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"Asociality"

The Construction of an Underclass Through the Concept of "Work"

Abstract

This article explores the correlation between "asociality" and "work", beginning with nineteenth-century Germany and Austria and then focusing on the twentieth century. The article's central thesis is that the nature of work determines the social classes within a society. Those who were deemed to be "asocials" were relegated to the most arduous and unwholesome tasks, with the argument that they needed to learn to do "proper" work. The article explains this through the historical contexts and semantics of "asociality" and "work" by exploring the impact of enemy images. The semantics of "asociality" led to the establishment of hostilities despite the absence of any enemies, while the semantics of "work" resulted in the formation of "people of disorder", excluding their real-life circumstances. By reflecting on the category "asocial" during the period of National Socialism, and on the case of three generations of a family of Holocaust survivors in the German Democratic Republic who were stigmatised as "workshy", this article demonstrates the long tradition and relevance of conceptualising "asociality".

The stigma of "asociality" increased with the industrialisation that occurred from the nineteenth century onwards. The poor left their villages looking for breadwinning and work: they migrated to the emerging cities, leaving their old homes and countries.[1] Society remained closely tied to old ways of thinking, based on the traditional idea that only those who stayed in the same place and at the same job for all their lives could belong to the community.[2] This idea did not change after 1945, and the experiences of those who were marginalised, who had to flee, who had been expelled, deported, and displaced, and who had barely survived, were not included when experiences were reflected on. In the West of Germany (FRG)[3] and in Austria,[4] there was little structural and mental change within the elites. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), too, there was a mental continuity that turned into practices

1 Jochen Oltmer, *Migration. Geschichte und Zukunft der Gegenwart* (Konrad Theiss Verlag, 2017), chapters 4 and 5. For a global view, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Verlag C.H. Beck, 2015, first 2009), 237–252, and Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Guilford Press, 1993).

2 Sebastian Conrad, Elisio Macamo, and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft und Nation", in *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Claus Offe (Campus, 2000), 449–475.

3 Stefan Romey, "'Asozial' als Ausschlusskriterium in der Entschädigungspraxis der BRD", in *Ausgegrenzt. "Asoziale" und "Kriminelle" im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystem*, ed. KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (Ed. Temmen, 2009), 149–159; Constantin Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden. Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung seit 1945* (Wallstein, 2008); Lothar Evers, "'Asoziale' NS-Verfolgte in der deutschen Wiedergutmachung", in *"Minderwertig" und "Asozial". Stationen der Verfolgung gesellschaftlicher Außenseiter*, ed. Dietmar Sedlaczek et al. (Chronos, 2005), 179-183; Wolfgang Ayaß, *"Asoziale" im Nationalsozialismus* (Klett Cotta 1995), Chapter 9; Klaus Scherer, *"Asozial" im Dritten Reich. Die vergessenen Verfolgten* (VOTUM, 1990).

4 Brigitte Bailer, *Wiedergutmachung kein Thema. Österreich und die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Löcker, 1993).

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against people who had been stigmatised as "workshy" (*arbeitsscheu*) or "lazy worker" (*Arbeitsbummelant*). The examples of the non-recognition of marginalised survivors of the Nazi-camps have already shown this cultural continuity.[5] In the GDR, the recognition of survivors was described as a "political behaviour bonus"[6] since political dissent, deviant behaviour, or non-conformist lifestyles led to de-recognition. Non-conformist lifestyles were described through types of work. Creative work or engagement for the family was mostly not recognised as "proper" work. If workers were disabled and could not work like healthy people, they were also often called "workshy" and "asocial".

The following article focuses on the circumstances of the lives of the described people and, in this way, on the relationship between "asociality" and "work". In the field of marginalised people, social and political discourses are interwoven with historical arguments. The discourse can be observed in social spaces, and in the juristic and psychological discussion. I argue that the ways in which people were (not) allowed to engage in paid work reveal the exclusionary cultural continuities that structure classes and, in this way, societies. During the 19th century, the idea of working for the common good emerged as the most important moral concept of modernity. Consequently, private life became an area of state intervention within the welfare state.[7] With the creation of the term "asocial" the way of life of lots of people was denounced as "workshy". This was related to improper and immoral work. The National Socialist dictatorship conceptualised work as a "struggle", thereby extending the concept of "asociality" to the non-professional sphere, encompassing private and leisure spaces. Following 1945, this manner of thinking manifested itself most distinctly in socialist societies, including the GDR. After the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the legalisation of "asociality" can be observed from 1968, creating an underclass in socialism by contrasting "proper" work against allegedly workshy asocials.[8]

As an opener to the argument of "proper" or "orderly" work, in this article I will first explain the historical contexts and semantics of "asociality" in a longer perspective, starting from the nineteenth century. Then, in this context, I will discuss the connection between the functionality of enemy images using the example of the semantics of "asociality" and "labour" or "work". The semantics of work changed from the nineteenth century to the National Socialist period and beyond. The third part of this article will focus on this connection by discussing the concept of "asociality" within the context of National Socialism. In the fourth part of the study, the heritage of National Socialism will be shown through the example of three generations of a Sinti family of Holocaust survivors who were stigmatised as "workshy" in the state-socialist GDR. This example demonstrates the long-standing tradition of interlinked thinking that connects the category of social racism with arguments of "asociality" and anti-"gypsyist" racism in the GDR. Although state socialism presented itself as an antifascist alternative to capitalism, people's mentalities continued to reflect a long-standing tradition of ethnic, eugenic, and social racism. In collaboration with

5 Christoph Hölscher, *NS-Verfolgte im "antifaschistischen Staat". Vereinnahmung und Ausgrenzung in der ostdeutschen Wiedergutmachung (1945–1989)* (Metropol 2002); Susanne zur Nieden, "'Unwürdige' Opfer. Zur Ausgrenzung der im Nationalsozialismus als 'Asoziale' Verfolgten in der DDR", in *Ausgegrenzt*, 138–148.

6 Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden*, 375.

7 Marcus Gräser, *Wohlfahrtsgesellschaft und Wohlfahrtsstaat. Bürgerliche Sozialreform und Welfare State Building in den USA und in Deutschland 1880–1940* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); Wolfgang Ayaß, Wilfried Rudloff, and Florian Tennstedt, *Sozialstaat im Werden*, vols. 1–2. (Steiner 2021).

8 Katharina Lenski, "Sinti in der DDR. Zwischen alten Zuschreibungen und neuen Ängsten", *Einsicht* 11, no. 20 (2019): 24–33, https://www.fritz-bauer-institut.de/en/publikation/einsicht-2019.

exclusionary institutions – such as special children's homes and prisons – as well as the state-party apparatus, public administration, (secret) police and youth authorities, these attitudes contributed to the construction of a new underclass of "asocials" within the socialist state.

This study highlights the long-standing tradition of conceptions of work in relation to the construction of "asociality". Using the example of the Sinti in the GDR, it examines the interrelation of racial discrimination and social racism, and how these dynamics contributed to the formation of underclasses through labour in a socialist society, despite the propagation of an ideology that advocated the concept of a classless society.

