

# Surveillance and Control: An Ethnographic Study of the Legacy of the Stasi and its impact on wellbeing

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## **Declaration**

I, Ulrike L. Neuendorf, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



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## Abstract

This ethnographic field study examines East Germans' experiences and perceptions of state surveillance in the former German Democratic Republic. Through ethnographic accounts and in-depth life histories, this study illustrates the long-term effects state control has had on the wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole. Here, several key themes emerged which are explored in detail: ideology and state control; betrayal and distrust; and trauma and resilience.

Life in a dictatorship and exposure to repressive techniques of the state created complex socio-cultural dynamics that are still palpable for victims today. Over 40 years of Stasi surveillance and the extensive use of unofficial informants within the population created a self-perpetuating surveillance culture. Along with the unique conditions that followed Germany's reunification, this has impacted East Germans' interpretation of their own wellbeing negatively (albeit to varying extents), accumulating traumatic experiences and compounding human suffering. The social dynamics created continue to impact East German's lives, their sense of self, and their regional identities. This thesis explores through various accounts how traumatic experiences are understood and coped with. It concludes that state surveillance leads to collective trauma that at times causes continued suffering, but in certain cases is interpreted positively eliciting a narrative of resilience.

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## Chapter One: Motivation and Methodology

I was born in 1987 in a small town in the Northeast of Germany, located in a picturesque rural area called Uckermark. In 1989 my family and I moved to East Berlin. Shortly after our move to the city, the Wall came down and the lives of many East Germans changed dramatically overnight.



One of my earliest memories is about me sitting in the backseat of my mother's Czech-built white Lada and crossing the border to West Berlin at "Bornholmer Brücke". Men in uniforms stopped our car and opened our trunk to search it. Although I was very small at the time, I recall that this intrusion made me feel very uncomfortable.

Of course, I did not understand what was happening at the time. I still have some vague recollections of this exciting time period, known to Germans as the *Wende* (Engl.: Turning point). We lived in a typical turn-of-the-century building in Berlin - *Prenzlauer Berg*, part of the city which is nowadays considered very hip, full of quirky shops and restaurants, particularly popular amongst tourists from abroad.

Only a short walk across *Prenzlauer Allee*, was my Kindergarten. Surprisingly, I remember my "Eastern" Kindergarten quite distinctly. In the GDR, *Kindergarten* and

*Krippe* (Engl. Daycare and nursery), were a person's first contact with the socialist state and its ideology. In the GDR, almost 90% of women were working full-time. Hence, a highly developed network of childcare was available, even catering to those parents working night shifts. State-run childcare was available to everyone. Children were uniformly taught cleanliness, order, and independence. At the same time, they were supposedly moulded into becoming "good socialists" (Plänkers et al. 2005; Schroeter 1974). Indeed, I remember the strict rules and highly structured daily routine, the songs we sang and the stories we were told. This was the time when they would do what some people these days ironically call "Potty-terrorism"- "*Toepfchen-Terror*", aligning potties in the nursery bathroom and expecting all toddlers to use them at the same time to achieve a controlled, reliable daily routine. Indeed, it was one of those things I would later hear my informants describe as "*just normal*". I suppose I felt the same way then. But as I discovered throughout my fieldwork, this "normality" had a much deeper meaning.

Finally, in 1990 Germany was officially reunited and soon after my family relocated to the West Berlin *Bezirk* of Reinickendorf, where I then spent the rest of my childhood. We moved into a house that a distant West German relative rented out to us in a quiet residential area. I still recall the first day at my new "Western" Kindergarten and how foreign it seemed to me. If one was to believe my family's stories, I was a pretty articulate toddler and apparently repeatedly pointed out the stark differences between the two *Kindergartens* expressing my devastation at the disorderliness of the new place.

Later on, as I started school, my East German background did not impact my daily life much. Only occasionally would it come up in conversation amongst the

teachers. Looking at it now, I suppose it was the type of conversation adults have, without realising that children can not only hear them but also understand that they are being talked about. I have several memories of this from Kindergarten and then later, primary school. Being the only Easterner it made me feel like I was different in some way, without really understanding how or why it mattered.

I do not remember when exactly it started, but at some point in my childhood, I began to get embarrassed about my background. I suspect it was my older brother who introduced me to that feeling. He was a teenager in the 1990's and had just been transferred to a school in West Berlin, where he persistently denied being from the East. It simply wasn't "cool". He wanted to fit in with the other kids, and having the stigma of being an "*Ossi*" (i.e., a cliché for being lazy, always complaining, etc.) attached to him was not desirable. Indeed, many East Germans of his generation, especially those who were between 8 and 16 years old when the wall fell, felt this way. They were ashamed, as people from the GDR were often portrayed as being less worthy by the media, and West German clichés further emphasised this (Rennefanz 2014). So, my brother would always tell me that I should never mention where we were from. From that point onwards, I believed being from the GDR was something to be ashamed of and avoided mentioning it.

As an easily impressionable child, his words stuck with me, even to this day. Without knowing why exactly, my East German identity had an ambivalent connotation for me. Later, when I spent time abroad, where most of my friends and acquaintances were not German, my "Eastern" background rarely mattered to anyone besides me.

Looking at it now, it seems somewhat puzzling, as all my extended family continued to live in the East after Germany's reunification and I still denied this part of my identity. As a child, I spent many summers there, with my grandmother in a small town in Brandenburg and my great-grandmother in a little village in Saxony. To this day, these places have a comforting familiarity for me and even make me feel "*at home*". Looking back at those summers in the countryside, the GDR was often casually mentioned in everyday conversations, mostly starting with the words "During the time of the GDR, we used to..." ("*Zu DDR Zeiten, haben wir...*"). To me, these memories always resembled some mystical, faraway place or even a previous life that everyone besides me had experienced.

In recent years I have begun reflecting more critically on where I am from and what it means to me. To what extent is East Germany still part of my own identity? I find myself wondering whether, after so many years, it still matters where you are from in Germany. As a Masters student in Medical Anthropology, I decided to investigate and compare contraceptive choices of women in East and West Germany. The continuing differences in perceptions and gender images were remarkable (Neuendorf unpublished, 2011). Conducting this research, I became extremely interested in the topic of the GDR. I was curious how my parents, family and friends had experienced life in this small isolated state. How had the legacy of the GDR shaped their lives as well as my own life and worldview?

Following my Masters, I spent half a year living in the East German city of Leipzig. This remarkable place is rich in history and a significant site, due to its major role in community activism, the formation of the *Neues Forum* and eventually the uprising against the socialist regime.

At the first viewing of my new apartment, I was quite astonished however. The place I had decided to rent was inside of a lovely early 1900's building, not far from the city centre. What unsettled me though, was the street I was going to live in. Apart from the newly renovated building directly opposite mine, all other buildings in the little street, were derelict with broken or bolted up windows. As it turned out, much of my new neighbourhood was like this. There were empty apartment blocks, flats, factories and even a large school in the area, giving the place a ghost-town-like feel. Sometimes you would find a dark, derelict building, right next to beautifully restored houses.

I was told that many of these apartments had belonged to the state before the reunification, and ownership was now uncertain or still unsettled. Neighbours also described to me how many people had moved to the West after 1989 and had left their life in Leipzig behind. Indeed, it was estimated that Leipzig lost up to 50% of its population during the *Wende*.

Although I found these old, empty buildings with their dusty GDR style shop windows a little creepy at times, they somehow fascinated me. Walking along those shady streets on my way home, I often wondered what had been going on inside them. Where were the people who had once lived there? I started reading about the GDR and visited the local memorial site at the Stasi headquarters. I became very intrigued by the dark sides of life in the GDR. What role did the socialist state's secret police, the *Stasi*, play in people's everyday lives?

It was also at this time that my family, following a complicated application process at the BStU, gained permission to view their parents' *Stasi* files. There were piles of

files with reports of in-depth surveillance of the family. These findings not only confirmed existing suspicions, but revealed that the entire family home had been bugged and officials were eavesdropping on every conversation. There was even a report confirming that the dog had been poisoned by *Stasi* men, who had tried to gain access to the house.

Due to the sheer amount of material, my relatives only made photocopies of a very small portion of the files. Reading them revealed the intensity of the around-the-clock surveillance, but also highlighted its absurdity and pointlessness. There was for instance a highly detailed account of my great-grandmother's daily shopping trip to the small town centre, describing her every step in minute detail and mentioning each time she stopped (every five minutes) to chat to acquaintances she met on the way. The reports also give detailed descriptions of the family members' personalities and appearances, providing them with cover names by which they were referred to in the following reports. Ironically (for a socialist country) my grandparents received the cover names "*Adam and Eve*", while my great-grandmother was simply called "*Oma*" (German for granny/grandma). Despite the irony of it all, reading these reports of observations and interrogations, I slowly began to understand the constant fear and pressure people had to endure in those years of the dictatorship and the power this frightening state apparatus must have had over people.

In my ethnographic exploration, I aim to uncover how East Germans experienced the presence of the *Stasi* in their lives. What did mass-surveillance of this calibre do to people and how do they feel about it today? Does the legacy of the SED regime still impact their lives in any way? And, most importantly how are personal relationships mediated in this context? I undertook 12 months of fieldwork to unveil

these questions and view the issues at hand through an anthropological lens, discerning key concepts such as state control, trauma and wellbeing. I will be looking at the way surveillance was and still is utilised as a tool of state control and the consequences that result for the people affected.

## Methodology

### **Anthropology at home and being a "partial insider"**

Anthropology at home has many advantages including the ease with which a researcher can enter the field without having to learn a new language and adjust to a new culture and environment (Strathern 1987). It also has the added bonus of a "discovery of large areas of ignorance about one's own circumstances" (Jackson 1987). But, it can mean that one is prone to overlook details, which may not stand out as extraordinary.

I decided to conduct research "at home", as I believe that I am in a unique position. On the one hand I am a native East German, but on the other hand, I have spent the majority of my life in the West and abroad. During the fieldwork my own identity was always shifting between being an insider and an outsider; being a researcher from a foreign university, but also sharing the same roots with my informants and coming to terms with my own *"East German-ness"*.

In her essay, "How Native is a "Native" Anthropologist?", Kirin Narayan addresses the "shifting identities" of anthropologists. Indeed, she urges us to acknowledge the subjectivity of field research, since an anthropologist's work is inevitably influenced by their unique personal and professional experiences, giving them a "hybrid and

positioned nature" (1993, p.682). Although someone may have been born in or lived in a particular place, this does not automatically mean that they are a "native returning home to blend smoothly with other natives" (1993, p. 675). Just as Jahan (2014) questioned her position in her field site where, despite having been a native to the village where she conducted research, she still recognised the limits of her position as an apparent "'native', having power and prestige as an 'insider'" (2014, p.1). I too, am aware of my shifting identifies in the field, I often questioned how native I am in my own culture. I have come to the conclusion that, like Jahan, I see myself as a "partial insider" (Jahan 2014).

When I was twelve years old I spent a year at a British boarding school, later I went to an international school in Berlin and eventually spent most of my time abroad, primarily in the UK. I always had a close relationship with my "home", yet due to my experience of living abroad, I often see things in a slightly different light than my family. At times, this has made me feel like an outsider in my culture. However, while conducting research, I experienced this as an advantage, allowing me to uncover unknown aspects I otherwise may not have noticed.

Kraft Alsop explores the German concepts of *Fernweh* and *Heimweh*<sup>1</sup> In an auto-ethnographic account of her life as a German immigrant in the United States, she demonstrates the value of self-reflexive auto-ethnography and describes how her identity and feelings change while home and away. She captures the process by which an emigrant turns into a stranger in their home, once they leave it behind. "However, leaving not only turns me into an outsider in the new culture, I also

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<sup>1</sup> *Fernweh* is a longing to go to a distant place, and *Heimweh* is yearning for home and the familiar.

become an outsider at home. My leaving disturbs the order of the divide into a here and a there. Those who stay at home identify me as belonging to their we, whereas I offend them by preferring the company of a they." (2006) I can certainly relate to this constantly shifting role of insider-outsider.

This ambivalent position can be tricky as Kraft Alsop eloquently puts it "Auto-ethnographers who set themselves the task of relating cultures are boundary walkers: they crisscross between the boundaries of being home and away, of being insider and outsider, of being personal and cultural selves. There is nothing more difficult than this back and forth between ways of living, speaking, thinking and feeling." (2006, p.13)

Despite this difficult balancing act, I made it my goal to gain the most from both worlds. Throughout my fieldwork, I found myself being identified as East German. My age also played a significant role. Yes, I was born in the GDR; but I was too young to experience the regime. Therefore, my informants accepted that I had some knowledge about the GDR due to my background, but my age still provided me with enough distance not to have *"too many preconceptions and political opinions"*. There was often the sense that they wanted to teach me *"what it was really like back then"*. At the same time, being a part-outsider, I was able to analyse and understand my informants' stories more objectively.

Nonetheless, gaining their trust was a very significant aspect and challenge in my fieldwork. Jahan (2014) describes her experience of doing fieldwork in her native village in Bangladesh and her struggles as a "partial insider". She found her fieldwork to be a "transforming experience" which changed her "understanding of

the social world" (2014, p.2). Just as I had experienced in my own fieldwork "at home", Jahan also developed ways to gain informants' respect and trust in a sensitive manner, as well as forming friendships. She writes: "In many instances, I shared my own life story and personal feelings, in order to develop relations of mutual friendship." (2014, p.2). This was certainly the case in my own interviews too. Every meeting began with a ten to fifteen-minute conversation about my background, my family story, and my motivation in conducting this fieldwork. In fact, all of my informants asked me numerous questions before beginning the "Zeitzeugengespräch". Since "The Stasi" as an area of enquiry is still a sensitive issue, I was generally approached with caution. But, as the conversation flowed, my interlocutors became more relaxed and at ease.

### **Finding Informants**

In the months leading up to my fieldwork, I always considered my background to be an advantage, as I assumed it provided me with plenty of informants amongst my own family and their friends. I openly discussed my research ideas with them before starting the fieldwork. They were quite interested, particularly because of the family's own history of being observed. When I asked who would be willing to speak to me about their experience with the *Stasi*, I received positive feedback. We exchanged phone numbers and email addresses of acquaintances who had "interesting stories".

Once the time of my fieldwork came around, I was motivated and confident that I had already lined up my group of informants. However, I quickly realised that this would be much more complicated than I had initially anticipated. They would hesitate and ask "*what exactly is your research about again?*" And when I told them,

they began making up excuses. " *I'm not sure my story will be interesting to you*", " *This was so long ago, I don't remember exactly...*", " *I'm very busy in the next few weeks*", and so on. All of a sudden no one seemed to want to speak to me. I was astonished—especially when I talked to people in my social network. Asking to conduct interviews for the first time, I was confronted with the massive emotional impact that the subject of the *Stasi* has on people. There were several difficult conversations in which I felt out of my depth. Was I allowed to ask these questions? Was this too personal? Could this have wider implications for our family relationships or friendships?

### **Research Challenges**

After several weeks of unsuccessful attempts at conducting my prepared interviews, I decided to approach my fieldwork from a different angle. Even though it initially felt like this resulted from personal shortcomings, I soon learnt this behaviour was not at all unusual. In fact, it showed what it was that I was dealing with. The extent of emotional pain and the aftermath still affecting personal relationships was immense. The reluctance to recall the conditions of governance and the avoidance of engaging with the personal repercussions resulting from them, are quite common in post-communist societies. This silence may in fact be regarded as a sign of the repression of traumatic experiences (Sztompka 2004; Smelser 2004), as I will outline later in this thesis. So, it can be said that the object my research indeed became a major obstacle, particularly in the early stages of my fieldwork. As Gallinat (2013) has asserted, the landscape of memory in East Germany is complex and at times ambiguous and this certainly poses some challenges in the research process and analysis.

I soon realised that the rejections of my requests to conduct interviews were merely scratching the surface of an underlying problem I did not anticipate encountering, let alone amongst my extended family and friends. The Stasi may not exist as an institution any longer, but in these first weeks of my fieldwork it became apparent that it still haunts people's relationships, keeping alive secrecy, rumours, suspicion, and shame.

When I noticed that my original plan would be very challenging to realise, I hence began to search for other ways to get in touch with East Germans who would be able to contribute to my study. My search led me to various websites, memorial sites and organisations.

#### **A note on the Oral History Approach and the Zeitzeugenbörse e.V.**

I became interested in the oral history approach or *Zeitzeugeninterview*. As I had planned originally, in my investigation I primarily used the ethnographic and life history methodologies. But, since my work to an extent is also an oral historical record, it made sense to search for organisations, which support this approach.

The Oral History Association (OHA) defined “Oral History” as “a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.” (OHA 2017).

The recording of oral history therefore gives those who experienced history first-hand a voice. This is particularly useful in contexts where historical research is

hindered by political circumstances, lack of - or destruction of archival records and war. Vilanova's (1997) work for instance, has focussed on oral history records in Spain. She investigated the Franco dictatorship (1939- 1975) and notes that, for many years, historical accounts were repressed and only in the 1980's some Spanish Universities, in particular the University of Barcelona, began engaging in the collection and analysis of historical accounts. Here the use of the oral history approach became invaluable.

In Germany, Lutz Niethammer has written extensively about the Oral History Approach and has published many oral history accounts of post-war Germany. Remarkably, he was also one of the few researchers that was able to independently interview GDR citizens before the fall of the wall, in the late 1980's. For his book *"Die volkseigene Erfahrung"*, the West German historian managed to get permission from the GDR authorities to conduct numerous life history interviews with citizens from all over East Germany, regarding their personal biographies and views. These accounts are extremely valuable, as they allow for a unique glimpse into GDR society, which reflects the authentic living conditions within the GDR at the time. So the accounts are not only memories but they illustrate the contemporary realities of life in the regime.

In recent years, there has been an emergence of many non-profit organisations that support and allow for a recording and distribution of oral history and personal accounts outside of the mainstream public domain. These organisations act as a point of contact for researchers, *"Zeitzeugen"*, and the interested public. Such organisations have been particularly useful in post-totalitarian contexts, especially in Eastern Europe. In countries where the public recognition of the historical record of

former regimes is highly politically contested and researchers, as well as institutions are in some way limited in their ability to conduct and publish impartial accounts (e.g. Belarus, Poland, Czech Republic), the use of the oral history approach and these organisations provide a good alternative.

For instance, in Belarus the *Belarussian Online Museum*, collects and makes oral history accounts available to the public. On their website they write: *“Since 2007 we’ve been collecting materials: recording audio and video interviews with the victims of the Soviet system, copying documents and photos. Now we want to share it all with you!”*

The *Post Bellum* and *Memory of Nations* organisations in the Czech Republic are also good examples of this. Over the last years, they have created a large collection of oral history records. On their website it says that,

*“They were led by their conviction that witnesses of historic events need to have an opportunity to tell their stories in detail and in their entirety. These memories bear precious testimony not only about modern history, but about the character of the Czech people as well”.*

Inspired by this, I began my own search. One afternoon in late February 2014, I visited the Berlin Wall Memorial Information Centre in the hope of finding resources to get in touch with possible informants. I spoke to a middle-aged lady at the information desk. She was surprised when I explained my research and what I was looking for. It seemed like she had never heard of such a request. This in turn surprised me, considering that it is an important aspect of recent history and surely the appearance of researchers here should be a common occurrence. I had

previously read about research projects that were ongoing at the BStU and so-called *Zeitzeugen* (Engl.: contemporary witnesses), that conducted public lectures and spoke at schools. Yet, I had initially been sceptical of approaching such "professional speakers" for fear that they had already formed too much of a rehearsed narrative. I was not looking for people who had some heroic story to offer or who would jump at any opportunity to tell their story for a TV interview. I wanted to speak to individuals who were not necessarily well-known political activists, but rather represented a cross-section of general GDR society. But, in my research, I found that throughout Germany, many memorial and oral history organisations had been extremely useful in recording the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With regards to recent history of the divided Germany, the German Federal Foundation for the reconciliation of the SED regime, had funded and organised numerous oral history projects. They, too, provide a collection of Oral History records and a contact database of interviewees (see [Zeitzeugenbüro.de](http://Zeitzeugenbüro.de)).

So, I decided to give this approach a try after all. During my search I had come across the non-governmental, non-profit *Zeitzeugenbörse (ZZB)*. Their motto is "*ZZB: Preserving Priceless Memories for the Future*", alluding to the importance of the preservation of oral historical accounts.

I preferred the idea of working with this smaller organisation, as it is not only independent of the State Department, but the *Zeitzeugen* who are registered here are also extremely multifaceted in their personal backgrounds. Members give accounts of the NS and SED regime, as well as the Second World War. Amongst the possible informants are supporters and opposers of the past dictatorship. Notably, the organisation is keen to encourage dialogue between the organisation members

themselves as well as researchers. I found that they organise informal afternoons of lectures with coffee, cake and discussions.

Additionally, the organisation offered a "service" of referring researchers (primarily journalists and historians) to possible *Zeitzeugen* - informants. They also organised talks at schools, where children could hear real-life accounts about things they would normally only read in history books.

On their website they describe the organisation's work as such:

*"Witnesses to Berlin history want to share their memories and experiences. Education and media professionals are looking for vivid and exciting narratives.*

*The ZZB brings both sides together.*

*The ZZB organizes the dialogue between the older and the younger generation in Berlin in order to share their experiences regarding: the time of National Socialism and the post-War period, life in the divided and reunited city, political and cultural events in East and West Berlin" (Zeitzeugen Börse e.V.).*

I decided to get in touch with them and see if they could be of help. After a few weeks, I had a response and arranged a meeting to explain my research further.

On a sunny day in March, I arrived at their office in *Ackerstrasse, Berlin Mitte*. I was greeted by two middle-aged women in a small ground floor office, which only consisted of two small rooms and a kitchen. They were both very friendly and welcoming and immediately began making coffee and unwrapping a cake that one of them had baked. We sat at a table and started talking. I explained my research interests and what I was looking for. They listened and began asking me questions

about the aims of my research: what I was interested in; my university affiliation; how I would ensure my informants' opinions were represented accurately; and what type of people I was looking for. It was an intense in-depth interview, somewhat resembling the departmental "upgrade exam" I had taken at UCL prior to my departure, but more daunting. They were very interested in the field of Anthropology and told me that most researchers who asked them for contacts were journalists. They explained that their small "contacting service" had been successful in matching up researchers and *Zeitzeugen*, but that there had been occasions where the informants were unhappy with the way journalists wrote about them or the way their opinions and memories were represented in the media. They also warned me about the handling of sensitive issues and traumatic memories. I told them about my difficulties in finding informants, and they were not at all surprised. Apparently, this was a well-known challenge to researchers. After all, this was a controversial topic surrounded with much secrecy.

When the two women were finally happy with my introduction, they took out lists with the organisation members' names and phone numbers. They both went through the list and discussed who could be a suitable contact. I encouraged them to suggest people with as wide a range of backgrounds as possible. They told me that they would email me a list of informants I could call and see if they would agree to be interviewed.

A week later I received a list of numbers and began making calls. I was not disappointed, the range of peoples' backgrounds was indeed extraordinary. I spoke to a variety of people: from a 94-year-old lady who was still a convinced socialist (as I learned over the phone), to a middle-aged "political dissident" who had been

imprisoned. These contacts came to be crucial in my fieldwork, as I also managed to make new connections through some of them. I conducted further interviews with acquaintances and friends-of-friends and eventually ended up recording ten in-depth life-histories in addition to several in-depth and casual interviews.

### **Research Questions**

In the *SED* regime of the GDR, German peoples' lives were heavily impacted by the presence of the Stasi. Always living under the watchful eye of state officials and unofficial informants influenced their personal freedom and life quality. When would one ever have known whether it was safe to speak one's mind openly? At the time, any step off the desired ideological path could have potentially led to personally catastrophic consequences. These conditions created strong feelings of uncertainty, suspicion and also anxiety.

In turn, this fear brings up numerous questions. How did life under these circumstances influence interpersonal relationships? How was social mistrust generated, and what were the nature of the bonds that people created, despite the heavy impact of the SED state on work, school and family life? Enduring the constant uncertainty of not knowing to whom one could truly invest one's trust was a heavy burden. How did East Germans perceive and deal with this uncertainty?

### **Aim**

The aim of this ethnographic field study, then, is to understand East Germans' experiences of state control and mass surveillance in the former German Democratic Republic and to do so from two standpoints.

First, from a collective perspective, it has been my aim to gain insight into how the general population perceived life in a dictatorship. I explore how control and conformity were achieved among East Germans. I look at Hannah Arendt and other scholars to understand how totalitarian regimes establish themselves and how citizens become actively involved in those systems. I investigate how the legacy of Stasi spying is interpreted today and how those affected have dealt with the aftermath. How, if at all, have East Germans come to terms with the past, and what role does the availability of Stasi records play in their efforts to reconcile, if not heal their emotional turmoil? And I explore the way Germany's divided past continues to impact the wellbeing of those who lived former their lives in the GDR.

The second approach examines the impact of surveillance at an individual level. How did my interviewees experience state control, and how did such control shape their ongoing lives, identities, and sense of wellbeing? Through ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth life histories, and less structured interviews, I have attempted to unpack what state control meant in everyday contexts and what led individuals either to conform to or to resist state doctrines. How have people coped with the trauma they experienced through repression and state violence since 1989? Can the painful wounds of the past ever be healed? Here I investigated not only their memories but how my informants see their development in the two states (GDR and FRG).

## Fieldwork and Informants

### **Life History Approach**

The main methodological tool used in this research project are life history (or oral history) interviews. I chose this method, as it allows for the most comprehensive and in-depth data-collection. Recording a person's unique life experiences, helps us locate them within the historical context and gives a multifaceted impression of life at the time of socialism as well as their personal transition and development in the reunited Germany. It relies on a person's past memories as well as contemporary impressions. This approach is a "powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the historical memory – how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them" (Frisch, 1990,p.188).

The use of this qualitative ethnographic method has been popular with historians and social scientists alike, as the collected narrative accounts can make "links across life phases and cohort generations revealing historical shifts in a culture. They help establish collective memories and imagined communities; and they tell of the concerns of their time and space." (Plummer 2001, p.395).

An important aspect in my investigation is understanding motivations and moral dimensions of people's actions and experiences. In this context, understanding a person's upbringing, whether they experienced the 2nd World War, where they lived at the time, worked and studied, as well as gaining an insight into their family and personal relationships has been crucial. These chronologically recounted

memories allow a researcher “to see lives as moral struggles, embedded in specific contexts, shaped by particular conventions of time and place.” (Plummer 2001 p.404) In other words, through learning about my informants’ life stories, I have been able to place their unique experiences and motivations within a local, historical and personal context and therefore gained a sympathetic impression of their moral struggles. Further, it has helped me to gain insight into challenges to their wellbeing, which are not exclusively related to the SED-regime, such as illness and family tragedies.

The way life stories are constructed and how narratives are placed within a chronological framework, provides further insight into informants’ meaning-making processes. Gallinat (2015) for example, explored the narratives of two East Germans who experienced the reunification process and found significant incoherence in the way the narratives were constructed, indicating a “lack of wider shared frameworks for the understandings of national events and historical problems”.

Moreover, I felt that the approach of asking my informants to describe their personal journey was of practical value in overcoming my informants’ and my own reservations. It relieved initial tensions while discussing the sensitive topic of Stasi surveillance. It meant that I did not have to “jump right into” the topic, but instead it gave my informants the chance to take the lead. Once they were recalling their story, it was then easier to follow up on certain aspects and ask questions. I found this to be less intrusive and it gave my informants more control of the situation, avoiding “putting them on the spot” or making them uncomfortable.

While this research method has been extremely fruitful in my investigation, there are inevitably risks involved in using it. First and foremost, is the ambiguous nature of memory itself. Various scholars have addressed this issue (Plummer 2001; Halbwachs, 1992; Niethammer, 1985). Naturally memories shift and change over time. Certain details may be forgotten, dates, places and people might get mixed up. Memories are also selective, and therefore so are the narratives that are chosen to be recalled. The role of collective memory is also significant in this context as “no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (Halbwachs 1992, p. 43).

Therefore, the social frameworks for recalling certain occurrences have to exist and the recalling of oral history give the claims legitimacy. Another possible risk, which is unavoidable in any work with human subjects, is the possibility that they might lie.

The problem of fictional life accounts has been written about extensively, as well as various methods of checking the validity of informants’ claims (see for example Denzin 1989). While this has not been possible with all my informants, I have had the chance to see copies of some Stasi files, as well as photos, letters and newspaper snippets provided by my interlocutors. In terms of my informants’ accounts of events, they have proven to be historically accurate. But, as it is the case with any recalling of personal history, there is always a possibility for small inaccuracies.

## Informants

As mentioned above, I made contact with interviewees who contributed to my ethnographic field study with the help of the *Zeitzeugen Börse e.V.*, my own acquaintances, my informants' recommended contacts, as well as my extended family.

Ten informants provided in-depth life histories, which I audio recorded and transcribed. A further seven informants took part in interviews which I mostly recorded in note-form. Additionally, I conducted numerous casual interviews during my fieldwork. The research was conducted in Berlin (where I had my base), in small towns throughout Eastern Germany (to which I travelled by car or train), as well as in one West German city. There I had the chance to speak to several East Germans who had moved to the West, either immediately after the fall of the Wall or in the years before 1989 through an *Ausreiseantrag* or escape. These informants allowed me to gain a clearer idea of life transitions from East to West, as well as the motivations behind escaping or applying to leave the GDR.

Interviews primarily took place in my informant's homes, as this provided a private, comfortable, and relaxed atmosphere. Interviewing in homes also offered a glimpse into an individual's personal world, and helped me gain a clearer picture of who they were. However, one of my informants chose to visit me in my home, while several others met me in the home of the acquaintance responsible who had put us in touch. Further casual conversations took place in numerous locations, such as dinner parties and guided tours, including the Stasi archive (BStU), Hohenschönhausen Memorial, Bautzen Memorial, Gedenkbibliothek Berlin, Runde Ecke Leipzig and the Wall Memorial Berlin.

The age of my informants ranged between 35 and 94 years. They had a wide variety of backgrounds, both regarding their careers and social standing, as well as their personal convictions. In spite of this diversity, all interviewees came into close contact with the Stasi and were aware that they were under surveillance (usually beyond the general base level of state control) during the time of the surveillance. Their experiences at times involved extreme repression, interrogations and imprisonment. Some informants were reporting to the Stasi themselves and in turn were also spied upon.

All interlocutors who participated in this study were very keen to contribute to it and felt that it was important for a discussion about the GDR to occur. Despite their at times radically different convictions, they all felt that my endeavor was very important in creating a nuanced image of life in the former GDR.

### **Interviews**

For some, only mentioning the word *Stasi* already had a visible emotional impact. Therefore, I became very careful in the way I described my research topic, sometimes needing to be quite circumspect about asking sensitive questions.

Thus, during my interviews I kept my initial questions as general as possible. I began every meeting following a *Zeitzeugengespräch* narrative style (see *Zeitzeugenbüro* Advice Brochure). This is often used in historical interviews, and I found it to be a good starting point for generating conversation. Specifically, I began by asking the informant to describe their personal journey. "*Könnten Sie bitte Ihren Werdegang beschreiben..*"<sup>2</sup> This way, the informants usually started off explaining where they

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<sup>2</sup> "Could you please describe your personal journey."

were born, their childhood, their education and career. It helped to put the events in a chronological order and provided me with fascinating life histories. In the process, I made sure to let the informant take the lead in the conversation at all times, yet enquiring for more details when something stood out to me. With many of my interviewees, I conducted two in-depth interviews. Generally, the first one being a detailed life history, and in the second one asking questions about details that intrigued me in our previous encounter.

All my in-depth interviews were rather lengthy, lasting one hour at the very least. However, the majority of conversations took approximately two to four hours. Sometimes I would spend an entire day with an interviewee, sometimes several days. This depended on their location, age, and also their relationship to me (e.g., acquaintances and/or extended family). While, spending time in Berlin and smaller towns in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, I also conducted numerous informal interviews and recorded my general observations.

