metall.

As some movement began on the stage, the people did not hurry to give up their seats on the benches. The program started with speeches from the head of the local IG Metall trade union and the mayor of the city. The mayor, Pia Findeiß, made a short speech in which she greeted the people and emphasized the importance of '*Weltoffenheit*'[145] for Zwickau. There was no main speaker at the event: instead different trade union members and regular workers came up to the microphone to talk about the campaign for a 35-hour week, the transformation towards electro and automation, and the persistent differences between east and west in Germany, especially in terms of wages. Thirty years after the fall of the Wall, it was finally time to make things right, they claimed. After the speeches, a rock band of Volkswagen workers calling themselves 'Out of Tune' continued the event. As announced by DGB, the event in Zwickau was the most numerous in the whole of Saxony, as it gathered more than 5500 people overall. However, the biggest crowd arrived by around 4 pm, when the performance of an originally East Berlin rock band, 'City', was announced. Some people in the crowd wore the band's T-shirts.

In 2016, amid the refugee crisis, 1st May event organised by the union went far less smoothly. About a hundred 'concerned citizens' stood in front of the stage and met the visiting politician and then Minister of Justice, Heiko Maas (SPD), with boos and whistles. The protesters held up posters saying '*Meinungsfreiheit*',[146] '*Maas ist voll*'[147] or '*Wir sind das Volk*'[148] and had anti-immigrant symbols on them, such as a crossed-out headscarf. The protest ended up requiring strong support from the police. Since then, the competition from the right on Labour Day has had to be taken into account every year.

On the 1st May celebration that took place during my fieldwork in 2019, no famous politician turned up to speak on the main stage in Zwickau. Apart from the official version that the union wanted to give a voice to the regular workers, the decision to do the celebration without speeches from famous politicians was taken to avoid the unrest of 2016 and the pressure from the right. The DGB celebration on the main square was described by the unionists prior to the event as a 'peaceful family fest', which might have also contributed to the desire of the organizers to stay politically neutral. Perhaps also in an attempt to be less 'political', one could hardly hear any vocabulary of class from the stage, including words

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[145] Open-mindedness.

[146] Freedom of opinion.

[147] A pay on words: the expression '*Das Maß ist voll*' means 'enough is enough'.

[148] We are the people.

that would be considered very leftist. In this sense, on the level of discourse, the union talked about fighting for 'better work', rather than the rights of the 'workers'. There was no mention of the class struggle, nor of a 'working class', nor even of the *Arbeiter*, the workers as a group. Instead, the speakers talked about 'the decent work' ('*Gute Arbeit'*) and 'the world of work' ('*Arbeitswelt*').

Just about two hundred meters away from the main square where the DGB family festival took place, on a smaller square called Kornmarkt, another event was going on. The event was called 'Patriots' Day' and was held by the political party Awakening of German Patriots (ADPM). The AfD stand with pre-election leaflets was also situated on the same square. The acoustic in the inner city was remarkable – despite both events taking place so close to each other, I could hardly hear anything from the crowded main square as I turned the corner. It felt like two separate worlds, which was also noticeable visually. The main square was dominated by red, IG Metall's main colour and rainbow colours, symbolizing 'openness' and 'tolerance', whereas Kornmarkt was decked out in black and blue, the colours of the AfD and ADPM. ADPM leaders André Poggenburg and Benjamin Przybylla were announced to speak in front of the audience from the back of a brown truck being used as a stage. The truck was decorated with German flags and blue posters of the ADPM. The one on the front said: 'Technologie statt ideologie. Diesel bleibt'. ('Technology instead of ideology. Diesel stays').

The first speaker was the local ADPM candidate for the municipal elections. He mentioned that he worked in the car industry and was a member of the works council; as I later found out, he worked at BMW in Leipzig. He was also active in an alternative workers' union, *Zentrum automobil*, which is a new right-wing trade union, created in 2009 and based at Daimler in Stuttgart, but also threatening to compete with IG Metall in Zwickau. The union describes globalisation as a 'virus',[149] condemns the practice of co-management and has recently supported the *Querdenker*[150] movement. since the beginning of the pandemic, this union has been arguing that the shortages and production stoppages, which often happened due to the problems with international suppliers, demonstrate the flaws of globalisation. *Zentrum Automobil* also speaks out against the 'Green lobby' and the loss of

[149] This expression had been used by the union even before the pandemic.

[150] The *Querdenker* (lateral thinker) movement is a group opposing coronavirus-related restrictions and vaccination in Germany.

jobs through the transformation towards electromobility. One of the arguments the union uses against electromobility is possible shortages of electricity "as in the socialist countries".