The Semantics of "Asociality": Creating Hostilities

The history of asociality goes back to the nineteenth century, when the police were given extensive powers to force marginalised people to work in an "orderly" manner.[9] The term "asociality" has always been open to misinterpretation. It is associated with terms of antisocial behaviour and therefore it creates hostility.[10] It seems to imply a chain of interventions by the state and welfare systems, by social, employment, and educational authorities, and by medicine, psychiatry, and the police. In the nineteenth century, these interventions deeply interfered in the lives of those affected, but they seemed to require little justification. The images of so called asocials were associated with everyday assumptions that included an ensemble of deviant behaviours: laziness, workshyness, dirtiness, alcoholism, and sexually deviant behaviour. The link between the deviant and workshy poor and the "born criminal" emerged. As early as the 1840s, the authorities instrumentalised the police "character references" for disciplinary purposes.[11]

The surveillance of "criminals" led to the development of social-racist profiling targeting the poor and migrants. Identity cards and workbooks were introduced as tools of control.[12] Police records stored in file boxes and cabinets, including photography and dactyloscopy, increasingly played an increasing role in compiling information on those seemed deviant. These practices reinforced an exclusionary, biologistic view of the socially marginalised, perpetuating their stigmatisation.[13]

The legalisation of repressive measures against "people of disorder"[14] started with the German Penal Code of 1871. It sanctioned "vagrants, gypsies, beggars" and women who allegedly engaged in "commercial fornication".[15] Even laziness was included in this penal code, and sanctions were imposed on homeless people who

9 See § 361 of the Penal Code of the German Empire: https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Strafgesetzbuch_für_das_Deutsche_Reich_(1871)#Siebenundzwanzigster_Abschnitt._Gemeingefährliche_Verbrechen_und_Vergehen.

10 Reinhart Koselleck and Ulrike Spree, *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Suhrkamp, 2010), 276–280.

11 Becker, *Vom "Haltlosen" zur "Bestie"*, 120.

12 Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz, "Von der Begriffsgeschichte zur historischen Semantik von 'Arbeit'", in *Semantiken von Arbeit: Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Böhlau, 2016), 30.

13 Ibid., 121, 126–131.

14 Ibid., 97–111.

15 Beate Althammer, *Vagabunden. Eine Geschichte von Armut, Bettel und Mobilität im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung (1815–1933)* (Klartext, 2017). Beate Althammer, "Vagabonds in the German Empire: Mobility, Unemployment, and the Transformation of Social Policies (1870–1914)", in *Poverty and Welfare in Modern German History*, ed. Lutz Raphael (Berghahn, 2017), 78–104.

failed to prove a place of residence within deadlines set by the authorities.[16] An important instrument was introduced through forced work in closed institutions. Section 362 of the Penal Code of 1871 stipulated that, following imprisonment, convicts were to be put to work both inside and outside of prison, according to their abilities and circumstances, and under police surveillance. Those released from prison could be sent to workhouses for up to two more years if the authorities documented deviant behaviour. Observed individuals could also be forced to do work designated as community service. This was an important element of the punishment as it provided a counter measure to the alleged harmful selfishness of the punished.

The economist Karl Georg Winkelblech (1810–1865) argued that individuals were not inherently averse to work. Rather, it was a lack of work that drove people out of their homes and into the streets to become vagrants.[17] Winkelblech's view was not unique for his time, yet criminological discourses increasingly supported of the punishment and imprisonment of the poor. A circle around legal scholar Robert von Hippel (1866–1951) argued against the so called workshy and vagabonds.[18] Hippel was a scholar of the legal expert Franz von Liszt,[19] who advocated for the lifelong internment of those so convicted. Hippel wrote: "[a]nyone who is deliberately determined to wage a lifelong struggle against the legal order has no place in human society […]."[20] These words articulated a goal of excluding the poor from society, but without empirical evidence. No scientific studies substantiated the notion of a "lifelong" struggle against society by the poor; the proposal for lifelong internment rested on scant biological assumptions about behaviour. As a result, the hastily formulated internment policies failed to adequately address the underlying social problems.

With the concept of the "lifelong internment," a swift and violent resolution became firmly entrenched in the prevailing discourse. The interlocutors articulated a predilection for a strategy that prioritised the interests of the affluent over those of the economically disadvantaged. This approach was distinguished by a targeted strategy against the impoverished, as opposed to a commitment to addressing the root causes of poverty. The emphasis was not on addressing the issue of poverty itself, but rather on the individuals living in poverty. Robert von Hippel, for instance, advanced arguments against those who were deemed to be workshy and "disturbers" of the public order, while concurrently expressing disapproval of the lifestyle of the impoverished. However, the investigation did not delve into the underlying causes of the association between alleged "asocial" behaviour and economic disadvantage or homelessness.[21] The concept of "normal" behaviour was the focal point, with the notion of "normalcy" being derived from the prevailing socioeconomic conditions of the middle class. However, the circumstances of the economically disadvantaged impeded the realisation of such a "normality". Consequently, these contributions did not result in an informed solution, but rather a pseudo-solution. The term "criminals" was employed in a vague manner to justify the implementation of preventative

16 Yvonne Robel, "Pathologisch faul? Das Nichtstun der 'Massen' von 1890 bis in die 1930er Jahre", *Werkstatt Geschichte* no. 78 (2018): 57–71.

17 Karl Marlo (= Karl Georg Winkelblech), *Untersuchungen über die Organisation der Arbeit oder: System der Weltökonomie*, vol. 4: Allgemeiner praktischer Theil der Volkswirtschaft (Laupp ,1886 [1850–1859], 49.

18 Beate Althammer, "Pathologische Vagabunden. Psychiatrische Grenzziehungen um 1900", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 39, no. 3 (2013): 306–337.

19 Monika Frommel, "Liszt, Franz Ritter von", Neue Deutsche Biographie 14 (1985), 704–705, https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118573519.html#ndbcontent.

20 Robert von Hippel, *Die korrektionelle Nachhaft* (Mohr, 1889), 117–118 (trans. K. Lenski); Althammer, *Pathologische Vagabunden*, 313.

21 Robert von Hippel, *Die strafrechtliche Bekämpfung von Bettel, Landstreicherei und Arbeitsscheu. Eine Darstellung des heutigen Rechtszustandes nebst Reformvorschlägen* (Liebmann, 1895).

actions, with these measures being directed towards those deemed to be "asocial disrupters of the public order".[22]

The concept of the "asocial disrupters of the public order" was not only established by criminologists, but also by psychiatrists such as Karl Wilmanns (1873–1945) and his book *Zur Psychopathologie des Landstreichers* about 120 vagrants, most of them from the workhouse in Kislau in the German region of Baden. He described the lifestyle of migrant workers, vagrants, and vagabonds as a "symptom of madness in its most advanced form".[23] This "madness" justified the alleged "biological inferiority" of those affected.[24] In welfare associations and in the care of poor and migrant workers, the pathologising language spread rapidly.[25] If they were not fit to be detained in the workhouses, the stigmatised were to be kept in closed psychiatric hospitals and welfare institutions.[26] The Nazi psychiatrist and forensic biologist Friedrich Stumpfl (1902–1997) was later concurred with Wilmanns and others in asserting that most vagrants were insane and abnormal.[27]

Public opinion therefore blamed the people stigmatised in this way for their own material hardship. This was justified on the grounds that the marginalised had not adapted to contemporary notions of work and life or had not submitted to the official regimes of time and place. This ignores the fact that those who were criticised were usually victims of the economic transformations and war, or suffered due to the deaths of relatives, hardship, illness, or trauma. These people were excluded as the "waste" of society, without roots and without goals.[28]

In the end, the term "asociality" was used as a matter of course, because it seemed to sum up something that was apparently clear but was in fact very difficult to define. The counter-term "asociality" was opposed to the social behaviour of human beings. It imagined a solution to the very different problems of the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly, or the disabled. But it did (and still does) produce a general hostility towards the marginalised. The term does not differentiate; rather, it generalises. The counter-term opens the possibility of marginalising the stigmatised, and ultimately unlocks the door to physical violence and (mass) killing.[29] It opens the field to interventions from the public to the private sphere: from children and younger people to the elderly, from open places to closed institutions.