### **"Ossi or Wessi?" - Why does it matter?**

As I mentioned in the beginning, the role of my own background was extremely important when I conducted my interviews. The question of whether I was from the East or the West came to be an issue I encountered in every single one of my interviews. But why did this still matter so much? I am constantly in the process of unravelling this question. Ultimately, it was important for my informants to see whether I was trustworthy and if I had some political (or other) agenda. Perhaps they even thought I would misunderstand or judge them as an *"ignorant Wessi"*. To me, these questions showed that many East Germans are still conscious of the

dangers and moral dilemmas associated with Stasi surveillance, as well as an indication of continued divisions between the East and the West.

## Language

The spoken language in all interviews, save one, was German, my mother-tongue. For this reason, I decided to offer the original language in all my quotes. Keeping the original language secures the authenticity of the statement made. To those readers who are German speakers, this will provide an interesting addition to the text. For others, I have done my best to either give an English translation and/or explain the German expressions I use in the text. Furthermore, I feature some frequently used terms in the language glossary below.

## Language Glossary

<b>German</b>	<b>English</b>
Ministerium für Staatssicherheit/ Stasi	Ministry of State Security
Kindergarten	Kindergarten/ Day care
(Kinder) Krippe	Nursery/ Creche
Bezirk	Regional city district e.g. Berlin Mitte
Zeitzeugen / Zeitzeugengespräch	Contemporary witness of the time /Contemporary witness interview
Fluchthelfer	A person who assisted others to escape (the GDR)
Aufbruchsstimmung	Optimistic spirit of embarking on a trip/entering a new era
Zuversicht	Confidence/assurance

Negative Elemente	Stasi speak for political dissidents
Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (IM)	Unofficial informants – regular GDR citizens who secretly spied and reported on people around them. They would usually meet Stasi officials to offer their reports in secret locations such as “fake flats or houses” – <i>Konspirative Wohnungen</i>
Zersetzung	Described as "the dissolution of the social" – extreme operative repressive technique employed by the Stasi to instil fear and destabilise a person's sense of self.
Republikflucht	Legal term to describe the offence of escaping from the GDR
Systemtreu	Being in-line with the political ideology of the state
Operativer Vorgang	Stasi speak for operative process of targeted repression on an individual or group
Oberschule	Secondary school
Volkshochschule	Community College/ Adult Education School
Gemeinschaftsgefühl	Sense of community
Klassenfeind	Marxist term for imperialist class enemy
Gesinnungsschnüffelei	Espionage into a person's political convictions
Gesellschaftliche Mitarbeiter (GM)	Stasi speak for a Community employee
Anpassungsdruck	Pressure to conform
"Lasst uns einig sein um uneinig zu sein."	"Let's agree to disagree."
Neubau Wohnung	A new building. In the GDR these flats were much sought after because they offered new amenities such as a central heating system, which were unavailable to those

	living in old (mostly unrenovated) buildings
Aufarbeitung	Reconciliation of the past (dictatorship)
Jdm. rauskaufen	“Buying someone out” – especially in the 1980’s the West (FRG) (and some organisations) paid the GDR to release political prisoners and leave the country
Autobahn	Motorway
Neue Bundesländer	New Regional Districts of East Germany, formerly the GDR
Menschenkenntnis	Knowledge of human nature, understanding others motivations and intentions
Bauchgefühl	Gut feeling
Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)	German Democratic Republic (GDR)
Wende	Turning Point describes the time period of the fall of the Wall and Germany's Reunification.
SED / Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands	Socialist Party of the German Democratic Republic
Ossis / Wessi	Colloquial term describing East and West Germans
Werdegang	personal journey

## Thesis Overview

This ethnographically based thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to my personal background and motivation for conducting this ethnographic research, including methodological details of my fieldwork.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing literature on the topic, as well as a theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 offers a selection of three extraordinary life stories that exemplify some of the key themes that have emerged from my ethnographic inquiry: Ideology and state control; betrayal and distrust; trauma and resilience. These topics are a red thread running throughout the thesis and will be examined in greater detail in later chapters.

Chapter 4 is divided into three sections. The first gives a brief introduction to the work of the Ministry of State Security in the GDR. The second and primary focus of the chapter is my informants' perceptions of the Stasi, which I illustrate through various ethnographic examples. The third part looks at the physical remnants of the ministry's work: the files. Here, I provide an overview of the decision-making process involved in viewing one's records, and also a description of the effects of the revelations discovered in files on those who explore them.

Chapter 5 focuses on the way state control intruded on, impacted, and shaped East Germans' lives. How were state control and conformity achieved? The chapter explores how concepts of privacy shifted over time, and how certain social dynamics promoted and reinforced systems of control.

Chapter 6 examines the trauma experienced as a result of state control and violence. Using ethnographic evidence, I illustrate the various ways violent control was experienced, how individuals have coped with the aftermath of state terror, and how such experiences shaped their wellbeing in the long term.

Chapter 7 explores how having a past characterised by mass surveillance impacts former East Germans today, and how multiple incidences of trauma among this population have led to a form of social suffering that manifests itself in high levels of distrust.

Following on from this, in Chapter 8 I briefly examine what mass surveillance and repression can do to society as a whole. For this, I examine my interviewees' narratives, illustrating the broad range of answers to this question.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I provide a synthesis of the arguments made and attempt a conclusion of my findings.

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## Chapter Two: An Overview of the Literature

“He who controls the past controls the future,  
He who controls the present controls the past.”-

George Orwell, *1984*

In this chapter I provide an overview of the existing anthropological and other related literature relevant to the research themes of this thesis. First, I will give a brief introduction to some of the literature on the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and its secret police force. Secondly, I will look at more theoretical perspectives surrounding the study of the state, its governance and different modes of surveillance (or “social optics”). Thirdly, I explore state terror and the way in which Stasi surveillance qualifies as such. Moving on from this, I will examine medical anthropology literature, which is concerned with the consequences of state terror, namely individual, cultural and collective trauma. With this chapter, I hope to offer a basic theoretical framework for the arguments made in this thesis.

### Literature on East Germany

The former GDR is a subject of interest, which has gained growing attention over the last few years, both in media (documentaries, TV series, Films) and publishing (books, newspapers, magazines). Especially journalists and other academic non-academic authors have been intrigued by the exciting and sometimes dark stories of the small socialist country that existed more than 27 years ago. Many interesting explorations have been embarked on; in popular German bookshops it is possible to find various biographies (see for example Schädlich 2017), family histories (e.g. Leo 2011; Hoffmann 2013) accounts of imprisonment (e.g. Knabe ed. 2007), spectacular

escapes (e.g. Wensierski 2014) and reflections on Germany's reunification (e.g. Goerz 2015). There are also numerous more nostalgic publications on GDR popular culture, cuisine, design and many more. Increasingly, non-German literature on the GDR is also emerging, so far the most famous of which is probably the Australian author Anna Funder's excellent book *Stasiland* (2011), which portrays the experience of Stasi surveillance through several stories of East Germans, who she interviewed shortly after the fall of the Wall.

Academically, the GDR has been of great interest nationally and internationally to many disciplines, but first and foremost to historians. There are too many historical studies of the GDR and its infamous secret police to list here, but scholars such as Weber (1991; 2012) have written extensively about the SED-dictatorship, Fulbrook (2008; 2014) and Betts (2010) have looked more specifically at the social history and private life within the state.

Betts' compelling book "*Within Walls*" (2010) sheds light on the many complex and at times contradictory aspects of private life in the GDR. For instance, he illustrates East Germans' defence mechanisms against state infiltration of their personal lives, while at the same time maintaining the outward image of upstanding socialists. I have found his work extremely useful, not only in terms of gaining a historical understanding of the GDR, but most importantly a societal insight.

Comprehensive studies on the country's Ministry of State Security have been composed, for example by Macrakis (2009), Bruce (2010) and Gieseke (2011). While these studies are highly detailed and extremely well researched, they tend to focus primarily on institutional organisation, as well as technological and practical

surveillance methods used by the Stasi. Further, it is important to mention that *The Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR (BStU)* commissions various studies; produces and publishes general information on the topic. Numerous public and private research institutes continually conduct surveys and quantitative research in and about the former GDR (e.g. Bertelsmann Stiftung, bpb.de).

East Germany has also received much attention from cultural, media and memory studies. Pinfold and Saunders' (2012) edited volume "*Remembering and Rethinking the GDR*", for instance, looks at memory cultures and the different ways in which the GDR is reconstructed and reflected on in the media. Social scientific work on the GDR is slowly emerging. Still, qualitative research and a social analysis of the wider societal effects of the dictatorship are still relatively few and far apart. Significantly, the number of anthropologists studying the former GDR remains relatively small.

Anselma Gallinat has probably written most extensively about the former GDR and East Germany focussing on a very wide range of topics such as regime-change (2009a), the role of personal and social memory (2009b), identity and narratives (2015). She has also explored notions of morality and secrecy in her work with former political prisoners (2006) and her reflections on the Stasi (2009c; 2015).

Another well-known anthropological account is "*Where the World Ended*" by Daphne Berdahl. She conducted fieldwork in a village located right at the border between East and West Germany in the early 1990's. She paints a vivid picture of villagers' lives, including their exceptional religiosity. She describes their struggles during communist rule, such as clashes with authorities, the arbitrariness of the

state, as well as, the deportation of some of the village inhabitants. Further, she sheds light on everyday concerns like chronic shortages of consumer goods and how people managed to overcome them, how they used relationships to their advantage and secretly bartered for products. She explores what life so close to the border entailed, how its fall affected the village and the following consequences such as unemployment.

Despite being less of a classic ethnography Hans Baer's *Crumbling Walls and tarnished Ideals* (1998) is another anthropological study on the GDR, which looks at post-revolutionary society and the contradictions between ideology and real life socialism. Like many authors, he searches for the reasons behind the collapse of state. He has written a number of articles on life in the GDR, before and after 1989.

Glaeser (2011) has probably written the most comprehensive social scientific study on the Stasi, I have come across so far. His sociological research focusses on the role of "political understanding" within the institutional and societal processes of the GDR. His detailed account of Stasi officials and civil activists of the peace movement of the 1980's, offers insight into the two groups' contrasting world-views and motivations. Glaeser argues that the Stasi's accumulation of knowledge and the state's claims to superior insight into the human condition, were unsuccessful in solving the problems of real existing socialism. He links the regime's collapse to some extent to the over-use of ideology and propaganda. The Marxist-Leninist ideology propagated by the regime, and in particular by the Stasi, contradicted the real life situation that East Germans experienced on an everyday basis. The secret police as well as the political elite of the GDR were unable to abandon their old ideology, clinging onto their own notions of reality within the

country. Anyone who questioned these was deemed an “anti-socialist” and therefore an enemy of the state. Economic, social and environmental problems were also largely ignored by the leadership, as they refused to reform the GDR’s political institutions, only in order to maintain the illusion of the perfectly functioning state. So, by the late 1980’s state institutions, did not solve problems or improve living conditions, but rather became fetishized versions of themselves, merely propagating ideology (Glaeser, 2011).

Looking at the topic of secret police surveillance in the former Soviet Bloc more broadly, the anthropological work of Katherine Verdery (1996; 2014) stands out. She has studied (post-) socialism and transformations in Romania and Transylvania. In *Secrets and Truths* (2014) she explored the Romanian secret police force, also known as Securitate. Here, she considered how the institution compares to classical anthropological concepts about secret societies. She researched the archives and even investigated her own file. In fact, she is one of a few authors who had the chance to conduct research in Eastern Europe pre-1989 and was viewed with suspicion by the authorities and therefore put under surveillance. Similarly, Vatulescu (2012) examined her own records and the “aesthetics of secret police files” in general. The journalist Timothy Garton Ash, also reflects on his own Stasi records in *The File* (1998).

So we can see that, while there is surely a fascination with Cold War spy stories and life in seemingly “exotic” socialism, there remains so much to be explored.

Understanding people’s memories, feelings and opinions on the past dictatorship are essential in the reconciliation process. One of the main reasons why the study of East Germany is so fascinating, is probably also intimidating: it is highly complex

and contradictory. Especially with regards to studying the Stasi - reservations, suspicion and distancing continue to persist, making qualitative research difficult at times. The remembrance culture is accordingly ambivalent, ranging from “ostalgic” feelings to extreme antipathy towards the former GDR, and everything in-between.

Undoubtedly, a deeper social analysis of life under socialism and the subsequent transformations is needed. In this thesis, I would like to embark on new territory and attempt to understand East Germans’ experiences of Stasi surveillance from two anthropological standpoints, namely from a political and a medical perspective, as well as their intersection. In the following section, I will start by looking at anthropological concepts of the state and governance. Accordingly, I will attempt to place GDR surveillance within this framework.

## The State and its governance

For a long time, social and political scientists have regarded the state as a clearly bounded entity, which exists separately from society. Indeed, not only was the state seen as the ultimate expression of the “nation”, but it was believed to hold all power as the single most significant actor, which possessed the monopoly over violence and territory. However, this clearly bounded concept of the state has been increasingly challenged due its restrictive nature (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991, 1999; Foucault 1991).

Abrams (2006 (1988)) questions “the state” as an ideological construct, since it is not an “object” that physically exists. He argues that the state should not be studied like a material, bounded entity, but rather the “idea of the state” should be

considered. He encourages us to pay especially close attention to the particular legitimating processes, which often take place coercively in exercising power over a population. He writes that it is the “institutions of the state system”, which initiate the subjection of certain groups, creating hierarchies of power. Abrams elaborates, “the crux of the task is to over-accredit them as an integrated expression of common interest cleanly dissociated from all sectional interests and the structures – class, church, race and so forth – associated with them.” (Abrams 2006 (1988) p. 122) It is institutions like the judicial, educational systems, as well as prisons and armies which actively legitimise illegitimate actions, that are in reality aimed at subjecting people to their power.

Concealment plays a very important role in the ideological notion of the state, as it facilitates the control and governance of people by particular actors, all in order to achieve certain means. In more drastic terms Abrams writes, “the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is. It is, one could almost say, the mind of a mindless world, the purpose of purposeless conditions, the opium of the citizen” (Abrams 2006 (1988), p. 125).

Timothy Mitchell (1991; 1999), too, believes that the separation of state and society is achieved through particular social practices, which exert power and social control. He says that “the phenomenon we name ‘the state’ arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, nonmaterial form” (Mitchell 2006 (1999) p. 170). So, through the numerous everyday social norms and practices, conducted by a variety of actors, enact power and control. He writes, “construed as a machinery of intentions – usually termed

*rule-making, decision making, or policymaking* – state becomes essentially a subjective realm of plans, programs, or ideas.” It is the resulting procedures; intertwining state, society and economy, which exert power over people.

Mitchell argues that the “state should be addressed as an effect of the detailed operations of power, of its spatial and temporal organisation, and its techniques, functions and symbols.” In other words, the power of the state does not work from the outside but from within society, through social life and “it does this not by constructing individual actions, but by producing them.” This is very much in line with Foucault’s (1977; 1991) standpoint, which I will examine in more detail later. He, too, asserted that the state itself is not “the ultimate seat of power”, but it is instead social and institutional actors, which direct people’s behaviour in seemingly mundane everyday practices.

### Understanding the state through social processes

Using the United Kingdom as a case study, Joyce (2013) highlights how “liberalism” goes hand in hand with “order” and draws attention to the role of social relationships. The UK is an interesting example of how hierarchy is created by the cultivation of particular social relationships, in which certain groups are governing, while others are being governed.

The British example shows how tightly intertwined the state and society actually are. Joyce explains that “(...) the supposed bastions of hierarchy and “tradition” – the monarchy, the established Church, the Armed Forces, the Conservative Party, the House of Lords, the public schools (the list in Britain is very long) - are inimical to the liberal state for the simple fact that they are an integral part of it. They are

the other side of the same liberal coin, that of authority, order and control.” (Joyce 2013, p.7). In the context of my research it is therefore essential to recognise the power that lies within the “social”, not necessarily “society”.

Power is expressed by the social in various forms, these can be physical (e.g. one’s house), in writing, in gender relations, education or even legalised coercions (Joyce 2013). So it can be said that social power may be found in “localised versions of the state” as well as particular social relationships and processes.

Social processes, which are inherently political, are what Bourdieu (1984) called “habitus”. He suggests that state actors produce and impose particular “categories of thought”, which shape and determine what people believe about them. These particular categories are applied in everyday life and constitute “habitus”.

The term describes “the set of socially acquired dispositions, skills and schemes of behaviour which are acquired by people in the activities of everyday life. It highlights the non-discursive, taken-for-granted aspects of social life that often operate outside conscious awareness.” (Joyce 2013, p.7) I would therefore propose that in the Soviet Bloc, for example, habitus came to determine much of everyday life. Due to the heavy influence of state actors on the private sphere, even the most intimate moments gained substantial political significance. With the concept of habitus, Bourdieu (1984) also encapsulates what many other authors have described (see Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1999; Joyce 2013) namely, that the state is constituted through socio-political processes within society and that this creates conditions in which even the abnormal is normalised, allowing for extreme exercises of power. Joyce summarises, that “this ‘normalisation’ enables the

ordering and the sanctioning of what would otherwise be regarded as abnormal. This eventually extends to the abnormal in extreme forms, so that the state has been enabled through the routines it has established in its mundane operation to order and incorporate not only injustice and inequality as 'normal' but famine, social conflict, and eventually if with some difficulty, mass war and the mass extermination of human beings" (Joyce 2013, p.7).

So to summarise, understandings of the nation state as a distinct, solitary actor of power over society must be challenged. Instead, different power processes are deeply embedded within society, (as indeed the East German police was). It is these processes and relationships, which I will focus my thesis on.

My ethnographic fieldwork shows that the state and society are not clearly separable, but inherently intertwined even in the most mundane everyday actions – take for example small children singing socialist propaganda songs in GDR Kindergartens. These children may have greatly enjoyed the act of singing and may even have liked the lyrics of the songs, without initially understanding their propagandistic function. Yet, one could say that such songs were a successful tool to instil the ideology of socialism from an early age, leading them to internalise particular ideas about correct behaviour. So, although a state department initially ordered the integration of propaganda in the education system, it is in the everyday life of society where political power is translated into actions and vice versa.

Although my informants in their narratives repeatedly refer to the "*state*", as an actor of almost almighty power, by closer examination it becomes clear that the state's power is deeply embedded in social processes, through the use of many

anonymous actors in almost all interactions. Notably, through an Anthropological inquiry, we can understand how the concept of *the state* is culturally constructed, and the role that culture plays in the building and maintenance of it (see Steinmetz 1999). An anthropological lens helps us discern the various actors involved in processes of governance (Sharma & Gupta 2006).

### Power and Foucault's theory of governmentality

In the following section, I would like to pay closer attention to ideas about power. As mentioned previously, Foucault, too, was critical of accrediting the state too much power. He writes, that in reality, the state does not possess the attributes or importance that it is often ascribed. He claims that the state by itself is simply a myth. Rather, it is the people in the apparatuses within society, which govern the state. He proposed instead to consider the concept of *governmentality*: a process by which social conduct, places and things become a tool in political control. He elaborates,

*“This governmentalization of the state is a singularly paradoxical phenomenon, since if in fact the problems of governmentality and techniques of government have become the only political issue, the only real space for political struggle and contestation, this is because the governmentalization of the state is at the same time what has permitted the state to survive, and it is possible to suppose that if the state is what it is today, this is so precisely thanks to this governmentality, which is at once internal and external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the*

*private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality” (Foucault (2006) 1991 p.143).*

Mitchell clarifies that for Foucault “government” is less about the formal institutions and apparatuses themselves but about the methods and techniques that are utilized to achieve certain means (Mitchell 1999 (2006)). Therefore, governmentality can be understood as “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.” (Foucault (1991)1977)

Yet, Foucault’s idea has been criticised for going too far in downplaying the role of the state. Joyce (2013, p.29) writes that “the governmentality literature, in emphasising power beyond the state, tended to throw out the baby of the state with the governmental bathwater.” Accordingly, Foucauldian approaches tend to emphasise the diffusion of different types of power (e.g. disciplinary power, bio-power), without paying much attention to the state.

So, I must differentiate in my analysis: it is clear that the state *does* possess power. Although it may not be a singular, bounded entity, the state *does* have the power to normalise abnormal and even dangerous processes such as violence, war and famine. While Foucault may go too far in undermining the overall significance of the state, his ideas are nonetheless incredibly useful in understanding how power is exercised. In the context of this thesis, Foucault’s assumptions about

governmentality lay the groundwork for analysing the methods and purpose of surveillance in the context of the GDR. His theories on different types of power and modes of governance can help us place Stasi surveillance within a theoretical framework.

In Foucault's writings we can see that his perspectives and focus changed over time. He began by attempting to understand the goals of early government – i.e. in a sovereign society, the main aim was for a leader to gain control over territory and his subjects, through exercising strict prohibitions. Foucault then went on to study disciplinary societies, in which not only the mode but also the object of governance changed (from entire populations to individuals) (Galic et al. 2017, p. 16). He found that power is diffuse and "hidden in the processes of conformity present in different places of society." This is where Foucault asserted his standpoint that *disciplinary power* is not only exercised by the state, but indeed, through different institutions which merge, shift and change in order to produce the desired outcomes (Galic et al. 2017). In this context he further consolidated his ideas about surveillance as a method of control, which I will examine in more detail later. It is important to note that "although this power operates somewhat independently from the judicial and government apparatus, it nevertheless requires institutions and the state, since it works through them—"the state, correctional institutions, and medical institutions [need to] be regarded as coagulations of practices"" (Valverde 2008, p.18 cited in Galic et al. 2017).

So, which aspects are involved in generating and maintaining disciplinary power? On the one hand it takes place through the utilisation of ideology, on the other by something Foucault called "normation". He writes, "The perpetual penalty that

traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions, compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault 1977, p. 183). Governing people, therefore means leading them to comply with particular ideas – i.e. the norm. Dalibert (2013) explains that the norm “constitutes what one has to conform to and strive for; it is both standard and ideal. Being regarded as normal is to conform to the norm, hence to occupy the position of the invisible, i.e. unmarked by difference construed as abnormality, and putative universal subject. The abnormal is the one deemed deficient and inferior in relation to the norm(al)” (Dalibert 2013). In the same vein, Canguilhem (1989) has asserted that what is deemed “normal” and even what is regarded as “pathological”, is certainly not based on objective facts, but always culturally and politically relative. As I will elaborate later, ideas about “normalisation” will become very important in this thesis.

In conclusion it can be said that, we should not simply examine the state and society as separate, independent actors but rather try to understand the processes involved in governance (i.e. surveillance) because, as Mitchell asserts, “the essence of modern politics is not policies formed on one side of this division being applied to or shaped by the other, but the producing and reproducing of these lines of difference.” (Mitchell 2006 (1999) p. 185). In the following section, I will look at the interaction of ideology and power. How societies may abide by and promote particular norms and rules, even if individuals do not believe in their value.

## Power and Ideology

Before examining the method of surveillance in detail, I would like to shed more light on the interplay between ideology and power in a real-life context. Hannah Arendt wrote: “To establish a totalitarian regime, terror must be presented as an instrument for carrying out a specific ideology; and that ideology must have won the adherence of many, and even a majority, before terror can be stabilized.”

It is important to understand that ideology serves a specific purpose, it is a means to an end so to speak; as ideology monopolizes the truth. It gives sense to the senseless and mundane actions of life under real socialism. It excuses acts of violence and intimidation, for the purpose of the greater good. It discourages the population from questioning the regime. Indeed, it stops people from being engaged – it stops them from thinking.

Vaclav Havel’s essay “The Power of the Powerless” is excellent, not only to understand the multitude of forces interacting in governance, but his work (written in 1985) provides a unique insight into life in the former Soviet Bloc. Although Havel analyses the Soviet Bloc as a whole and the “system” within it, I have found his observations to be spot-on and very relatable to the East German context.

Havel writes that the Soviet Bloc was not a dictatorship in the classic sense, as it was not limited geographically within a single country, but it was a “huge power bloc controlled by one of the two super powers.” This meant that any sign of resistance or uprising of a population could be controlled by not only a single national army but by the armed forces of several states, if necessary. This created a power structure so immense, it is hard for us to imagine today. (And, as I would

argue, also creating a massive feeling of powerlessness on behalf of those who were against it).

The Soviet Bloc also differed substantially from other dictatorships, due its unique psycho-social conditions, in particular the response to the ideology that was embedded in everyday activities of “real existing socialism”. In the following chapters, I outline some of the ways in which this took place (e.g. in schools, the workplace and even on vacation). Havel writes that “(...) it commands an incomparably more precise, logically structured, generally comprehensible and, in essence, extremely flexible ontology that, in its elaborateness and completeness, is almost a secularized religion.” (Havel 1985, p. 25) Socialism was certainly a tempting system to follow, as its ideology was relatable and seemed to solve humankind’s most pressing problems (as confirmed by my informants, see Chapter 3), while apparently providing a home for all. But, Havel warned, “Of course, one pays dearly for this low-rent home: the price is its abdication of one’s own reason, conscience, and responsibility, for an essential aspect of this ideology is the consignment of reason and conscience to a higher authority” (Havel 1985, p.25).

As this thesis demonstrates, we may observe a unique form of governmentality in which the state certainly had the power to enforce punishment, yet disciplinary power and control was largely enacted in, and deeply embedded within society. Havel even claims that the Soviet Bloc was a novel totalitarian regime, with a new form of power over its subjects: an intricate system of direct and indirect manipulation. Havel calls it a “post-totalitarian” regime. (However, as this could be a misleading term I prefer to use the word “neo-totalitarian”, from here on.)

Besides the Soviet Union's vastness, Havel points out the importance of "state ownership and central direction of all the means of production", as this gave the system even more power. It gave the "power structure an unprecedented and uncontrollable capacity to invest in itself (in the areas of bureaucracy and the police, for example) and makes it easier for that structure, as the sole employer, to manipulate the day-to-day existence of all citizens" (1985 p.26). In other words, the regime had complete influence on all areas of life, controlling everything from employment to accommodation.

### **Understanding Ideology in the time of Socialism: The Greengrocer**

Havel provides an excellent example to illustrate how the system of "real existing socialism" maintained itself at the time and the role that ideology and propaganda played in this. Havel writes, "The manager of a fruit and vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the socialist slogan: 'Workers of the World, Unite!'" . Then he asks, "Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world?". He finds that there are a multitude of answers to these questions, least of them are expected, such as the greengrocer's strong conviction of the socialist cause. Indeed, Havel claims that "it can be safely assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions" (1985, p.27). Rather, the shopkeeper put the sign in the window because this was what everyone did, what had been done for years and because it was what was expected of him.

Furthermore, he had to uphold the image of the obedient citizen in order to live peacefully without the harassment of state officials or his fellow citizens. The

salesman thus followed the unwritten rules, because “these things must be done if one is to get along in life” (1985, p.28).

So, Havel explains that by putting the sign in his window, the action is deeply connected to the greengrocer’s personal, “vital” interests. His interests have nothing to do with the socialist slogan, but the slogan provides a good cover-up for the real purpose of this procedure. Since he does not want to risk being publicly humiliated, “his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction” (Havel 1985, p.28).

It is this seemingly mundane “obedient” action which illustrates the role of ideology and propaganda in socialist everyday life. It covers up the realities of state-control and obedience. Havel explains that the sign “must allow the greengrocer to say, ‘What’s wrong with the workers of the world uniting?’ Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the façade of something high. And that something is *ideology*” (Havel 1985, p.28).

Therefore, ideology helps to justify actions (and inaction), it aides in deceiving one’s conscience (in the name of creating something better, serving the common good etc.) and it hides true opinions from oneself and those surrounding him.

### Maintaining the order

One of the main purposes of ideology is therefore to conceal realities and excuse certain actions, to maintain the order of the socialist system. This was true for everyone within that system, regular citizens and state officials alike. Havel explains, “The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide

people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.” (Havel 1985, p. 29).

Similarly, in my interviews, I encountered many situations where my informants did not question certain aspects of the dictatorship, simply claiming that “*that was just how things were done back then*”. This could be seen in seemingly mundane activities, as illustrated in Havel’s example. But, when blatant injustice is not challenged but excused as serving the socialist cause, it becomes clear that ideology serves a very particular purpose. On the one hand, it maintains the order by providing convenient excuses. On the other, ideology is the link between the regime and the people, it keeps the system running smoothly. So, the constant demand for conformity, uniformity, and discipline, was a means for ensuring the system would be maintained, while inciting a social phenomenon where “self-preservation is subordinated to something higher, to a kind of blind *automatism* which drives the system”. (Havel 1985, p.30) Therefore, much of what keeps this system running is based on hypocrisy and lies according to Havel, indeed he claims “the regime is captive to its own lies”, caught up in a game of pretences (Havel 1985, p.31). Havel phrases this phenomenon as “living within a lie”: in order to keep the said system going and to avoid any disorder, citizens had to tolerate falsehoods and even live by them. They had to “accept appearances as reality”, participate in and “accept the prescribed ritual”, just as the greengrocer did when he put the sign into his shop window. As I will show in this thesis, this is exactly how the all-encompassing surveillance system functioned.

## Understanding power in the neo-totalitarian system

Havel focuses less on the state, but rather on “the system”. By this he means the Soviet regime which not only controlled one state but the entire Eastern Bloc.

Although there were local differences, the unique neo-totalitarian structures had very similar attributes throughout the Bloc. Havel describes how power was generated *within* the system creating a “power structure”, which was constituted, maintained and bound through a variety of mechanisms, only one of which was ideology. Only if all parts of the power structure worked together, could the system continue to exist. It was therefore essential that this “metaphysical order” of things would be upheld in order to protect the power structure.

In line with the literature I reviewed above (Mitchell 1999; Abrams 1988; Joyce 2013 Foucault 1977), we learn that governance is deeply embedded within society, and the system that Havel speaks of. This is not “a social order imposed by one group upon another”, but as we have seen it is “something which permeates the entire society and is a factor in shaping it, something which may seem impossible to grasp or define (for it is in the nature of a mere principle), but which is expressed by the entire society as an important feature of its life.” (Havel, 1985, p.37).

## The common ritual and anonymous power

Resonating with what I said earlier about the role of the state, it did not matter so much who held which position in the system, as power became *anonymous* (see also Foucault 1977). Even when internal power struggles took place amongst individuals, the order was mostly restored swiftly as the other aspects of the system remained intact. People still continued to accept and abide by the common rules

and enacted their rituals of everyday life, enforced by the “faceless people”, the “puppets” of state institutions.

Havel makes a very important point here, which helps us to understand how the Stasi’s power gained such a grip on the population. It was not about individual officers doing their “duty”, but instead the significance lay within the system that they actively maintained and enforced. It was the system of control, which became self-perpetuating. No one knew exactly who was watching them at any given time, but it did not matter because the system gave the illusion that the almighty control apparatus was present and ready to strike at any moment.

This in turn, brings us to Hannah Arendt’s work on the “Banality of Evil”. She too speaks of a totalitarian system, albeit a more traditional one, in which everyone participates knowingly and unknowingly to maintain and drive the system. Like Havel, she explores the potential of individual responsibility for crimes committed in the regime. Havel asserts that Western scholars have the tendency to overemphasize the power of individuals in the Soviet Bloc, while they are more often than not, opportunistic unreflecting executors that keep the system running. Significantly, “this automatism is far more powerful than the will of any individual; and should someone possess a more independent will, he or she must conceal it behind a ritually anonymous mask in order in order to have an opportunity to enter the power hierarchy at all” (Havel, 1985, p.34). Despite the seemingly very powerful nature of the system, it was still fragile because it was built on lies. It was only sustainable as long as the people would participate in the game of pretences (1985, p.35). History taught us that this was indeed one of the main contributing factors that led to the eventual collapse of the system (see for example Glaeser 2011).

To conclude, life under Socialism was a life in an all-encompassing neo-totalitarian regime, which operated its power from “within”. In the final part of this chapter, I will examine one of the particular modes of governance that allowed the regime to function in this way: surveillance. While I will go into the specificities of what Stasi spying entailed in the later chapters of this thesis, I would like to provide an overview of the various theories that have emerged to make sense of the act of surveillance and I will explore how the surveillance apparatus of the GDR may constitute as a form of state terror.

### Surveillance Theories

Like the study of the state, inquiries on surveillance have also transformed over time and can be divided roughly into three phases. In the first phase, Bentham and Foucault’s theories stand out. They consider the Panopticon and panopticism, which offer architectural theories of observation, where surveillance is largely physical and spatial in character (Galic et al.2017).