The speaker condemned the traditional workers union, IG Metall, and said that it no longer represented the workers and that the traditional unionists were 'drunk on power' ('*machtbesoffen*'). '*On the principles of co-management, the union goes hand in hand with the employer*', he proclaimed. Other speakers talked about safety and the criminal threat coming from foreigners, and put the focus on taking care of 'our children'.

Figure 11. The 'Patriots' day' at the Kornmarkt square (Zwickau, 01.05.2019).

"*The unions have to be fundamentally reformed or abolished!*", was the verdict of the main speaker of the day Poggenburg. He also emphasized that the managers were overpaid, whereas the essential jobs ("*where the people work with people*") were underpaid. Here for the first time over the whole day I heard the word 'class', as he mentioned that "*the Left took care that we have two-class society: on the first place are the migrants and on the second place the Germans*". Poggenburg also condemned the persistent differences between east and west, as well as the low pensions in the east. At the end of his speech, he called for the people to stand with the ADPM for the *real* 'welfare state' ('Sozialstaat'). '*We go where it hurts*', stated Przybylla at the end of his speech.

The audience of around eighty people, predominantly middle-aged and senior men, gave generous rounds of applause to the speakers, especially whenever they talked about the inferior position of the Germans in the country as compared to the migrants. Two youths stopped right next to us with their bikes: ‘Nazis, one of them murmured. A young man with long hair and glasses on the side of the square was playing the flugelhorn as a protest to the right-wing rally, and a few helpers (*Ordner*) tried to stop him, but he resumed playing straight away, and the police let him continue. A few middle-aged men with tattoos and wearing all-black biker clothing, who were irritated by the performance, cheered the speakers and applauded their speeches even more loudly to cover up the sound of the music. Some of them were wearing clothing with neo-Nazi symbols and *Thor Steinar* leather jackets, a brand associated with right-wing extremists.[151] The message of the speeches was one of a betrayal, with the managers and cosmopolitan elites being presented as traitors to the working class. The speeches were seemingly disconnected from the 1st May celebration, and the event was indicatively called ‘The day of patriots’. The meeting had a rather an ‘anti-elite’ character than being pro-right. Although the participants claimed that the elites had betrayed the workers, who are the elites? Neither the political elites nor the corporation bosses were mentioned. Rather, managers, engineers and trade unionists were seen as the problem. In other words, it is mostly the cosmopolitan middle-class who were accused of betraying the workers.

I present this story of the 1st May celebration in Zwickau because it is a very telling example of the political relationships in Zwickau, which I characterised with both affect and a lack of differentiation of *who is speaking for whom*. There were also a few things in common to the speeches on both squares in the town. One of these was the persistent gap in salary and working conditions between east and west. This point seemed to be on both right-wing and left-wing agendas. The language of ‘defending’ society from the external enemy also featured on both stages. While the ADPM urged defence of the nation from foreigners, the DGB mentioned the need to defend against right-wing tendencies and show that ‘Zwickau is colourful’. The classic division between political right and left seemed to be quite fuzzy on 1st May on the streets of Zwickau. The events of both left and right seemed to cater to ‘working people’ but avoided using the language of class or even using the word

[151] Wearing this brand of clothing is forbidden in some public spaces, such as, for example, some football stadiums.

'workers' to identify the group whose interests they both represented. On the contrary, the claims were made in the name of 'the people' or the vague 'us'.

Representing 'the People'

As I could observe in the field, *das Volk* was more than a mere rhetorical device of the political actors: it was a category that also proved salient for my interlocutors in Zwickau. For 77-year Karl, who had worked his way up from an unskilled worker to become a technical manager first in Sachsenring, and then in Volkswagen, the matter of *das Volk* was connected to the topic of local belonging in Saxony:

> "Earlier in German history, Saxony always lead the way. But now [after the *Wende*] it will take very long until Saxony goes forward again. This is also an important reason why the people here are so frustrated. I mean, the Saxons have always been a very committed people [*stark engagiertes Volk*]. Politically and economically, they have always been the strongest. And, of course, they deal with everything that happens now in Germany quite differently. And from that sometimes some extreme views arise. Not because right-wing, or Nazis, or fascists, or reactionary people live here. These are people who feel very strongly about the situation, that things aren't right, and are those who articulate it in a very strong manner. And it is interpreted as if the people here are reactionaries. And that is why people vote for the AfD, just not to support these other parties… This is the only chance for us to express ourselves. Before, in GDR times, you couldn't say anything. Now you can say something, but you don't have any influence. Before you couldn't say "Honecker is stupid [*doof*]". Now you can say "Merkel is stupid", but it won't change anything. So we are doing the one thing we can – we say we don't want them, that we won't vote for them."