The Semantics of "Work": Creating "People of Disorder"

"Work" became a key word for the main form of state intervention in modern times. The term is constantly updated; it is defined by a view of and towards settled and skilled workers. From the 19th century migrant, seasonal, or unskilled workers, vagrants and vagabonds have been increasingly downgraded to "people of disor-

22 Peter Becker, "Vom 'Haltlosen' zur 'Bestie'. Das polizeiliche Bild des 'Verbrechers' im 19. Jahrhundert", in *"Sicherheit" und "Wohlfahrt". Polizei, Gesellschaft und Herrschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Suhrkamp, 1992), 97–132.

23 Karl Wilmanns, *Zur Psychopathologie des Landstreichers. Eine klinische Studie* (Barth, 1906). See also Wolfgang Ayaß, *Das Arbeitshaus Breitenau* (Jenior und Pressler, 1991), 66 and Althammer, *Vagabunden*, 525–534.

24 Regina Schulte, *Das Dorf im Verhör. Brandstifter, Kindsmörderinnen und Wilderer vor den Schranken des bürgerlichen Gerichts* (Rowohlt, 1989), 98.

25 Althammer, *Vagabunden*, 535.

26 Ayaß, *Arbeitshaus Breitenau*, 47.

27 Althammer, *Vagabunden*, 541.

28 On the relationship between the underclass and "waste": Zygmunt Bauman, *Verworfenes Leben. Die Ausgegrenzten der Moderne* (Hamburger Edition, 2005).

29 Cf. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, 276.

der".[30] Forced to remain on the margins of society, they had neither the resources nor the power to make their voices heard politically. The counter-concept of asociality places those who are outside the honoured work on the social sidelines.[31]

The ideas associated with "modern", "orderly", or "proper" work differentiate societies through hierarchies and in destructive and exclusionary ways. Prejudice leads to convictions without the convicted breaking the law. It extends the field of intervention from punishment by the legal system to not formally codified areas in closed institutions, from childhood to old age, from the public space to the private home. We are therefore faced with the question of the relationship between work and patterns of social order in modernity.

As the division of labour progressed, people began to differentiate between productive and unproductive work. Since the Reformation that began in 1517, there has been a revaluation of manual labour as opposed to intellectual activity. The reformers turned against the supposed good-for-nothings, even among the monks, against the lazy and the beggars.[32] During the nineteenth century, "work" moved to the forefront of moral concepts. Laziness became the antithesis of Protestant ethics.[33]

The modern concept of work is characterised by five features. In a fundamental process of abstraction, work is transformed into an economised, collective singular. It includes the labour force and the whole person of the workers. It is inscribed in concepts of progress and civilisation and has been temporalised. It politicises and sacralises the activities, processes, objects, and subjects involved.[34]

The characteristics of work described above have been closely intertwined with the development of the concept of the nation state. Until 1850, there was a distinction between productive and unproductive work; afterwards, the concept of "socially useful" work emerged. In 1861, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl published what would become a well-known book, *Die Deutsche Arbeit* (The German Work).[35] He nationalised the concept of "work" and filled it with antisemitic stereotypes: Jewish people would not be able to work for the common good, he claimed.[36] Nationalisation thus created a link to comparisons with so-called primitive societies or even competing so-called civilised nations. In this way, work was semantically linked to honour, people, and nation in a colonising hierarchy.[37] Thus, it was linked to antisemitism and morality.[38] The new concept of work structured the placement of workers and determined *who*

30 Becker, *Vom "Haltlosen" zur "Bestie"*, 97–111.

31 Leonhard and Steinmetz, *Begriffsgeschichte*, 9–59; Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Eine Globalgeschichte der Arbeit*, trans. Bettina Hoyer and Tim Jack (Campus, 2017); Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt, "Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus", in *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marc Buggeln and Michael Wildt (de Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), IX.

32 Werner Conze, "Arbeit", in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, 4th ed. (Klett Cotta, 1994), 154–215, 164.

33 Sharon Beder, *Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR* (VIC Scribe Publications, 2000); Adriano Tilgher, *Work: What it has Meant to Men Through the Ages* (Harcourt, Brace and Company 1931, Italian 1929); Robel, "Pathologisch faul?", 57–71.

34 Conze, *Arbeit*, 154–215, 174–189; Leonhard and Steinmetz, *Begriffsgeschichte*, 16–17.

35 On earlier (antisemitic) publications, see Michael Wildt, "Der Begriff der Arbeit bei Hitler", in *Arbeit*, ed. Buggeln and Wildt, 3–24.

36 Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die Deutsche Arbeit* (Cotta, 1861), 5–6.

37 Horst Gründer, "Neger, Kanaken und Chinesen zu nützlichen Menschen erziehen. Ideologie und Praxis des deutschen Kolonialismus", in *Überseegeschichte. Beiträge zur jüngeren Forschung*, ed. Thomas Beck et al. (Steiner, 1999) 254–266; Felix Axster, "Arbeit an der 'Erziehung zur Arbeit'. Oder: Die Figur des guten deutschen Kolonisators", in *"Deutsche Arbeit". Kritische Perspektiven auf ein ideologisches Selbstbild*, ed. Felix Axster and Nicolas Lelle (Wallstein, 2018), 226–251.

38 Klaus Holz and Jan Weyand, "Arbeit und Nation. Die Ethik nationaler Arbeit und ihre Feinde am Beispiel Hitlers", in *"Deutsche Arbeit"*, 88–115 (2014).

was allowed to do *which* kind of work, in *which time structure* and under *which conditions*.

On this basis, work has been associated with the counter-concept of "asociality" as morally charged ethics. Morality and work were combined in a single figure of thought. A distinction was made between charitable and selfish work, between socially useful work and selfish work. This was linked with the antisemitic view. Jews were denounced as incapable of doing something for the common good and only being capable of self-interest. The antisemitic interpretation of "German work", such as by Riehl, the distinction between "creating" and "plundering" capital, was canonised.

The First World War accelerated the dehumanising differentiation between work for the common good and working for one's own interests. The "common good in the service of nation and fatherland" at the front was set against the supposedly workshy members of society. This presupposed a pattern of identity formation that is still valid today. With the First World War, "work for the war" created a social space in which (gendered) militarised action, disciplinary subordination, and obedience, as well as biologised hierarchies, were promoted.[39]

Therefore, antisemites argued that Jews should only be trained for charitable work done through hard physical activity, especially in agriculture. They would have to learn to do that labour, but most of them would not be able to learn to do productive work. Only heavy physical labour in a warlike struggle for survival was considered honest. Originally an antisemitic stereotype, it was extended during the Nazi era to exclude dissenters and political opponents, as well as Sinti and other racially and socially marginalised people. Stereotypes were established not only about external enemies, but also about internal social enemies, through the discourse on workshy people who allegedly did not work for the nation at the (home) front. Society was designed as a militarised space, and the concept of work became a militarised field, closely linked to racist and nationalist thinking. This can be demonstrated by the relationship between the terms *"Volksgemeinschaft"* ("People's community") and "labour" in National Socialism. The cult of labour and working heroes grew immensely in the dictatorships of the twentieth century.[40] The fixed schedules of the *struggle for survival* were contrasted with leisure. Work was equated with discipline, effort, and agony in opposition to pleasurable play. It was associated with war work, fighting for the fatherland against the so-called enemies.