#### **The Panopticon**

When Jeremy Bentham visited his brother in Russia in the late 1780's, he noticed a technique that he used to watch and control his factory workers. Bentham took this idea and created a physical design of how the same method could be applied in different institutions, which required some level of supervision; schools, factories, hospitals and most famously prisons (Bentham 1843). He designed a circular building with an observation tower, which is surrounded by individual cells. Inside the tower sits the watchman, the person who surveilles those who are meant to be supervised and controlled. Those who are being watched would sit in the cells

surrounding the watchtower. The watchman can at any time shine a light on one of the cells and see the person inside, while at the same time being invisible to them. The assumption is that those who are surveilled can never be sure whether the watchman is looking at them at a given time. Therefore, they are constantly weary of his scrutiny. This uncertainty creates a condition of self-policing, where those who are under surveillance alter and control their behaviour to avoid punishment (Foucault 1977; Lyon 2006, 2007).

Michel Foucault analysed this model in *Discipline and Punish* and highlights the way in which this idea can also be applied to conditions of disciplinary societies. Indeed, the most interesting aspect of his idea is the asymmetrical nature of surveillance.

"He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 1977 (1975), p. 202-203).

Foucault elaborates on the *anonymous power* that is located within the central tower of the Panopticon, proposing that "we have seen that anyone may come and exercise in the central tower the functions of surveillance, and that this being the case, he can gain a clear idea of the way the surveillance is practiced" (cited in Hier & Greenberg 2007, p.73). In individualising the "inmates" and exposing them to constant observation, the efficacy of the model as a tool for total control is increased. Most importantly perhaps, control is ensured without necessarily physically exerting power (Hier & Greenberg 2007).

As the subsequent chapters of this thesis show, this same process was evident in the GDR, where the state transformed the public servant into this powerful being who controlled every aspect of the citizens' lives. Significantly, I argue that even citizens themselves were easily converted into watchmen, informers who would shine a constant light on the people who "needed to be watched". Not knowing who actually was looking at you, or even if you were being watched improved the efficacy of this model of surveillance. As my ethnographic accounts suggest, mutual surveillance became common-place.

### **Post-Panoptic Theories**

The second phase of surveillance studies, moves away from classic panoptic metaphors and shifts the focus from institutions to networks, from ostensible forms of discipline to relatively opaque forms of control. But, they focus largely on new forms of surveillance that involve technology and do not place much emphasis on physical human beings but largely on data (Galic et al. 2017). Scholars such as Latour (2005), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Deleuze (1992), Haggerty and Ericson (2000) and Murakami Wood (2013) have developed post-panoptic theories.

Bruno Latour's concept of the *oligopticon* for example urges us to look beyond Foucault's panopticon as it is too large and utopian in his opinion. He does not agree with the idea of a "society of total surveillance":

*"We, however, are not looking for utopia but for places on earth that are fully assignable. Oligoptica are just those sites since they do exactly the opposite of panoptica: they see much too little to feed the megalomania of the inspector or the paranoia of the inspected, but what they see, they see well..." (Latour, 2005).*

He proposes the idea of an *oligopticon* instead: conditions where there are a multitude of surveillance devices. They record everything but rarely communicate with one another and therefore cannot create conditions of absolute surveillance.

Further surveillance theories have emerged in which the observing gaze is thought to be dispersed, not only originating from a single site (Wood 2003; Deleuze and Guattari 2003; Haggerty & Ericson 2000). *Rhizomatic surveillance* encapsulates the idea that surveillance is a series of "interconnected roots which throw up shoots in different locations" (Haggerty & Ericson 2000, p. 614).

Significantly, this theory broadens the scope of who the surveillers can be:

“While Orwell and Foucault talk about either a state or a person (or at least understood as a limited number of people in control) of surveillance from the top down, the idea of rhizomatic surveillance connotes that the hierarchies of observation are disrupted and now both institutions and the general population can become surveillers” (Haggerty & Ericson 2000, p. 616). Furthermore, studying contemporary surveillance we see an increasingly quantitative approach, focussed primarily on the categorisation and profiling of data. This trend in surveillance practices noticeably came into motion in the aftermath of 9/11 and has become relatively accepted and, importantly, has been normalised since then (Haggerty & Gazzo 2005).

Thirdly, in the most recent approaches to surveillance studies, the theories of the first two phases have been expanded, combined and reconceptualised. These new theories examine the predominantly technological trends of “*dataveillance*, access control, social sorting, peer-to-peer surveillance and resistance” (Galic et al. 2017).

For instance, Albrechtslund (2008) has examined surveillance practices that people are engaged in on social media sites. He contemplates the positive sides to surveillance, such as the entertainment value of watching others, as well as being watched (Albrechtslund and Dubbeld 2005). Galic et al. (2000) explain, "Albrechtslund coins the term 'participatory surveillance'; citizens/users are actively engaged in surveillance themselves as watchers, but they also participate voluntarily and consciously in the role of watched."

### **Post-Panoptic Surveillance in the GDR**

Overall, we can see that there are a multitude of surveillance theories, each adapting to particular local conditions and media (i.e. physical/digital/statistical). Ascribing one particular theory of surveillance to the context of the former GDR is not simple.

Over the last few pages of this chapter, I demonstrated that disciplinary power is generated and maintained within society, with the state (at least in a physical sense) mainly occupying the role of policymaker and ultimate enforcer of punishment (e.g. violence and imprisonment). As we saw, in neo-totalitarianism the main aim was to preserve and protect the socialist system, eliminating any threat. Surveillance therefore played an important role in achieving this. Controlling all areas of citizens' lives, Stasi spies were able to observe, listen to and influence GDR citizens' interactions. Especially due to the high number of undercover informants, a feeling of omnipresence was created, leading to conformity, fear and suspicion. Significantly, people not only complied for fear of repercussions, they also came to pressure those around them to conform - knowingly and unknowingly. Havel called

this form of forced conformity “social auto-totality”. He wrote, “They do what is done, what is to be done, what must be done, but at the same time – by that very token – they confirm that it must be done in fact. They conform to a particular requirement and in doing so they themselves perpetuate that requirement.” (Havel 1985, p.36) In other words, social auto-totality works by involving each and every citizen, leading them to reinforce the system amongst themselves, even exerting pressure on one another to conform and maintain the order.

With respect to surveillance this meant that everyone watched one another. As I will demonstrate through my informants’ narratives in the following chapters, the destructive forces of the East German surveillance apparatus were two-fold. Firstly, people suffered from the direct results of Stasi operative techniques such as repression, intimidation and imprisonment by state officials. And secondly, especially notable in this context, they endured societal dynamics that led those who did not conform to be ostracised and even abnormalised. Havel explains how this interplay of complacency and intimidation created adverse societal conditions, in which people “may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable and ultimately, so they may – with no external urging – come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves, as a form of dropping out of society” (Havel 1985).

Hence, everyone became an instrument of power, individuals were merely responsible to different degrees. Technically everyone could be a victim and supporter of the system – sometimes both at the same time. Certainly this is an

argument not everyone would agree with. Those who suffered greatly under the regime tend to set themselves apart from the “perpetrators”-“the state”. Yet, the truth is that even those who committed state terror, were at the end of the day, also victims of the system. Those who exerted pressure, meddled with others’ career and education, observed private lives, arrested and imprisoned were compliant to the system. Havel (1985) writes that many of these people did not necessarily conform because of “any authentic inner conviction but simply under pressure from conditions, the same conditions that once pressured the greengrocer to display official slogans.” They, too, are instruments in the system. Havel explains that they persecuted people “because it was expected of them”, “to demonstrate their loyalty”, or “simply as part of the general panorama, to which belongs an awareness that this is how situations (...) are dealt with, that this is, in fact, how things are always done, particularly if one is not to become a suspect oneself” (Havel 1985, p. 39). At this point, I would like to reiterate that this does not mean that these people are not responsible for their own actions, or to excuse the, at times, irreparable damage they did. It merely explains how they came to be executors of unpleasant or even evil deeds within the neo-totalitarian power structure.

### **A system of Auto-Governmentality?**

In order to place the spying efforts of the Stasi into a particular framework of surveillance theory, we must consider that it does not fully fit into either the classic theory of the Panopticon, or the more technological data and information centred theories. However, my argument builds on all of them. GDR surveillance did not just take place metaphorically, but physically, since there was a strong focus on

watching “real” people and not merely the collecting raw data. Of course the collection of information and data mattered too, but it was only one aspect of the Stasi’s control apparatus. It is not the only focus of my study, as I have been particularly interested in the socio-psychological dynamics created by the control system of the GDR.

Considering the work of Foucault we may then say that Stasi surveillance is a combination of disciplinary and post-panoptic society as it shows features of both. It undoubtedly shows features of governmentality, in that it created power structures from within, that lead and managed the population, sometimes openly, sometimes coercively. Yet, this took its shape in a disciplinary fashion, as it used repressive techniques and punishment to control the population. Furthermore, the use of ideology played a major role in maintaining the system, as did the normation or normalisation of control and violence.

Moreover, surveillance was de-territorialised in the sense that it took place on a large scale within the confines of the GDR/Eastern Bloc, but also on a smaller scale within local institutions and apparatuses like the workplace, schools, youth organisations etc. following Latour’s idea of the oligopticon (2005). There was certainly a “levelling” out of surveillance, meaning that it became increasingly de-centralised. Not only conducted by one individual, but by many – often indiscernible and anonymous (Havel called them “faceless puppets”), this would be in line with Haggerty and Ericson’s (2000) assumptions about rhizomatic surveillance.

In this sense, we may also see similarities to the most recently emerged type of surveillance. As proposed by Albrechtslund (2008) who investigated social media

and found that “many look at many”. Although, his approach focusses on the entertainment values of social media surveillance, here too we can discern similarities in the sense that in the GDR everyone was also constantly monitoring one another and oneself.

So, we can assume that Stasi surveillance was a form of “auto-governmentality”. By this I mean that the socialist state’s institutions governed the population via various processes and at the same time, individuals within the population governed themselves and one another. This was done by creating conditions of “normality” (Foucault 2006) and the cultivation of “habitus” (Bourdieu 1984) – all in order to maintain the “system”. My theory therefore resonates with what Havel called “social auto-totality” an aspect, unique to neo-totalitarian regimes such as the former Soviet Bloc and East Germany.

### State Terror and Its Consequences

In the final section of this chapter, I will consider the effects and long-term consequences of the forms governance I introduced above. I will briefly examine the Stasi’s mode of operation and how it can be considered as a form of state terror. Finally, I will review some of the Anthropology literature on state terror, as well as literature on the resulting trauma.

In “*The origins of totalitarianism*” Hannah Arendt (1951) wrote: “A fundamental difference between modern dictatorships and all other tyrannies of the past, is that terror is no longer used as a means to exterminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule the masses of people who are perfectly obedient.”

This rings true in the case of the GDR and the heavy impact of its security apparatus. The methods used by East Germany's Ministry of State Security were originally based on the Russian Cheka. The Cheka was the first in a long succession of Soviet Secret Police agencies, first founded by Felix Dzerzhinsky, in order to defeat counter-revolutionaries during the Bolshevik rule. The Stasi utilized some of its methods and officials were often referred to as "Checkists" (Willis 2013, p.88, see also Betts 2010). Essentially this meant that terror – in the form of persecution, repression and imprisonment of dissidents – became a form of governance.

The Anthropologist Jeffrey A. Sluka defines state terror as follows: "the use or threat of violence by the state or its agents or supporters, particularly against civilian individuals and populations, as a means of political intimidation and control (i.e. a means of repression)" (Sluka 2000, p. 2). As it will be demonstrated throughout this thesis and supported by ethnographic evidence, all of the above criteria apply to the methods of the East German secret police. The Stasi's mode of operation was very much embedded in socialist ideology. The social historian Paul Betts (2010) explains how the Stasi's place within GDR society differed from other secret police forces in the West: "Whereas liberal law was built on protecting individuals from the state, socialist jurisprudence presumed that the state was the people" (Betts 2010). Therefore, it was crucial to organise, control and even mould each and every citizen to fit the pre-prescribed ideals. Further, Betts' statement alludes to the fact that any resistance, even if it was only committed by a single person, could be seen as a threat to the entire state. Betts explains that "the state thus felt compelled to organize networks of intelligence, snooping, and supervision in order to scout out potential wellsprings of dissatisfaction." Significantly, "the

home was routinely singled out as the most worrisome cell of secrecy and dissent” (Betts 2010), threatening East Germans freedom and privacy.

The Stasi’s policing methods shifted over the 40 years of its existence, while in the early years there was a clear tendency to use physical violence on a large scale, later, more subtle methods were employed, resorting to systematic psychological control (BStU 2016). Especially after the June 1953 Uprising, did the Stasi truly begin targeting its own citizens, aiming to eliminate any form of dissent. They began to infiltrate the private sphere more than ever, all in an attempt to single out and remove so-called “asocials”. Interestingly, these methods not only focused on regular citizens, but indeed everyone, including state officials. Party members, as well as Stasi officers or anyone in an official position had to prove their suitability and “socialist morality”. This meant that their private lives were scrutinized to the same extent (or at times even more intensely) as any regular citizen. Betts writes that amongst officials, adultery and unstable family relationships were frowned upon. “If married functionaries were caught in adulterous relationships, for example, they were often forced to confess all before the commission, express contrition, and recommit to their spouses at the next Party forum” (Betts 2010).

Yet, it must be said that the Stasi’s methods were more noticeable to some than to others. Betts outlined his research findings as such: *“In the twenty-five interviews and thirty questionnaires on private life that were conducted for this book over the period 2004–7, I was surprised how few people communicated any real conflict with either the Stasi or the Hausvertrauensmann. Invariably they all knew who these people were in the neighbourhood and residential building, and that they had to be*

*very careful and discreet in their dealing with them. Many recounted an atmosphere of fear and mutual surveillance. Yet those who kept their heads down and never fell foul of the state's purview—probably the vast majority of people—rarely encountered any real problems, and even dismissed the state's security presence as more akin to an accepted annoyance” (Betts 2010, p.34).*

While the majority of the population came to accept, and more or less got used to the base-level of surveillance, some others suffered greatly especially if they became explicit targets of Stasi investigation and repression. When a person was deemed an “enemy of the state”, the secret police’s actions were to re-establish “order”. As I will review in detail in the following chapters, in these cases operative repressive methods such as *Zersetzung* were employed. The main goal of *Zersetzung* was to actively destabilize a person. Its use indicates a clear shift away from merely cultivating a “socialist personality”, but instead its aim lay explicitly in “breaking” the person. This had profound psychological consequences such as anxiety and paranoia. Betts describes instances where “people dreamt of being followed and observed, they internalized fear to such an extent that the Stasi were believed to be able to spy on their dreams.”(Betts 2010) These methods explicitly set the Stasi apart from other secret police agencies, both historically and compared to other states of the Soviet Bloc (Rosenberg 1995; Gallately 1997). The Stasi’s use of systematic psycho-social repressive techniques led to its far-reaching traumatic societal impact. So to conclude, this brief outline indicates that the mode of operation of the GDR’s security apparatus certainly qualifies as a form of terror as the Ministry of State Security was a highly regulated, hierarchical organisation and its sophisticated socio-psychological approach caused widespread fear, distrust

and self-policing. Over the next few pages I would like to review some of the existing literature on state terror and its consequences.

### Anthropology of state terror

In the Anthropological literature, there are many recorded cases of state terror around the world. Jeffery Sluka (2000) has written extensively on the topic. In his book *“Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror”* he reviews numerous ethnographic examples of instances where fear and terror became the prime mode of governance. Robert Carmack’s edited volume *“Harvest of Violence”* (1988) for example examines the *“culture of fear”* amongst the indigenous populations of Guatemala, as a reaction to the government’s destructive policies. Similarly, Suarez-Orozco (see 1991) and Green (1994; 1995), examined the long lasting psychological aspects of collective anxieties and the state of *“living in fear”* in Guatemala and Argentina. Another example is E.V. Walter’s (*“Terror and Resistance,”* 1969) research on despotic rule in African Kingdoms, which investigated governance by *“fear and violence”*. The aim of this mode of governance was to stop potential disobedience pre-emptively and *“break the power to resist”* (1969, p.10).

So one may wonder, how do such regimes of fear occur in the first place and how do they gain enough support from within a given society? Sluka writes that, often cultures of fear arise out of state terror in colonial, post-colonial or 3<sup>rd</sup> world contexts, this is for example evidenced by the extensive literature from Latin America. Moreover, there is often an extensive ideological machinery in place, which provides justification for the state’s abuses. Further roots of collective anxieties lie in war and violence, such as those caused by US intervention missions,

for example (Sluka 2000). Very important in the context of this research is Sluka's assumption about the maintenance of order, which is compatible with what I described above: "The basic characteristic of cultures of terror is that these are societies where "order" (more precisely, the order of stratification or social inequality) and the politico-economic status quo can only be maintained by the permanent, massive, and systematic use or threat of violence and intimidation by the state as a means of political control." (Sluka 2000 p. 22).

Another important point to consider in this regard, is the issue of conformity and its consequences. Walter found that, "The terror regime creates a context, in which a person must choose between the lesser of two evils – the obvious dangers of resistance, or relative safety and the potential advantage of cooperating with the regime; "the subjective alliance he makes with the officials shatters the solidarity of his own social group and reinforces his active cooperation with despotic power" (Walter 1969, p. 286-287; Sluka 2000 p.16). In other words, people have the tendency to cooperate with regimes. This becomes particularly clear when there is something to be gained from cooperation, but it inevitably has an adverse effect on social relationships and the society's wellbeing. Accordingly, I would now like to take a look at some of the long-term effects of state terror; how it is remembered and made sense of.

## Memory and Trauma

The literature on trauma is very broad and encompasses trauma experienced in a wide range of regional, temporal and cultural contexts. For the purpose of this thesis, I am briefly examining trauma which is primarily caused by the state and its

supporters. Here, I would like to explore the intersection between medical and political anthropology, so to speak. Understanding trauma, begins with an investigation into memory, how and if it is recalled.

Kirmayer (1996) investigated the distinctive features of childhood trauma compared to the trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors. Childhood trauma in general is associated with forgetting, memory lapses and mental escape, whereas symptoms of Holocaust trauma tend to be overwhelming and ever-present in sufferer's everyday lives. The most intriguing argument Kirmayer makes, is the way in which memories are recalled and made sense of. While childhood trauma survivors often struggle with shame, stigma and wider social repercussions of their experiences, the trauma narratives of Holocaust survivors have received more extensive acceptance and are seen as an active dealing with collective trauma. Therefore, it can be expected that the open recognition of the trauma suffered during the atrocities of the NS regime have gained a high level of social acceptance. Kirmayer argues that the symptoms of childhood and Holocaust trauma differ significantly, which is partly due to the "landscape of memory" that they are embedded in. These landscapes of memory are culturally constructed. The psychopathology does not differ significantly, but it is dependent on the socio-political context, in which memories are recollected and retold. He explains that, "Landscapes of memory are given shape by the personal and social significance of specific memories but also draw from meta-memory – implicit models of memory which influence what can be recalled and cited as veridical. Narratives of trauma may be understood then as cultural constructions of personal and historical memory" (Kirmayer 1996, p.5).

In his investigation, he looks at cases in which childhood and Holocaust trauma coincided, and makes an interesting discovery. In one case where a person recalled the suffering experienced as a child during the Holocaust, yet emitted particular aspects of the trauma narrative, the recalling of trauma was selective, leaving out the experience of rape. Therefore it can be seen that the retelling of an experience is highly dependent on notions of shame and humiliation, and what is deemed “socially acceptable”. “When the costs of recollection seem catastrophic for self or others, memory may be sequestered in a virtual (mental) space that is asocial, a space that closes in on itself through the conviction that a telling will ever be possible. Dissociation is the sequestration of memory in a virtual space shaped by the social demand – and personal decision – to remain silent, or to speak the unspeakable only with a voice one can disown.” (Kirmayer 1996, p.24).

So, here we can see that there are two distinct spheres in which the recalling and, most importantly, the retelling of trauma occur. There is a “public space of solidarity” versus the “private space of shame”. Each of these spheres is highly culturally constructed. To gain any understanding of trauma, it is therefore important to note, “if a community agrees traumatic events occurred and interweaves this fact into its identity, then collective memory survives and individual memory can find a place (albeit transformed) within that landscape. If a family or a community agrees that a trauma did not happen, then it vanishes from collective memory and the possibility for individual memory is severely strained” (Kirmayer 1996, p.25). Under such conditions, it is extremely problematic to deal with private trauma.

In the context of trauma that occurred during GDR times or shortly after, this realisation is extremely significant. Firstly, due to the deep infiltration and influence of the Stasi in the private sphere and people's most intimate personal lives, an element of shame is almost inevitable in the recalling of experiences. Secondly, we must note the deep ambiguities encountered in the East German context (Gallinat 2013). Memory of the GDR and the engagement with the legacy of the SED-regime, are therefore problematic. The deep contradictions of life under socialist rule, created a complex landscape of memory, in which the retelling of trauma is a highly political and personal act (Gallinat 2013). Indeed, Gallinat and Kittel (2009) say that "Memories will often reflect tensions that individuals experienced during the socialist past as well as since." The question of legitimacy plays a major role in this context – was one an opponent or a supporter of the regime? Is one's suffering legitimate?

Gallinat is critical of oversimplifying GDR memory. She asserts that there is no simple categorisation of supporter or opponent of the system. Contemporary debates about the GDR lack depth, especially when it comes to understanding the more complex social repercussions. GDR life was multifaceted and we must be careful not to overemphasise the Stasi in the memory of the GDR. Certainly, they played an extremely significant and impactful role, but for many, memories of life in the socialist regime encompassed much more: personal relationships, growing up, feeling at home and a sense of belonging, personal milestones such as marriage, having children, as well as divorces and deaths. Gallinat accurately points out the two main public discourses in East Germany, which can be categorised into the two distinct binaries of *Aufarbeitung* and *Ostalgie*. One is the political effort of

reworking and coming to terms with the past, while the other one is a feeling of nostalgia for socialist everyday life. In reality however, East Germans memories and associations do not fit these oversimplified official discourses. Gallinat highlights how people may feel pressured to take on one or the other memory of the GDR. She warns that a sole emphasis on the memory of suffering and subjection can be problematic: "Due to the emotional power of its messages about suffering this discourse has, however, become part of the narrative framework and for individuals to be recognised as morally acceptable beings they have to acknowledge the 'dictatorship' when talking about the GDR." (Gallinat 2013, p.160). As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is this ambiguity, which makes East Germany an interesting but also very complex region to investigate. With this thesis, I hope to add new insights to the study of the former GDR, how it is remembered and made sense of.

As my ethnographic case studies demonstrate, many of those who were exposed to intense pressure during the SED-regime saw the fall of the Wall as a chance for a new beginning. So, there was a tendency to concentrate on making a life in the new, reunited Germany. Thus, distancing themselves from negative memories of the past.

Neil Smelser (2004) has extensively engaged with the issue of the mass denial of trauma. Repression of trauma is displayed in various ways and much has been written on the symptoms and behavioural patterns associated with it. For instance, those affected often show a tendency of attraction to - or avoidance of - situations that resemble the traumatic event. "One of the peculiarities that has been noticed in connection with acute psychological traumas is a very strong dual tendency: to avoid and to relive. There is an avoidance of situations or places which remind the

victim of - or resemble - the traumatic experience. At the same time, some people experience a strong compulsion to repeat the trauma or some aspect of the experience (Smelser 2004, p.53). Interestingly, this has been seen in trauma patients on a personal level, but also on a broader societal level. Further distress is caused by the constant pressure to avoid and deny the experience of a frightening or violent event. Based on this assumption, “traumatic feelings and perceptions, then, come not only from the originating event but from the anxiety of keeping it repressed” (Neal 1998, p.5). Caruth (1995) has found that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Neal 1998, p.7).

Smelser reflects for instance on the memory culture of West Germany, and asserts that there was a systematic denial of trauma after the Second World War (Smelser 2004). He explains that in the post-war years, there was an initial focus on moving forward, and rebuilding of the country. Especially with regard to the Holocaust, the tendency was to “forget”, “deny” or simply “an unwillingness to remember”. Both in East and West Germany, during first years after the War hardly any dealing with the personal traumas of destruction, violence and displacement took place. Here, we may note that this lack of engagement is beginning to be recognised increasingly through the display of intergenerational trauma. The recent emergence of German *Kriegsenkel* literature (literally meaning grandchildren of the war), explicitly deals with the silence surrounding traumatic experiences and the profound effects on the psyche and intergenerational family relations. For instance, Welzer et al. (2002), Bode (2017) and Baer et al. (2017) have explored these issues in great detail.

Although this thesis does not explicitly focus on this topic, intergenerational trauma of the war is undoubtedly a concern in the multi-layered landscape of trauma of East Germany and should be explored in detail in future research.

So, we can see that there is an inherent difficulty in recognising an event or a series of events of state terror as traumatic. This may be due to a political effort to repress a reconciliatory process, or a personal and societal denial of its occurrence, or indeed the nature of *trauma* as a diagnostic category may be limiting, in presenting the complexity of the problem. As I will discuss further in the later chapters of this thesis, trauma in itself is a controversial topic. Fassin and Rechtman (2009), for example, have discussed the difficulties of “trauma” as a psychological and social concept in great detail. Smelser, too, has reviewed the history of trauma research (Smelser 2004, p.56) and alluded to some of the issues of trauma as a diagnostic category. He writes, “If we regard the history of the concept of trauma in this constructed journey, we note a progression from the simple (and as it turns out erroneous) causal connection contained in Freud’s theory of conversion hysteria to a vast number of possible (not necessary) traumatic events and situations all funnelling into a single clinical entity (PTSD), which is manifested in an equally vast number of possible (not necessary) symptoms.” (2004, p.58) Therefore, one of the main criticisms of “trauma”, is its unspecificity. As I will elaborate later, many scholars have argued for an expansion of sub-categories of trauma. For the purpose of this chapter, I would like to look at some of the literature on collective trauma caused by state terror.

Jeffrey C. Alexander has written extensively about trauma as a social theory. In his edited volume (2012) he introduces various cases of social suffering from around

the world, including accounts of trauma from the Holocaust, Maoist China, and the India – Pakistan conflict. Alexander notes that collective trauma does not always originate from a single event, but instead it can, for example occur in multiple instances while a particular event unfolds. Or, interestingly, even before anything happens. Indeed, some traumatic events may just be “imagined”. On these occasions it is often the fear that something *could* happen, which has a traumatizing effect. Alexander links this to Anderson’s concept of *imagined communities*, commonly found in nationalist history which often asserts “the existence of some national trauma”. He writes, “in the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry for revenge.” The accusations usually target some “putatively antagonistic ethnic or political group” (Alexander 2012, p.8). What Anderson describes is wholly imagined, yet it serves to feed into nationalistic ideology. In terms of collective trauma, “imagination informs trauma construction just as much when the reference is to something that has actually occurred as to something that has not. It is only through the imaginative process of representation that actions have a sense of experience.” (Alexander 2012, p.9)

It can be said that something is regarded to be traumatic (real or imagined), because “these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity” (Alexander 2012, p.10). Cultural trauma is therefore a social process, in which one or several events significantly harm a group, leading to a social crisis, which turns into a cultural crisis in other words, “trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collective’s sense of its own identity” (Alexander 2012, p.10). As I will argue in this thesis, this has been the case in East Germany.

Alexander lays out, what he calls the “trauma process”. This process illustrates how trauma is recognized and constructed. At the beginning is the harmful event, which is then called out in the “claim”. While making the “claim”, particular individuals report on the nature of the traumatic event. “It is a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstruction.” Such claims are made sense of, by so-called “carrier groups” (Alexander uses Max Weber’s terminology). These carrier groups facilitate the meaning-making process that occurs, before any public representation of the cultural trauma can take place. Part of this “trauma process” is the determining of the nature of pain, who the victims are and the attribution of responsibility. Once some public recognition of the suffering has been achieved, representation becomes possible in the various institutional arenas, such as religious, legal and scientific arenas, as well as through mass media and state bureaucracy. Still, stratificational hierarchies continue to exist. This is exemplified by the uneven distribution of material resources and within social networks.

The process of trauma recognition and representation is not straightforward and there are many obstacles to overcome before an “identity revision” takes place. A failure to accept collective trauma and the inability to incorporate its repercussions into the collective identity, are not dependent on the actual nature of the original suffering, but rather a failure in completing the “trauma process” that Alexander describes. Such a disruption in the “trauma process” is very common, as it can be seen in the cases of Japan, China, Rwanda and many other countries, where victims make claims to be recognised, yet the so-called “carrier groups” fail to acknowledge

their suffering. This is seen when the perpetrators of the traumatic events, fail to take responsibility for their actions, or straight out deny that the event took place at all. For many East Germans the trauma process also has not been completed yet.

As mentioned before, there is a wealth of literature from Latin America concerning state terror and accordingly its long-term consequences. In *"Layers of Memories: Twenty years after Argentina"* Jelin and Kaufman, shed light on collective trauma originating in the brutality and terror of the past dictatorship. They question how memory is produced and constructed in a highly ambiguous and complex social environment, as they are found in Argentina. Their analysis attempts to make sense of the process of "societal remembering (and forgetting), looking at the various *levels and layers* in which this takes place" (Jelin & Kaufman 2009, p. 89).

Here trauma sufferers face some similar paradoxes to those Germans are confronted with. In Argentina, while victims strive to be recognised, perpetrators of the regime continue to deny the existence of traumatic events and their emphasis to forget the past, dominates the public discourse. In addition, there is the persistent denial of ever having known about what was happening at the time. Thus, shedding any responsibility for ever having been part of the system: "The confrontation is between the voices of those who call for commemoration, for remembrance of the disappearances and the torment, for denunciation of the repressors, and those who make it their business to act as if nothing has happened here" (Alexander 2012, p.12).

One of the long-term consequences of collective trauma is the further manifestation in the form of cultural trauma. Piotr Sztompka has conducted research in Poland, studying trauma as the result of social change after the collapse of communism. He describes how even revolutionary change initiated by the people can have traumatic effects. Sztompka writes, "But even when change of regime is originating from below, realizing aspirations of the people, it inevitably engenders some forms of cultural trauma, as it clashes with deeply embedded, thoroughly internalized, earlier "habits of the heart" (Tocqueville 1945 (1835); Bellah et al. 1985), which create, at least temporarily, the "learned incapacity" to follow cultural imperatives of the new system." (Sztompka 2004, p.163) Postcommunist societies exemplify this condition. Although the collapse of the Soviet Bloc was celebrated as a success, leading to benefits and progress for all, it inevitably led to a traumatic change for (at least some segments of) post-communist societies. What Bourdieu (1984) called "habitus" continues to be deeply ingrained in people's lives, as well as ideologies and ideas about the right conduct in everyday life. Closely related to the "trauma process", Sztompka introduces the idea of the "traumatic sequence", the trauma experienced by a society as a result of a sudden, abruptly experienced change. He writes, "Trauma thus is neither a cause nor a result, but a process, a dynamic sequence of typical stages, having its beginning, but also – at least potentially – its resolution." (Sztompka p. 168)

Sztompka lists some of the after-effects of cultural trauma: In the first instance, people feel "*anxious, insecure and uncertain*", this may display itself in the "phenomenon of moral panics". Secondly, high levels of distrust towards people and institutions are common. And finally, "the collective identity is challenged and

re-shaped". Feelings of "apathy, passivism and helplessness" become prevalent leading to, general atmosphere of hopelessness and pessimism about the future. At the same time, nostalgic voices become louder, praising the good things of the past (Sztompka 2004, p. 166).

The "generational turnover" is another significant aspect in the trauma process. It can be described as the process in which the radically contradicting, differing new ideas, as well as the new political and social order challenge old beliefs and convictions. "This means that the powerful impact of culture derived from earlier history, and internalized by the generations whose lives were spent during its prevailing grip, may become much weaker as the new generations emerge, raised under different conditions, the changed, reformed society. This process running parallel to the traumatic sequence becomes very helpful at the stage of overcoming trauma and achieving final reconsolidation of a culture." (Sztompka 2004, p.169)

### **Coping with Post-communist trauma**

Sztompka asserts that there is a "trauma of collective memory, with strong sentiments of guilt or shame, self-righteousness or forgiveness, concerning the communist past." (Sztompka 2004, p. 183) He believes that post-communist trauma is in its healing phase. Yet, claims that as long as the cultural gap between socialism and capitalism still exists in post-communist countries, a complete healing is not possible. More importantly, a generational turnover needs to take place. "*Cultural ambivalence* or *split* between the heritage of the 'bloc culture' and the democratic and market culture fades away or disappears may we expect lasting healing of the post-communist trauma" (Sztompka 2004, p.193).