The narrative of the locals' dissatisfaction with the current state of politics as a sign of higher political awareness was also echoed by some automotive workers. Thomas, a precarious worker who commuted to BMW in Leipzig every day, was also convinced that the level of political awareness of former GDR citizens was underestimated by the political elites in the West:

> "What annoys people in the new states, or the former GDR states, is this constant 'We have to show you how to work. We have to show you how democracy works. We have to show you how to live'. […] After thirty years you can't listen to this anymore. If people from the GDR had no idea about democracy, they wouldn't have been able to overthrow the dictatorship non-violently. I don't need anyone to tell me how democracy works, not anybody from the old states: I know how democracy works."

Thomas also voiced disappointment with the elites for the lack of support for the region's economy and people. He was particularly annoyed by programs which were supposed to attract the returnees who went west after the *Wende* to cope with the shortage of skilled labour:

> "There are people who very consciously stayed here. Because we wanted to build something here, to move something here. I never wanted to go to any other state [Bundesland]. Firstly, because I don't like the type of crowd [*Menschenschlag*] there. Most people in the West are materialistic, inhumanly oriented, the school system is absurd there too. And I wanted to stay here, why would I go? I have everything here. And now what do politicians do? They make a program for those who went to the West and now want to return here, but *what do they do for people who stayed here*?"

Not all the members of the political elites, however, have been accused of abandoning their commitment to the 'local people'. According to Karl, the only reason the CDU were still strong in Saxony was Saxony's Minister-President Michael Kretschmer: "*Because he is a good man, and he is well-connected to the people [das Volk]. And in many things, he expresses the opinion of the people. And that's why he got elected, because he went to the people, discussed things with them*." Karl's opinion was shared by some of my other interlocutors as well, who told me about Kretschmer: "*He is always in the car, on his way through Saxony*". It therefore comes as no surprise that, during my one year of fieldwork, I also had a chance to see Kretschmer in person. Together with other Saxonian ministers, he came to a large concert hall in Zwickau as part of the '*Sachsengespräch*'[152] campaign. After a short introductory speech, the ministers dispersed to different rooms, where Zwickau's citizens could come and sit with them at the same table and ask their questions. At the politicians' tables, I could often feel the disconnect: the people would talk about very local, specific issues rather than big politics, while the politicians often looked confused and referred them to the local authorities. For example, at the table of the integration minister, Petra Köpping, a director of the homeless shelter begged for assistance with the tears in her eyes: the building where the shelter was located was about to be demolished. The most popular topic of the evening, however, was criminality and safety, which seemed to concern the citizens the most.

Another pressing issue that was often voiced by the attendees at these public discussions before the elections was electro-mobility. During the meeting with the Green

[152] 'Saxony talk'.

Party politician, one man, probably in his late sixties, stood up and started talking: "*I have to say, I am traditionally an SPD voter, but I am deeply disappointed by them and considering voting for the Greens*". However, he had one concern – the Greens supported electro-mobility. The man said he was an electrician and understood a thing or two about how the technology of electric car production works, and he had major doubts that putting all eggs into the basket of e-mobility was the right decision for Germany or for Zwickau in particular. One of the problems he saw was the lack of infrastructure. He also considered hydrogen fuel to be a better alternative. He was concerned, among other things, about the future of Zwickau as a *Standort* (industrial location) since everything depended on the success of electric cars on the market. Many of my interlocutors, regardless of their political views, also accused the political elites (*die Politik*) for dishonesty in pushing electric car production. They argued that the emissions from the electric cars were not any less than the emissions from regular cars if one counts the emissions from the factory during production and the disposal of the battery afterwards. Almost at every pre-election discussion, at least one person from the public would raise similar issues. Although he was hopeful about electro-mobility, Karl also took issue with the green agendas, especially those promoted by Fridays for Future:

> "I am not as green as they would like it. The youngsters are easily motivated, but there is too little knowledge behind it, it goes in the wrong direction. This Thunberg effect…It doesn't mean that some things shouldn't change. I don't know any other country which does as much as Germany in terms of climate… I am for example a total supporter of nuclear power. […] And they want an immediate coal exit. They don't think what kind of consequences it will have. It is right, the way it's decided at the moment – coal exit by 2030: we invest the money there, we qualify people, we make tolerable conditions for the older ones, and we manage to transform the coal industry into another form of industry. And this is rightly so."