At the same time, work became sacralised. It was staged as a secular religion, paving the way for the cult of work in the dictatorships of the twentieth century. The concept of work was reduced to dependent wage labour. With the separation of home and work, seemingly inescapable gender roles were established. Women's freedom thus depended on the patriarch of the house.[41] Labour entered time and space, transcending the boundaries between day and night, between home and factory.[42]

39 Alf Lüdtke, "Soldiering and Working: Almost the Same? Reviewing Practices in Industry and the Military in Twentieth-Century Contexts", in *Global Histories of Work: Work in Global and Historical Perspective*, eds. Andreas Eckert et al. (De Gruyter, 2016), 146–168; Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

40 Alf Lüdtke, "'Helden der Arbeit' – Mühen beim Arbeiten. Zur missmutigen Loyalität von Industriearbeitern in der DDR", in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble/Jürgen Kocka/Hartmut Zwahr (Klett Cotta 1994), 188–213. Rainer Gries/Silke Satjukow, "Helden der Arbeit". In *Europäische Erinnerungsorte. Das Haus Europa*, Bd. 2, ed. Pim Den Boer et al. (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag 2011), 65–72.

41 Ida Blom, "Gender and Nation in International Comparison", in *Gendered Nations. Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall (Berg 2000), 3–26.

42 Leonhard and Steinmetz, *Begriffsgeschichte*, 20.

"Asociality" and Labour under National Socialism

Racism, social racism, and the militarisation of society laid the foundation for violent social practices in the period after First World War. Under the National Socialists, society eroded into a "mobilisation dictatorship", in which labour market policy was transformed into a "labour struggle".[43] The workers became soldiers in the so-called Volksgemeinschaft. This meant a racist, culturally, and politically homogeneous community.[44] "Work" turned into a catchword for the unlimited temporal and spatial availability of the Volksgemeinschaft. The sacralisation of work as a service to the people, such as in the labour service, points to the increasingly racial and one-sided orientation towards the national state with its inclusive and exclusive functions.[45] The goal was to work in a "socially useful" way all the time, every day, and in every place, in order to join the Volksgemeinschaft.[46] The term "Volksgemeinschaft" is the symbol of a racial society, as Ulrich Herbert has explained.[47] By linking antisemitism with labour, the Nazis ruled out the possibility of Jews being able to do "German work".[48] On the one hand, racially "valuable" people were integrated and disciplined. On the other hand, the supposedly "inferior" were increasingly marginalised, persecuted, forced into deadly labour, and ultimately killed.[49]

In 1933, welfare turned into a system of militarised restrictions, the foundations of which had been prepared in previous years.[50] First came the "beggar razzia" from September 18 to 23 in 1933. This was the largest ever police operation against homeless people, and Wolfgang Ayass estimated that more than 10,000 of them were temporarily or permanently imprisoned. Most of them were sent to workhouses and some to concentration camps.[51] By using antisemitic stereotypes such as "Jews learn-

43 Michael Wildt, "'Arbeit' im Nationalsozialismus. Zur Bedeutung des Begriffs in Ideologie und Praxis des NS-Staats", *Einsicht* 6, no. 12 (2014): 14–18; Detlev Humann, *"Arbeitsschlacht. Arbeitsbeschaffung und Propaganda in der NS-Zeit 1933–1939"* (Wallstein, 2011); "Die 'Arbeitsschlacht' als Krisenüberwindung", in *Arbeit*, 71–86.

44 Michael Wildt, "Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Zugehörigkeit, Ausgrenzung, Vernichtung," in *"Deutsche Arbeit"*, 116–134, 119–123; Kiran Klaus Patel, *"Soldaten der Arbeit". Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA 1933–1945* (Wallstein, 2003), 73–103.

45 Michael Wildt, "Die Volksgemeinschaft nach Detlev Peukert", in *Detlev Peukert und die NS-Forschung*, ed. Rüdiger Hachtmann and Sven Reichardt (Wallstein, 2015), 49–67, 59; Daniel Logemann, Rikola-Gunnar Lütgenau, and Jens-Christian Wagner, ed., *Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus* (Wallstein, 2024).

46 See the discussion about time and space in Edward P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past & Present* 38, no. 1 (1967): 56–97; Alf Lüdtke, "'Ehre der Arbeit'. Industriearbeiter und Macht der Symbole. Zur Reichweite symbolischer Ordnungen im Nationalsozialismus", in *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2015), 248–306. See also "'Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit': Mitmachen und Eigensinn im Nationalsozialismus – Interview von Marc Buggeln und Michael Wildt mit Alf Lüdtke" (Göttingen, 19 February 2014), in *Arbeit*, 373–401; Ulrich Herbert, "Arbeiterklasse und Gemeinschaftsfremde", in *Detlev Peukert*, 39–48.

47 Ibid., 47.

48 Wildt, "Der Begriff der Arbeit bei Hitler", in *Arbeit*, ed. Buggeln and Wildt, 3–6.

49 Jens-Christian Wagner, "Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Ein Überblick", in *Zwangsarbeit*, 182–195, 184.

50 On the discussion about the "Preservation Act" (*Bewahrungsgesetz*) see, for example, the *Nachrichtendienst des Deutschen Vereins für öffentliche und private Fürsorge* 9 (1928): 415–418; Ayaß, *"Asoziale" im Nationalsozialismus*, chapters 2 and 4; Matthias Willing, *Das Bewahrungsgesetz (1918–1967). Eine rechtshistorische Studie zur Geschichte der deutschen Fürsorge* (Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

51 Ayaß, *"Asoziale" im Nationalsozialismus*, 24; Julia Hörath, "Leistung, 'Nichtarbeit', Ausschluss. Die Verhängung von KZ-Haft gegen 'Arbeitsscheue' 1933 bis 1937/38", *Einsicht* 6, no. 12 (2014): 28–57; Franziska Schleupner, *"Arbeitsscheu Reich". Die Sonderaktion der Geheimen Staatspolizei im April 1938. Ursachen. Motive. Planung – und deren Umsetzung im Regierungsbezirk Mainfranken* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2014); Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann et al., ed., *Der Ort der "Volksgemeinschaft" in der deutschen Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Schöningh, 2018); Dietmar von Reeken, Malte Thießen, ed., *"Volksgemeinschaft" als soziale Praxis. Neue Forschungen zur NS-Gesellschaft vor Ort* (Schöningh, 2013). See also Gerhard Paul and Michael Wildt, *Nationalsozialismus. Aufstieg, Macht, Niedergang, Nachgeschichte* (bpb, 2022), esp. chapter 6, chapters 8–10, and chapters 13–15.

ing to work", the racially constructed "German worker" was ideologically upgraded.[52] The absurdity of the humiliating violence against the Jews shows that it was not about education for labour. This can be seen, for instance, in the so-called rubbing actions, the *Reibeaktionen*, in which Jews were forced to clean the stones on the pavements.[53] This pointless activity served only to humiliate and intimidate them. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws inscribed racism and ethnic antisemitism into the legal canon.