Although I agree that collective communist and post-communist trauma is beginning to be worked through in Germany, I feel that there is still much to be done, both in terms of healing and addressing personal and cultural trauma. While silence persists the trauma process cannot move forward. Smelser points to Freud's works on repression, who argued that repression leads to neurosis, preventing a successful healing process. (Smelser 2004, p.50 -51). In contemporary diagnosis, too, the repression of trauma is associated with PTSD.

One may wonder, whether East Germans are in fact trapped in a state of liminality. Thomassen encourages us to consider that the transition from one type of political system to another can create a state of liminality (Thomassen 2009). The healing of trauma must occur by solving problems in the "outside" world, but significantly, also on the "inside" (Neal 1998), allowing people to move forward. Despite trauma's initially negative impact, it does hold the potential for social change in the long-run and as I will show in this thesis it may also create resilience and strength.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the theoretical debates that this thesis addresses. Taking into consideration Hannah Arendt's study of the *"Origins of totalitarianism"*, I would argue that the neo-totalitarian state certainly also used terror as a form of governance.

As the ethnographic evidence in this thesis will demonstrate, on the one hand there is a self-perpetuating system at play ("auto-governmentality") that led the population to conform and discipline itself, in order to keep the system intact and the façade of socialism upheld. On the other hand, there is clear evidence of state

terror in the form of interrogations, extensive repressive and intimidating techniques used by the Stasi, torture and imprisonment. Here, the state (as well as the Soviet Union as a superpower controlling the GDR) clearly committed crimes against its own population. So, despite the fact that “the state” is an illusive concept, it still holds significance here, especially when we consider individual cases of extreme repression and abuse. I argue that East Germans suffered from state terror, leading to individual and collective trauma.

On an individual level, we see post-traumatic symptoms caused by direct observation, repression and abuse by the Stasi, as well as suspected surveillance (see trauma of the imagined in Alexander 2012). Some of the evidence in this thesis further points towards the occurrence of personal trauma as a direct result of the regime’s mode of governance, even provoking traumatic experiences years after the collapse of the state (as I will discuss later in regards to revelations made by viewing Stasi files).

On a collective level, again, traumatic experiences are manifold and indeed, I would argue that East Germans suffered collective trauma from the intimidating and destructive large-scale measures of the Stasi and the regime as a whole. Further trauma ensued after the fall of the Wall due to fundamental social change in the wake of the collapse of socialism, creating uncertainty and further cultural trauma.

## Chapter Three:

### Life in the former German Democratic Republic: Emerging themes

From my ten main informants' life histories, I have chosen the following three ethnographic vignettes to illustrate some of the main themes that have emerged throughout my fieldwork. These life histories, despite being quite unusual, display the essence of what many East Germans were confronted with before and after the fall of the Wall.

It is important to note that their stories are by no means representative of all East Germans. Instead, I have decided to present these three cases to demonstrate some of the meaning-making processes and spacial – temporal factors involved, in shaping social, psychological and political trends in East Germany.

#### Ideology and State Control

In the first life story, Frau M. formerly a devoted socialist who migrated from Australia to the GDR, readily accepted betrayal and denunciatory practices to serve the socialist cause. Her fears and childhood trauma (specifically, having been forced to flee Nazi Germany), led her to cling onto a set of beliefs she thought would provide the solution for all human suffering. For her, socialist ideology seemed to be a remedy for the pain and suffering of displacement and war years she had endured. But being a part-outsider in the GDR, she not only came to realise over the years her own role in the system of control and repression, but also the destructive forces that were poisoning personal relationships throughout society as a whole. Frau M.'s accounts were ripe with examples of the self-perpetuating and reinforcing control of the Stasi among the population, leading to self-policing and an acquiescence to

control in everyday life. Her break with the East German secret services became a further turning point in her life. Her troubled past continues to impact her mental wellbeing severely.

This example shows on a smaller scale, how personal circumstances during the Nazi regime and in post-war years also shaped many East German's beliefs and motivations. For some, socialism was a beacon of hope. The building of a new, better state was a substantial incentive to create a system of control in the first place for showing loyalty to the state and complying with the system. But, as Frau M.'s story demonstrates, the ideal and reality did not coincide. The negative consequences of real life socialism coupled with the psychological burden of living in a dictatorship caused disillusionment, blind conformity, and apathy. Only a few people came to realise these dangerous tendencies within the state and stood up against them, eventually leading to the breakdown of the regime.

### Betrayal and Distrust

The second account concerns the remarkable story of Herr K., a so-called *Fluchthelfer*, who helped over 50 East Germans leave the repressive regime with the aid of elaborate escape plans, engaging in James Bond-like missions. His astounding story demonstrates, on the one hand, the ingenuity and determination of a man who put his life at risk to help others. On the other, it highlights the conditions of sheer desperation and anguish that these ideas sprang from. He helped his parents and other GDR citizens flee the injustice that he had experienced, without ever expecting anything in return.

While he was selfless in his pursuit, others around him acted in self-interest and placed state ideology above the value of trust or personal relationships. The trauma he experienced was, therefore, two-fold. First, he suffered immensely under the dictatorship in the GDR and later on from the Stasi's persecution and repressive techniques, leading to an unstable sense of self, anxiety and severe distrust of others. After the fall of the Wall, the second traumatic breakdown ensued. Viewing his Stasi files provided some shocking revelations. Since his retirement, like many others, he has begun to delve deeper into his past by researching his archival records. Over the years, and through several applications at the BStU<sup>3</sup>, he uncovered some ugly truths about people whom he had previously trusted.

Like many others, he had to come to terms with extreme betrayal. At the same time, his continuation of relationships with those who betrayed him demonstrates the human capacity to suppress feelings and consciously ignore certain realities in order to move forward and (in his specific case) to save a familial tie.

### Trauma and Resilience

In the third vignette, I explore the traumatic story of a woman who was subjected to the arbitrariness of the regime at a very young age. Frau L. was forced to witness her parents' unjust treatment and was exposed to intense social pressure by those who supported the dictatorship. Even as a child, she had to experience isolation and rejection from those who became so deeply ingrained in the GDR's system of indoctrination and control that they lost sight of their essential humanness. Soon

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<sup>3</sup> Abbreviation BStU stands for Federal Commissioner of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic, also known as the Stasi file archive

she saw the state as an enemy that separated her from her parents, and that restricted her life significantly. Even years later, the aftermath of the regime's impact on her profoundly affects her personal wellbeing. Her East German identity continues to be an ambivalent issue in spite of the intervening years.

Though she was still battling her ongoing emotional trials, what stood out to me in our conversation was the way she laid emphasis on the positive personal gains of her experience, especially with regard to her relationships with others. Despite her experience of disloyalty, her childhood taught her a great lesson about human character. She found that even though many people were conforming to the dictatorship at any price, there were also a few who were very consistent in their behaviour. They disregarded the possibility of being persecuted, acting on their moral standards as opposed to state-ordered behaviour. Like some of my other interviewees who endured adverse circumstances in the GDR, her narrative was one of hope and resilience.

### Ethnographic vignettes

The following section consists of these three biographical accounts. All stemmed from interviews conducted in 2014.

#### **Case 1: Ideology and State Control**

*"I reported on my husband, the man who was the father of my children..."*

*Frau M.*

I was slightly afraid of my first encounter with Frau M. I had spoken to her on the phone a few times, and she was always a little abrupt. Until then, my other

informants had been very kind and welcoming. She was a little more brash. She demanded to know why I had not called back sooner, and anyway she was busy right now. I could call back later.

When we finally agreed on an appointment, I made sure to arrive very punctually. I was a little surprised when I saw the area she lived in. It's a popular tourist area, which has been taken over by many hip, creative young professionals most of whom are not originally from the city. The area where she lives, has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years and sometimes it is easy to forget that there are people who have been living here for decades.

I arrived at the turn of the century block of flats at 3 o'clock on the dot and climbed the old creaky staircase. Frau M. already stood in the door-frame awaiting my arrival—a small, sturdy woman with short greyish-dark hair. She greeted me and told me to come in, put down my things, and please take off my shoes. The flat had an unusual beautiful *Altbau*-style layout with high ceilings. The interior was old-fashioned and sparsely decorated. Her living room had a large old bookshelf and many books, newspapers, and old cassette tapes floating around the room.

In her very matter-of-fact manner, she told me to sit. I gave her my information sheet to read and told her that my work would be written in English. I then went on to explain what I was interested in finding out. She silently watched me and listened. All of a sudden she said (in English) "So, we can speak English". At first, I thought she might have learnt English somewhere, but as she continued to talk, I could make out from her accent and vocabulary that she must be a native speaker. I

asked her why she spoke such good English. Surprisingly she answered that she grew up in Australia.

After this short introduction, she began recalling her life story in a very factual and structured manner. She told me that she was Jewish, born in Germany, and as a child forced to flee from Hitler with her family. She also stated that the flight from Germany was a severely traumatising experience. After a long, tedious journey, they arrived in Australia, where she spent most of her youth and young adult life. From an early age, she was fascinated by socialism and believed that it was the only ideology that could lead the way to achieve equality, peace, and freedom for humankind. She had close relationships with a group of communist men known as the Dunera Boys, who had initially arrived in Australia onboard the HMT Dunera.

The story of the Dunera Boys is quite fascinating in itself. At the beginning of the second World War, as fears over a German invasion grew, and Britain was afraid of housing enemy spies, it ordered a ship to take German nationals away from Europe. However, the operation was hasty and chaotic. In July 1940, the HMT Dunera (originally with a capacity for 1600 passengers including crew), took away 2000 mostly Jewish refugees. On board the highly overcrowded ship were also prisoners of war, around 200 Italian fascists, and 251 German Nazis. Without originally knowing where they were being sent, these people eventually ended up as internees in Australia (BBC 2010).

"After a 57-day journey in appalling conditions, during which the ship was hit by a torpedo, the internees' eventual arrival is regarded as one of the greatest influxes of academic and artistic talent to have entered Australia on a single vessel." (BBC 2010)

Onboard were many extraordinary personalities who later became renowned scientists, authors, and sportsmen. Among the passengers was, for example, Anton Walter Freud, grandson of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who wrote about the Dunera's journey in his unpublished memoirs (BBC 2010). The story of the Dunera boys became a scandal in British politics and the government eventually apologised, offering them to stay in Australian camps and wait until the end of the war or join the military.

Out of these passengers emerged a group of young, idealistic communists. Frau M. was a young woman and became infatuated with their ideas. She began to follow them and when the group decided to move to the GDR, she decided to join them. By 1945/1946, they were sent back to Europe, finding themselves in an *Aufbruchsstimmung* - an atmosphere of starting afresh. Frau M. was quickly taken by this euphoric mood.

*"The atmosphere at the end of the war...after the main 1945 wars... we had fought this war so that never again, shall there be fascism, shall there be wars, shall we have depressions...we the people are now going to let us take it in our own hands and not let all the capitalists keep it all for themselves.*

*The post-war years were... there was an atmosphere of great hope...*

*Zuversicht..."*

Though it was the beginning of the Cold War, Frau M. applied for immigration to the GDR several times. To her, the GDR represented the hopeful new beginning of a better social order. She was denied entry for the first few years. Then eventually, when she was in her early thirties, she was permitted to move to the small socialist

country. In her Stasi files, she later found that the state was highly suspicious of her, yet she had already begun reporting to the Stasi.

*"Anyway... they couldn't really believe that anybody would want to live in their country...which is what I read in my Stasi file... and I arrived and they then let me in in 1963 after I had already worked for the Stasi since 1961 and ... so that they should believe I was a real communist but whether they believed me or not, was not a question.... And I arrived there naïve, blauäugig ...believing all the propaganda because my comrade... was telling lies. I needed 20 years to realise that ... I was living in a police state."*

Nonetheless, she quickly moved on to work in a prestigious position in the national trade department as a translator. She believed that she was helping the GDR accomplish the "building of the socialist state" by working as an unofficial collaborator (IM) for the Stasi. At the time she was entirely convinced by the cause. She spied and reported on everyone around her—family and friends and even her husband.

I asked her what motivated her to do this and she said that it was out of the conviction that this was the only true and right thing to do. It was her firm belief in socialism, she claimed, that drove her to do it. However, by the late 1970's she realised that the GDR was not the state she had thought it would become. She saw all the contradictions of everyday life and the injustices imposed upon people. She encountered suffering and repression, just as there had been in the former dictatorship. Having had the experience of growing up in a democracy, the state control of the GDR became ever more apparent to her.

*"You have to understand that my experiences are very different to the ones of the normal GDR citizens. Or more to the point, not only were my experiences different, but my reactions towards those experiences were different."*

She had wanted to adapt to East German culture, but she came to realise that she was different, having been socialised in Australia, where one was not used to self-censorship and state influence to the extent she now rather unexpectedly experienced.

*"A normal GDR citizen was used to keeping his mouth shut. He was...he grew up with the fact that he was under surveillance and that the school and the state decided for him what his future was going to be like. These were all things that had nothing to do with me. I was over 30 when I came to the GDR, but I was already socialised out in Australia. And not told what not to do.... I thought for a long time that I could change my identity... but that was not possible."*

In addition to this realisation, she became aware of the toxic relationships she had had with the men who initially drew her to the country. She said that only much later when she received psychological counselling, did she realise that these men had been "father figures" to her and that she had suffered from her own form of "Stockholm syndrome" in which the victim sympathises with the oppressor.

The 1980s became a turning point in her life. It became increasingly difficult for her to justify the means to an end that did not match reality. Her troubling relationships and growing disillusionment with the regime finally led her to the decision that she could no longer continue to inform on others. Upon breaking with the Stasi, Frau M.

found herself in the midst of a crisis. She became suicidal and depressed. Eventually, she was forced to seek out the help of a professional. The therapy sessions provided her with many insights and realisations about herself and her life. She now knew that she had never really been able to come to terms with her traumatising childhood. Her early experience of "being uprooted and living in fear", continued to dominate her feelings and thoughts. She told me that the old fears are still inside of her, the same ones she felt when she fled with her family many years ago. Psychotherapy and reflections about her childhood helped her come to this conclusion and eventually led her to confess to friends and relatives that she had been informing on them to the Stasi.

*"We talked about my childhood... and I came to understand how much I had been driven by fear in my life. And by 1987 I was feeling very guilty indeed. I had helped to make this country a police state.*

*I went from one friend to the other and told them...*

*'Look, I want to tell you that I was working for the Stasi for 20 years... I reported on you as well.'*

Everything changed after she publicly revealed that she had reported on her friends and family to the Stasi. Some of her personal relationships were challenged. Soon after she finally overcame this time of crisis, the Wall fell.

Her case was particularly unusual in my work because not only did she openly admit that she worked for the Stasi, but she also gained a unique insight into GDR society—one which other people barely had, and certainly one not provided by my other informants. She saw the state with different eyes because she was not born

into the system. Unlike the majority of East Germans, she had grown up in a democratic country where it was possible to practice free speech. Life in Australia also did not involve the kinds of heavy restrictions as did life in the GDR. Indeed, many things that most East Germans consider ordinary made a strong impression on her. She did not see things as *"just normal"*.

As an example, she recalled one time when she was standing at the local airport and heard the announcements coming from the speakers. They told people (they didn't ask them) to take sharp objects out of their luggage before boarding the plane. The announcements were repeated in English, yet they sounded completely different in the two languages. In German, to her, it sounded like a demand or even an order, not just a piece of information that was brought to people's attention. Upon leaving the airport, Frau M. got into a taxi and told the driver about her sudden realisation. He simply laughed it off and said that was nothing unusual; it was *"normal"*.

Frau M. explained,

*"I was a translator and interpreter in the GDR, and I was asked to talk to foreign guests. And one time I brought a foreign guest to the airport ...and I had just said goodbye to them and then suddenly heard through the microphone a voice saying in a rough tone, "Es ist verboten Messer, Scheren und spitze Gegenstände im Gepäck mitzunehmen..." Es wäre eine Verletzung der DDR Gesetze und wird bestraft. Sie erwarten das alle Passagiere dieses Gesetz einhalten". The tone of this shocked me. (...) Ok, I just noticed this and*

*then I heard the same sentence again but in English. First of all the tone wasn't there... I was interested how they would translate ...'Sie erwarten...'*

*And what it said was 'We ask passengers to' in other words... and as I had often done in my translations, to pretty up the whole thing."*

*"I walked out of the airport... I wondered, what is it that...that... shocks me.*

*What is that I'm objecting to, really?*

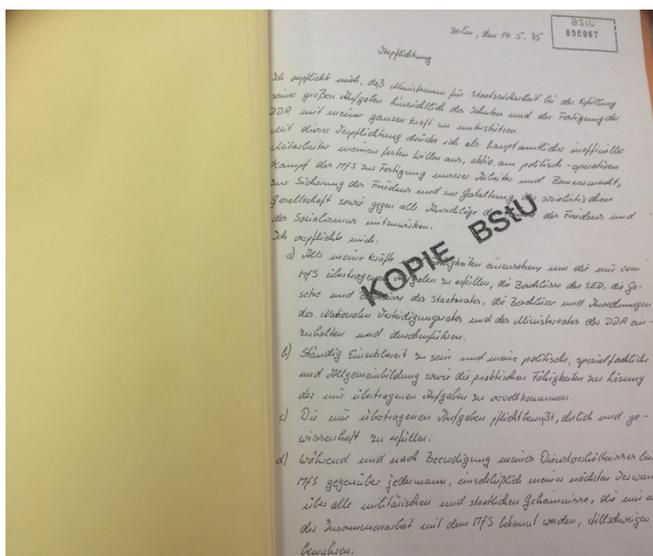
*And I walked to the taxi. I was working for the ministry of culture at the time, and spoke to the driver. I told the taxi driver what I had just experienced. And I ask him, does this "Wir erwarten...", this expression, 'do you also object to this?' and he laughed and said "no, not really I went to GDR children's holiday camps and they always used this sort of terminology there, so I got used to it!"*

She points out that this simple situation portrays how people normalised state control in their lives, and even accommodated open aggression. This has been particularly true of the generation that had been born in the GDR and had spent a significant part of their young adult lives in the country. She described that this inevitably had an impact on interpersonal relationships, leading people to be cautious and distrustful.

*"I felt I was being oppressed by that sort of language and that sort of tone. But he didn't. It was normal. Just the same, it also became a normal part of peoples' lives to know that those who were their best friends could very well be...also...be reporting about them to the Stasi. So it was very tricky to make new friends ..."*

She stressed the destructive force that state control had on personal relationships, saying that there was a general atmosphere of distrust. She had herself been very much involved in this system until she could no longer bear the guilt.

Frau M. made quite a grim and at times even unfriendly impression on me. She seemed miserable. After hearing her life story, though, I could understand why it is hard to interact with her. It was clear that she was still very much preoccupied with her past. She repeatedly told me about her psychological problems and how her suffering never ended.



Her extraordinary story demonstrates the powerful impact propaganda and ideology can have on young minds. As a young woman, she truly believed that she was fighting for an honourable cause. Her traumatising past,

fleeing Nazi Germany, re-enforced the striving for a new better world. With her outsider's perspective, she soon came to realise the dangerous system of control she had become a part of. In the GDR, state control was accepted as normal.

Frau M. is very critical of both German dictatorships these days. She sees the purpose of her life now, to tell the younger generation about the history and suffering of the past to ensure that there would be "no forgetting". She is now very

active in the Jewish community and has written a book and appeared in many TV interviews.

## **Case 2: Betrayal and Distrust**

*Herr K.*

Arranging my first meeting with Herr K. was quite unusual. I had received his contact through the Berlin-based organisation *Zeitzeugen Börse e.V.*. Before I could even reach him, I already received a phone call. Without much of an introduction, he asked what my project was about, briefly listened and then said "OK, when and where shall we meet?". After noticing that we live relatively close to each other, he stated that he would prefer to come and see me at the place where I was staying. Unlike my other informants, he did not give anything away about his background before our meeting.

On the day, he arrived very punctually at my house, carrying a black briefcase. We went and sat in the living room. And although he made a friendly impression, he was noticeably reserved. When we sat down with coffee to begin our interview, he told me that he was not sure whether his story would be "useful" to me. As I always did when I heard this statement,<sup>4</sup> I simply said, "anything you say is useful". He unpacked various books and papers, which he laid on the table. After showing him the research information sheet, he quickly began telling me his story.

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<sup>4</sup> During many interviews interlocutors were at first reluctant in sharing their stories. They would often say that it may be "irrelevant" or "not interesting". In general, I interpreted this as an expression of caution, and also a way for them to gauge what my intentions were.

He was born in 1941, and despite having only been four years old when the war ended, he could still remember everything very well. He described his childhood and the way he and his friends would roam the streets and forests while their parents were working and rebuilding the country. Although these were difficult times, he seemed to have had a free and enjoyable childhood. He then went on to describe his adolescence and his apprenticeship in a communication technology company that he began as a 14-year-old boy. He proudly told me about a little flag that he had received as an award for being the best apprentice. Not much later, he decided to join a congregation of young Christians ("Evangelische Junge Gemeinde") to the dismay of the political leadership in his region. At the time, he did not conceive the far-reaching consequences this would have. But, soon after, he lost his job. His story was even published in a newspaper, as a warning to others. He then began studying at a university in the West Berlin, while commuting from the Soviet Occupation Zone (later GDR).

One weekend in 1961 he went on a trip to Warnemünde on the Baltic Sea with his friends from the church youth group. For them, the religious aspect of the group was not so important. They just enjoyed going on trips together: swimming, playing table tennis, and so on. They did not seek contact with the state or politics; instead, they just enjoyed spending time together. But it was not long before the shocking news reached them that the border had been closed and a wall built, separating East and West Berlin. Hearing the news, Herr K. quickly made his way back. He arrived in East Berlin on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August by train, which was strictly monitored by police and military. In the city, he recognised the hopelessness of the situation. In the coming days, he was informed that he would no longer be able to study at a

university, but instead, would be expected to join the army. So, as soon as an opportunity arose, he fled to West Berlin.

He passed through the Notaufnahmelager Marienfelde<sup>5</sup> and in West Berlin, he quickly began a new job, earned money, got himself a place to live and continued to study. At this time he was still in touch with family and friends in the East, though the separation from his loved ones was very tough. He read me one of the letters from his parents that he had kept, written in 1962. As he read it, he became very emotional. Their desperation to leave the East was clearly palpable in the lines he read. His mother was very ill, had heart problems and could barely walk. She was not receiving the right medication in the GDR. Of course, she would have never been able to escape by climbing fences and walls, but he was determined to get her out. He came up with an elaborate escape plan. For this, he got a car with a fake number plate, changed his appearance and took up the identity of a foreign diplomat. He underwent lengthy preparations including getting a fake diplomat passport, gaining graphics and printing expertise and learning enough English to get by without arising suspicions of the border guards. He even tried to adopt certain "diplomat characteristics". After successfully bringing some of his family members to the West, he continued this endeavor, eventually bringing some 50 East Germans across the border, smuggling back large quantities of medications over the following years.

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<sup>5</sup> Emergency Refugee Centre Marienfelde received East German refugees arriving in West Berlin, where they completed the formal procedure to obtain residency permits for West Germany and West Berlin.

He told me how people pleaded him for help. There were families with small children and many difficult cases, but he was lucky enough never to be checked at the border and successfully took them to the West. An elaborate and time-consuming activity.

*"Ich Weiss nicht ob sie sich vorstellen können, wie die Leute sie anflehen können...da waren Eltern mit kleinen Kindern... also ich habe schwierige Fälle geholt und wir wurden nicht kontrolliert."*

*"I don't know if you can imagine how people can beg...there were parents with small children...so I took the difficult cases and they didn't check us."*

Yet, these undertakings were only possible because he regularly changed his identity and appearance. He was always sure to conduct all his missions alone, and not many people knew what he was up to. Back in the time when he was still living in East Berlin, the Stasi noted in his family's file that they were deemed "*negative Elemente*", possibly "negative elects of society", but in general there was no reason for them to put him under intense surveillance—not yet at least.

Now, however, the Stasi were frantically searching for the person who was helping so many people escape. In the beginning, they found it difficult to track him down and to know whether it was a single person conducting these elaborate deceptions. Although he was in West Berlin, he became a highly suspicious person to them. Increasingly he found that his room in the student halls was searched, and his things were looked through, but he ensured that they were unable to find anything. The Stasi were trying to find out his real identity, but they were not sure if he was the

one they were looking for. The fact that the person they were looking for lived in the West, made it hard for them to know his background, exactly where he came from, and what his name was. Only through undercover spy work, they slowly got an idea of what the name of the person they were searching for might be. They had a list of different versions of a name that spies had overheard in various conversations. In his Stasi files, he found that they had an operation running to observe him – his code name was "*Adler*" - "Eagle". He read the passage from the copy of his file to me. It was a detailed description of his person, but it was clear that they did not know who he truly was because of his ever-changing identity. Sometimes he would enter the GDR with a foreigner's passport and leave with a diplomat's passport, always crossing at Friedrichstraße – Checkpoint Charlie – a crossing that was only used by foreigners.

At some point, he became aware that the Stasi was about to close in on him. He told me that what eventually lead them to find him was, on the one hand, a denunciation from someone close to him and, on the other, his carelessness ("*Unvorsichtigkeit*") in his pursuit to help others.

He read a section from his file written by an 'IM', an unofficial collaborator, who was watching both him and his GDR network. In the report, the IM was sharing intimate details about his sexual encounter with a woman who he believed to have been in contact with Herr K. Indeed, Herr K. later helped her escape, but had not known her previously. He had been asked by her Austrian fiancé to help her get out of the GDR.

When the time of this woman's arranged escape finally came, the Stasi was close on their heels. The records illustrate in great detail how the woman got into his car and

where they travelled. He had finally been unmasked, and now they did everything in their power to try and catch him. He read the section of the dramatic chase from his file—how they were following his car, and how he stopped, got out, and confronted them, asking why they were following him. At this point, he felt superior to them because he thought it would not be easy for them to arrest a diplomat. Yet they continued following him and even tried shooting at his car. He managed to escape, but the experience changed everything for him. He was no longer safe, and he knew that he could not continue as he had previously.

He realised that someone had probably denounced him, but he had no idea who it could be, so he distanced himself from everyone he knew. It was the beginning of a long period of isolation and severe distrust. He says that he became *"psychotic and could trust no one"* -*"ich wurde psychotisch, ich traute gar keinem mehr"*. He was afraid to stay in touch with anyone and broke contact even with close relatives. Today he regrets rejecting their attempts of speaking to him.

*"I regret it today... even when my relatives tried to get in touch with me, I rigorously dismissed them".*

*"Ich bedauere es heute...auch bei Verwandten die Kontakt aufnehmen wollten habe ich es rigoros abgelehnt".*

Shortly after Germany's reunification, he finally had the chance to view his *Stasi* files. The shocking revelations from his past caused him to have a severe psychological breakdown. He says that viewing the files broke him.

*"After this file-viewing after the Wende, I was broken"*

*"Nach dieser Akteneinsicht nach der Wende war ich eigentlich kaputt".*

He found out who eventually revealed his identity to the Stasi: it had been his own sister. She lived in the GDR and in general, he thought that they had a good relationship at the time. So, he offered to take her and her family to West Berlin too. She declined the offer. But he did not know that she was also reporting everything to the secret police. All of their interactions were on record. As early as 1962, she reported that he had sent her a Christmas parcel and even any harmless postcard was delivered directly to the Stasi as he later found in his files. The ministry gained a lot of information about him this way, and at some point, they were able to put two and two together and figured out that he was the person they had been frantically searching for. Soon after the Stasi identified him, an intense manhunt began. From then on it was their goal to catch him or do anything in their power to stop him from taking more people to the West.

Not only did they attempt to shoot him, but they also began using repressive operative techniques on him, even while he was living in West Berlin. He experienced house searches and a variety of intimidation methods, which put him under immense psychological pressure. He was no longer sure whom it was safe to trust. In our interview, he revealed how isolated he became for years. Only when he met his wife, did he begin building new friendships.

In the records, he found that still in 1984, 20 years later after the incident, he was being observed. He read that he had also been denounced by people in his sister's network, especially by his niece. Apparently, she was building a house at the time

and wanted to show her appreciation for the state. In order to gain special permissions, she repeatedly reported on him, and this led the secret police to start an entire operation on him. Herr K. Said that this was traceable through the archived reports which had been passed along various regional Stasi offices and departments.

To this day, he suffers immensely from the consequences of the persecution. He is still very cautious in his personal interactions and only recently has he found the courage to get back in touch with his friends from the past. To me, his story truly demonstrated the destructiveness that distrust, generated by the state, can have on personal relationships. He described the complicated relationship that he and his sister continue to have to this day. He never confronted her with his discovery that she was the one who betrayed him. He thinks that it would be pointless, as she would deny everything since she *"still believes in socialism"*. He says that even today she still has a subscription to the former official party newspaper: *"Sie ist heute noch Abonnentin von Neues Deutschland"*. Nevertheless, he continues to stay in touch with her. He says that he does it out of a sense of obligation because she is family. He and his wife visit her twice a year, but for him, it is tough every time.

He says that her attitude towards him continues to be very negative, even when he tries to please her with small gestures. During GDR times he had even bought a car for her, which she happily accepted but never showed thanks. He says that talking to her is pointless, as they always end up arguing. When I asked him how he would describe their relationship, he stated that superficially they are relatively friendly; but under no circumstances is their relationship "normal". Too much had happened. He recalled one time when he visited her, and she was hosting a garden party, which

many former Stasi officials attended. He told me that this event made him sick and gave him nightmares for weeks.

To me, this continuation of a relationship even in the face of the most severe betrayal is particularly striking. In East Germany and many other post-socialist states this is common because the lines between victim and perpetrator were so blurry, everyone played some role in the system. Therefore, silence and to a certain extent even denial are common. In this thesis, I will explore how this can be interpreted as a continuation of years of state-imposed silencing, secrecy and social control.

Speaking to Herr K., I got the impression that trust and distrust still play a very significant role in his life. He still seems to suffer under the burden of his inability to trust friends and family, feeling uncertain of who is "really on his side". Even in our interactions, I could sense caution (e.g., in phone calls and emails he did not mention his name) and he told me that he had never given an interview before and was unsure whether he would do it again. The interview was very emotional, and he was visibly shaken by recounting his memories. He told me, now that he is a pensioner, he has begun to engage more actively with his past. He has for example made a scrapbook collecting photos, newspaper articles, copies of archival records and personal accounts. Perhaps this engagement is a way to come to terms with his trauma.

Still, Herr K.'s example demonstrates, like no other, the extent to which the pain and sorrow of the past can continue to impact a person's wellbeing in the long term. At the same time, it illustrates how the human psyche can suppress certain realities even in the face of severe betrayal. The example of Herr K. is quite dramatic, yet it

gives a glimpse into the way in which many East Germans choose to move forward and even continue distrusting relationships. As I will show in this thesis, this denial and silencing surfaces in many situations, one example is the fact that many East Germans refuse to view their Stasi files for fear of finding out something disappointing about somebody close to them.

### **Case 3: Trauma and Resilience**

*Frau L.*

I conducted this interview in a small central German town. Frau L. was a close friend of the family that I was staying with. She was an elegant, well-kept woman in her mid-forties. At first, she studied me carefully and left me with a reserved impression. Our host had prepared coffee and water on the dining room table, so she just helped herself and seemed to feel quite at home. This relaxed the atmosphere a little.

I presented her with my information sheet and briefly explained what my project is about. So, in turn, she began asking me several questions about why I am doing this, how I came up with the research question, and where exactly I am from (East or West). I felt a bit like she was testing me, even trying to understand my true intentions. I readily explained everything to her, and she seemed more or less satisfied.