Karl's view, according to which the current climate goals were too extreme and had resulted from environmental panic, was common among my interlocutors in Zwickau across the political spectrum. Contrary to the common stereotype which labels right-wing voters as 'extreme', their self-perception was rather that they were more moderate and conservative, whereas the political elites are blamed for being too extreme and radical on most issues, including climate change. Although I never accused my interlocutors of anything or even mentioned the word 'radical' to them, many of them would emphasize to me that people in Zwickau, or even they themselves personally, were not 'radical'. Interestingly, this did not only apply to the AfD voters. Paul, a retired Sachsenring engineer, once told me how he

came across a right-wing protest in town and saw a poster with an image of Angela Merkel being hanged. He went up to the police officer and said to him: "*You all have cameras on your uniform, you know who has this poster, you need to find them, and they have to be held responsible!*". The policeman answered Paul that he was being too "radical". "*Radical! Just because I expressed my opinion and said that they have to take responsibility*", Paul exclaimed.

In the public discourse, right-wing supporters are mostly associated with issues in the politics of migration. However, in my conversations with some AfD supporters, this topic often came up after the 'green lobby' or not feeling represented by the political elites in the West. This could be explained by the topics of our conversations, but also, perhaps, by the fact that I was a foreigner myself. In this regard, my interlocutors often made distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants. According to Jens, a retired automotive industry shop-floor worker, the deserving were those who were ready to work, pay taxes and observe not only German laws but also "German values":

> "We had at peak times probably two thousand Vietnamese people at the Trabi plant. After the *Wende*, they could take their possessions from here in a giant container and go back to Vietnam. And many did that. […] And those who stayed here, they opened an Asian takeaway or something. And that doesn't disturb anybody. They pay taxes, they have children, they learned the German language, they accepted the laws. But those who come here and want to live from our taxes and do nothing…they get hatred from the population. Or I know, for example, one guy who opened a Russian restaurant here, nobody has anything against him… He pays taxes in this country. I have nothing against the Vietnamese, or the Indians, or the Indian who comes here and sells clothes…You have to understand, the German folk has its customs and values, and its laws. And as a foreigner, I would have to accept them. I have nothing against the mosques too. But if they come and it should be financed from the tax money and the population has to work longer and longer…"

The distinction that Jens made between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' immigrants, which was framed in accordance with the criteria of working and paying taxes, was rather common among my interlocutors. Also, a distinction was made between the 'old' migrant communities, such as the Vietnamese and the 'new' refugees, as the Vietnamese were depicted as more hard-working and compromising on the cultural level. The topic of religion seems to be implicitly present in such statements.

Conclusion

The topic of politics and right-wing populism runs through my whole dissertation, as it emerges from other topics that I have been discussing. In the previous chapters, I focused on the class divisions, inequality and issues of personal worth and value, which, I argue, stand behind those tensions and conflicts that are often framed along ethno-nationalist lines. In this last ethnographic chapter, I have switched the focus to the ways in which these tensions are articulated within Zwickau's political landscape. I have also discussed some of the specifics of the local context (such as the town's connection to the NSU) which contribute to the highly affective character of the local political scene.

In this chapter, I have also discussed the meaning of the notion of 'the People' in the local political context. Excluding certain groups from 'the People' (immigrants, vaguely defined 'elites', right-wing voters) contributes to the city's political polarisation. In Zwickau, not only the physical but also often the ideological proximity of the so-called right and left, as well as the recent neo-Nazi history, further charges these polarisations with affect and the fear of 'contamination'. On the one hand, the blurring of the boundaries between the mainstream and the extreme right inflicts intense fear on parts of Zwickau's population. On the other hand, the stigmatisation of right-wing voters by their opponents pushes them further to the right and away from the centre.

Chapter 8: Summary and conclusions

This dissertation has followed the industrial transformations within the automotive industry in Zwickau, including the collapse of socialism, post-Fordism and the transformation towards electromobility. The main research questions of this thesis have been concerned with how these transformations have been embedded in the wider social fields in and outside Zwickau, how they influenced labour relations within the Zwickau automotive industry and restructured social, economic and political relations among the locals. I have analysed these processes of transformation by using the literature on postsocialism, post-industrialism, industrial labour and populism, both within and outside of the field of social anthropology.