The arbitrariness of the restrictions is particularly evident in the construction of the "gypsies" as it is this group that was created by the bureaucratic card index empire of the psychiatrist Robert Ritter (1901–1951). This was a network of biological and social information about the stigmatised persons in the so called "gypsy" files. Ritter headed the Racial Hygiene and Population Biology Research Centre (*Rassenhygienische und bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle beim Reichsgesundheitsamt*), a department of the Reich Health Office, from the centre's foundation in 1936.[54] Ritter used the "gypsy" files to assess the worthiness or unworthiness of a life, and he claimed their scientific nature by pointing to supposed deviations.[55] The act of fixing and stamping added asociality to the canon of scientific objects. The vagueness of the term remained and was part of its functionality: It was applicable when other attributions did not apply and were not (yet) sanctionable.[56] The Sinti were both racially and socially stigmatised. Since 1941, they had been excluded by supposedly scientific, but in fact racist, "expert reports".[57]

In the 1930s, the authorities increasingly prevented "gypsies" from working as itinerant workers. They were forced into wage labour, until a special law finally subjected this group to forced labour, claiming these people were "workshy".[58]

From 1935, all workers were disciplined through the reintroduction of the *working book* ("Arbeitsbuch"), a record of an individual's work history.[59] Young people had to do unskilled and physically demanding manual labour, especially in agriculture, in the *National Labour Service* ("Reichsarbeitsdienst").[60] The Basic Decree on crime prevention of 14 December 1937 criminalised and deprived of their civil liberties those whose way of working and living deviated from the narrow canon of the Volksgemeinschaft. With this Basic Decree, "preventive detention" was extended to so-called asocials. People who were labelled as "asocials" were imprisoned by the following *Arbeitsscheu Reich* campaigns in 1938. Before the campaigns took place, authorities compiled lists of healthy men capable of hard physical labour. In April and June 1938, these campaigns filled the concentration camps with alleged "asocials". Nearly 10,000 men, around 25 per cent of them Jews, were sent to the camps.[61] The

52 Buggeln and Wildt, *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, XIX. See Lüdtke, "Ehre der Arbeit", 248–306.

53 Logemann et al., eds., *Zwangsarbeit,* 22.

54 Carola Fings, *Rassismus, Lager, Völkermord. Die nationalsozialistische Zigeunerverfolgung in Köln* (Emons, 2005), 128–151; Joachim S. Hohmann, *Robert Ritter und die Erben der Kriminalbiologie. "Zigeunerforschung" im Nationalsozialismus und in Westdeutschland im Zeichen des Rassismus* (Lang, 1991); Tobias Schmidt-Degenhard, *Vermessen und Vernichten. Der NS-"Zigeunerforscher" Robert Ritter* (Steiner 2012).

55 Fings, *Rassismus,* 140.

56 Lenski, "Sinti", 24–33.

57 Karola Fings, *Sinti und Roma. Geschichte einer Minderheit* (C. H. Beck, 2016), 66.

58 Fings, *Sinti,* 66–69; Sybil Milton, "Vorstufe zur Vernichtung. Die Zigeunerlager nach 1933", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 43, no. 1 (1995), 115–130.

59 Stefanie Werner et al., "Hitlers gläserne Arbeitskräfte. Das Arbeitsbuch als Quelle von Mikrodaten für die historische Arbeitsmarktforschung", *JbfWG* 52, no. 2 (2011): 175–191. See also Karsten Linne, "Von der Arbeitsvermittlung zum 'Arbeitseinsatz'. Zum Wandel der Arbeitsverwaltung 1933–1945," in *Arbeit*, 53–70, 53.

60 Wildt, "Der Begriff der Arbeit", in *Arbeit*, 3–24, 17–20.

61 Ayaß, *"Asoziale" im Nationalsozialismus*, 138–165; Wolfgang Ayaß, "Ein Gebot der nationalen Arbeitsdisziplin. Die Aktion 'Arbeitsscheu Reich' 1938", in *Feinderklärung und Prävention: Kriminalbiologie, Zigeunerforschung und Asozialenpolitik*, ed. Wolfgang Ayaß et al. (Rotbuch, 1988), 43–74.

labour was in quarries, tunnels, road construction, and brickworks, as manual labour, usually without tools and protective clothing. In the concentration camps they were forced to do the hardest physical labour, not to "educate" these people to work, but to destroy them.[62] The contempt for humanity was most clearly expressed in a 1942 report on a meeting in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories on the "General Plan East".[63] Erhard Wetzel, Special Commissioner for Racial Policy to the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories and a participant in the Final Solution conferences of the same year, spoke about "scrapping" the stigmatised people, about deporting and murdering over thirty million people from the polish territories.[64]

In contrast to the propagation of education through labour, "work" became a highly destructive field.[65] For that part of the population that was racially excluded, or politically or culturally deviant, it became the term for exclusion, division, and death. For this reason, the nature of work that someone was allowed or required to perform was categorised according to social groups, ethnicities, or races with the aim of developing "racial criteria and gender differences", which preceded the separation of alleged enemies during the Shoah.[66]

The bureaucratically established normalcy of the production of asociality is clearly demonstrated by the "asocial commissions" in Vienna. It included members of the Racial Policy Office (*Rassenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP*), the Nazi Party, the Health Department, and the welfare authorities. The commission recommended allegedly asocial women and men for deportation to forced labour camps, asylums, and concentration camps. There, the criminal investigation department, the Gestapo, and the legal department of the local administration, health, welfare, and labour offices agreed on the persecution of those affected and determined the steps to be taken.[67] The concept of work thus became a normalisation metaphor for the mass murder in the concentration camps and during the war, which refers to the industrial nature of daily killing.[68]

An Expanding Field: "Asociality" in the GDR

Long-term marginalisation could be observed behind the Iron Curtain, where those stigmatised were subjected to surveillance in everyday life and subordinate work. The stigmatisation as "asocial" had led to deadly consequences before 1945. After 1945, with the "socialist lifestyle", *ordinary* work related also to people's whole

62 Michael Wildt, "Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Zugehörigkeit, Ausgrenzung, Vernichtung", in *Deutsche Arbeit*, 116–134.

63 "Bericht Wetzels über die Besprechung im Ostministerium am 4. 2. 1942," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6 (1958): 293–325, 295.

64 Wildt, *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, 116–134, 128. For more information about Wetzel (1903–1975), see Helmut Heiber, "Vorbemerkung zur Dokumentation 'Generalplan Ost'", in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6, no. 3 (1958): 286–287; Ernst Klee, *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945*, 5th ed. (Nikol, 2021), 673.

65 Wildt, *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, 131.

66 Leonhard and Steinmetz, *Begriffsgeschichte*, 52.

67 Helga Amesberger, Brigitte Halbmayr, and Elke Rayal, *"Arbeitsscheu und moralisch verkommen". Verfolgung von Frauen als "Asoziale" im Nationalsozialismus* (Mandelbaum, 2019), 49–80. See also Helga Amesberger, Brigitte Halbmayr, and Elke Rayal, *Stigma Asozial. Geschlechtsspezifische Zuschreibungen, behördliche Routinen und Orte der Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus* (Mandelbaum, 2020), 150–156. An individual case can be seen in Brigitte Halbmayr, *Brüchiges Schweigen. Tod in Ravensbrück – auf den Spuren von Anna Burger* (Mandelbaum, 2023).

68 Wildt, *Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus*, 116–134.

lives. People of "disorderly work" were labelled as "asocial". This was dangerous for the survivors of the concentration camps, who were often physically and mentally disabled and unable to do manual work or stay in enclosed spaces.