She then began recalling her childhood and told me that she had two siblings. One year they went on vacation to the Baltic Sea, just as they had always done. When the holiday came to an end, her parents announced that they had managed to get an extra visa for Hungary and that they would all go there to visit a relative. So they,

indeed, made their way towards the Hungarian border. In reality, her parents had obtained fake passports from an organisation based in West Germany, which claimed to help GDR citizens to get out of the country. They made a lot of money by selling fake papers to those who were desperate to escape. Yet, shockingly, at the same time they actually received money from the Stasi, as they would expose their clients to them. So, whenever someone had obtained a fake passport and attempted to leave, the secret police were already informed and ready to strike at the border crossing. Of course, for those affected, this had serious consequences. As any "illegal" attempt to leave the GDR was deemed a criminal offence, this meant that these individuals would be prosecuted. Frau L. told me that years later, one of these exposed East Germans who had been imprisoned by the Stasi for "*Republikflucht*" tracked down the leader of the criminal organisation, which supplied the Stasi with information, and shot him dead.

My informant's parents suffered a similar fate. When they approached the passport control, they were quickly found out by the border guards. Before the eyes of their children, they were arrested. They were then all flown to Berlin, where her parents were imprisoned. The children were to live with their grandparents. The entire situation was very traumatic for her and her siblings, as she recalls having been terrified. The sight of her parents being handcuffed is a painful memory. At the time she did not understand what was happening, in her mind, her parents had not done anything wrong. Following the arrest, the children were not allowed to see or speak to their parents, only later were they allowed to write one letter a month, which was read and censored by the authorities. Life with their grandparents was very strict, as they were devoted socialists and party members.

Luckily, due to an official state amnesty on a national celebration, her parents' prison sentences was shortened from 3.5 years to 1.5 years. When they were eventually released from prison, they were reunited with their children. Her experience with those surrounding her during her parent's imprisonment and after their release was two-fold. There were those who were very much pro-GDR - "*Systemtreu*"<sup>6</sup>. After what they had done, the family were regarded as criminals.

In the small town, her grandfather was a very well-known and respected man. The news of his son's attempted escape spread fast, and the family became the talk of the town. He was afraid that the reputation could harm his career, and upon the couple's release from prison limited contact with them, especially since his son had applied for emigration. Frau L. described that, especially amongst their relatives, many decided to act in favour of the state as opposed to the family. Some, who already had to deal with disadvantages—such as academics, or those who were in the opposition movement—also distanced themselves. These people were already on the Stasi's radar, and their involvement with the family could have exposed them to further repression by the secret police. Many people turned away, stopped speaking to them, and they eventually lost touch. This feeling of rejection was a prominent one during this period of her childhood.

It is remarkable, that in spite of Frau L.'s traumatic account of severe betrayal and injustice, she made a point to embrace the positive gains she received from the experience, especially in regard to certain relationships. Although she had experienced rejection from some people, others acted in the complete opposite

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<sup>6</sup> Literally means being loyal to the political system.

way. First and foremost of this group was her best friend. When Frau L. first moved to her grandparent's house, she dreaded going back to school after the summer. In the small town where she lived, everyone knew what had happened. People pointed at her on the street and spoke behind her back. But this particular friend stood by her no matter what everyone said. Although she was only a little girl at the time, she showed great strength of character in this situation. On the first day of school, she rang her doorbell and picked her up to walk to school together as if nothing had happened over the summer. She told her: *"You were my friend before. Nothing has changed, you will always be my friend"*. This gave her hope and showed her that there were people who could be trusted even in such difficult times. They shared a special bond, strengthened her belief in people.

*"Well, the time when they were in prison was very uncomfortable because people showed (how they felt). Just imagine that in this society, many people were very politically loyal...they then looked at my family and to them we were practically criminals. We felt that, of course...but I have to say there were also really great friends..."*

*"Die Zeit danach war...ähm... na ja die Zeit, als sie im Gefängnis waren, (war) insofern auch sehr unangenehm, weil alle anderen das auch sehr gezeigt haben. Wenn man sich vorstellt, dass ja diese Gesellschaft oder sehr viele davon natürlich sehr politisch treu waren,...die haben dann auf mich oder meine Familie geguckt und (wir) waren für viele dann praktisch Verbrecher. Das hat man natürlich auch zu spüren bekommen, ...wobei ich auch sagen muss, es gab ganz tolle Freunde..."*

She believes that this behaviour and how one handles such a situation is a matter of character. Some people just make a decision and are consistent in the way they approach their relationships. For her, her loyal childhood friend is the prime example of this, as she continued to live in such a manner, even until today, while others were afraid of disadvantages or perhaps they simply chose to be loyal to the political system.

*"Everyone has to come to terms with their own behaviour. It is a matter of personality. There were those, like my friend, who said 'You were my friend and you will stay my friend, nothing will change'. She continued living her life that way and then there were others, who did not handle it like that...whether this was due to disadvantages or to be politically loyal to the system, I don't know."*

*"Das Verhalten muss jeder mit sich ausmachen. Das ist eine Entscheidung des persönlichen Charakters. Da waren so welche wie meine Freundin, die gesagt hat, 'Du warst meine Freundin und bleibst auch meine Freundin, da ändert sich nichts.' So hat sie auch (ihr) ganzes Leben weiterhin gestaltet und dann gibt es andere, die das nicht so gehandhabt haben,...ob wegen der Nachteile oder Systemtreu, ich weiß es nicht."*

Eventually, after the application period (to emigrate) passed, she and her family were finally granted permission to leave the GDR, which came as a great relief. Still to this day, she has intensely negative feelings towards the GDR and East Germans. She avoids going to Eastern Germany whenever she can and thinks that most Easterners are still very different from Westerners.

She said that her traumatic past in the GDR continues to impact her life significantly. First, in the way she sees the East and the way its history is dealt with in public discourse. She feels that there has been no real effort to engage with the past. Second, the fact is that East German is still part of her identity, even though she does not like to be associated with the GDR in any way. She told me how she always hesitates when people ask about her place of birth. In her profession, this question is often asked and carries significant meaning. She said that she hates having to say that she was born in the East because people immediately draw conclusions about her in the West, assuming she studied in the GDR. To her, this is still a burden.

Her story gives great insight into human nature. Although Frau L. undoubtedly still suffers from the injustice endured, she places great emphasis on the strength and resilience of human character and that even in the most adverse situation certain people can be counted on.

So, these brief case studies illustrate how East Germans manifested their beliefs or indeed became disillusioned with the socialist state. The stories give an indication of the broad spectrum of experiences, while reflecting the main themes that emerged time and time again, throughout my fieldwork. In the following chapter, I would like to take a more detailed look at surveillance in the GDR.

## Chapter Four: The Ministry of State Security (MfS)

To gain a better understanding of surveillance practices in the former GDR, this chapter will examine the Ministry of State Security's work, how it was perceived by East Germans and their attempts at coming to terms with its legacy through the engagement with personal records. Chapter four is comprised of three parts: Part I briefly reviews the institutions' mode of conduct and governance, Part II shows ethnographic accounts about former GDR citizens' perceptions of surveillance and Part III engages with the records in the Stasi file archive.

### Part I: The Ministry of State Security or "Stasi" - A brief introduction

The German Democratic Republic (GDR), was essentially a one-party state, ruled by the Socialist Unity Party (SED) for four decades. The GDR's living conditions were relatively good compared to most other socialist states of the time. Nevertheless, life in the small country was characterised by oppression, shortages, and social and environmental problems (Baer 1992; 1995). The state's leadership severely mistrusted its population and as a result built a massive security apparatus, aiming to take control over all areas of life.

The socialist ideology of the productive *Arbeiter und Bauernstaat* (Worker's and Farmer's state) was enforced through strict employment and family politics. Socialist propaganda was widely distributed: in the workplace, on television and radio, newspapers, schools and universities. The state infiltrated and interconnected all areas of life by, for instance, linking companies (*Betrieb*) with schools and kindergartens and sending all children to the same summer camp. Similarly, co-workers would spend their summer vacations together at designated holiday homes

(*FDGB/ VEB Ferienheime*). By merging work and private life, the state exercised maximum control and influence on the population, and could at the same time “foster a sense of community” (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*).

Virtually every aspect of life was to be transformed to fit the new “socialist state”. The aim of creating a “real existing” socialist state was achieved by taking a highly systematic approach. Indeed, the state followed the concept of the “Scientific Socialist”, a uniquely systematic, scientific approach to creating a socialist economy but also the political police system. For instance, “in the Stasi regulations on the IMs, the words that recur (such as *planned, concrete, rational, quality control, precisely directed, effective conspirational*) have a distinctly social scientific ring to them. The intention of the Stasi seems to have been to create a ‘scientific’ and thoroughly modern approach to obtaining ‘complete coverage’ of the country” (Gallately 1997, p.212).

Therefore, to ensure that all citizens adhered to the new ideology and obeyed the restrictive law, an efficient, but ruthless, secret police force was employed. The Ministry of State Security, in colloquial terms known as the “Stasi”, was founded 1950. The institution was the main pillar in the state’s aim to gain full control and influence over the GDR’s population. They were considered the “shield and sword” of the SED. The MfS was built and established under the guidance of the Soviet secret service (later KGB). It served as the national internal secret police, prime investigating agency and foreign secret service. It had its own interrogation prisons and even armed forces (BStU 2014).

The Stasi spied on GDR citizens by reading their mail, tapping their phone lines and bugging their homes, house searches, following their every step and prying on their personal lives by gaining as much information as possible through undercover spies (Kowalczyk 2013; BStU 2013; Funder 2003). To make mass-surveillance on such a large scale possible, the secret police was an ever expanding institution. In 1989 there were approximately 91 000 official employees and at least 189 000 unofficial collaborators also known as IM, “and perhaps ten times that many occasional informants” (BStU 2014; Rosenberg 1995). There were also IMs in West-Germany who spied for the Stasi in the West. The ministry received support in its endeavour from the country’s police force, the customs office and many other GDR institutions. There were approximately 2171 mail readers, 1486 phone tappers and another 8426 phone and radio broadcast monitors (Rosenberg 1995). The ministry’s actions permeated all areas of GDR citizens’ lives in its strive to eliminate any “negative enemy elements”. (BStU 2016 - Stasi File Archive). Anyone who was critical of the regime was seen as an enemy of the state leading to potentially horrific consequences for them, their friends and families.

In the early years of the Stasi's existence, the ministry primarily made use of overtly hostile and aggressive control methods. But, as time went by, the SED leadership made a conscious effort to improve its reputation and gain international acknowledgement. It was decided that the Stasi's techniques needed to become more subtle and coercive to uphold the image of a state, which honoured human rights and valued peace. Open aggression was to be avoided. Instead, the ministry developed and executed covert and less obvious methods of control and repression (BStU 2016).

One such method was known as "*Zersetzung*", which was characterised by the exertion of extreme psychological pressure and based on principles of so-called "operative psychology"<sup>7</sup> (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 200, p.51). This involved the application of principles of social and clinical psychology and their deliberate misuse. The Legal and Police College in Potsdam developed the psychological techniques, which were used in observation and repression, as well as interrogations and imprisonment. Doctoral theses were written on political dissidents and the effectiveness of psychological techniques in interrogations and other operative methods (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.56). The aim of "*Zersetzung*" was to destabilise the personality of those who had undesirable convictions and who were deemed as "opponents of Socialism", employing psychological "dissolution", the Stasi was supposedly combatting hostile ideologies (Behnke & Fuchs, 1995). With the abuse of these psychological techniques, the main aim was to damage a person's principles of self-worth by focussing specifically on a person's weaknesses. They wanted to elicit self-doubt (Gauck, 1991) and destabilise their enemies (Galletely 1997; Trobisch-Lütge 2010). The Stasi also intruded deeply into people's private lives by searching their houses, moving and removing objects, creating further feelings of uncertainty and fear.

For those targeted by the operative processes, adverse social conditions were created, such as social isolation, psychological insecurity and damaging personal reputations. They, for instance, blackmailed people using letters or recorded phone conversations. They spread rumours and false accusations, caused problems in or

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<sup>7</sup> MfS jargon: 'operative Psychologie' - psychological techniques to aid and develop operative processes (OV)

hindered careers, and interfered in children's educational advancement (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009; Behnke & Fuchs 1995; Fuchs 2009; Gallately 1997).

The secret police even made use of so-called "Romeos", men (and women) who started affairs with a targeted person or their spouse in order to deliberately break up marriages or



relationships. Sometimes they forged love letters, which were sent to a couple's address aiming to provoke conflict. Other personal relationships were also destroyed by "sending compromising photos and anonymous letters with false allegations to friends or neighbours, or fostering malicious gossip that the alleged "enemy" worked for the Stasi, was a counterrevolutionary, or had a "loose tongue" and could not be trusted" (Gallately 1997, p.214). Most notable is the fact that these "operations were designed to mobilise ordinary men and women beyond the ranks of the police to put pressure on suspects and to destabilise those defined as enemies".

Peters (1991) considers the Stasi's methods as a systematic form of torture. He lists the Stasi's destructive methods as follows: Interrogations, ostracisation, abuse, embarrassment, social degradation, execution of unlawful actions/lack of justice, conveying feelings of uncertainty of fate, threatening lives and defamation. Indeed, some of those considered political dissidents were imprisoned under terrible

conditions, this is evident in former prisons such as Berlin Hohenschönhausen (central remand prison of the GDR), Bautzen, colloquially known as the "*Gelbes Elend*" - "Yellow Misery" or Hoheneck (women's prison), naming only a few. Here, forms of torture involved being locked up in small spaces in the cold and darkness, sleep deprivation and switching the lights on and off arbitrarily (at night time) (Peters 1991). Until 1987, a death penalty existed in the GDR and in the course of the state's 40-year existence, the official record claims that at least 230 people were sentenced to death (stern.de 2006; welt.de 2013). The real numbers of how many people were killed are unknown to this day, as the Stasi is suspected to have planned and executed numerous murders by for instance manipulating car breaks or radiation (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.52).

The Stasi's torturous methods resulted in a broad range of harmful physical and psychological conditions. Peters (1991), for example, calls the long-lasting negative effects a "Stasi-persecution-syndrome" - "*Stasi-Verfolgten-Syndrom*". According to Peters, symptoms include persistent fears and paranoiac persecution anxieties that can easily be triggered by particular situations, realistic fear and persecution dreams, emotional/depressed moods, sleep disorders, feelings of exhaustion, suicide attempts as well as social distrust and feeling misunderstood by one's surroundings (1991, p.251). Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge (2009), Trobisch-Lütge (2010), Priebe et al. (1996) and Freyberger et al. (2003) also conducted detailed investigations into the long-term consequences of so-called "political traumatisation" resulting from imprisonment and persecution. In this thesis, I shed light on exactly these traumatising experiences that my interlocutors encountered during the SED-regime (and after the fall of the Wall). It is important to note here,

that it is this unique systematic socio-psychological approach of the former East German state security service, which sets it apart from any other secret police force.

Gallately (1997) studied and compared the denunciatory practices of the NS secret police - the Gestapo, and the Stasi. He found that although a few similarities between the institutions exist, there are also some significant differences. The Stasi used more sophisticated psycho-social repressive techniques. They systematically pressurised and oppressed citizens on a large scale. It was their aim to destabilise their victims both in their social standing and psychologically, something that the Gestapo did not engage in, to the same extent. The Stasi's approach was an entirely new form of policing. Most interesting is the way in which people responded to this extreme pressure: self-policing within the population became the key aspect mass-surveillance in the GDR.

No doubt during the Nazi regime pressure was also exerted, yet in a far less organised fashion. As Gallately writes, "for example, against spouses in mixed marriages with Jews – but such tactics were not employed quite so systematically as in the GDR. The preferred method under Nazism was the less 'socialized', more 'individualized' one of marking, exclusion, confinement, and destruction" (Gallately 1997, p. 214). Of course, it must be emphasised that GDR repression did not come close to the Nazi terror of persecution and extermination. Differences can be observed in the use of the general population for denunciatory practices. The Gestapo relied on unofficial collaborators who voluntarily provided information on an occasional basis. However, such services were not subject to many guidelines. "Leaders of the Nazi police issued no more than a handful of guidelines and reminders in the press on the topic of denunciation, and in fact much of the concern

was to warn people about offering false information or making careless charges" (Gallately 1997, p. 211). In contrast, the Stasi's use of "unofficial" sources was highly regulated with hundreds of guidelines (1997, p.211). Contrary to the NS secret police, they viewed "casual collaborators" with a large amount of scepticism, shedding some light on the high level of paranoia and distrust that the SED-regime felt towards its own citizens and even Stasi people. Indeed, the ministry spent a considerable amount of time and resources on "preliminary investigations and background checks" of unofficial collaborators. "Stasi boss Mielke often alluded to the "wisdom" of such (alleged) Cheka procedures. Various kinds of reliability tests continued throughout the career of the IM. This thorough, systematic approach represents a dramatic contrast to the practices of the National Socialist period" (Gallately 1997, p.212).

In the GDR there was an aim to create and mould humans into becoming "good socialists" who obeyed to the regime's laws and rules, no matter what it would take. This was the justification behind the widespread use of destructive Stasi techniques.

Overall, what set the work of the East German Ministry of State Security apart from many other institutions of state surveillance, was its highly systematic and regulated nature, as well as its far-reaching psycho-social repressive techniques. Large scale participation of the general population led denunciation to become institutionalised. The result was, therefore, as Gallately suggests, that the GDR became a panoptic, "self-policing society" (1997, p.210). As I show in the following chapters, this had wide-ranging, long-term consequences. Indeed, Gallately points out, "these psychological aspects of self-policing- involving subjective psychological dimensions such as self-surveillance, self-discipline, and self-censorship of

behaviour, opinion, writings, and even thoughts seem to play a very important role in modern dictatorships but so far have received relatively little attention" (Gellately 1997, p.220).

Indeed, as I argue in this thesis, due to the unique socio-psychological approach of the East German secret police, control and monitoring of (and within) the population became normalised, creating adverse conditions both for GDR citizens' individual and collective wellbeing.

## Part II: Ethnographic Findings

*"I was helping to build a just society in which there would be, not only, no war and antisemitism but also where there would be equality and greater justice... A better world!" -*

*Frau M.*

In this ethnographic study, I have been particularly (but not exclusively) interested in the impact that the large number of undercover agents had on the population. It was especially conditions of uncertainty, not knowing whether the person you were interacting with could be trusted, which exerted pressure to conform and made the building of personal relationships difficult. But what motivated people to report on their friends and family? In the GDR this was not straightforward, as I will show in the following chapters. Reporting and being reported on were perceived in a variety of ways.

Surveillance was an unquestioned reality in Eastern Germany. Everyone was to some extent aware of state control and its enforcement. As I will show through numerous

examples, this control became normalised over the 40 years of the country's existence. Additionally, the extent to which individuals experienced state power varied significantly. This diversity paints a complex picture of East Germans' psychosocial realities, not only regarding the perception of surveillance then, but also of the way the state is seen retrospectively. It makes East Germany an incredibly exciting region of study because its social history embodies the complexity and contradictions of human interactions, rarely seen elsewhere. This study reveals the human capacity for betrayal as well as for forgiveness—hope and desperation along with indifference and the suppression of realities, feelings, and memories.

Many believed the Stasi to be a necessary evil, to make the socialist cause possible. The state institution provided security and order. By fulfilling their duties, the unofficial collaborators (IM), showed their loyalty to the regime. One informant told me about her occasional involvement with the Stasi during her professional work in the foreign trade department. At the peak of the Cold War, many trade restrictions were imposed on the Soviet Bloc. The GDR was particularly affected by the embargo on new technologies. To her, a devoted socialist, these limitations were grossly unfair. She wanted to build a socialist state that would grow and prosper and told me that she would have done anything to achieve that. The West had tried to slow their progress! She says that, had she been in the position, she would have worked with the *Staatssicherheit* to avoid these imposed embargo restrictions.

*“If I had worked there by chance, I would have committed myself completely to break through these embargo restrictions. Because they were unfair...only in order to cut us off of world development.”*

*"Wenn ich durch Zufall dort gearbeitet hätte, ich hätte meine ganze Person dazu eingesetzt, um mit Hilfe der Staatssicherheit diese Embargobestimmungen zu durchbrechen. Weil sie waren einfach anmaßend, ungerecht, ...nur um uns von der Weltentwicklung abzukoppeln." (Frau J.)*

To her, the *Staatssicherheit*<sup>8</sup> was a necessary institution in the state's ambition to achieve the socialist ideal. For others, the secret police and particularly its collaborators were a normal part of everyday life, especially within professional settings (*Betriebe*). I was repeatedly told about workplaces where several people reported to the Stasi but were apparently never secretive about it, and it was a commonly accepted fact. For example, a woman explained that individuals who had previously been imprisoned and were being "reintegrated", had to report to these designated employees who fulfilled duties for the Stasi in the workplace. Those who were supposedly being reintegrated into the collective were questioned on a regular basis and checked whether they were abiding by the rules. She did not see this negatively. Overall, she was rather indifferent towards surveillance. Surveillance was such an integral part of everyday life that it even became widely accepted. Like many others, Frau F. knew stories of acquaintances of whom she did not suspect their unofficial duty to the Stasi. Their collaboration with the secret police was found out after the *Wende*, and the revelations came as a surprise. Still, she had a sympathetic attitude. She explained that those were the people who had "*gotten up to something previously*" and were blackmailed by the Stasi. Here, she is alluding to the fact that people had no choice but to comply, explaining: "*Sometimes we'd say:*

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<sup>8</sup> "*Staatssicherheit*": A further abbreviation for Ministry of State Security

*that poor guy, he just couldn't say no*". This points to a sense of powerlessness that many East Germans felt towards this seemingly almighty state apparatus.

Moreover, surveillance was a part of GDR culture that everyone was aware of, but that was rarely discussed openly. The nature of spying inevitably involves an element of secrecy, silence and silencing. Frau F. recalled an occasion where she herself was pursued as a possible undercover informant. Despite the fact that she was aware that her husband had had an extremely traumatic history of mental illness and imprisonment after an attempted escape, the Stasi's proposal was not a big concern for her. The exact details of her husband's past were unknown to her because he had "signed a paper". In other words, he had signed a non-disclosure agreement about his arrest and imprisonment, so he never spoke of it again. The practice of silencing and denial even of the most traumatic experiences were commonplace.

The issue would be pushed aside seemingly carelessly. As Frau F. Said,

*"Oh well, whatever, one person or another gained something from it. It's like that in every state. If you are close to the state, you are likely to gain certain privileges from it. And yet another person just couldn't say no."*

*"Na ja was soll's, der eine oder andere hatte seinen Nutzen, das ist in jedem Staat so. Dass man, wenn man staatsnah ist bestimmte Vorteile davon hat. Und andere konnten nicht nein sagen" (Frau F.).*

Although Frau F. undoubtedly recognises the negative sides to state control, she is not openly critical of it. In fact, her view may appear rather opportunistic. She said people spied covertly because there was something to gain from it. She then went

on to explain in great detail about gifts that the Stasi gave out for providing information. Such presents could, for instance, be nylon stockings (*Dederon Strumpfhosen*), which were notoriously difficult to get hold of in the GDR. Of course, she claimed that she never received any such gifts. The act of reporting, in this case, is interpreted rather opportunistically as a means to an end, namely receiving goods, services or personal advantages. It was not done out of the conviction of the socialist cause. She blanked out the reality of what surveillance meant.

It can be said that in the advancing process of the normalisation of control in the GDR, feelings about Stasi spying were mixed among the population. While some viewed the Stasi as a necessary tool for the provision of state security and the advancement of the socialist cause and certain people enjoyed the perks they received by providing the occasional report, there were also numerous negative and highly traumatic accounts.

The most severe cases are to be found amongst individuals (or groups) who were actively repressed and surveilled (*Operativer Vorgang* and *Zersetzung*) and imprisoned. Through the systematic use of sophisticated psychological techniques, victims were frightened and intimidated, with the aim to destabilise their sense of self. This was, for instance, achieved through constant monitoring, spreading of rumours and breaking apart of relationships. Most significantly, those exposed to the repressive techniques were made extremely distrustful of their environment. Stefan Trobisch-Lütge, a Berlin-based psychiatrist who has been working with politically traumatised East Germans for years, likens the Stasi to the all-encompassing and intrusive nine-headed mythological snake Hydra, whose poison slowly spreads and taints all human relationships, even to this day (Trobisch-Lütge

2010 p.12). In his book *Das Späte Gift*, which literally translates to "The late venom" he shows how victims' emotional scars are reproduced in a number of ways, creating complex trauma which continues to impact lives severely.

Indeed, conversations with some of my interlocutors revealed the continuing impact of Stasi surveillance, especially on interpersonal relationships, as I have shown in the example of Herr K., the man who had been found out by the Stasi after helping over 50 people escape to the West. Although he was living in West Berlin, the Stasi were still somehow observing him, and his flat was repeatedly searched. He became increasingly fearful and paranoid. He knew that someone must have denounced him, but since he had no idea who it could be, he distanced himself from everyone he knew including family and friends. For him, it was impossible to trust anyone. He said *"I grew psychotic, I trusted no one"- "ich wurde psychotisch, ich traute gar keinem mehr."* Instead, he isolated himself because the incessant surveillance made him feel insecure. He was unsure where and when he was safe at all.

*"This non-stop surveillance, I didn't know where, in what place I was safe."*

*"Diese pausenlose Überwachung, ich wusste überhaupt nicht mehr, wo, an welcher Stelle ich sicher bin." (Herr K.)*

Indeed, this distressing state of uncertainty led him to cut ties with his relatives and close friends. In our interview, he was very emotional, as he now feels many regrets for having rejected their attempts at getting in touch with him. Only in recent years has he finally found courage begun to rekindle old relationships. For instance, now he meets his friends from the Junge Gemeinde (church youth group) once a year. He read extracts from several letters to me, by which he was visibly touched.

He read the beginning of one postcard that a friend had sent him. It hints at the fact that many of his old friends did not know where he was or what had happened to him:<sup>9</sup>

*"Hello..., you will be surprised by this letter. We plan to hold a meeting of the evangelical youth group of 1960 in Köpenick. Your address was not known to the organisers so that an invitation was not sent. If you're nevertheless interested in the memorable photographs and list of addresses, please call someone ... "*

*"Hallo..., du wirst dich über diese Post wundern, wir halten in Köpenick ein Treffen der evangelischen Jugend aus der Zeit von 1960. Deine Adresse war den Organisatoren nicht bekannt, sodass eine Einladung nicht erfolgt ist. Wir würden uns freuen, wenn du Interesse an den Erinnerungsfotos und der Adressenliste hättest, ruf doch mal jemanden an..."*

And a further letter from 2002 began like this:

*"Dear..., you were right in writing that I would be a bit surprised and at the same time I was quite happy. In 1962 we tried to make contact several times, but since there was no reply, we assumed that you surely had your reasons ..."*

*"Lieber..., mit Recht schreibst du, dass ich mich etwas gewundert habe und gleichzeitig ziemlich gefreut. Wir hatten 1962 einige Male versucht, Kontakt*

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<sup>9</sup> Name removed by author

*aufzunehmen, aber nachdem keine Reaktion kam, nahmen wir an, dass du sicher deine Gründe hattest..."*

*And another letter from a woman whom he had helped to escape: "Dear..., I would like to thank you for your Christmas greeting, I was very happy to receive it. Did you know that we were looking for you and your address for years? Apparently, no one knew where you were. I have always wanted to tell you how grateful and happy I am, that you enabled me to get to the West. With horror, I imagine how my life in the GDR could have ended. The gain of personal freedom in a democracy ... "*

*"Lieber..., ich bedanke mich ganz herzlich für deinen Weihnachtsgruß, ich habe mich sehr gefreut darüber. Weißt du eigentlich, dass wir dich bzw. deine Adresse jahrelang gesucht haben? Angeblich wusste niemand etwas über deinen Verbleib. Ich wollte dir immer sagen, wie dankbar und glücklich ich bin, durch dich in den Westen gelangt zu sein. Mit Grausen denke ich daran, wie mein Leben in der DDR sicherlich geendet hätte. Der Gewinn der persönlichen Freiheit in einer Demokratie..."*

These letters exemplify the great destruction that the Stasi's repressive methods had; tearing apart friendships and families. Surveillance did not just target one person, but quite often networks of people. This meant that especially family members suffered in the aftermath, sometimes even intergenerationally. As I will explore in greater detail in the following chapters, the regime's legacy is certainly one of generating widespread social distrust.

Frau L.'s account (Ethnographic Case Study 3) of her traumatic childhood experience exemplifies how she learned to hate the Stasi and the state she was living in at a young age. Her parents' attempted to escape, and imprisonment meant that the state separated her family and placed heavy restrictions on her life, even as a young child. At the time she could barely understand what had happened. Naturally, she did not see her parents as criminals. After all, her father was a doctor; she knew that he was helping people. He simply wanted to live in a just state. The adults surrounding her tried to make her believe otherwise. Later on, when her parents were released and officially applied for emigration, she was regularly asked to see the school headmaster who tried to convince her to sign a paper that would ensure that she would stay in the country even if her parents were allowed to leave. She says that these experiences impacted her perception of the state and the people who embodied it significantly.

*"When my parents were released from prison, I thought about it more. At that moment the state was my personal enemy since it had imprisoned my parents... How was I supposed to understand that at the age of twelve? My father was a doctor, he helped others and never killed anyone. He wanted to live in a just state. And so, we were certainly critical of the state and the people who embodied it..."*

*"Als meine Eltern aus der Haft freikamen, hab' ich mir da schon mehr Gedanken gemacht. In dem Moment war der Staat ja mein persönlicher Feind, er hatte ja meine Eltern verhaftet.... Wie sollte ich das mit zwölf Jahren verstehen? Mein Vater war Arzt, der hat anderen geholfen und niemanden umgebracht. Er wollte in einem gerechten Staat leben, und da haben wir*

*schon den Staat und die Menschen, die ihn verkörpert haben, kritisch gesehen...(Frau L.)*

Perceptions of spying varied temporally too. What was once seen as a fight for the advancement of the socialist state, could, upon reflection, be interpreted entirely differently. Not only did the system of control get more intrusive over the years, but the realities of life under socialist rule also came to light (i.e. shortages, injustice, repression). One informant (Frau M.) who was an undercover spy for many years (spying on close family, friends and even her husband) lived through such a radical transformation. It led her to confess the truth about the double life that she was leading, to everyone she knew.

When she confessed that she had spied on her husband, he was devastated. She told me,

*"He was very shocked. He didn't talk to me for months. He never really forgave me. We had already parted, but we still had two children." All these years he had not suspected anything. So I asked, "But he didn't know that you worked for the Stasi at any point?" She replied, "He knew that I was a very convinced communist and he tried to show me GDR realities, but he didn't know I was working for the Stasi. The Stasi forbade you to talk to anyone about it. I was quite scared... But then back in the 80's... I couldn't... It was against my conscience. And the people that I told it to knew that they couldn't tell anyone about it. Otherwise, they could get into a lot of trouble. "*  
*(Frau M.)*

The realisation that the GDR was not the state she had idealised previously led her to this decision. It was the knowledge that she was supporting a dictatorship with no freedom of expression, which laid heavy on her conscience. The recognition of the realities of the dictatorship and her active role in the system of control led her to grow increasingly doubtful, as she elaborated,

*"20 years experiencing the autocracy of the GDR, of the repression, of realising in 1984,... I had come to the GDR in 1963, that people were being put in jail for saying their opinions, telling jokes or whatever and that there was no freedom of speech, no freedom of expression, no freedom of the press. There was, in fact, no public voice in the GDR, eine Öffentlichkeit did<sup>10</sup> not exist in the GDR. This did not exist, nothing that was not dictated by the party."*

Indeed, she said: *"I felt my conscience telling me that I should tell the people who I had close contact to, what I had done, which I did...in 1987."* (Frau M.) So, eventually, she broke out of the double life she was leading, by confessing to those around her.

Her confession is quite exceptional; for many East Germans still living were at some point approached by the Stasi and informed on friends and family. This in itself could pose a great moral dilemma. What was the "right thing to do"? Was one to serve the state (and apparently the greater good) or was it better to avoid betrayal and protect loved ones from potential state violence? One informant, a successful

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<sup>10</sup> Public discourse

surgeon in a hospital, told me that, although he was fearful of the regime he still engaged in small acts of resistance.

