

**Theorizing the temporality of moral-economic sentiments: The case of East Germany post 1989.**  
*Till Hilmar, PhD Candidate in Sociology, Yale University, USA, till.hilmar@yale.edu*

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As the concept of economic nationalism is gaining renewed attention in economic sociology, the issues of temporality (Beckert 2016, Steinmetz 1992) and references to events (Sewell 2008) in economic reasoning must similarly come to the forefront. From nationalism scholars, we know that logics of temporality are key to the cultural construction of a community. How can the debate on economic nationalism draw on these existing bodies of knowledge and incorporate them in a way that is sensitive to the particular moral grammars that are associated with discourses about the economy and inequality?

This paper argues that a key component of economic nationalism must be researched at the level of group-specific accounts and their moral-economic reasoning (Sayer 2005) in relation to events. This is what E.P. Thompson (1963) proposed when he first introduced the concept of “moral economy”, studying how individuals sought to “balance” economic injustice in the English bread riots: what stirred economic anger was a notion of a broken social contract. At this meso-level of social imagination and action, we find groups that mobilize economic sentiments relative to others (Runciman 1966). These groups advance specific notions of temporal balance or deservingness, uniting the moral and the economic in the service of larger grammars of justification and political claim-making. Just how local logics of deservingness are linked with regional or national narratives of economic fate and justice is the key issue that must be methodologically unpacked.

As a contribution to this task, this paper draws on the study of two groups with systematic variation in their economic trajectory in East Germany after 1989. These two groups are engineers and care workers: while engineers tend to be among the “winners” of the postsocialist transformation, care workers tend to be among the “stagnators”. Using a likelihood of attaining certain labor market outcomes (Diewald, Mayer and Goedicke 2006) over time instead of a static indicator allows for a Weberian comparison of status. Truly unique to this historical context and advantageous to the analysis is that individuals from both groups grew up and have work experience in a society that levelled economic trajectories and systematically suppressed material differences. Differences in material rewards for skills post-1989 are therefore culturally pronounced, allowing for a systematic, time-bound comparison of moral-economic sentiments.

Deservingness should be key concept in scholarship on economic nationalism because it allows to document and theorize group-specific accounts of moral closure and the creation of “we”-communities (Lamont 2000). Unfortunately, it has so far mainly found articulation in scholarly debates on poverty or the welfare state. Broadening its application and appreciating the insights it has to offer for the study of economic temporalities, this paper links the concept of deservingness with research on equity notions of justice (Liebig and Sauer 2016, Sachweh 2011). Moral-economic notions of deservingness are shown to be generated out of concrete economic and social experiences that are also recounted on behalf of strong ties such as friends, colleagues, family and kinship (Bandelj 2015, Zelizer 2011).

These local interpretations gain traction as they are linked with (and are in tension with) broader national and regional economic narratives. Notions of deservingness crucially drive the process of inscribing individual economic experiences into a larger economic narrative: the grievances and feelings of superiority revealed by group-specific accounts are fundamental to broader articulations of an East German “moral economy” post-1989. The paper draws on semi-structured interviews and a survey with 41 respondents between around 50 and 70 years of age (23 engineers, 18 care workers), drawn from two middle-sized cities in Saxony. Beyond allowing for a systematic comparison of likelihoods of attaining labor market positions, this sampling strategy enables access to respondents who have experienced the event of 1989 as a rupture in their work biography.

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