The correlation between traumatic experiences and the capacity to function in the workplace has not been the subject of academic investigation in Germany. In 1992, the Norwegian psychiatrist Leo Eitinger (1912–1996), an Auschwitz survivor who became a leading expert in the study of post-traumatic stress disorder, summarised the effects of concentration camp imprisonment that he had observed in international long-term studies. He argued that feelings of isolation and insecurity, fear, depression, and a lack of courage to face life must be overcome against all odds. They were forced to integrate into a society of work, ideology, and bureaucracy. To facilitate the integration of survivors into society and enable them to resume their lives, since 1968 the Norwegian authorities had to prove that there were no health problems attributable to persecution when individuals applied for pension benefits. This was a fundamental difference from Germany where, in contrast to this, the victims themselves had to prove the consequences of persecution.[69]

In the GDR is to seen the long-life tradition of the discriminations against "asocials". If survivors were too ill to work, or if they worked independently, for instance as musicians, they were often labelled as "asocial". If they were marked as "gypsies", they were also denounced as "asocial", even if they were doing hard physical labour.[70] The failure of the new government to recognise the survivors of the concentration camps who were defined as "asocial", demonstrates the continuity of both racist and social-racist stigmatisation.[71] After the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the legal basis for persecuting social deviants became more and more extensive in the GDR. Itinerant trades, the existence of musicians, and cross-border contacts were followed with mistrust, and quickly punished with forced labour in camps or prisons. In 1964, the headline of the GDR's main newspaper *Neues Deutschland* repeated an antisemitic stereotype: the author wrote that only "work for the common good" would be accepted:

> Work – source of happiness: through work it can be clearly shown to young people that asociality and irresponsibility (recognisable by a selfish, i.e. capitalistic attitude) are the points at which the danger of *inhumanity is* particularly great.[72]

Apart from the echoes of the antisemitic rhetoric of the "Volksgemeinschaft", the call against individuality is in line with the tried and tested approach against individual action up to 1945. In the GDR, the Youth Act of 1965 and the Labour Code of 1968 provided for special support for young people but also legalised the penal code

69 Leo Eitinger, "Norwegische Untersuchungen über Spätschäden bei KZ-Häftlingen", in *Spuren Der Verfolgung: Seelische Auswirkungen des Holocaust auf die Opfer und ihre Kinder*, ed. Gertrud Hardtmann and Dan Bar-On (Bleicher Books, 1992), 56–68, 64–68. On Leo Eitinger, see the obituary by Inge Genefke in *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 10, no. 1 (1997):157–159, and Experiencing History: Holocaust Sources in Context, "Panel Discussion with Leo Eitinger", n.d., https://perspectives.ushmm.org/item/panel-discussion-with-leo-eitinger, and "Leo Joshua Eitinger – Norsk Digitalt Fangearkiv 1940–1945 – Fanger.no", n.d. https://www.fanger.no/persons/3251.

70 Anja Reuss, *Kontinuitäten der Stigmatisierung. Sinti und Roma in der deutschen Nachkriegszeit* (Metropol, 2015), 139–151.

71 Currently see Frank Nonnenmacher, ed., *Die Nazis nannten sie "Asoziale" und "Berufsverbrecher". Verfolgungsgeschichten im Nationalsozialismus und in der Bundesrepublik* (Campus, 2024).

72 Pastor Friedrich Schmidt, Magdeburg (GDR), "Arbeit, Quelle des Glücks", *Neues Deutschland*, 27 August 1964, 5, "ND-Archiv: 27.08.1964: Arbeit – Quelle Des Glücks", n.d., https://www.nd-archiv.de/artikel/1405683.arbeit-m-quelle-des-gluecks.html.

against so called asociality.[73] The persistence and re-establishment of anti-"gypsy" and social-racist stereotypes in law, politics, and society consolidated the mental maps and institutional infrastructure of exclusion. In the last years of the GDR, at least a quarter of all prisoners were serving sentences for so-called asocial behaviour.[74]

The Example of a Sinti Family in the GDR

The following part of the study will demonstrate the relationship between work and discrimination after 1945, when the stigma was still alive. The evidence presented will show that the concept of "work" functioned as a mechanism for perpetuating the stigmatisation of individuals identified as "asocial". As an "asocial race",[75] the Sinti were subjected to intersectional discrimination. Whole Sinti families were incarcerated in the Nazi camps, only few survived. The following example of three generations of a surviving Sinti family provides an insight into the blocked possibilities in connection with the forgotten mass murder of Sinti in the concentration camps.

The grandfather of the family died shortly after the birth of his two youngest sons. His first son, Willy, was born in 1948, and the second, Hans, in 1950.[76] Their mother was not recognised as a Nazi victim after 1945. But she was ill from her years in the forced camp (*Zwangslager*) in Berlin-Marzahn.[77] It was in 1967 that she was finally recognised as a Nazi victim. She died in 1968 after a serious illness.[78] Willy and Hans were musically talented and played guitar, but they were stigmatised as "workshy" because of their desire to be musicians.

Hans would marry Jutta, who was born in 1953. Her father had survived Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Mittelbau-Dora. Furthermore, her mother had been obliged to reside in the forced camp for Sinti in Berlin-Marzahn. The son of Jutta and Hans, Janko, was born in 1976 in Berlin, one year after Erich Honecker, the head of GDR, had signed the Helsinki Accords Declaration on Human Rights.[79]

The members of the three generations of the family described here were discriminated against as "workshy" and "asocial" without any valid arguments. They were discriminated against intersectionally, through racist and social exclusion. The older brother of Hans, Willy, stuttered and could hardly speak; he had traumatic experiences and blocks because of the violence and marginalisation that he experienced at school and in the reformatory.[80] As a pupil, he was sent to a special school (*Sonderschule)* without individual support and did not learn to read or write. After leaving

73 See Katharina Lenski, "Erziehung. Gewalt. Eine Jugend in der DDR", in *Jugend – Gewalt. Erleben – Erörtern – Erinnern*, eds. Meike Sophia Baader, Till Kössler, and Dirk Schumann (V&R unipress, 2023), 145–162.

74 Katharina Lenski, "The Stigma of 'Asociality' in the GDR: Reconstructing the Language of Marginalization", in *After Auschwitz: The Difficult Legacies of the GDR*, eds. Enrico Heitzer et. al. (Berghahn Books, 2021), 150–162; Christoph Lorke, *Armut im geteilten Deutschland. Die Wahrnehmung sozialer Randlagen in der Bundesrepublik und in der DDR* (Campus. 2015), 200–221.

75 Michael Zimmermann, "Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik gegen Sinti und Roma", in APuZ 35, no. 16–17 (1987): 32–35.

76 There were seven brothers and sisters. See Janko Lauenberger, with Juliane von Wedemeyer, *Ede und Unku – die wahre Geschichte. Das Schicksal einer Sinti-Familie von der Weimarer Republik bis heute* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2018), 34.

77 On the forced camp in Berlin-Marzahn (1936–1949), see Patricia Pientka, *Das Zwangslager für Sinti und Roma in Berlin-Marzahn. Alltag, Verfolgung und Deportation* (Metropol, 2013).

78 The morbidity and mortality rates were much higher than those of the average population. Eitinger, *Spätschäden,* 62–65.