He found ways to "*get around the system*" and could occasionally risk saying his true opinion because of his high position in the hospital. He was needed by the state and says that he could probably get away with more than many other people. He never joined the SED party, and even when the Stasi approached him for information, he did everything not to comply. He described one incident where he was approached by Stasi men on a ward round. They enquired about a young colleague from another department, suspecting that she may have fled the GDR. So they asked for him to call the surgery to find out if she was at work. He refused, excusing himself by saying "*No, she's young and beautiful, how would that look!? If I call to ask if she is around, by tomorrow, the whole hospital will be talking...*" In this way, he avoided the situation of telling on her. It was these small everyday incidents which may appear unremarkable, but in a regime such as the GDR, the consequences were potentially severe.

The repressive powers of the Stasi really came to the forefront in situations where they invested particularly great efforts to keep someone from leaving the state. This was seen when individuals applied for emigration (submission of an "*Ausreiseantrag*"). A 57-year-old woman told me that, upon handing in her application (*Ausreiseantrag*), an extended period of intense surveillance and interrogations ensued for her and her husband. Since she knew that the Stasi saw people who wanted to leave for political reasons as "State enemies", she was very cautious about what she told the authorities. She and her husband were regularly questioned by the Stasi and, knowing the risks, they made sure to say that they only

wanted to move to the West because they had inherited a house. They wanted to show that they had no political motivations whatsoever. In a long process of two and a half years, the Stasi continuously probed their true incentives and during questionings, posed various trick questions. Additionally, the Stasi employed a variety of techniques to make those trying to leave, feel insecure and discourage them from their decision. The agents left no option untouched, even attempting to destabilise the couple's relationship. She recalled that they would, for instance, ask her husband *"Do you really think your wife is always faithful? Is she trustworthy? Would you really want to go to the West with her?"*. Over the course of this application period, the ministry tried everything to convince the couple to stay in the GDR. They intimidated them with severe threats, yet again instilling a sense that Stasi informers were ubiquitous, that *"nowhere was safe"*. The officials told them that they *"had people everywhere"*, even in the West. They threatened them by claiming that people could track them down anywhere, even in hospitals. They even said things such as *"Sometimes people could just get run over..."* Until the application was approved, their family home was also under close observation and bugged, so they avoided having any meaningful conversation in the house. Instead, they usually went out into a field to talk in private, creating a very small niche of privacy for themselves. Under these extremely distressing conditions, interpersonal relationships were undoubtedly jeopardised.

In our conversation, she told me that she suspects that there were even IM's in her family, but she does not want to know who had reported on her. She is aware that their neighbours must surely have been approached too, but she and her husband

want to move forward, they do not want to view their files. The experience is in the past, and she thinks that they would not get anything out of it.

*"We never viewed our files, because we thought there was nothing to be gained from finding out who,... for example our neighbours...of course, they were questioned too. We said, we don't want to see the files, it's over."*

*"Wir haben unsere Akten nie angeschaut, weil wir dachten, es bringt uns nichts zu erfahren, wer, ... zum Beispiel Nachbarn, natürlich wurden die auch befragt. Wir haben gesagt, wir wollen die Akten nicht einsehen, es ist vorbei"*  
*(Frau T).*

Indeed, as I will show in the following section, the decision to apply to view personal records can become a traumatic experience in itself. Although numbers of file viewings are still increasing, it remains a debated issue in many East Germans' lives.

### Part III: Stasi Files: Records of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit The Agency of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU)

The Agency of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU) safeguards and administers the records of the former State Security Service of the GDR. In December 1991 the Stasi Records Act (StUG) came into effect and by January 1992 citizens were able to view their files for the first time. From 1991 up to the end of 2014, the archive received 6.91 million requests and petitions, out of which 3.05 million individual citizens requested to view and obtain their records. The sheer amount of surveillance material housed in the archive is astonishing. It amounts to 111 shelf kilometres (ca. 887 million pages) of documents as well as photos, negatives and slides (1.7 million); film, video and audio recordings (30.100); and



fragmented material in more than 15.000 bags (all information directly retrieved from BStU 2016).

The headquarters of the Stasi file archive are located near the former city centre of East Berlin - Alexander Platz. The BStU is based in a large, daunting, typical GDR-style building.

During my fieldwork, I had the

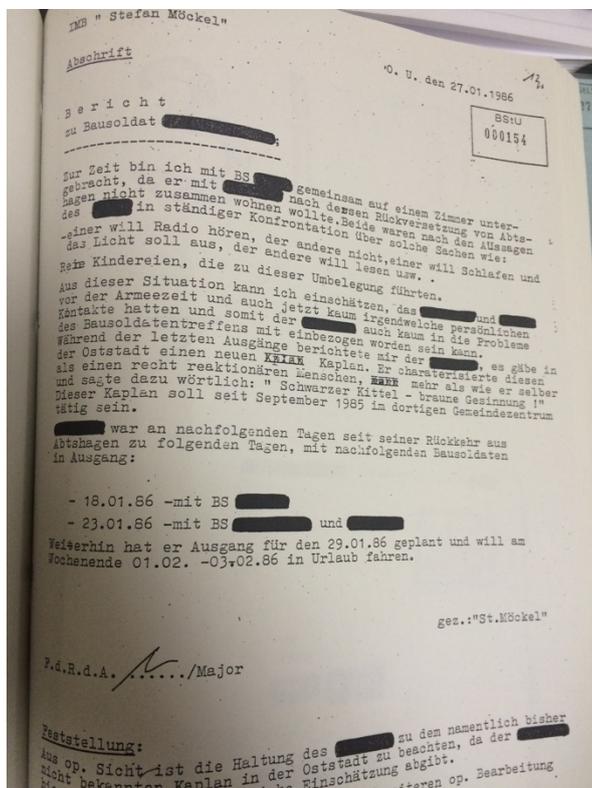
chance to visit the archive several times. One time, I signed up for an organised talk about the institution and a guided tour around the site. With its long, seemingly never-ending corridors, the place has a maze-like feel to it. Prior to commencing our tour, the guide warned us to stick to the small group in order not to get lost. He also advised us that a security guard would accompany us, throughout the walk. Also, should anyone feel panicked or unwell, there were chairs to sit on and the said person could be escorted out at any point. As we navigated through the long rows of shelves, stacked to the brim with papers and files, I understood how this place could create feelings of claustrophobia and panic. And indeed, a mere fifteen minutes into our tour, a woman from our group had an emotional outbreak. In tears, she voiced her frustration that the "archive hadn't handed out her file to her", she told us that she has been in an out of psychiatric treatment for years now and that she was still "not treated fairly". The tour guide, discernibly familiar with



this type of reaction, remained calm and collected. He enquired further, and it turned out that the woman had applied to view her files several years previously and none had been found. The BStU employee advised her to submit a further application. She was appalled. As we learnt, the material is continuously reconstructed and re-evaluated, this means that some people

have to apply to view their records several times. For a few, records are never uncovered because they are either lost or were deliberately destroyed by the Stasi when the regime broke down. This situation illustrates on the one hand, how victims of the regime continue to feel powerless and treated unfairly. Continued distrust seems to be felt towards state institutions and those who embody them, those affected are under the impression that injustice and arbitrariness persist. (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009; Trobisch-Lütge 2010). On the other hand, the woman's clear desperation and despair show just how difficult victims' healing processes are when no process of coming to terms with the past can take place. For some East Germans, the ability to view their file may relieve their feelings of uncertainty and empower them. East German civil activist groups immediately recognised the significance of citizen's records and called for access to them, as the peaceful revolution took its course.

Indeed, in a world-wide unique process, the former Ministry of State Security of the GDR (MfS) was occupied by demonstrators in 1989/90, forcing the dissolution of the secret police. The buildings of the central Stasi headquarters in Berlin Normannenstraße were occupied to stop the destruction of files, by the officials who tried to cover up their terrible deeds. Civil activists demanded for everyone concerned to have the legal right to access their records. And eventually, citizens' will and the freely elected parliament of the GDR paved the way for the



safeguarding and controlled opening up of Stasi files soon after (BStU 2016).

Applying to view Stasi records

The decision-making process to ask to view one's files at the Stasi archive is often a contentious and arduous one. What is at stake when you see your file? For some, there may be no records to be found or

only a small collection of

bureaucratic notes. For others, it can confirm existing suspicions, and for yet others, it can mean life-changing revelations. Out of my informants, all of whom knew that they had been subject to Stasi investigations (to varying extents), many viewed their own files or those of family members, and others did not.

Some already decided to apply in the 1990's, while the majority have only begun to engage with their past in recent years. As this generation has gotten older and

retired, some have felt more inspired to reflect on their lives. One of my informants said that now that he's retired he has enough time for in-depth investigations into the archival records of his life. As I mentioned previously, he even made a little book with letters, newspaper clippings, photos and copies of his Stasi files. He told me that he wanted to collect everything that could find about his life, for himself and his daughters.

Many others whom I interviewed and spoke to informally told me that they would rather not see their files. One woman who had moved to the West in the 1980's by being granted emigration, said that she wants to look forward. By the time the files became available, she had already worked through her troubling experiences years ago. In her mind, she had dealt with the issue for a while already. She would rather leave the past behind now.

Another woman said that she does not want to see her Stasi file for fear of being disappointed, she is afraid that she may have judged someone in the wrong way after all - *"It is the fear of being disappointed" - "Es ist die Angst darin Menschen zu finden, in denen ich mich vielleicht doch geirrt habe... das ist die Angst enttäuscht zu werden."* (Frau T.)

### **Shocking Revelations**

As mentioned previously, the possible revelations and repercussions of reports could range from minimal to devastating. Frau M. had spied on her friends and family, yet upon viewing her own file, she was surprised to find that she had been under observation herself. It had been a close friend, who had embarked on a similar quest to the GDR as her, in the hope of finding an ideal society and was later

disappointed with the realities of the state and committed suicide. When I asked whether she viewed her Stasi file, right after the wall came down, she replied: *"No, ...in the 90's I think it was. Not immediately."* I then asked whether she found that any of her friends had spied on her, she told me *"Only one person... that he had spied on me... it shocked me."* She went on saying, *"... he later committed suicide. He was one of the Dunera boys who came back from Australia and realized by 1980 that this GDR was not what he had thought for all his life."* (Frau M.)

A man from a town in Saxony, who had been imprisoned as a "political dissident" and was later 'bought out' by the FRG, also applied to view his files after the *Wende*. He, on the other hand, said that the revelations did not surprise him much. In the file he read that there were two main IMs who observed him. He had already suspected them previously; one of them was a woman he had worked with and had known for many years. She was a secretary in the construction company where he had been employed. Indeed, she had even openly discussed the fact that she was writing reports about him at the time. He explained that he felt bad for her because she "didn't have a choice". Apparently, she had had an affair with someone before, and the Stasi blackmailed her with that information, asking her to report on people.

As outlined above, Stasi spying did not only target one person alone but more often a whole network of individuals; it could be friendship groups, colleagues and entire families. This meant that numerous people could be directly affected by spy activity at once. As I mentioned previously, if denunciatory suspicions arose, it could negatively impact networks of people, fostering distrust and paranoia.

Not all were aware to what extent or by whom they were being targeted. In one narrative, a woman in her forties explained how her whole family was devastated by the revelations of their file. Upon viewing their records after the *Wende*, they found out that a very close family friend had been spying and reporting on them for years. None of them had had any idea, and the revelation came as a great shock. The sense of betrayal was worsened by the realisation that his activities had directly impacted her education and career opportunities in a negative way. She was a member of the *Junge Gemeinde* (Church youth organisation) and therefore not in line with the state doctrine. She found that he had been significant in the decision-making of not allowing her to proceed to the *Oberschule* (secondary school) or higher education. It was her dream to become a doctor, and she worked extremely hard to find a way to achieve this, volunteering for many hours at her local hospital and taking extra classes at the college (*Volkshochschule*). But all her hard work remained unrecognised and instead she was designated to do an apprenticeship to become a bricklayer. Eventually, after 1989, she was able to go to a West German university and realised her ambition.

At the time of viewing the file, the family friend had already passed away. Two years earlier he had suffered a heart attack, gotten into an accident, and died. His wife, who had been involved in the reporting activities, did not want to stay in touch or talk about what had happened. Frau D.'s family respected this decision and just let the issue go. But for Frau D. it is not as easy to come to terms with the past. It is something that still affects her, remaining a 'sore spot', as there are many unanswered questions. She wishes that she could have spoken to him and asked him about his motivation to work for the Stasi.

*"He himself was a surgeon. Two years before my parents read their files; he had a heart attack and it took his life. It becomes a sore point in one's life when you can't talk about it with that person anymore.*

*His wife, who seems to have participated too, broke off all contact with my parents very quickly. Yes ... Out of shame or something ... My parents have, of course, never tried again to get in touch with her to talk. It was very hard for her too; it took a bad course. She was not old when her husband died. A bad situation... But maybe it would have been easier if they could have talked with the person. Just to ask 'why did you do something like that?' ... It remains an unanswered question." (Frau D.)*

*"Er selber war Chirurg, er hatte zwei Jahre, bevor meine Eltern ihre Akte gelesen haben, einen Herzinfarkt und ist dabei tödlich verunglückt. Das bleibt dann so ein wunder Punkt im Leben, wenn man mit derjenigen Person nicht mehr darüber sprechen kann.*

*Seine Ehefrau, die da ja wohl mitgemacht hat, hat den Kontakt zu meinen Eltern ganz schnell abgebrochen. Ja...aus Schamgefühl oder was... Meine Eltern haben da natürlich nicht auch nochmal versucht, da Anstalten zu machen, sich mit ihr in Verbindung zu setzen, um mit ihr zu sprechen. Für sie ist es ja auch schlimm, für sie ist es dann ja auch sehr schlimm gelaufen. Sie ist ja noch nicht alt gewesen, als ihr Mann gestorben ist. 'Ne schlimme Sache, aber...vielleicht wär's einfacher gewesen, wenn man hätte mit der Person mal sprechen können. Um zu fragen, 'warum hast du denn so was gemacht?'... das steht jetzt so im Raum." (Frau D.)*

Looking back, the family has come to some grave realisations regarding the friendship they had entertained for many years. Right after the *Wende*, their friends had tried to let the contact die down. She and her parents had been puzzled by this behaviour, but upon reading the Stasi files, it all made sense now.

*"She blocked it and tried to let the contact with our family die down after the opening of the borders. And we did not know why they never had time, why they never came to Birthday parties anymore. But when one read the Stasi file, one could understand why." (Frau D.)*

*"Sie hat das abgeblockt und versucht, schon nach der Wende den Kontakt zu unserer Familie einschlafen zu lassen. Und wir wussten nicht, warum die nie mehr Zeit hatten, nicht mehr zum Geburtstag kamen. Aber als man dann die Stasi-Akte gelesen hatte, konnte man sich das alles erklären." (Frau D.)*

The case of Frau D. illustrates not only how Stasi activities could directly impact a person's life course. It also shows how the revelations of the files elicit intense feelings of betrayal, not only affecting a single person but sometimes whole families. Moreover, the nature of covert spying meant that often people did not even suspect that a person, with whom they thought they had a close, trusting bond could betray them in such a fundamental way. In the aftermath of the revelations, this further leads the affected people to question everything that had happened over the years. A reevaluation of the past takes place. As is often the case in situations of great disappointment and betrayal, moments are relived, conversations are played out in the mind and interactions are weighed. But how should one react in such a situation? For many East Germans, issues remain unresolved partly because it is

impossible to engage with the person as in Frau D.'s case, or the emotional wounds are too deep to embark on the painful path of reconciliation.

In the dramatic case of Herr K. (see chapter 3), upon viewing his Stasi files he suffered immensely. He told me that for many years he did not engage with his past, he had tried to move forward and was busy with his work and family. When he finally decided to visit the Stasi archive he was faced with a devastating revelation that his sister (and later on his niece too) had systematically reported on him. As, outlined previously, she had been the driving force in his being found out and persecuted by the Stasi. He was astonished when he read about his sister's betrayal:

*"When I read that, I collapsed ... I had to get out of there; I did not say anything. I then called fourteen days later again and said that they should send me something again ... they did. And only, let's say around three years later, did I apply again to view the same files. By then they had changed. Some things were added, some were removed. I don't know why. It's their own system. " (Herr K.)*

*"Als ich das gelesen hab', bin ich zusammengeklappt...ich musste dann da raus. Ich hab auch nichts gesagt. Ich hab, dann vierzehn Tage später nochmal angerufen und hab gesagt, die sollen mir doch noch mal was zuschicken... Das haben sie dann auch gemacht, und erst, sagen wir mal, drei Jahre später habe ich dann noch mal einen Antrag gestellt und noch mal die gleichen Akten eingesehen. Inzwischen haben die sich auch verändert. Da sind manche Sachen hinzugekommen, andere wurden herausgenommen. Warum weiß ich nicht. Das ist deren eigenes System." (Herr K.)*

In the coming years he viewed his files several times, and each time the content of the files had changed. He found it puzzling that they just removed and changed certain things. But as I discovered when I spoke to employees at the BStU, this is fairly standard practice when new information is added, as new files are reconstructed and worked through continuously. This also impacts information and names of people involved that are blackened out for data protection reasons.

The above short stories illustrate the large spectrum of ways in which the records of the *Staatssicherheit* are dealt with and received by those affected. Significantly, the repercussions are felt on both sides, by the victim and the perpetrator. But, as we have seen even those lines are blurred since those who spied, were generally under observation themselves. The Stasi was constantly collecting new information about GDR citizens, as well as continually recruiting new informants in the process. Occasionally they were not even aware that they were being used. Rosenberg suggests that "perhaps this was the idea: East Germany would be safe only when every East German was Stasi, a chain of people each informing on the others, 16 million long" (Rosenberg 1995, p.302).

In the book *Stasi Kinder*, Hoffmann (2012) examines in-depth the way children of Stasi officials perceived the all-encompassing control, which their families had to endure. As I explained in Chapter 2, the social pressure exerted by the community of Stasi officials - amongst themselves - was tremendous. As Paul Betts has written, "the Stasi subculture was one built on a severe code of conformity, superiority, and model citizenship, whose repressive politics were geared towards itself as much as to 'asocials'" (Betts 2010, p.34). In her analysis, Rosenberg (1995) also examines the way in which "social pressure was created from within" in other official state

positions. Here, she explores how border guards were pressured to follow the orders to shoot at escapees. She explains that guards felt that there was no "choice" of whether to shoot or not. The repercussions of letting someone escape would have been immense, not only for one person but indeed, for the entire regiment. It was this threat that heightened the pressure from within. She further quotes a Catholic priest, Father Durstewitz, who worked as a counsellor to the former border guards. His statement illustrates the internal pressure that guards were exposed to very clearly.

"The young men say that if there was an escape at the border, an immense repressive system almost automatically came into play. It wasn't just against the individual soldier who let the escape succeed but against the whole group, to create more pressure within the regiment. The whole group was eliminated from socialist honours. The soldiers never got a clear answer as to whether they could be locked up if they refused. But it was very simple if someone said, 'I'm not prepared to shoot, everyone thought he would suffer.'" (Rosenberg 1995, p. 287)

As I will demonstrate in detail in the following chapters, we can see how the panoptic gaze is not merely directed from the state to the "inmate", but conditions are created where the "inmates", monitor one another, building a socially complex and morally ambiguous environment. Once again, it becomes clear how deeply intertwined and integrated state control was in the GDR, and first and foremost in East Germans' personal relationships. This is reflected in the decision-making process of opening files, but also in the aftermath of the revelations that ensue. As I argue, it is these complex and highly sensitive issues which continue to impact people's lives, albeit to varying extents, even to this day. In the following chapter, I

will explore further how the experience of mass surveillance and state control was mediated in an everyday context. In relation to this, I will investigate how privacy is valued and understood and ultimately how it shapes people's sense of wellbeing.

## Chapter Five: Privacy and the State

*Die Gedanken sind frei, wer kann sie erraten,  
sie fliegen vorbei wie nächtliche Schatten.  
Kein Mensch kann sie wissen, kein Jäger erschießen  
mit Pulver und Blei: Die Gedanken sind frei!*

*Thoughts are free, who can guess them?  
They fly by like nocturnal shadows.  
No man can know them, no hunter can shoot them  
with powder and lead: Thoughts are free!*

*From the German folk song " Die Gedanken sind Frei" - Hoffman von Fallersleben (1842)*

Before I left for my fieldwork, the topic of surveillance, in general, was rarely addressed in the media or public debate. Yes, there had been some discussions about the retention of citizens' data by telecommunications companies, but ever since the end of the Cold War, spying and surveillance was left for the plots Hollywood movies and TV shows (E.g. Bond, Homeland, 24, Bourne trilogy). It was not until a few months into my preparations to enter the field in the summer of 2013; that Edward Snowden revealed to the world the extent to which the US government had been spying, not only on foreign citizens and politicians but their own people. It was as though someone had opened a can of worms and all of a sudden the topic of surveillance received massive media attention and became a much-debated issue in everyday conversation. Many questions remain: Is it justified? Is this protecting us from terrorists? What does this surveillance even entail; if it's not noticeable, why does it matter?

In Germany, many people were uncomfortable with the thought, that a "friendly ally", a fellow member of the NATO, and the self-proclaimed champion of freedom

and democracy would feel the need to spy on innocent people. There was outrage when it was discovered that the NSA had been eavesdropping on Chancellor Angela Merkel's private phone conversations. She's not a likely terror suspect, so what justified spying on her?

As time went by the public outcry quieted down. Although, newspaper articles were written, and journalists reported and discussed the issue, the general public did not seem too worried by the increasingly alarming revelations. When it became part of the daily news, it was also quickly forgotten, particularly by younger people who themselves had not grown up in the GDR. Even speaking to many East Germans of the older generations, I couldn't help but notice a certain despondency, sometimes even cynicism towards the revelations. *"So what?"* people would say, *"They spied on us back then, of course, they're still spying on us now; I'm not surprised"*. I was intrigued by the way in which Germans dealt with the issue of contemporary surveillance. I wondered how my informants would react, these people who had experienced the most traumatising moments in their lives due to state surveillance. Would it make a difference to them or would they consider this type of monitoring to be harmless? I also wondered what the younger generation would think. This generation is so accustomed to sharing large amounts of personal information through social media; would it even matter if another pair of eyes saw how they present themselves on the internet?

As I explored these questions, I became increasingly interested in the concept of privacy. What does privacy mean to East Germans, especially those who lived under communist rule, and how has this meaning shifted over almost three decades? How does my generation conceive privacy? It feels like two extreme worlds are colliding

when looking at it from an intergenerational point of view. My parents' generation's extreme protectiveness over their privacy lies in stark contrast with my own generation's eagerness to share the most intimate information with the world through the internet. In this chapter, I will explore the many different facets of privacy. I will enquire into the various meanings of privacy from a social science perspective and how it varies throughout cultural contexts. I will look at the way in which privacy was understood and mediated in the GDR and how former citizens feel about it today. Finally, I will compare and contrast contemporary surveillance and Stasi surveillance in the GDR, exploring how limited privacy impacted GDR citizens' wellbeing.

### What is Privacy?

The topic of privacy is an elusive concept, which is ever-changing, situational, as well as culturally relative. Its meaning varies across time and generations. Anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists have analysed this concept in-depth, while examining it in the context of related notions such as culture, identity and sense of self. The topic has also been studied by philosophers, biologists and most recently in the field of surveillance studies. The study of privacy is problematic as its theoretical and philosophical roots lie in a western-centric liberal individualism, addressing notions of the self in relation to the state. Defining the concept as: "Privacy. . . is about the protection of the self, from the state, from organisations and other individuals. Privacy, therefore, tends to reinforce individuation, rather than community, sociability, trust and so on. It is about me, and nobody else" (Bennet 2011, p. 493).

Privacy has been discussed by scholars of many disciplines. Daniel Solov (2007) has looked at the topic from a philosophical as well as a legal standpoint. He challenges the popular argument that, concerning surveillance, one has nothing to worry if you have nothing to hide. He analyses the many concepts of privacy and concludes that the challenges in protecting privacy partly lie in the ambiguity of the concept itself. "Because privacy involves protecting against a plurality of different harms or problems, the value of privacy is different depending upon, which particular problem or harm is being protected. Not all privacy problems are equal; some are more harmful than others. Therefore, we cannot ascribe an abstract value to privacy. Its worth will differ substantially depending upon the kind of problem or harm we are safeguarding against. Thus, to understand privacy, we must conceptualise it and its value more pluralistically. Privacy is a set of protections against a related set of problems. These problems are not all related in the same way, but they resemble each other. There is a social value in protecting against each problem, and that value differs depending upon the nature of each problem" (Solov 2007 p.763 – 764). Schneider (1977) also investigated privacy along with shame and exposure from a theoretical point of view, examining the classic works of Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre. Consequently, he addresses the contemporary deterioration of the private sphere, defending our human need for privacy, claiming that, along with shame, it is a protective mechanism of the self.

There have been numerous sociological compilations of the study of privacy. Nippert-Eng' s edited volume for example, focuses on ethnographic accounts of "Islands of privacy", illustrating how people of all ages maintain small niches of privacy in their everyday lives, what they choose to share with others, and what

they prefer to keep to themselves. To me, this idea of pockets of privacy very much resonates with my own research, in that it is these small details of day-to-day life that gave people the ability to disappear from the prying eyes of others. Plänkner et al. (2005) have also asserted the importance of “niche cultures” in GDR societies, these could be found amongst friends, the home, church groups or even some psycho-therapeutic institutions (p.166-167).

In fact, Günter Gaus (1989) wrote that the GDR was a “niche Society”, explaining that the niche presented an “apolitical private sphere into which East Germans retreated in order to withdraw from a system that they opposed and from its public institutions and spaces. Thus, the niche allow(ed) the pursuit of individual interests beyond the reach of state control.” Despite having received a great deal of criticism due to its reductionist nature (i.e. simply assuming that everyone was against the GDR’s form of socialism), the concept of “niche society” has also been used by other scholars to explain a variety of social phenomena or processes, in West Germany and other Eastern Bloc States (in Müller 2013).

Many investigations of privacy in Eastern Germany come from the field of social history. As I mentioned earlier, Paul Betts's (2010) edition *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* provides an excellent account of exactly how GDR citizens managed to find small niches of privacy in their everyday lives and how they managed to maintain them in the face of the oppressive state. He contends that privacy was of particularly high value, enabling a “cherished locus of individuality, alternative identity-formation, and/or dissent and resistance” (Betts 2010, p. 238).

## Privacy and Anthropology

Anthropologists spend much of their fieldwork time trying to understand the nature of people's private lives. Indeed, within Anthropology the study of privacy is sometimes regarded with scepticism as it is considered a Western concept. However, people around the world often engage in behaviours which, from a Western scholarly perspective may be seen as an expression of privacy, even if it is not described as such within the given culture (see Yan 2003, p.134). Anthropology has regarded the role of privacy in various ethnographic contexts. There are far too many to mention here. Instead, I will explore in greater detail two ethnographic accounts that illustrate our innate need for privacy. These ethnographies allow us to understand privacy as it is experienced within two very different cultural contexts.

Yan Yunxiang conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a village in northeast China during the Communist era, examining privacy and family life as it transformed after the Maoist revolution. Yunxiang pays particular attention to notions of emotion, intimacy, conjugality, and individuality, giving an insight into the way family members manage their own, often limited privacy within the household home. She describes her informants' conception of privacy as such:

"It should be noted that Xiajia villagers do not use the term *privacy* per se and are unfamiliar with the trendy term *yinsi*, which is the Chinese translation of the Western notion of privacy (...) villagers often gave *fangbian* (convenience) as their reason for house remodelling, and some used the word freedom (*ziyou*) to describe their experience of having more personal space. When pressed further about the meaning of convenience and freedom, several used a similar image: "You can sleep

*on the bed during daytime without worrying about being seen or gossiped about by anyone"* (2003, p.134-135).

In relation to the modernisation and remodelling of village family homes, she emphasises the noticeable shift towards seeking more privacy, both spatially and to family relations, love and intimacy. She concludes:

"...Putting these pieces together, I am convinced that, without resorting to the urban notion of yinsi (privacy), Xiajia villagers actually have begun to pursue and protect their privacy at both the family and individual levels." (Yan 2003 p.135)

On the other hand, Thomas Gregor (1980) conducted his fieldwork in Central Brazil with the Mehinaka tribe. He examined the way in which institutionalised isolation becomes a tool for ensuring some level of privacy within an environment where everyone knows everything about one another. He describes how the Mehinaka are extremely visible and audible to one another in everyday life, leading to a highly developed gossip network amongst all members of the tribe. He writes that "the Mehinaka are masters of indirect observation", as members of the tribe are able to recognise one another's footprints in the sand (1980 p. 82). So when people are walking around together, they inevitably leave a visual record. Tribe members make a habit of interpreting these traces. He writes: "The print of heels or buttocks on the ground may be enough to show that a couple stopped and had sexual relations alongside the path"(1980 p.83). Audibility within the village also poses challenges to people's privacy, as conversations can easily be overheard. Sometimes people will be wrapped in a hammock and eavesdrop into conversations nearby. Even inside their homes, the Mehinaka often whisper to maintain privacy as their neighbours

might hear them otherwise. Gregor describes many ways in which the Mehinaka conceal their actions or hide from the prying eyes of others: "Opportunities for privacy must be consciously sought after and manipulated before an individual can really gain control over what others know about him" (1980, p. 87). He describes how institutionalised seclusion helps to relieve social tensions within the village, especially in relation to gossip, illness, death and accusations of witchcraft. A person will move into seclusion creating not only privacy for himself, but also for those around him. Therefore, seclusion acts as an antidote to social surveillance. "Mehinaku seclusion (is) an adaptive device that maintains the flow of information and the rate of social engagement within tolerable extremes." (1980, p.97) Gregor concludes that excessive exposure is a stress factor that those who live in small societies such as the Mehinaka must adapt to.

Some scholars maintain that privacy could even be considered an innate, biological human need: "Biologist Peter Watts makes the point that a desire for privacy is innate: mammals, in particular, don't respond well to surveillance. We consider it a physical threat because animals in the natural world are surveilled by predators. Surveillance makes us feel like prey, just as it makes the surveillers act like predators." (Schneier 2015, p.126-127)

Bruce Schneier writes that "Privacy is an essential human need, and central to our ability to control how we relate to the world. Being stripped of privacy is fundamentally dehumanising, and it makes no difference whether the surveillance is conducted by an undercover policeman following us around or by a computer algorithm tracking our every move." (Schneier 2015, p.7) He argues that in our modern, digital age it is a common misconception that privacy is not important if

you have nothing to hide. To the contrary, he highlights that there are things we would rather keep private, even if we are not doing anything wrong. Yes, there are things we would only tell certain people; however, nowadays social media blurs those lines. What is acceptable to be shared with one person versus another? In her ethnography *Intimacy at Work* (2015) Stefana Broadbent similarly looks at this paradox of modern life where private and work life become inseparable through the use of social media. For Broadbent privacy is also considered a fundamental human right, tightly intertwined with concepts of personal dignity and respect as well as the agency. In many ways, a loss of privacy, is not only an intrusion, even violation, of the self, but it is also a loss of control. Privacy violations can take many shapes, and forms and those who are in marginal socio-economic situations are affected in particular, including those in powerful positions, as they are dependent on peoples' approvals. Schneier warns that today "Our privacy is under assault from constant surveillance" leading to dehumanisation, loss of dignity and ultimately challenging people's wellbeing.

Sloan and Warner (2016) investigate privacy from Georg Simmel's standpoint, looking at "privacy in public". They compare contemporary state surveillance by the NSA and other agencies with the methods practised by the East German Stasi. Despite significant problems in comparing the two, they conclude that modern-day surveillance, like that of the Stasi, has an adverse impact on people's sense of self and privacy. Indeed, the Stasi used surveillance as a repressive tool on a large scale, which is not as noticeable in contemporary surveillance. However, they write:

"Current surveillance undermines privacy in public by undermining norm-enabled coordination. The 1950 to 1990 East German Stasi illustrates the threat to self-

realization. The 'hidden, but for every citizen tangible omnipresence of the Stasi, damaged the very basic conditions for individual and societal creativity and development: Sense of one's self, Trust, Spontaneity.'" (Sloan and Warner 2016, p.1-2)

Sociologist Sami Coll (2012) also considers Georg Simmel's theories on secrecy to understand privacy as a protection against surveillance interventions. Simmel contends that secrecy, and therefore also privacy, is a necessity for a stable society. As life in an environment of "full publicity" would be stressful and unbalanced (Simmel 1950; Coll 2012). An element of secrecy is, therefore, necessary in personal interactions.