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the symbolic, economic and political divide between east and west in Germany remains. Recent federal elections also showed significant support for right-wing populist parties among the population of the former GDR, especially in Saxony. It is commonly argued that right-wing populism flourishes in poor, de-industrialized regions with high levels of unemployment. Saxony, however, is neither of those: it is highly industrialized and has a relatively low level of unemployment. The automotive industry in the east German town of Zwickau in particular is often cited as a success story of the post-socialist transition. Unlike many other industrial towns in the former GDR, production here did not come to a complete stop after the reunification of Germany.

The case of the post-socialist working class within the east German automotive industry presents a particular challenge for anthropological research on post-socialist labour. On the one hand, much of the anthropological research on post-socialist working classes focuses on the unemployed or underemployed, the impoverished *lumpenproletariat*. In this sense, it is often discussed in terms of the underclass or certain 'cultures of poverty' that result mainly from deindustrialisation and capitalist dispossession. On the other hand, the former East Germany is often singled out among all post-socialist states as an exceptional case because it was incorporated into a capitalist state with an already fully developed market economy and existing institutions. Therefore, the relatively affluent east German working class, apart from the deindustrialised regions and urban ghettos, falls outside the conceptualisations mentioned above and is often treated as an exceptional case, rather than part of global struggles. This, in turn, paves the way for culturalist, rather than economic explanations for some of the socio-political orientations within the working class, such as

political apathy, nostalgia, or susceptibility to right-wing populism. By emphasising the relative affluence of some segments of the working class, culturalist perspectives aim to dismiss the importance of dimensions of class and inequality in favour of culture and historical path-dependencies.

In this dissertation, I have aimed to dismantle these dichotomies of economy *vs* culture, culture *vs* class, society *vs* market, etc. by focusing on the subjective experiences of work, classness and industrial transformation, rather than formal measures of economic inequality. In the case of the workers in eastern Germany, this meant that close attention had to be paid to the experiences of socialism, the post-socialist transition and privatization, as well as the symbolic and economic hegemony of the West after German reunification. Untangling how global processes of neoliberalisation, capitalist dispossession, the rise of neo-nationalism and post-Fordism became intertwined with local histories and contexts, and produce local outcomes, has been one of the main goals of this research.

Among the key concepts used in this thesis were work, the commodification of labour, embeddedness, class and value. In Chapter 1, I explored the current debates concerning these concepts within the anthropology of post-socialism, industrial labour and beyond. The discussion around the 'embeddedness' of the economy in social and political institutions and relationships has been particularly influenced by the work of Karl Polanyi and his seminal book *The Great Transformation*. According to Polanyi, the disembedding of the economy from the social fabric inevitably led to society's resistance in the form of *counter-movements*, which resisted the expansion of the market into all spheres of social life. In line with more recent research on the topic, I have argued for a wider view of counter-movements than suggested by Polanyi, to include some forms of economic chauvinism, right-wing populism and nationalism, etc. Just as the expansion of the market can be embedded in culture, moral values and social relationships, counter-movements do not necessarily represent the resistance from the left. As I showed in the literature review, Polanyi's perspective can be enriched with Marxist concepts, such as class, hegemony and exploitation, to account for issues of power in the analysis. This dissertation also contributes to bridging these perspectives.

In this dissertation, I have also critically engaged with the literature on post-socialism and the issue of post-socialist otherness. Recently, the question "do we still need post-socialism?" has often been asked by anthropologists and other social scientists. While it is important to analyse certain 'family resemblances' among post-socialist states and account for the common subjective experiences of the post-socialist transformation, I have argued

for being wary of contributing to the essentialising narratives, which end up orientalising people from post-socialist countries, in particular the working classes. Anthropology, with its preoccupation with exotic otherness, is especially at risk of doing so. The focus on post-socialism could also reify the distinction between before and after 1989, by prioritising ruptures over continuities, whereas in reality the collapse of socialist regimes did not always bring about a complete change in the economic and political development of the post-socialist countries. A substantial body of research explores the continuities between late socialist regimes and the free-market economic systems that came after them.