79 Anja Hanisch, *Die DDR im KSZE-Prozess 1972–1985* (Oldenbourg, 2012).

80 On the reformatories in the GDR, see Christian Sachse, *Der letzte Schliff. Jugendhilfe der DDR im Dienst der Disziplinierung von Kindern und Jugendlichen (1945–1989)* (Landesbeauftragte für Mecklenburg-Vorpommern für die Unterlagen der Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2010).

school, he was detained in a reformatory, the *Jugendwerkhof*, from 1964 to 1966 and again in 1968. The argument for sending him to the reformatory is not clear. In 1965. a forensic psychiatrist wrote that the sixteen-year-old boy would mentally be considered a child and was thus not criminally responsible.[81] When his mother died in 1968, he was released from the reformatory. Nevertheless, he went on to be imprisoned from 1969 to 1970 and from 1971 to 1973 for "workshy" behaviour and "disturbing" the public order through music.[82]

"Workshy" was the argument for incarcerating Willy's brother Hans in a "special object" in 1967; however, the authorities did not provide a detailed description of Hans' specific mistake.[83] After his release, Hans had to work in an industrial bakery.[84] During this time, in 1968, Willy and Hans mourned the recent death of their mother. Notwithstanding the profound grief felt by the brothers at their mother's demise, they were compelled to seek employment without respite. They went to more than eight factories, yet, hardly any company wanted to employ them, or them were offered the hardest and dirtiest jobs, which they could not do because of physical limitations and disabilities.[85]

The lack of understanding or support blocked the possibilities for the young brothers and sanctioned their ingenious actions to break the blockade. Because of their exceptional musical talent, the brothers wanted to become professional musicians and tried to get permission to go on a musical tour. But the authorities did not permit them to do so, arguing that the musicians were too poorly educated. Nevertheless, Hans and Willy went on tour in the summer of 1969. This was the reason why they were imprisoned by the end of August 1969. In December 1969 the East Berlin Municipal Court ruled that the brothers were guilty of "disturbing the peace and public order" and of being unwilling to work ("workshy").[86] After ten months in pre-trial detention, they were sentenced to so-called "work education" (*Arbeitserziehung*), followed by unlimited state control and so-called educational observation, which was in fact police surveillance.[87]

Hans and Willy probably would have remained in prison for more years if the journalist and human rights activist Reimar Gilsenbach had not intervened. Gilsenbach wrote about the parallels to practices in National Socialism in 1970. He had known the convict's mother and had helped her in her late recognition as a victim of the Nazis' persecution of "gypsies". In his letter of complaint regarding the court's decision, Gilsenbach criticised not only the uncritical use of racial-biological terms by the court, but also the fact that the court accused the defendants of failing to prove themselves worthy of their deceased mother's status as a victim. It was only after everal complaints, and shortly before her death in 1967, that she had been recognised:

> [i]n fact, the children grew up under the impression that their mother never enjoyed the respect and help that our state offers to those persecuted by the Nazi regime. They never once saw their mother […] honoured, not even by the residents of the house. Therefore, it cannot be said that the defendants were unworthy of the recognition their mother received.[88]

81 Rudolf Hirsch, "Als Zeuge in dieser Sache. Aber was sagt Franz?", *Wochenpost*, 19 July 1968.
82 Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma (DokuZ), NG-O 04, sht. 369–379.
83 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 369–370. Lauenberger, *Ede*, 31–32.
84 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 369–379.
85 Ibid.
86 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 320–330, 383–387.
87 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 369–379.
88 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 386.

The letter shows the lack of awareness of the history of the survivors, their problems, traumas, and limitations, and the fate of their children, who suffered from renewed marginalisation and non-recognition. It shows how the moral attitude of the authorities did not benefit the children and went against their interests. Gilsenbach rejected the idea of making the duration of work education dependent on probation during the prison term, pointing to its parallels with concentration camp imprisonment: if police supervision and educational supervision were to be ordered, fixed periods should at least be set. He also addressed the alleged asociality of those affected, which on closer inspection revealed their lack of knowledge about the GDR's processes and bureaucracy. The letter offered no reflection on the terms "workshy" and "asocial". The use of these exclusionary terms reveals a societal consensus on "asociality", alongside only minimal criticism of National Socialist practices and historical analysis in the GDR. Gilsenbach also advocated for assisting instead of constantly punishing Hans and Willy. He argued that the authorities should help them with education and training, support them in their search for work and housing, and integrate them through "respect, understanding, and […] a little fun and success".[89] The notion of a peaceful community free from enemy imagery, coupled with inclusive, compassionate, and humane institutions, met with profound indifference. The later history of the brothers demonstrates the absence of these instruments.

The court approved Gilsenbach's application only in so far as Hans and Willy were released from pre-trial detention. However, in essence, the judges did not correct the stigmatising arguments. Following their release, the young brothers were required to adhere to a rigorous programme of "labour education." They had to start working in a furniture factory only one day after they had been released. The police control – and thus the drastic restriction of their freedom rights, including nightly police checks in their own home – was ordered for a "longer period" without setting an end date. The court argued that, although the brothers had lived in a reformatory, they had not been introduced to "regular work" outside of there. Nobody realised that this argument absurdly distorted the function of reformatories as "labour education."[90] The court also did not write about the parent's victimhood and the difficulties of the survivors; furthermore, the judges did not respond to Gilsenbach's sentences about the parallels to the Nazi period invisible.

The authorities' repressive treatment of the two teenagers reveals a reality that contradicts the laws on supporting and promoting young people.[91] Hans and Willy's lack of integration into socialist society and the absence of humanitarian institutions could be through the instruments of communication and the type of work that the brothers had to do. The communication was only top-down by a Commission for Social Education (*Kommission für gesellschaftliche Erziehung*), as well as the Department of Internal Affairs (*Abteilung Inneres*), where the brothers had to justify themselves.[92] They did not get any support to develop their talents; they could not talk about their own problems and limitations. The nature of the work and the failure to educate them also shows their lack of integration. Willy had to work in the reformatory, in railway construction and in a box factory, as a transport worker in a metal factory, as a heater, and as a cemetery gardener. The younger brother Hans also had to work in the reformatory and in a large industrial bakery. Both had no opportunity to learn and to qualify themselves: they were forced to do dreary and physical hard

89 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 386.
90 DokuZ, NG-O 04, sht. 329.
91 Lenski, "Erziehung", 145–162.
92 Hirsch, *Zeuge*.

work every day.[93] Any violations committed by them were considered a disturbance of the public order and could result in further imprisonment. This was exactly the opposite of what Gilsenbach had called for. Instead of kindness, the brothers again experienced harshness and violence. Regardless of their family history, antiziganist stereotypes were used to continually demean the brothers. In fact, the authorities practiced a "black" pedagogic.

More than a decade later, Hans finally obtained a restricted performance licence after again being convicted for producing music in 1980.[94] After his release, he did not live in Berlin but in a small town near Dresden in Saxonia; he worked in a factory and played music after work in the evening. Later, he met other musicians and they played in a band. In the beginning of the 1980s, the provincial commission gave them a performance license for amateurs, but only for small village festivals and company parties.[95]

Because of the discrimination and restrictions, Hans and his family applied for permission to leave the GDR for West Germany in 1984 and 1986, when they lived in East Berlin again. However, they withdrew the application when the authorities threatened to take their children away from them.[96] Later, they wrote that they would stay in the GDR if they could work as professional musicians. With the help of Gilsenbach, Hans and his band, the Sinti Swing Quintett, got the permission after many interventions.[97] But this was only possible for Hans: there is no more information about Willy. In 1971, Willy's appeal against a new ruling on "labour education" because of "asociality" failed.[98] He was sentenced to "labour education" for "asociality" from 1971 to 1973, even though he was known to be mentally handicapped and, according to the report from 1965 mentioned above, either not criminally responsible or only partially so.

"Working properly" continued as a sign of the intersectional discrimination, devaluation, and exclusion of the next generation. In 1987, the son of Hans, Janko, was forced to spend seven months in a special children's home in Bad Langensalza in Thuringia, far away from his family and home. Janko had been subjected to a racially motivated attack and insulted at school and had defended himself against this mistreatment. Neither the teachers nor his classmates had helped him. Instead, the teachers had insisted that he be locked up in the special children's home.[99] The authorities argued that he needed to learn how to work in an orderly way – the same arguments the authorities had used to force his father and uncle, and the generations before them. Hannelore Gilsenbach, the wife of Reimar Gilsenbach, wrote letters to Margot Honecker, the Ministry of Education, and other authorities to get Janko out of the children`s home.[100] After seven months, she succeeded. This was the impact of the solidarity expressed by Hannelore and Reimar Gilsenbach at the end of the 1980s.