"According to Simmel, interactions are at the origin of social structures of power (Simmel 1950b; Coser 1977). The social dynamics of secrecy are not an exception. Rather than being a social fact in which we should protect an individual's privacy and liberty, information (and its partner, secrecy) is thus constitutive of the individual and her social relations. In other words, when a certain boundary between disclosure and concealment is repeated through certain types of social relations, it becomes a structure, and then a collective fact. As the capacity to withhold specific information becomes a commodity constitutive of power and social stratification (Simmel 1950a, 338), secrecy (which is, again, in Simmel's language, privacy) has an important collective implication, one which is defended by those scholars wishing to retain privacy as a collective good" (see Westin 2003; Regan 1995; Regan 2011 cited in Coll 2012).

In other words, the concept of privacy is socially constructed and variable. This means that particular social contexts can be either advantageous or detrimental to one's health. Therefore, privacy should be regarded as a "collective fact, as a contextual integrity and as an individual fact" (Coll 2012). We can hence conclude, that privacy is essential in human interactions, and most importantly, it is socially constructed and mediated, benefitting our sense of wellbeing. In the following section, I will explore how privacy is challenged in the face of the state surveillance.

### **Self-Policing in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)**

In chapter 2, I contemplated which model of surveillance applies most to the mass-surveillance of the GDR. I argued that building on the theory of Foucault's famous Panopticon, surveillance not only changed people's way of thinking and controlling their behaviour but it also changed social processes and challenged their interpersonal relationships.

Creating an ambience of distrust where people would fear standing out and being targeted by the Stasi, the government forced people to recede to the privacy of their homes and in extreme cases their own minds. Privacy became a precious thing, the only space where one could act freely without the intervention of the state. Fearful of losing this precious privacy, people would act accordingly to what was expected from communist citizens.

The production of strict division between public and private sphere was an everyday fact for most GDR citizens, even from a very young age. Frau D. recalls having spent her childhood living in two worlds: her family home, where she felt safe, protected and where she could freely express her thoughts. And then there was the public

realm, where the state with its norms and restrictions was ever present. For her, this realm extended to kindergarten, school and even her friends.

*"Even as a child, you noticed that you were living in a divided world. At home, you felt sheltered, that's where you are protected, where everything is ok. And then there's the state side: school, kindergarten...also friends" (Frau D.)*

*"Da merkte man als Kind schon, dass man in einer zwei-geteilten Welt lebt. Zuhause wo man sich behütet fühlt, wo man geschützt wird, da ist Alles in Ordnung und eben die Staatliche Seite: Schulen, Kindergärten...auch die Freunde" (Frau D.)*

For those unlucky to lose their privacy to the bugging and constant watchful eye of the state, a creeping sense that everything they did was scrutinised would imprison them in their minds, the last refuge of privacy. Their Panoptic prison would become mental as well as physical.

One informant, for example, described the immense psychological pressure that he was exposed to by being unable to speak his mind while feeling the constant pressure to comply with the system. He says that surveillance or simply the possibility that someone was not conforming, would create ever more pressure. Indeed, it was this extreme pressure to conform that caused so much distress. For him, it was this, and living in a state of continuous cognitive dissonance, having to act and speak contrary to his own beliefs, which made life in the dictatorship unbearable.

*“Surveillance or the knowledge that someone did not conform, led to more pressure being exerted. This pressure to conform is so unpleasant. I felt that this was really awful, that you couldn’t say what you wanted... This pressure to conform and having to say something different from what you are thinking.”*

*"Überwachung oder Erkenntnisse, dass jemand nicht angepasst ist, führen dazu, dass mehr Druck ausgeübt wird. Dieser Anpassungsdruck, der ist so unangenehm. Ich habe das als ganz schrecklich empfunden, dass man nicht das reden konnte, was man wollte... Dieser Druck zur Anpassung und was anderes zu sagen, als was man denkt." (Herr Z.)*

### **Beyond the real life Panopticon: Auto-Governmentality**

To an extent, Foucault’s classic model of the Panopticon certainly applied to people's behaviour during the communist era in Eastern Germany. Their own country (the GDR) had become a prison of sorts and the Stasi (and other state institutions), along with unofficial informants became the metaphorical “prison guards”. As outlined previously, one may even wonder whether the power of the "invisible" prison guards was extended in the GDR, considering that the population as a whole was exposed to state control in a variety of forms. State institutions (and its supporters) exerted their power primarily through repression and mass-surveillance, ranging from “basic” everyday surveillance (e.g. phone lines being tapped, mail read, comings and goings of a household recorded in *Hausbücher*) to extreme measures such as house searches, house bugging, being followed, being interrogated, being exposed to destructive repressive techniques such as

*Zersetzung*, and even being imprisoned. The seemingly almighty power of the state was therefore reflected in many everyday situations, starting from the way people interacted, dressed and spoke to how they worked and enjoyed their free time. Although, the extent to which people in East Germany experienced and were aware of surveillance varied significantly, self-policing, a reaction to the threat of state violence, became an integral aspect of GDR culture. Most importantly, although the state was the prime "watchman", citizens were constantly suspicious of one another's intentions, always on guard and therefore turning into watchmen themselves, creating an atmosphere of collective fear and paranoia.

Keeping this in mind, we can understand why less powerful individuals may have been ascribed greater power than they actually had in the imagination of the populous. Since no one could be trusted 100 % and the way people were observed varied so much, a person would never know who was listening, recording and reporting their every move and would never know what effect their words and actions had. This created a situation of extreme uncertainty; uncertainty regarding who could be trusted (see section on distrust) but moreover an uncertainty about the effect of one's actions and even one's thoughts.

Paul Betts (2010) has said that "citizens were trained to view each other suspiciously in a world of mutual surveillance. This was the dark side of the social contract between the GDR state and its citizenry, but it is one that went far beyond the classic bargain of exchanging freedom for security. In this case it was a strictly private agreement between the state and its citizens, based on material rewards for snitching and snooping" (2010, p.49).

I argue that the uncertainty created made people hypersensitive to the scrutiny of others. What were they watching? What did they know? What did they think about you? And most importantly, did one stand out? Did you appear different from others? As I was told, "There was a general atmosphere of distrust" (Frau M.). In this world of uncertainty keeping under the radar was people's only way of achieving some sort of sense of safety. Betts (2010) does not believe that Foucault's idea of the Panopticon is sufficient in understanding Stasi surveillance. Instead he sees it as "a world based on private bargains in exchange for cooperation and complicity" (2010, p.49). He writes that "over time GDR citizens learnt to 'speak Bolshevik' in the GDR, both internalizing and mastering the language (and practices) of power offered to them by the regime. Denunciations were therefore a kind of citizen activity in their own right, one of the few powerful forms of agency available to them" (Betts 2010, p.49).

Socialist collectives in work, family life, schooling, sports and many other state-organised activities constantly exposed people to the scrutiny of others. One was involved in social activities at all times. Of course, this allowed the state to spread propaganda, but it also allowed the state to exert its power in all areas of life ("creating the good communists"). As people faced the judgment of others to fit into the communist ideal, it was subtly turning any GDR citizen into one of these "invisible prison guards". Since the majority of people were potentially judging one's behaviour in one way or another, East Germans were constantly self-monitoring. Fitting in was the main objective for the majority of its citizens. Many felt the burden of this arrangement and the pressure of continuous social surveillance, struggling with their cognitive dissonance. Certainly, for some people this created

no problems whatsoever and many East Germans are nostalgic about these collective activities (work outings, parties, FDGB *Ferienheime*) and being constantly socially active.

One informant mentioned that the one thing about the GDR that she misses is the "*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*" - the community spirit and friendships. Everyone had a very active social life, people used to visit each other often. Back then, few people had a telephone in their house, so you had to visit them in order to speak to them directly. So, often people would end up staying for a glass of wine and a chat. She says that many people she knows miss this today, saying "*We saw each other much more often. We had such nice evenings together...*" Yet, she recognises that this sense of community emerged by default. "*The sense of community - but of course that was born out of necessity...*"- "*Das Gemeinschaftsgefühl – aber das war natürlich auch aus der Not geboren...*" (Frau D.). Despite her nostalgia for this aspect of GDR life and although she felt that in the GDR certain friendships were stronger, she would not want to relive the experience because much of the time she felt pressurised and restricted in her everyday life.

Another informant mentioned the close relationships between work colleagues who were helpful and sympathetic towards one another. For instance, during the long work hours (in the GDR the majority of the population was in full time work) when someone's child was sick and needed to be picked up from school, colleagues were understanding and helpful. They helped one another out because they knew the same thing could happen to them. She is convinced that this stemmed from the humanistic culture that was cultivated in the socialist state. Yet, she says that this was not because "*they were better people but simply out of necessity - because they*

*were all in the same situation". "Das ist nicht weil die Menschen besser sind, sondern weil sie in der gleichen Situation sind" (Frau J.).*

Hence, we can see that in the socialist regime's influence was far reaching, directly impacting people's personal lives; shaping their relationships both positively and negatively. The population's common struggles led to the formation of strong friendships, whether these were created out of necessity, to gain certain benefits ("Vitamin B") or because they were truly nurturing and trusting (see also Berdahl 1999). The state's infringement on personal life was undeniable, narrowing the space of the private sphere significantly and increasing the scope of social control.

Examples of this are common throughout the world. In many cultures, it is manifested in the innate fear of witchcraft, as it offers powerful methods of social control. Not only are these people fearful of the secret power of an often powerless person, but the fear of being judged as a witch or sorcerer obliges individuals to act according to social norms. Envy and "the evil eye" also produce similar effects, as the fear of the power of envious eyes forces them to have humility and to share their good fortune with the rest of the community. Sickness caused by the evil eye or witchcraft may act as a deterrent to act against social norms, yet it has an intangible nature, unlike the Stasi's actions no one could really be sure if the disease came from the witch or if it was just a stroke of bad luck. In these communities, there are spaces for social resistance, by using charms and contras one can act against social norms without the fear of getting sick. For East Germans, any space of social resistance could make life even more challenging, yet people did them anyway in the hope that the privacy of their most intimate moments would not be breached.

To summarise, it can be said that the social dynamics of the regime created “invisible prison guards”, or in other words it built a system of auto-governmentality. In fact, many people may have never been aware of having been part of this self-perpetuating system, even to this date. But, perhaps, this is what made it all the more powerful. Because behaving as one such guards manifested itself in many ordinary ways, from noticing that someone was wearing clothing from the West and casually mentioning it in conversation to calling someone out for not keeping their front yard in order to fit the community's standards. Certainly social control is a fairly universal feature of human social interactions, but I believe that in the East German context it created unique dynamics, as the ambience of distrust and uncertainty over being watched – and by whom – created a greater fear of being pointed out. As a doctor in his 60,'s pointed out, the primary cause of his suffering was the incessant pressure to fit in– “*Anpassungsdruck*”. Stasi surveillance itself did not necessarily cause anxiety, as it was not always perceptible, but it was rather the psycho-social dynamics that it created amongst the population which led to a culture of forced conformation and social pressure.

*“One did not suffer so much from surveillance since that was not constantly noticeable. The things that caused suffering was the pressure to adapt.”*

*“Unter der Überwachung hat man eigentlich nicht gelitten, weil man die ja nicht immer gemerkt hat. Worunter man leiden konnte, das war der Anpassungsdruck.” (Herr Z.)*

Abiding by social rules, being orderly, neat, conscientious and polite (or any other socialist ideal) were valued greatly in a society which was less focussed on monetary

success and more on socialist ideology and social interactions. This ideal not only influenced how people acted but transformed the individual in a very intimate and profound way. The perfect German communist had to abide by the rules or fear the reprisal of society and the state. Even to this day, East Germans appear to be especially adept at abiding by social norms and rules (see research by Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013/2014), and (superficially, at least) people often appear very much concerned with the way their immediate community sees them.

Herr Z. remembers GDR times as a time of oppression and being silenced, explaining:

*"If you were smart enough not say your opinion publicly and kept your mouth shut, you had no pressure. Those who conformed felt no pressure. "*

*"Die die sich angepasst haben, hatten keinen Druck."*

This statement in itself points towards a vicious circle where those complying with the system, appeared to feel no pressure. Yet, this statement could be challenged, questioning whether the whole purpose of conforming was to avoid social repercussions in the first place. Herr Z. says that he was suffering mostly from the burden of his own fears - or "cowardice" as he calls it. I believe the cowardice he refers to was the fear of voicing his true opinion and speaking up against the injustices imposed by the regime. He thinks that East Germans know particularly well what it's like to comply with a particular political system. He also says that he has a special sense for recognising these patterns because of his experience and he can even tell when people comply with a particular system in the West, noticing a similar *"pressure to adapt in the West" – "Anpassungsdruck im Westen"*. He believes

that in the East it was more about complying to a political ideology, whereas in the West conformity takes place on a more a personal level, saying for example "*When someone's boss is an asshole, but he still continues to work with him and complies with the system, that's just as bad.*" (Herr Z.).

Indeed, how can we relate this to life in the West? Is the GDR a unique example of an extraordinary social process incited by neo-totalitarianism. Or, perhaps we have reached a time in which we also feel a pressure to conform? In this vain, I would like to take a short detour and consider how privacy, conformity and surveillance are understood and experienced in a contemporary context.

#### Contemplating contemporary privacy: Facebook, Twitter and others...

Being a so-called "millennial" and having grown up in the age of the internet and more recently social media, my conception of privacy is much more fluid than that of my parent's generation. However, having been born in East Germany and having actively engaged with the experience of Stasi surveillance in my own family history, I conceive the generational differences with particular intensity. I have come to wonder what privacy really meant before the Wall came down. Was true privacy non-existent or was it in fact more highly valued and precious than anywhere else? With some people experiencing the infringement of privacy and personal liberties to such a significant extent that their basic human rights were violated, was there any way to maintain a sense of privacy?

I once heard a talk by a fellow anthropologist speaking about her fieldwork in China and the non-existence of privacy within the family home until the recent emergence of smart phones. It got me thinking about the circumstances under which people

across the globe ensure a small piece of privacy in their lives. It seems that the concept of privacy is much more complex than we may think. What is highly valued privacy to one person, may be a given to others. The statement that there is no privacy in a given society is highly problematic. I believe that people create their own niches of privacy, however, big or small. Of course in extreme situations such as imprisonment human privacy becomes diminished to the point where it is barely existent. But even in these cases, there is still the private arena of the mind - just as it is celebrated in Hoffmann von Fallersleben's famous song "*Die Gedanken sind Frei*" (The Freedom of Thoughts). Yet, even the mind can be corrupted, and one can monitor one's own thoughts under conditions of extreme control. Still, the mind and our thoughts are the ultimate niche of privacy and the ultimate space of social resistance. After all the mind is the ultimate place of non-control, feared by any authoritarian government.

As mentioned above, my fieldwork revealed that for some of my informants their immediate family and their family home represented their private niche. This was where many, sadly, not all, could freely express their true opinions, be themselves, and trust that personal concerns would not be shared with anyone else. For many, what happened in the home or what was read, watched, listened and discussed rarely left the four walls. This created a unique sense of intimacy and comfort, which is once again idealised and missed by many nostalgic East Germans. What would my parent's generation see as appropriate to share with others, and what would they see as fit to discuss or do in public or even amongst friends? This is a hard question to answer since I can only relate to my family – how can we know what private matters are really shared if you do not know a person particularly well? You will

rarely get access to their intimacy group and even if you could you would never get access to the true mental privacy.

In many ways, this protection of privacy and sharing of personal matters is especially apparent retrospectively. It seems that people were particularly afraid of discussing things that happened before the wall came down. In the course of my fieldwork, this became very obvious to me, and I often found myself holding back on questions as I was afraid of infringing the privacy of those who now gave me their trust. Speaking to family members, this was a constant balancing act of trying to be objective and asking rational/justified questions and staying away from sensitive topics. I did not want to make people uncomfortable, but I am also aware that there was always a lingering fear of what I might find out.

To my parents, it would have been unthinkable to share intimate details about relationships, religious or political views and everyday activities with a stranger (like an ethnographer) and much less to wider audience (such as the internet). To them, the idea of actively deciding to make these things public is inherently dangerous and also socially inappropriate. Looking at this generational gap, one can observe how in present day Germany there is a very wide spectrum of what is deemed private and what is not. Thus I ask myself, what is the motivation behind exposing such large amounts of information and why is it so common in my generation?

To address this question, we must briefly inquire what privacy means to contemporary East Germans or Europeans more generally? Having spoken to young East Germans, there is no obvious difference in the way they conduct themselves in the public sphere, more specifically the Internet, compared to other Western

Europeans of my generation. Regarding their online social media use and sharing of personal information, many feel somewhat relaxed. As one informant asked me rhetorically "*everyone does it, what difference does it make what I share?*".

An actual concern about an infringement of privacy or *Privatsphäre* per se rarely came up in conversation. Another exchange with a 28-year-old woman revealed that she takes care of what she posts online, as she would not want to risk being scrutinised by her current or future employer. While many agree that their parents are somewhat suspicious of social media, others (whose families were also active online) voiced concern about "adding them as friends on Facebook", as they did not want them to see everything they got up to. Indeed, it seems that many "ensure their privacy" by using Facebook's feature of placing their "friends" into categories such as "close friends" or "acquaintances", allowing differing degrees of visibility of their profiles. Others seem to consciously categorise those they connect with on any particular form of social media. Therefore, while the majority of young East Germans use social media such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and WhatsApp quite liberally, their concern about privacy is generally restricted to those who are potentially "visible" in their off-line life (e.g. parents, family, employer, teachers).

So what about less visible forms of surveillance that go beyond the people we know, such as governments and corporations? To what extent are we shedding our privacy willingly (or as Zygmunt Bauman describes it as DIY ['Do it yourself'] surveillance) and why? We must understand that our own willingness to supply intimate details—through the use of smartphones, smartwatches and social media, as well as indirectly by other means such as tracking (GPS) or use of credit cards or Oyster card—is a drastically different yet a much more effective way of surveillance than

anything used by the GDR. Our bodies have become enhanced by this technology in many ways, reaching the point where, with our fitness trackers and smart devices, we have become cyborgs (Gray 1995; Amber Case 2010; 2014).

Consequently, surveillance technology has also become an extension of ourselves. It is active 24/7, and so are we, always in touch with the World Wide Web and those in it, including governments and corporations who are incessantly gathering information. We are constantly available and through instant messaging apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp we also feel in demand all the time. People see whether we are "online" or when we have read their messages. While these messaging services convey a feeling of intimacy (since we are perpetually in touch) this intimacy is somewhat superficial. Messages can be typed quickly and to a number of people at once. It doesn't require much effort or commitment. Those who are communicating do not even have to be in the same city, country or even continent. While we feel that this new type of communication has made our lives better in many ways (staying in touch with those abroad/ communication is easier/ always being in contact with the world), there are also downsides to these forms of technological innovations. They create new types of relationships, which may otherwise never occur. New forms of intimacy are built, which are somewhat detached from our life off-line.

Social media has also made our information a commodity for use by corporations and governments alike. It is a self-perpetuating system, since everyone is using it we feel a sense of peer pressure to use it as well. This is a social anxiety to miss out on important social contact if one does not participate. Our ability to see when someone is active in social media at any given time turns us into surveillance tools

too. It creates social pressure to partake in online activities and respond to them as quickly as possible. Our lives online are dominated by the pressure of instant gratification. The nature or validity of entire relationships can be questioned or determined by the speed of a reply, the non-response to a message and the way a single message is phrased.

Much like those invisible prison guards in the everyday life of East Germany, social media sites (and in particular Facebook) create an environment where everyone watches everyone, only this time around people are not only aware of the profound social and psychological effect of this type of surveillance. People in fact *know* they are being watched yet only exploit it to present themselves in a particular way, an idealised digital image of themselves (Albrechtslund 2008). This not only concerns friendships and personal activities but political views, forcing one to disclose one's political views and judge others openly.

This once again became crystal clear with the terrorist attacks in Paris of November 2015. The response to this event regarding public statements, articles and posts shortly after the event was particularly telling of projected political ideals. I was particularly surprised by Facebook's very quick response in enabling people to add a French flag filter to their profile picture and also for the first time to have discovered their "Safety Check" feature which allows people to mark themselves or friends as safe after a disaster. While the Safety Check feature is undoubtedly helpful and reassuring, the fact that it was only noticeable for Paris and not similar recent events in Beirut or Baghdad said a lot about Facebook's political views. The display of solidarity through the profile picture filter was another matter, offering a space for a highly political statement that influenced how people show their digital avatar.

The majority of individuals may not be aware of it, but it is a symbolic act. Openly portraying themselves not only as representing all that the French flag symbolises, but making a public stance against the 'other', the enemy who dared attack the Western world.

The fact that Facebook added this feature within less than 24 hours after the attack created a powerful dynamic. People were still in shock, as they slowly learned about what had happened, and numerous dramatic videos (mostly recorded by people's smartphones) emerged. When I checked my Facebook feed the day following the event, about half of my Facebook friends had already changed their pictures. That evening I spoke to a French friend of mine who works as a journalist (most recently in Pakistan and Morocco). We were discussing why she had made the conscious decision not to change her profile picture, stating that she did not agree with what it stood for. At the same time, she openly voiced her concern about how this decision may make her look in front of her friends. She told me that she almost feels a social pressure, since all her French friends had already done it, and she was the odd one out. She feared returning to France at Christmas time, and that she would be exposed to questions of why she did not participate in this act of solidarity. Her anxiety demonstrated the powerful political influence Facebook has on its users and global politics. More importantly, it reveals how its users reinforce this influence by participating on the one hand and acting as surveillance on the other. In this way, it ascribes political and even religious beliefs to its users.

Our willingness to give data about our personal life in subtle and not so subtle ways has had many effects on how our generation behaves. Not only are we deeply influenced by the opinion of others in this "digital Panopticon" but we also are

forced to deal with the realities of digital life without really knowing how to do it. Being in the vanguard of the digital revolution has shoved us into uncharted social territory. We are not only forced out of our private lives but also forced into unstable and often non-existent social relationships. Beyond this, the fact of immortalising our data in the form of bits and bytes has had many consequences more or less new to us, to which we have had to adapt.

### Losing the Ephemeral: Contemporary online records and The Records of the GDR State Security Service

One of the most challenging issues of online privacy in the age of "Big Data", is the loss of the ephemeral. Certainly, there is an element of this of "never forgetting" in the vast amount of citizens' files stored in the Stasi headquarters. Even more than 25 years after the fall of the Wall, reading old Stasi files, East Germans are reminded of events of the distant past and are astounded by things they had forgotten about long ago. Nevertheless, the recording of data today is unsurpassed. Everything we do today is remembered, stored, and ultimately it will also "be associated with you forever." (Schneier 2015, p.129)

It is also important to keep this eternal record in mind in relation to interpersonal relationships, since our ability to forget things that we (or others) may have said or done at a given time, enables forgiving (see Gathman 2008). I believe that the ability to forget has helped to heal many wounds of the past, not just in East Germany. Nevertheless, once East Germans were able to view their Stasi files, those old wounds were broken again. Indeed, Stasi files are not merely bureaucratic records, but rather moments captured on paper. They immortalised real events, words that

were spoken and relationships that were cultivated. Of course, not everything recorded in these files is the truth, since this type of surveillance was conducted by human beings and not by computer algorithms capturing meta-data. Yet, what these recordings of the past provide, is a glimpse into a secretive system that existed alongside normal everyday life during that time. Sometimes people suspected that a given person was reporting on them. Perhaps what they read in their file comes as no big surprise. Yet for others, the revelations of viewing their Stasi files can be devastating. Beliefs and memories of former events and relationships can be challenged fundamentally. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the Stasi file archive (BStU) provides psychological counselling to those experiencing traumatic realisations as they view their personal records.

Here, we can observe two fundamental differences between contemporary (especially digital) surveillance, and surveillance conducted by the Secret Police in East Germany. Historic spying contained inaccuracies due to human error or deliberately falsified records. In contemporary spying, false conclusions occur too by oversimplified information processing and data profiling. Nevertheless, online records and archival records share their non-ephemeral nature.

To conclude, it can be said that contemporary ideas about privacy, especially online, stand in stark contrast with privacy in the GDR. Secret Police spying was at times extremely invasive, and its aftermath haunts many lives to this day. I argue that Stasi spying was perceived as far more threatening by the population than contemporary online surveillance is. The observation was conducted by real human beings, leading to the permeation of distrust into many personal relationships and therefore eliciting a higher protectiveness of privacy. Modern day digital recording of data is

regarded as less threatening, as it is invisible and if there is an awareness, it is seen as the mere collection of "numbers, data..." and so on, although this new form of surveillance is potentially significantly more comprehensive and large-scale than spying in the GDR ever was. Perhaps it is too soon to tell what the consequences of the modern day deterioration of the private sphere will mean for individuals, yet we can assume that a narrowing private sphere leaves more room for social control.

Zygmunt Bauman (2015) has suggested that nowadays we willingly offer our most intimate and private information to the world in order to be seen, because of our species' innate fear of being alone we have sacrificed our privacy for the superficial feeling of community. By contrast, in East Germany people were often forced to partake in social interactions and community meetings. Indeed, the community spirit was highly valued by most GDR citizens and as one informant told me, the community spirit, working for the greater good, was deeply ingrained in GDR culture, no matter how devoted to the state a person was.

*"No matter whether one was for or against the government,...but in the East everything was based on the assumption that work serves the community, as well as the fact that the community serves me and my education and to secure my employment possibilities. For GDR citizens, besides a few exceptions, this became ingrained. It already started in kindergarten. They were brought up to be mindful of the community...It was deeply rooted, even in people who didn't necessarily stand for the defence of the government, yet they were somehow involved." (Frau J.)*

*"Ob für oder gegen die Regierung, ...aber im Osten waren wir alle geprägt von dem Gedanken, unsere Arbeit dient der Gemeinschaft, so wie die Gemeinschaft mir dient und meine Ausbildung und meine Arbeitsmöglichkeiten zufriedenstellend sichern...Das war den Leuten in der DDR, mit einigen Ausnahmen, in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen. Das fing im Kindergarten schon an. Sie wurden so erzogen, auf die Gemeinschaft zu achten und alles...Das war tief verwurzelt, selbst bei Leuten, die in der DDR gar nicht so für die Verteidigung der Regierung standen, aber doch waren sie irgendwie miteinbezogen" (Frau J.)*

As I mentioned before, this communal feeling is what some East Germans are very nostalgic about. Many East Germans say that they miss the helpfulness, the fact that people met up spontaneously and visited each other in their homes. In many ways, GDR citizens were rarely alone. Many people were, willingly or not, active members of their local community. This constant exposure to the public sphere (and hence political scrutiny) reinforced peoples' needs for privacy. Private life also became highly valued and was sought after even in the most difficult and oppressive situations (see also Baer 1998). This need for privacy is due in part to the fact that their actions had almost immediate consequences, making the "sense of community" a double-edged sword.

Perhaps we will begin to see a similar trend in our digital world. As the social pressure and obligation of being part of some online network increase and online surveillance begins having a real-life impact, people will once again value the small niches of privacy that are left. We can't live without privacy. As I mentioned, many anthropological examples illustrate how people around the world live under

conditions where they seemingly have no or barely any privacy. Yet, almost universally, we can observe ways in which people ensure small niches of privacy for themselves. The fact that privacy is considered a human right by the United Nations (Article 12 – UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights), shows that it is, in fact, a basic human need and essential for human wellbeing.

## Chapter Six: The Role of Ideology and Power - How Conformity was achieved in the GDR.

Building on the theoretical background I laid out in Chapter 2, I would like to return to the notions of power and ideology and how these forces enabled the neo-totalitarian system to function.

Fullbrook (2005) writes that “power spread like a dye through the wider fabric of society, colouring great patches of all areas of professional occupation and social activity, in some areas visible and benign, in others dark and disturbing” (Fullbrook 2005, p. 249). This quote alludes to the versatility of the concept in the context of the former SED-regime. A large body of literature exists on ideas of power and what it means in different contexts. On a basic level, Benedict Anderson (1972) sees power as a relationship between two parties, in which one obeys the other's demands. The link that is created by these behaviours is the power relationship. As I outlined in detail in previous chapters, (see for example 1977; 2006 (1991)) examined power relationships at great length, his key premise being the idea of the operation of power without people's knowledge. According to Foucault, power is “not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1990, p.93). As we have seen thus far, in the GDR power was exercised by the state but also by its own citizens. Foucault's principle of the Panopticon suggests that there is power in concealment and the unknown. As Gallinat writes, “MfS surveillance and state control were a ‘public secret’ in Taussig's sense: they were generally known but impossible to articulate in their specificities.”

(Gallinat 2015). The secrecy surrounding the Stasi incited rumours about its almighty power. "Myths and the 'paranoid fantasy' about its power and influence, and whispers about the Stasi's technical sophistication (...) served (...) as informal of its alleged omnipresence" (Gallately 1997, p.218). Therefore, "...subjective forms of self-policing were fuelled not only by the secrecy surrounding Stasi activities and the possibility that a Stasi agent might be physically present but also by worry that party or state 'authorities' might learn one way or another of information that could be considered subversive." (Gallately 1997, p. 220)

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) rejected the idea that power is only embedded in formal social-structural relations and maintained by overt force. His stance was that power is often applied in understated ways. The Ministry of State Security's work is a good example of this principle, as it operated largely secretly by instilling fear and exerting social pressure. An "invisible power that can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu 1991, p.164). The Ministry's 1950's shift towards more "subtle" operative techniques is a good example of the way in which power was exerted in an indirect, coercive fashion. Further, symbolic power was displayed in East German everyday practice and language, as it is nicely illustrated by Frau M.'s anecdote of the "oppressive language" she noticed at the airport. As I have shown, there are direct and indirect ways a state can exercise its power on a population. Next, I will take a closer look at how this power translates to control. So, what is the purpose of control and how is it achieved?

## Propaganda

One way to stabilise the state's position was through gaining the population's support. Stefes and colleagues (2013) identified three pillars of stability found in any model of authoritarian rule: legitimation, repression and co-optation. Once any of these pillars are weakened, the regime is threatened. Therefore, even in the most authoritarian regime, some participation and active engagement of the population is necessary, in order to secure the regime's continued existence. The distribution of propaganda plays an important role in this. The state is to appear benevolent and concerned with the "common good" of its people, while in actuality it pursues its interests and thereby threatens that very concept. "Modern states are everywhere based on the assertion of a common good that necessarily masks or misrepresents key social relationships – especially those based on inequality. Because the state depicts itself as the guardian of a mythical general interest that is contradicted by the very social relations it is compelled to reproduce, there are always truths about the social order that must be concealed, that cannot be acknowledged in discourse. As a result, state processes inevitably conjure into being powerful phantoms that are said to provoke the disorder that state activities generate (or encourage), and, in the process, threaten the common good" (Krupa & Nugent 2015, p.209). Following this assertion, it is deemed legitimate by society, that "imagined entities" need to be organised, recorded, "controlled and surveilled" (Krupa & Nugent 2015; Scott 1998).

One way to persuade a population to take on and sustain a particular belief system is to create a dehumanised view of the state enemy and therefore the ideological enemy (i.e. in the case of the GDR this was anyone who did not believe in socialism).

This enemy is portrayed in a way that suggests that he actively tries to invade and destroy the current ideological system. In the context of nation states, this means that such an enemy is threatening state security (Mattelart 2010; Taylor 2004). Thus, it becomes the state's aim to preserve and spread ideology, at the same time ridding the society of possible security threats. This goal can only be achieved if everyone is kept under strict surveillance. Hence surveillance, repression and control become a form of governance, or in fact a form of state terror.

In *The Globalization of Surveillance* Mattelart (2010) studies newer forms of surveillance. The example of the United States stands out, with its governmental justifications for extensive civilian control and surveillance after 9/11. In order to gain public support for such undertakings, here too, a large propaganda apparatus was at work. Mattelart (2010) outlines how propaganda is designed and shaped by in-depth knowledge of a society and is in turn distributed and nurtured in all areas of life. Mass control can be achieved through gaining power over public opinion. He writes, "the population viewed from the standpoint of its opinions, its ways of doing things, its behaviours, its habits, its fears, its prejudices, its demands, whatever can be affected by education, campaigns or convictions" (2010, p.9). By making the 'state enemy' out to be a threat to a society's values and therefore to a state's security, state control is no longer solely practised through disciplinary measures but through generating fear and creating a 'security society'. In East Germany, much literature indicates the extent to which propaganda was employed in order disseminate socialist ideology and notions of security played a significant role in the state's persuasive techniques (see for example Fulbrook 1995).