Research on the socio-economic transformation in eastern Germany has focused on changes and continuities in religious life, relations with the state, gender roles, post-socialist nostalgia, material culture and consumption, collective memory and national identity, workplace relations and the position of the working class. Much attention in recent years has been dedicated to the issue of privatisation in the 1990s and the activities of the *Treuhandanstalt*. Despite the significant body of research focused on the socio-economic transformation in eastern Germany, little has been done (especially in the field of anthropology) to situate local industrial developments in eastern Germany in a global context of economic, political and social struggles, nor to account for the changes that have happened within the past thirty years since the *Wende*. Recent anthropological studies on post-industrialism in eastern Germany focus on knowledge, affective responses, and attitudes regarding the future, whereas the links to the political economy are discussed rather vaguely. Mau's (2019) book on the social life of the *Plattenbau* neighbourhood of Lütten Klein in Rostock is successful in retaining the links with 'the big picture', while also focusing on peoples' experiences on the ground. However, being written by a sociologist, the book could be enriched by achieving a greater depth through ethnographic research, as well as connections with anthropological theories. In my dissertation, I have been working towards closing the above-mentioned gaps. Based on the existing body of research, I put forward the following research questions: How have working relations in the eastern German automotive industry been transformed through the shifts to a market economy, flexible capitalism and electromobility? How does this influence the lives of the workers, their world views and political orientations? What have been the wider political, economic and social effects of these industrial transformations on the lives and relationships of the people of Zwickau?

Empirically, this dissertation was based on ethnographic field research that I carried out in Zwickau from September 2018 until October 2019. During this period, I conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews with former and current automotive workers,

engineers and trade-union members. I view the factory as a social and socially embedded space rather than merely a technological and productive space. The field research was therefore mainly conducted outside the factory walls, in accordance with my main premise of the social embeddedness of the factory and the need to follow relationships and dependencies beyond the physical space of the factory. Participant observation was also carried out during public events and meetings in the town dedicated to politics, work and employment, and the automotive industry. 2019 was a year of municipal, European and *Landtag* elections in Saxony, which made the political space of the town especially interesting during my fieldwork and provided plenty of opportunities for observation. The in-depth interviews were structured around the topics of work, work relations, experiences of transformation, inequality and power relations, livelihoods, morality and fairness in relation to economic systems and social relationships among the various social classes and groups within the town.

Chapter 2 introduced the field-site and followed the industrial development of Zwickau and its automotive industry. Zwickau has been a highly industrialised town with a flourishing automotive industry for over a century. The car industry was launched in Zwickau as far back as in 1904, when the first Audi factory was established in the northern part of the town. During the GDR period, the car production continued under the factory name of Sachsenring, which became famous for producing the East German answer to the Volkswagen Beetle – the compact Trabant car. The Trabant, with its body made of *Duroplast,* was a modern car when it was launched in 1958. However, it quickly became outdated, as, due to shortages and political restrictions, its was not modernised in a timely fashion and essentially stayed almost the same up until it was discontinued in 1991. By 1989, the Sachsenring car plant was employing over 11,000 people, or about a tenth of the town's population. In the early 1990s the Sachsenring plant was divided into parts, which were either privatised or liquidated.

Building on the previous agreements with Sachsenring, which were established before the *Wende*, Volkswagen was quick to set foot in Zwickau by taking over the new Sachsenring facility in Mosel, a suburb of Zwickau. The automotive workers and other local residents welcomed Volkswagen's investment with the hope that all of the former Sachsenring departments would be incorporated by Volkswagen and that the automotive workers' jobs would be safe. However, the transition from Sachsenring to Volkswagen was far less smooth than the workers had hoped and than Volkswagen depicted it in its press materials. It took years for employment at Volkswagen to reach about 7000 people, supplier

networks had been built, and thousands of former Sachsenring workers had found new jobs. Within this transition period, many of the workers experienced turbulence and uncertainty, had to change their jobs multiple times, or fell into unemployment. Despite that, the automotive industry in Zwickau was in a far better position than the textile industry, or industries in other former GDR industrial towns. For example, the automotive industry in Eisenach, which was famous for its Wartburg cars and then continued production under the ownership of Opel (General Motors), shrank much more significantly compared to its size during socialism.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the experiences of unemployment and overcoming the turbulence in the labour market in the early 1990s shaped the attitudes of automotive employees towards unemployment and the unemployed. These experiences were framed by both white-collar and blue-collar workers as a test of personal worth, which contributed to the acceptance of the neoliberal narrative and the naïve social Darwinism of the 'survival of the fittest'. Unemployment hit the former automotive workers in Zwickau hard not only because they lost their livelihoods and had to cope with uncertainty, but also because the fell out of the factory's social systems and systems of support, a consequence of to the centrality of work and the factory for all spheres of life and social relations. With the transition to a market economy, workers had to adjust to the shift from the stable, socially embedded *Arbeitsplatz* of the past to flexible and often temporary *Jobs*. In remembering the overwhelming uncertainty of the 1990s, many adopted the narrative of the 'enterprising self', in which they presented themselves as adaptive, flexible and hardworking, in contrast to those who fell into unemployment. This narrative was further strengthened at the beginning of the 2000s when neoliberalism crept into the German welfare system in the shape of the Hartz IV reforms, which aggravated the financial situation of the unemployed and promoted their stigmatisation. Although initially met with resistance, the neoliberalisation of the social system was finally accepted by the wider public of the former GDR. I argue that one of the reasons for this was the policy's embeddedness in the moral values and narratives about work and worth.