93 Hirsch, *Zeuge*; DokuZ, NGO 04, sht. 369–379. See Lauenberger, *Ede*, 31–33.
94 Lauenberger, *Ede*, 32.
95 Lauenberger, *Ede*, 32–33.
96 Tele Romani, "Djangos Lied – Eine Sinti-Jugend in Deutschland 1/2", 21 January 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NdvgtR7hYw., 13 October 2025, Hans Lauenberger 5:25.
97 DokuZ, NG-O 24, sht. 72. Lauenberger, *Ede*, 84.
98 DokuZ, NG-O 24, sht.161–165.
99 Susanne Messmer, "Montagsinterview Janko Lauenberger: 'Ich War Als Junge Ein Großmaul'", *taz.de*, 19 August 2012, https://taz.de/Montagsinterview-Janko-Lauenberger/!5086098/, 12 October 2025. Reimar Gilsenbach, *Von Tschudemann zu Seemann. Zwei Prozesse aus der Geschichte der deutschen Sinti* (Ed. Parabolis), 142–144.
100 Tele Romani, "Djangos Lied – Eine Sinti-Jugend in Deutschland 1/2," 21 January 2012, 12 October 2025, min 6:25 to 9:42. Lauenberger, *Ede*, 134–147, 176–177.

However, the system of exclusion and devaluation based on unfounded generalisations as "asocial" and "workshy" has not changed. This part of the study has focused on three generations of people who were housed in closed institutions and forced to perform hard physical labour. The case of the Sinti family illustrates the intersectional discrimination that survivors and their descendants have historically faced, and which is reflected in the long-standing exclusion of those considered "asocial". The subjects were deprived of the opportunity to develop their talents. In this case, the musicians demonstrated exceptional persistence and tenacity in cultivating their talents despite a lack of external support, restrictions and sanctions imposed by authoritarian authorities, and an unstable and violent environment.

Conclusion

The counter-term "asociality" opened the door for generalising hostility against marginalised people; it called for disciplining interventions against them in the public and private sphere. The most important field of interventions was the practice of labour: work was the most important field of the moral concepts of modernity and civilisation. The laziness of allegedly asocials became the antithesis to the protestant work-ethic. This ethic was grounded by social useful work and was linked to the concept of the nation-state. The opposition between allegedly (Jewish) selfish work and orderly (German) work for the common good grounded the link between "asociality" and "work". There is to seen the correlation with ethnic, eugenic, and social racism. The differentiation between productive and unproductive work shaped the workers through antisemitic and colonising stereotypes to bring them to do "orderly" work. In the changing rooms allegedly people of disorder were sanctioned outside of legal codes. The conceptual history of "asociality" and "work" shows the construction of allegedly disorderly people and the criminalisation of people with limited resources. The type of work, it's time structure, the spaces and conditions of work were instruments to place the people long-life on the edges. In this way, work in relation with asociality was a metaphor to normalise the violent and, in Nazi-times, murdering practices. However, the propagation of hostilities through the counter term "asociality" did not stimulate societal order; rather, it produced further complications. This can be shown by the example of the surviving Sinti family described.

The conviction of the brothers Willy and Hans Lauenberger for making music without a legalisation card shows the long path of exclusion of "asocials" in the state socialist GDR. The example traces the persecution of the brothers' grandparents and parents during the Nazi era, their subsequent non-recognition as victims of the Nazi regime after 1945, and, finally, the late recognition of their mother's victimhood at the end of the 1960s. The anti-fascist state doctrine not only excluded the murdered victims of the so-called asocials from its historical narrative. The survivors were marginalised; most of them received no recognition.

The state and the Stasi actors determined who worked "properly" and who belonged to the community. The above-mentioned (disabled) brothers were imprisoned for their autonomous work as musicians. They were arrested and, after being sentenced to so-called work education, subjected to unlimited police surveillance. What was described as "education" was in fact forced labour with violent practices against the convicted. With no chance of further training or improvement, they were forced to do the dirtiest, hardest, and most boring work. The forced imprison-

ment of the two brothers in reformatories and prisons without individual help or useful education shows the continuity of exclusion and forced placement after 1945 – even though the Youth Act of 1965 and the Labour Code of 1968 provided for special support for young people.[101] The stigmatised had to do hard, meaningless work, often outdoors, risking their health. They had no prospects, no successes, and no purpose in life. The two brothers decided to work as musicians and did not accept the forced placement. For this reason, they were stigmatised as "workshy". After work they were subjected to police surveillance: the police entered their private homes at night and checked whether Hans and Willy had cleaned the rooms or played forbidden music. The brothers therefore had no safe place where they were protected from police violence and which they could truly claim as private. They were deprived of any sense of security with the argument that they were being educated to become "orderly" socialist people. They were also deprived of the sense of legality that every human being can claim and instead had to fear being punished at any time for their everyday efforts to survive. When the son of Hans was, at the age of eleven, racially attacked by pupils, the teachers and parents campaigned for him to be detained in a special child home, were he had to live in a space of violence and insecurity.

The borders in time and space, in work and life demonstrate the construction of an underclass within state socialism. The exclusionary stereotypes of the *Volksgemeinschaft* were actualised and extended to the whole of society. People who belonged to the underclass of asocials faced limited life opportunities due to widespread denunciation, as well as ideological and violent practices against othered people under the dictatorship. The structures of prejudice, initially expressed in the denial of recognition of the survivors, were reflected in the spatial and social patterns of their (dis-)placement in society, and became evident in the kind of work they had to do or were not allowed to do.

The link between "asociality" and "work" gave the state the opportunity to intervene deeply in the social sphere. The state – with its repressive apparatus –created a large space for intervention in public and private spaces with the argument of "work for the people's community" and, after 1945, in the socialist space with the ideal of a "socialist life". The former antisemitic stereotype of charitable or selfish work was extended in socialism to all work that did not conform to the socialist economics.

The formation of the (invisible) underclass through work can be defined by the following characteristics:

1. The stigmatised had to do dirty, hard, and unhealthy work with no prospect of improvement, with it being argued that they had to learn to work "properly". They could not change their workplace without the approval of the authorities.
2. Their personal space and private rooms became a place of insecurity and fear because of the possibility of police intervention and police violence at any time.
3. They were unable to move freely due to the restrictions on their movement and were relocated, and their social relations were decimated by the additional provisions of the "asociality" law, especially the enforced residence restrictions.

It was not only the economic resources of the stigmatised that were constantly diminished by the authorities and public opinion, but also their social and cultural capital. These characteristics also marked the boundary between the "ordinary" members of the socialist community and the outsiders.

The concept of "asociality" persisted as a fundamental pattern of order in society, marking the outsiders who had no chance of inclusion. The secret police, the police,

101 Lenski, "Erziehung", 145–162.

care, and welfare systems, together with educational institutions, children's homes, reformatories, and prisons, used the argument of "proper work" against the "work-shy". The authorities implemented a range of bureaucratic, violent, and secret practices through which they labelled those stigmatised as "asocial", often for life. The individuals categorised as "asocials" became an underclass: an invisible underclass. The concepts have survived, and the outsiders remain largely invisible to society. Indeed, they are often banished from people's minds and memories to this day. This phenomenon of invisibility has the potential to create profound divisions within society. It is therefore necessary to explore the history of this invisible marginalisation and to make it visible for contemporary discourses.

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