In Chapter 4, I explored the topic of class and middle-classness among Zwickau's automotive workers. In this chapter, I focused on the entanglement of people's class positions and lived experiences, which produces what Mau has called the 'country of the little people' (Mau 2019: 174) in the former East Germany. I first sketched the lines of division between workers and white-collar employees, as well as groups of workers during socialism, and the common experiences and relationships which promoted class

identification. Apart from encounters directly within the factory, both horizontal and vertical relationships among the *Automobilbauer* were strengthened through the informal exchange of goods, such as beer, car parts, furniture, etc. With the transition to a market economy and flexible capitalism, class relations and divisions have gone through some changes: the divisions between temporary and permanent, VW and its suppliers, the car industry and others, have been strengthened, despite the general self-identification of many workers, engineers and some managers with a uniform 'middle class'. At the same time, a surprising alliance emerged between some white-collar employees and precarious workers in terms of both political views and views on the trade unions.

Chapter 5 delved more deeply into the issue of the fragmentation of the working class by looking at industrial relations and labour struggles within the Zwickau automotive industry. In this chapter, I discussed the changes in the strategies of the labour union and the works council, as well as the ways these changes have been perceived by the workers. By using the lens of uneven and combined development, I observed how regional and spatial inequalities translate into local hierarchies that can be captured within the scope of ethnographic fieldwork, and how these affect the position and strategies of the labour unions, which have shifted from militancy to cooperation in recent years. With more than 90% of its workforce unionized, and given its above-average wages within the region, Volkswagen has positioned its wage workers to become the local 'aristocracy of labour'. However, this privilege did not extend to workers in the supplier industry or other local employers. This differentiation contributed to the fragmentation of the local working class, as well as to maintaining the lower status of the workers in Zwickau in general, compared to those working in the west.

In the second part of my dissertation, the attention was shifted from work to the wider contexts of power, value and politics. After reunification, Sachsenring workers became witnesses to how the Sachsenring factory, Trabants, production itself and their labour were devalued based on a lack of economic efficiency and technological backwardness. Their former factory and the products of their labour were treated as waste both symbolically and literally. My encounters with my interlocutors in Zwickau who experienced the *Wende* made me think about the devaluation of East German products and what it meant to the people whose identities were connected to them. Through the practice of defending East German products, the car which they produced in some cases for twenty to thirty years of their lives, the factories they worked in and the technologies they used, they tried to reclaim the value of their experience, labour and, perhaps, themselves. I argued that, by opposing the dominant

categories of waste and value, imposed by the new economic and social system, Zwickau automotive workers also challenged this system. They did so by recognizing value beyond the domains of consumption and production and bringing the social context back into the picture. Although a significant part of Chapter 6 was dedicated to various aspects of the materiality of Sachsenring production (factories, infrastructure, products) and the way they were treated after the *Wende*, I treated materiality first and foremost as a medium of value (Graeber 2001: 75). As a medium, it is important in itself and inseparable from the social relations it represents. However, value is rooted in social relations and power struggles, rather than the objects themselves. Therefore, the emphasis of the chapter was put on the recognition, negotiation and reclaiming of value by the people.

The themes of politics and political views underpinned the whole thesis, as emerged in the chapters dedicated to work, class, industrial relations and value. However, it was in the final ethnographic Chapter 7 that this theme received greater elaboration. The political scene in Zwickau is characterised by intense polarisation, which sometimes results in violence. Negotiations over the collective memory of the town's recent NSU add another dimension to these tensions. The workers are divided into factions, some supporting the traditional social-democratic unions, others the right-wing populist parties and alternative right-wing unions. Many, however, do not feel represented by either one of them. Neither side relies on a vocabulary of class, but rather makes extensive use of the notion of an undifferentiated 'People' (das Volk), on whose behalf political claims are made, which further contributes to political polarisation.

In this dissertation, I have shown how the automotive factory and the industrial transformations that happened within it are embedded in the social, economic, moral and political spaces of the town. In this regard, the factory is a place where not only actual products but social relations are produced and reproduced, which go beyond the factory walls. The structure of some of my ethnographic chapters followed the chronological order of the development of the automotive industry in Zwickau before and throughout the transformation from socialism to capitalism. I realise that such a structure might favour differences rather than continuities and construct the *Wende* as an ultimate turning point in events. However, although some processes (disruptions to production, the commodification of labour, the lack of actual political representation, the lack of labour union action) had been taking place already before the fall of the Wall, I have favoured the voice of my interlocutors when talking about the *Wende* as a turning point in their lives. In the multiple individual biographies and stories I heard in the field, the collapse of socialism certainly marked a

dramatic change towards unemployment, more flexibility and uncertainty, and feelings of being abandoned, devalued and dismissed. All of that was emphasized despite the general satisfaction with the collapse of socialism, the gain in political freedom and freedom of speech, and reunification with the western part of Germany. In my dissertation, I have striven to stay true to my interlocutors in discussing their experiences, which *they* felt had been silenced.

The devaluation I discussed above went far beyond economic decline and the loss of financial security and livelihoods. After all, Zwickau did not at all experience the level of economic deterioration, unemployment and shrinkage of some other industrial cities of the former GDR. Nevertheless, the experience of social decline in terms of class (articulated in an actual decline in social status, devaluation of qualifications and production during socialism, and the general loss of status of the working class), along with the economic and symbolic hegemony of the West, were expressed by many workers and employees as feelings of misrecognition, devaluation and misrepresentation on the political level. The weakening of the labour movements, building on the socialist legacies, as well as the subsequent neoliberalisation, uneven development and the threats of capitalist disinvestment, have contributed to these experiences of devaluation.

The lack of the vocabulary of class and the decline of the rhetoric of exploitation and working-class identification have also played a major role in the decline of the labour movements and the framing of political and economic dissatisfactions along ethno-nationalist, rather than class-based, lines. Although I discussed these processes with regard to their contribution to the rise of right-wing populism, I do not intend to draw any grand conclusions explaining the voting behaviour of particular people or groups of people. Anthropological enquiry can hardly give a simple answer to this question. What it can do, however, is to complicate the analysis in a theoretically enriching way, which was one of the goals of this dissertation.

Recent developments connected with the COVID-19 pandemic complicate the analysis even further. Although my fieldwork was over by the time of the pandemic, I have been closely following the developments in my field site on the news. Zwickau became an active spot of demonstrations against vaccination and COVID-19 measures, often paired with right-wing sentiments. The pandemic hit the Volkswagen plant in Zwickau shortly after the beginning of electric car production. As a result of the protection measures against COVID-19 and the disruptions to supply, the plant went through several pauses and stoppages in production. The surrounding automotive suppliers, due to the lean production

and ‘just-in-time’ supply method, mostly stopped production simultaneously with Volkswagen. Their workers, however, being less unionised and more precarious, experience the stoppages in a different way than the Volkswagen workers. The uneven effects of the pandemic on the various groups of workers could be a fruitful topic for further research within the automotive industry in and around Zwickau. I would hypothesise that the COVID-19 pandemic would aggravate the inequalities that already exist among Zwickau’s workers. The current (2022) crisis of the war in Ukraine, which have caused a disruption in supply from Ukraine and led to another stoppage in production in Zwickau, has been used by the right-wing labour union as a warning against the dangers of globalisation and economic reliance on foreign supply. Remembering the anxieties of my interlocutors concerning the risks of the transition towards electromobility and overreliance on any one type of car, I could imagine recent developments increasing these anxieties.

Apart from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, I recognise two major topics for further research which could provide important insights. Firstly, it might be fruitful to follow the issues of environment and climate change in relation to the turn towards electromobility and examine how these issues play themselves out among the automotive workers. I touched on the topic of waste and the environment during and after socialism in Chapter 6, but the topic could be expanded as a separate project, in which modern issues are brought into perspective considering memories of the past. For example, some parallels can be drawn regarding the issue of current coal-exit goals and Zwickau’s experience of ceasing coal extraction in the 1970s. Recently, similar topics have been explored in relation to coal workers in Poland and industrial populism (Allen 2021).

Another topic for future investigation could be the link between labour unions and uneven development, which I explored in Chapter 5. In this sense, the issues of centrality and peripherality, as well as their relative character, might be worth exploring. One possibility is to bring the experiences of automotive workers in Slovakia into a comparison with those of the workers in Zwickau. The issue of global cooperation within the trade union and how this relates to geographical inequalities would be particularly fruitful to research.

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