Moreover, history was re-written, and fictitious statements were disseminated among the population in order to legitimate the desired ideology. As Funder (2003) writes: "In the GDR people were required to acknowledge an assortment of fictions as fact. Some of these fictions were fundamental, such as the idea that human nature is a work in progress, which can be improved upon, and that Communism is the way to do it. Others were more specific: that East Germans were not the Germans responsible (even in part) for the Holocaust; that the GDR was a multi-party democracy; that socialism was peace-loving; that there were no former Nazis in the country; and that, under socialism, prostitution did not exist" (Funder 2003, p. 96). Therefore, the entire premise of the Wall was sold to the population, not as a way to imprison them in their own state, but to protect them from the security threat of the neighbouring Western countries.

A significant influence on public opinion within a state is the media; hence it is unsurprising that it is often used by state actors to accomplish certain goals. Lasswell claims that a role of the media is to report but also to "*surveillance the social environment*" (2010, p.35). In the GDR, a totalitarian socialist regime, the role of the media was hardly that of an institution that critically evaluated life in East Germany. On the contrary, the media was used as a vital propaganda tool.

In his 1992 article, Hans A. Baer describes his experiences of doing fieldwork in East Germany before and after the wall fell. He describes the GDR's situation before the collapse of communism as a '*legitimation crisis*'. He outlines his impressions of life in the GDR with its ironies and contradictions. He traces much of citizen unhappiness back to the fact that the population had been indoctrinated about the advantages of socialist life for years, yet could not recognise the benefits for themselves. Everyone

knew about the ideas of Marx and Engels, but the realities of life in the GDR were disheartening. There were huge discrepancies between the ideology and reality of socialism. He talks about people's discontent of the role of the Stasi, citing how his informants frequently refer to the institution as "a state within a state". The media in the GDR was full of propaganda, and as Baer writes, "many GDR citizens found information disseminated on GDR television and radio, in *Neues Deutschland* (the SED daily newspaper), in local newspapers, and in GDR state-operated popular magazines, simplistic, propagandistic, and boring. Intellectuals also lamented that the state permitted limited opportunities to publish critical analyses of GDR society" (1992, p. 326).

Understanding the role of propaganda is important within my investigation, as it helps to recognise how people are persuaded to behave in a certain way in the context of a political regime. Looking at experimental social psychology, evidence suggests that behaviours are heavily influenced by suggestion and propaganda. Zimbardo (2007) wrote about the power of propaganda and the way in which it can elicit evil in people. He explains that "*systems create hierarchies of dominance with influence and communication going down – rarely up – the line. When a power elite wants to destroy an enemy nation, it turns to propaganda experts to fashion a program of hate*". Dehumanising the other person, creating stereotyped conceptions, creating a particularly evil image, an "abstract monster", "the other as a fundamental threat to our cherished values and beliefs", creating dramatic visual images are all aspects of distributing propaganda.

Historically, we look back on the impact propaganda can have and how it can affect human behaviour in the most atrocious ways. In the past, this has been not only

true for states but also for religious institutions. By looking at the Christian witch-hunts, astounding parallels become clear. These persecutions primarily took place in Europe and North America between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and were the Catholic church's aim to 'purify the world of evil', but at the same time, reaffirm its status quo and power. Those who actively or seemingly threatened the current system including those who simply thought differently became scapegoats of evil. They would be declared as witches were seen as the embodiment of evil, directly under the influence of the devil. The only way to stop the spread of evil, according to the Catholic Church, was witch-hunts. Their approach was to find the witch, get her to confess heresy and destroy her or, execute her regardless of what she said. In order to find witches a special system was in place: "find out through spies who among the population were witches, test their witchy natures by getting confessions using various torture techniques, and kill those who failed the test." (Zimbardo 2008, p.9)

Arthur Miller wrote his famous play *The Crucible* (1953) is an excellent representation of this effect, though set in a different time period. The story takes place during the witch-hunts in North America, namely the town of Salem, Massachusetts. Based on a true story, Miller's characters become increasingly entangled in a web of lies. The story begins with a few girls being caught in a forest while appearing to perform witchcraft. Knowing the possible consequences of witchcraft accusations, the girls try to cover up the incidence by pretending that they themselves had been bewitched. As time goes by, more and more people in the town become involved in the shifting of blame. Suddenly, one person is accusing another of being a witch or of working with the devil. Eventually, the accusations get

completely out of hand, as people begin to blame one another for personal benefit. This pattern is emphasised through the character of Abigail Williams, who had previously had an affair with the farmer, John Proctor, and thus accuses his wife of witchcraft in order to get rid of her so that she can marry him.

What is interesting here is the way in which Miller manages to convey the atmosphere of the time and most importantly the impact of the witch-hunt had on human relationships. By looking at this literary example, we learn much about the effects of mass hysteria and the fear of denunciation; for the play very accurately represents the way power can be abused and how espionage into people's political convictions can create collective anxiety and paranoia.

As it is demonstrated through Arthur Miller's personal life history, the phenomenon conveyed in his play is not a unique one in history. Indeed, *The Crucible* was a commentary on the political situation in the US at the time, alluding to paranoia over communists in the McCarthy Era. At the time, US authorities also became suspicious of Miller, forcing him to provide information on fellow authors with communist tendencies. He, however refused to give away anything and was sent to prison. Hence, he became the victim of a witch-hunt of sorts upon publishing the play. The magazine *The New Yorker* (1996) once wrote that "Miller understood the universal experience of being unable to believe that the state has lost its mind".

Similarly, in the GDR, the state became increasingly paranoid of its population, especially supposed "political dissidents" threatening the regime, in order to control the population the state employed extensive surveillance and repressive techniques. From the above examples, it can be concluded that the state not only

acts in ways which transform societies to fit political (or even religious) ideals but within imposing controlling measures it also can alter core human moral perceptions and values.

Still, we must consider Havel's (1985) standpoint as valid, too. Not everyone was convinced by, or genuinely believed in the ideology of socialism, but rather they learnt to accept rules and enacted everyday rituals in order to appear as an obedient citizen.

Hence, we learn that there are two sides to ideology. It convinces people to agree to and to support political systems and actions (such as war and violence). Accordingly, it normalizes and legitimizes (at times) immoral behavior. On the other, hand in the neo-totalitarian system ideology was an excuse, a façade to uphold the system. This leads us to the following section, investigating questions of conformity and resistance in the GDR.

### Conformity in the GDR

What is it that leads people to comply and actively participate in a dictatorship, and what are long-term implications for their wellbeing?

There are various ways in which the GDR gained support from its citizens or at the very least secured their participation in the regime for over 40 years. Many people were indeed convinced by the communist cause. After the Second World War, the country was to be rebuilt, while the Eastern zone was occupied by the Soviet Union. Rosenberg writes, "Communism was imposed from outside everywhere in Eastern Europe, but it was less resented in Germany, where supporting the SED was a natural reaction to the shame of the Nazi era. The communist's anti-Nazi posture

helped to legitimise the Party" (Rosenberg 1995). I would add that many young people, especially young women, were determined to build a new country based on socialist principles, with the hope that the atrocities of the War would never be repeated.

During the first years of the GDR's existence, there was open opposition against socialist propaganda, which led to a mass exodus to the West and eventually to the building of the Wall. Between 1949 and 1961, around 2.7 million people left the GDR for the Federal Republic (FRG) (BStU 2016).

Before the Wall was built, many young professionals fled to the West. Apparently one year the Law Faculty of Leipzig University lost its entire staff (Rosenberg 1995, p. 269). Still, the ideal of socialism had many supporters who truly believed in the potential of this new social order. When the GDR was founded, the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* had 2700 employees, by 1990 it had 91.015 official and around 189.000 unofficial employees (IMs), yet these numbers do not include SED party members, *Gesellschaftliche Mitarbeiter (GM)* or anyone who casually passed on information to *IMs* (BStU 2016). Over the years the surveillance apparatus grew immensely both in labour force and their impact on the general population.

As contradictions between the socialist ideal and the realities of everyday life grew, the power of the Stasi increased, with their goal to control and repress the population. As previously mentioned, I argue that it was not only the Stasi who exerted the control but in fact the population, many of whom became guards in the panoptic sense. They did not exert the main control in the GDR, but they added another dimension to existing Stasi repression. This dynamic reinforced social

distrust and exposed many to the psychological and social pressure to conform ("*Anpassungsdruck*"). This also meant that control was so deeply engrained in GDR culture, that it became, especially in later years, normalised.

### Apathy and normalisation of control

Addressing questions of how dictatorships receive the support of the population Hannah Arendt illustrated the way in which a regime can lure citizens into compliance by giving them not only a sense of security but also through the apathy created by comforts and mundanities of everyday life. Certainly, the comforts of everyday life are not necessarily the only reasons to actively support a political system, but they reduce incentives to oppose the system. I argue that it is these benefits, no matter how small, which led people to become lethargic. This, perhaps coupled with a sense of defeat, caused people to give up and (at least outwardly) comply with the regime.

The ethnographic accounts of East Germans suggest that many people were particularly compliant if they had a relatively comfortable life. Acting out of line with the system may have posed a threat to their lifestyle and created disadvantages. One woman in her 50's felt that compliance with the dictatorship and its impact was more extreme in the younger generation. She thinks this trend stemmed from "*convenient adjustment to the given circumstances*" - "*bequeme Anpassung*". People avoided asking too many questions. She says that many GDR citizens felt that they were "*taken care of by the state*", allowing the state to exert control "*under the guise of public welfare*" - "*Unter dem Deckmantel der Fürsorge*".

Certainly, everything was taken care of; everyone had a job, food, money and housing. The state provided these services to its citizens. This all-encompassing-provision meant that for one, a great deal of the existential uncertainties (that many people grapple with nowadays) were taken care of, but it also meant that the state had a maximum of control over its population's life choices (e.g. careers). The informant believes that, since many difficulties had been taken off their hands, people did not think much about or hardly questioned the system that they were so deeply engrained in. She says that this state made many people *"inactive" – "träge"*.

For some people surveillance was simply another form of security – after all, there was apparently *"no crime, nothing bad could happen and children were looked after"*. Frau T. decided to leave the GDR because to her, these people were overlooking the real problems of a dictatorship, simply saying: *"We are actually well-off" – "Es geht uns doch eigentlich gut"*. Leading up to her application to emigrate the country, she noticed that particularly by the 1980's state control had become fairly normalised. She says that *"surveillance displayed itself in conformation, indifference and complacency. And so one just accepted it" – "Die Überwachung hat sich als Anpassung, Gleichgültigkeit, Bequemlichkeit dargestellt. Und da hat man das so hingenommen"*. (Frau T.)

As Frau M. described, living under surveillance became a part of everyday life: *"I realized at one stage, the vast majority of GDR people didn't even register that they were living a repressive society... because they didn't know anything else."* Having had the experience of living abroad, she noticed many people's blind compliance with the system they were living in, recognising the way they avoided open discussions and voicing their true opinions. She told me,

*“The arbitrariness of the state horrified me and I had had the experience... I was used to political discussions in Australia and the West. Everyone grew up with a right to their opinion.” Frau M. stressed that she missed a culture of debate: “When I said to people 'Lasst uns einig sein, um uneinig zu sein’<sup>11</sup> they looked at me as though I was talking Chinese. They didn't have such a concept even, they didn't know what I was talking about.” (Frau M.)*

Those who did speak their mind, were often met with judgement and social pressure to adjust. At times this was due to the danger of repercussions of state control and fear of disadvantages, not necessarily because people were convinced by the socialist cause. An informant in her 40's described how friends and family had shunned her when they found out that her parents had submitted an application to leave the GDR. However, as soon as the borders opened and Germany was reunited, they got back in touch with them and were happy to see them. She believes that they had feared the repercussions of associating with political dissidents.

*“...But I can't imagine why someone wouldn't want to see their son just because he applied to emigrate... But perhaps nowadays we can't imagine such a thing anymore, because luckily these horrible times are over, ...but um...I don't know, if it was just the disadvantages or whether they were really so loyal to the political system. I can't make judge that. I think it was primarily the potential disadvantages, because when the borders opened, they all came back to us.”*

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<sup>11</sup> “Let's agree to disagree”

*"... Aber ich kann mir auch nicht vorstellen, wie man seinen Sohn nicht mehr sehen will, wenn der einen Ausreiseantrag stellt...Aber vielleicht können wir uns heute so was einfach nicht mehr vorstellen, weil es ja zum Glück so eine furchtbare Zeit nicht mehr gibt,...aber ähm... ich weiß nicht, ob es jetzt nur die Nachteile waren oder ob sie wirklich so systemtreu waren. Ich kann es nicht beurteilen. Ich denke überwiegend waren's die Nachteile, weil, als sich dann die Grenzöffnung entwickelte, kamen sie ja alle wieder an.*

*Also als wir dann hier waren, wir sind ja '81 ausgereist, und dann die Wende kam, waren sie alle wieder da. Haben sich gefreut, eingeladen zu werden, und wir haben auch sie besucht. Aber dieses Thema, denke ich, hat immer eine Rolle gespielt". (Frau L.)*

Another informant had a similar experience. When he submitted his *Ausreiseantrag*, his decision was received with incomprehension by friends and acquaintances. People would say to him *"What more do you want? You have a car, a (Neubau) flat, money, your mother is in the West and sends you things..."*. But to him, these apparent privileges were meaningless because he wanted freedom. He would say: *"What shall I do with the money? I want my freedom. I want to be able to visit my mother when it pleases me"* - *"Was soll ich mit dem Geld anfangen? Ich will meine Freiheit haben. Ich will meine Mutter besuchen können..."* (Herr A).

Frau T. explained how, in the psychologically tedious process of her emigration application, her local church community helped her. When she and her husband submitted their *Ausreiseantrag*, their exposure to Stasi surveillance became more extreme with interrogations, being followed and placed under close observation

even in their own house. Indeed, the community within the church, her own intellectual curiosity and reading alternative literature helped her in this stressful time and further encouraged her desire to leave. Indeed, it was *"a strong desire for freedom"* that motivated her. She says that she was not concerned with material things. Yes, they were nice but did not matter much.

Her desire to emigrate really cemented itself when she had her first child. It was her critical view of the aforementioned all-encompassing and self-perpetuating system of control, that led her to that decision. When her daughter was born, she was immediately urged to apply for a nursery place. Yet, she did not want her child to be exposed to this system of surveillance from such a young age. When she rebelled against the state-imposed ideas and insisted on raising her daughter at home until she was 3, this was not accepted. It was frowned upon and she was told that such children could not be easily integrated into the GDR's educational system.

Frau T. primarily opposed the control and indoctrination that children were exposed to. She feared that this would worsen in the next generation, as there was no escape. She says that when she was young, her parents had more freedom to create alternative spaces for expression, separate from the state system. Her own nursery and school teachers had grown up in a different time and took a slightly different approach to education, while the teachers of the younger generation had been brought up in a system where state power was all-encompassing. As I outlined previously, control was normalised; it was very much embedded in people's minds. When the couple submitted their application to leave, other mothers were outraged asking *"How can you do such a thing to your child?"*-*"Wie kannst du deinem Kind so etwas antun?"* .

There was, indeed, a lot of uncertainty about what could happen once the application was submitted. There had been rumours that children were taken away from their parents. There was also the knowledge that they could be facing an insecure future in the West. Still, they knew that leaving was the right decision and this received with incomprehension. The mothers of other children whom she knew could not understand why she was willing to take the risk. They were more prepared to adjust and play along with whatever was dictated by the state. She was shocked that, in their heads, the right thing to do was to stay. They never even questioned the current state of the system they were living in. They never wondered what the problem was with a system where a mother could potentially be separated from her child merely because she had different opinions. Instead, they made Frau T. responsible, because according to them she should have complied with the system.

A further interview revealed how closely conformity was linked with convenience, personal circumstances (education, profession, location, etc.), and individual privileges. Frau F. recalled a trip that she took in 1989, where she got permission to accompany her mother to the West for her aunt's funeral. During their journey, whilst stopping at a Western train station, they saw the arrival of the first East German refugee train coming from Prague. They saw how people stormed into the shops buying coffee, cake and fruit. She was shocked! She says that she was ashamed of her fellow GDR citizens, because *"it hadn't been that bad in the GDR" - "Ich habe mich für unsere DDR Bürger geschämt. So schlecht ist es uns in der DDR nicht gegangen"* (Frau F.). I found this statement particularly interesting because shortly beforehand she had told me that through her employment at a large chemical plant in Saxony, she had significantly better access to food and products in

general. She was not as severely affected by shortages as the general population and the fact that her life was relatively comfortable, surely impacted her view of her position within the state. As I was told by many people there was a culture of *“suppression and denial”*. This tendency to block out certain realities seems to have lived on. As one informant criticised, even in the aftermath of the collapse of the regime, many East Germans chose to move forward and simply leave memories behind without engaging with their own past within the dictatorship.

### The Turning point: *Wende*

In the final years of the GDR's existence, as shortages increased and the contradictions of everyday life were more apparent, voices of discontent became louder amongst the population.

Frau J., a 94-year-old woman who has been a devoted socialist all her life explained that the collapse of the GDR was caused by an "implosion". She says that the socialist system could not survive; because the contradictions and injustices of everyday life were not resolved, there was no development. She says that this inability to move forward can be ascribed to the abuse of power by political elites, who had lost touch with the realities of life within the state. She says it was their hunger for power, which led them to act contrary to their original convictions of creating a humanistic social order, saying that *“The most horrific temptation of all, is the temptation of power”* - *“Die furchtbarste Aller Versuchungen, ist die Versuchung der Macht”* . According to Frau J., *“The more power they (ruling elite gained), the more they lost sight of the socialist cause”* - *“Je mehr Macht sie hatten umso mehr haben sie den Bezug zu ihrer humanitären Funktion verloren.”*

On the other hand, the younger generation wanted reforms and felt that the old leadership was stagnant and policies were no longer up to date. Previous events such as the forced exile of singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann demonstrated the state's tightening of control and attempt at eliminating dissent. In particular churches became spaces for open critique and discussion (for a detailed investigation see Grünbaum 2011).

Frau T. who emigrated from the GDR, described the important role of the church community during the last years that she spent in the state. To her, the church represented a place where she felt free and it was safe to express her opinions. Her local congregation provided her with a lot of support and gave her strength, especially during the time of the application to emigrate. She described her time there as intellectually stimulating and nurturing, saying *"The church in the GDR was the best of my life."* She found the people to be *"authentic, creative and in touch with their emotions"*. - *"Die Kirche der DDR war die beste Kirche meines Lebens. Das war was ganz besonderes. Das war ehrlich, die Leute waren kreativ und ganz emotional."* It appears that there was a different character to the community, incomparable to churches in the West for example. *"The churches that I know in the West are good, but they just don't compare."* - *"Kirchen die ich im Westen kenne, die sind gut aber die kann man nicht vergleichen"* (Frau T.)

Indeed, the church and religion in general was viewed with suspicion by the state, and in later years were targeted with particular intensity by the Stasi. Nevertheless, it was a space where alternative intellectual discourses could take place without the judgmental attitude that people were exposed to in everyday life. Hence, it contributed significantly as a source of comfort and strength.

Because of its key role in providing shelter for more critical voices, the church soon became a space for political discussions. In the later years of the regime, people gathered mostly in churches and created the civil activist movement *Neues Forum* (Kukutz 2009). It was there that they organised demonstrations, which ultimately led to the peaceful revolution and the fall of the Wall. There were calls for change, a reformation of GDR policies with more freedom to travel. Therefore, it must be noted that it would be a misconception to assume that this movement was aimed purely at achieving the reunification of Germany (and ultimately being taken over by the FRG). Many people were unhappy with the status quo, but not all wanted the state to collapse all together.

Nearly all of my informants, no matter how devoted they were to the state, criticise the way in which GDR history is addressed in the public discourse today, especially those who were critical of the regime feel that a process of coming to terms with the past never really took place. Not only did the euphoria of change in the early 1990's overpower any engagement with the legacy of the socialist dictatorship; the quick political change also left many feeling disillusioned and disenfranchised.

### Accountability

*“As Germany sweeps up its broken glass for the second time in fifty years, the border guards’ trial reveals that many of the issues involved have not changed: the question of obedience to a higher authority, of prosecution for crimes that had been given the stamp of law, of the responsibility of the individual in a totalitarian state.”*  
(Rosenberg 1995, p. 264)

In the years following Germany's reunification, some effort was made to reveal former Stasi employees, but a process of reconciliation for victims of the

dictatorship is yet to take place. Those who were traumatised by state oppression suffer, in particular, as they feel that certain "old structures" continue to exist in the East and former perpetrators continue to hold influential positions in society. The persistent silence and reluctance of victims to come forward stems from a sense of defeat, due to the belief that old power structures continue to exist, leaving them in a powerless position. Many feel that their suffering is not taken seriously, while some fear that the Stasi past is glorified by popular culture. Yet, others feel betrayed when they see negative accounts about the GDR in the media.

Frau L. told me that she feels like in the East, some old GDR regime structures continue to exist. She says that while many things had changed, she still recognizes certain mannerisms and characteristics in people, especially those working in council offices, who remind her of Stasi officials. She thinks that she could never go back to live in the region because the past has never really been evaluated and dealt with.

She says that even after all these years she can still feel the impact of Stasi surveillance:

*"These monitoring structures, the people in these offices, I can still feel it. I notice exactly who still has certain characteristics, certain features, and I could never, never live there again. Although it is now beautiful, it has changed a lot, but we both feel that certain structures still exist and personally we would not be able to live in the region."*

*"Diese Überwachungsstrukturen, die Menschen in diesen Ämtern, ich spüre das immernoch. Ich merke genau, die haben noch bestimmte Eigenschaften,*

*bestimmte Wesensmerkmale, und ich könnte nie, nie da leben wieder. Obwohl es jetzt schön ist, es hat sich ja einiges verändert aber gewisse Strukturen spüren wir beide und uns persönlich wäre es unmöglich in dieser Region noch leben zu können."* (Frau L.).

Indeed, she is convinced that even today the East-West border is present in people's minds. When she visits the East, she is always happy to be able to return to the West eventually. Somehow the place and the people still make her *"feel somewhat restricted"* - *"es engt mich ein"* (Frau L.).

Like for many others, the old surveillance structures still challenge their sense of wellbeing, and in particularly prominent cases leading them to avoid the region all together. It appears that due to the rapid unravelling of the SED regime, certain structures of the dictatorship and the culture surrounding them are still present because they were never challenged enough.

Another informant told me that there was no real process of reconciliation in which the true burden of the regime was addressed. There is not enough recognition of the tragedy behind the dictatorship because the euphoria of freedom to travel and materialism overshadowed it.

*"I think that certain structures are still there, and I have the feeling the past was not worked through properly because the process was overwhelmed by materialism, everyone was glad to be able to travel now... While the gravity of this dictatorship was not addressed...it is still not recognised. When we start such discussions in the family, it is impossible. "* (Frau T.)

*"Ich glaube das gewisse Strukturen immernoch da sind. Und ich habe das Gefühl das wurde nicht richtig aufgearbeitet. Das wurde vom Materiellen übergestülpt, alle waren froh, jetzt reisen zu können, wo jetzt diese Schwere dieser Diktatur, ... das ist immer noch nicht aufgearbeitet. Das wird auch immer noch nicht erkannt. Wenn wir dann in der Familie solche Diskussionen anfangen, das geht gar nicht." (Frau T.)*

Frau T. migrated to the West before the fall of the Wall and addressing the past in family discussions in the East continues to be extremely difficult. As I have heard from many others who also left the GDR before 1989, the legitimacy and validity of their claims is often challenged by those who stayed in the country until the end.

Striking up a conversation about state control in the former GDR is pointless in her opinion as people have not learnt anything from the past. She thinks that the opportunity to learn from past mistakes has been wasted. The past has never been collectively reprocessed - *"aufgearbeitet"*.

*"This great potential to learn from the past has been wasted, I think,... it has not been processed."*

*"Dieses große Potenzial davon lernen zu können, hat man vergeudet, finde ich,...man hat es nicht aufgearbeitet". (Frau L.)*

Meanwhile, those who suffered immensely under state control are taken aback by the contemporary idealisation of the past, both by individuals and the media alike. The trend of "Ostalgie" (see for example Pence & Betts 2008; Berdahl 2009), a kind of nostalgia for the GDR, is met with dismissal and incomprehension. In fact, some say that Stasi spying is at times glorified in popular culture. One informant told me

that the award-winning Hollywood film, *"The Lives of the Others"* (2006) affected her immensely. She feels that the Stasi officials were not portrayed realistically and it bothers her that in particular the lead actor, Ulrich Mühe (an actor "whom everyone loves") portrayed his Stasi officer character as too likeable, giving viewers the impression that *"it wasn't so bad after all"*. She feels that the opposite was true, saying that in her experience dealing with Stasi officials was awful. For her, they were "disgusting". It makes her angry, that people are misled.

*"There is this movie, 'The lives of the others', ... wonderful actors, Mühe,<sup>12</sup> everyone loves him, as a Stasi officer, ... that has totally annoyed me. I never met such a person. Maybe there were ones like that, maybe weren't not all so awful. But if you do a film with a Stasi officer who plays a positive role, many might think, 'It was not so bad'. And it was bad! Such films make me angry ... Perhaps they have to do this for the cinema, otherwise, no one can go in there ... But really, they were not like that. They were disgusting! It makes me angry." (Frau T.)*

*"Es gibt ja diesen Film, 'Das Leben der anderen',...wunderbare Schauspieler, der Mühe, jeder liebt ihn, der als Stasi-Offizier,...das hat mich total aufgeregt. So einen hab ich nie getroffen Vielleicht gab es die, ...es waren sicher nicht alle so schlimm. Aber wenn man einen Film macht mit einem Stasi-Offizier der eine positive Rolle spielt, könnten viele denken, 'So schlimm war's gar nicht'. Und es war schlimm! Solche Filme machen mich wütend... Die müssen*

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<sup>12</sup> The German actor Ulrich Mühe played the lead role in the 2006 movie 'The lives of the others'. The movie received many awards included an Oscar for 'Best foreign film'.

*das ja vielleicht machen fürs Kino, sonst geht da ja keiner rein...Aber so waren die nicht. Die waren eklig! Das macht mich wütend.” (Frau T.)*

Frau T.’s emotional response demonstrates the extent to which the suffering of past trauma still surfaces in everyday life. It also points towards a lack of public debate and recognition of former East Germans’ suffering. Those who are affected often feel that the past is misrepresented, diminishing the true tragedy of the experience of repression and persecution.

One informant criticised the fact that there is no real dialogue about the realities of the dictatorship, but instead there is a focus on an idealisation of everyday life in the GDR. She says that people choose to discuss material things or their travels. It appears that now, more than 25 years after the fall of the Wall, certain topics associated with the GDR past are still “off-limits”. Indeed, as I mentioned previously, when it comes to the acknowledgment of the suffering endured in the regime, there is a culture of silence. Many discussions and public representations of the GDR centre around light-hearted topics.

Frau T. recalled a phone conversation in which an old friend from the GDR contemplated why people often forget about all the good things of the old times. She said that she could not respond to that claim. She told me that to her it is shocking that a man of 60 years could draw such a positive conclusion of the past. She thinks that it is obvious that he did not understand anything about the state that he was living in. I am wondering, perhaps he does not want to seriously reflect on it. She is exasperated at the fact that he can so nonchalantly say *“It was actually quite good”* - *“Es war doch eigentlich ganz gut”*, about a state that was surrounded

by a wire fence. In her opinion, many people argue for the comfort of things of the old days, such as good child care provisions :*"the children were well taken care of..."*-*"die Kinder waren doch versorgt..."*. But, they are failing to critically reflect on the reality that they were locked in. Frau T. believes that people tend to *"suppress the actual tragedy of the political system that they were living in"* -*" Man verdrängt die eigentliche Tragik des Systems"* (Frau T.)

Herr A., a man in his 60's, told me that even nowadays he still gets emotional when people defend the GDR or praise communism. It makes him lose his temper. Indeed, he considers himself as having been an "enemy of the state".

*"If someone praises the GDR or praises the communists, I can also go ballistic...I really hated this state. It had to collapse. That is why I was a real enemy of the state. Just not everyone knew this."* (Herr A.)

*"Wenn einer die DDR lobt oder die Kommunisten lobt, da kann ich auch ausrasten... Diesen Staat hab ich wirklich gehasst. Der musste untergehen. Deshalb war ich ein wirklicher Staatsfeind. Nur das hat nicht jeder gewusst."* (Herr A.)

Some people simply changed their convictions and opinions to suit the new system, virtually overnight. All of a sudden, they claimed that they had never believed in socialism or the state. One informant gives the example of a friend's sister who had worked for the Stasi as a secretary, in the main offices in Berlin. A few years ago she sent her a postcard from a trip to Paris on which she wrote "how nice that we can do this now" - *"wie schön dass wir das jetzt können."* She found this peculiar and also ironic, as this woman may have only been a secretary but she "was probably

typing up some prisoner's reports". Indeed, some people just changed their attitude and have gotten into influential positions once again.

Those of my informants who suffered greatly by being exposed to the arbitrariness of the state still fear a loss of control, giving them a continued sense of powerlessness. The possibility of being controlled by unchecked powers causes a great deal of anxiety. The suspicion (and occasionally proof) that some Stasi officials managed to get into influential positions after the fall of the Wall, exacerbates this feeling, further challenging the healing process. In an anecdote, one informant (who had been exposed to the Stasi's "Zersetzung" method in past) describes a Stasi party he had witnessed at his sister's house, where many former state employees debated and distributed positions within local councils in the early 1990's. It was a summer garden party, a big event hosting around 40 or 50 guests, including many former party members and Stasi officials who, standing on the lawn, wine glass in hand, discussed how they would exchange and move around posts within local counties and constituencies, securing influential positions such as mayors.

*"I then said afterwards, that was a real Stasi party. They debated about how to divide the departments in (town in North-East Germany)<sup>13</sup>, so that as many people as possible could get a job ... And that was done with a glass of wine in hand on the garden lawn .... 'So then you'll get this village ..., this village has so-and-so many inhabitants, so you can be used as the main official mayor' ... And so on ... " (Herr K.)*

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<sup>13</sup> town name removed by author

*"Ich hab dann hinterher gesagt, das war 'ne richtige Stasi-Party. Da wurde dann darüber debattiert, wie man in ..., wie man die Dezernate aufteilt, damit möglichst viele der Leute einen Posten kriegen...Und das wurde mit einem Glas Wein in der Hand im Garten auf der Wiese debattiert....'Also dann kriegst du noch dieses Dorf dazu..., dieses Dorf hat so-und-so viele Einwohner, da kannst du als Hauptamtlicher Bürgermeister eingesetzt werden'...Und so weiter..." (Herr K.)*

Upon witnessing this, Herr K. and his wife quickly left the event. But this experience caused so much emotional upheaval that he could not sleep for several nights after the party, bringing old anxieties back to light. Understandably so, as someone who was traumatised by extensive repression and persecution, the knowledge that his perpetrators are still in positions of power, makes a coming to terms with the past extremely difficult.

Indeed, Herr K.'s story exemplifies a reality that many East Germans are confronted with on an everyday basis. According to a recent investigation (2009), around 17,000 former employees of the GDR Ministry of State Security (MfS) are said to have remained in the public service of East German state administrations. According to the evaluation, there are still 2247 in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2942 in Brandenburg, 800 in Thuringia, 4400 in Saxony-Anhalt, 2733 in Berlin and 4101 employees in Saxony, the "Financial Times Deutschland" reported. Although extensive checks took place after the *Wende*, The Federal Criminal Police Office (*Bundeskriminalamt, BKA*) too, confirms that some former Stasi-people were taken over after reunification. The exact numbers remain unclear but Klaus Schroeder, head of the research group SED State of the Free University of Berlin, estimates that

there are several tens of thousands of former unofficial staff of the Stasi to ministries and authorities. Of course, such revelations have a severe emotional impact on those Easterners who were traumatised in the GDR. Accordingly, one could pose the question as to whether a healing process is possible at all if individuals are constantly confronted with the presence of their perpetrators and the knowledge that they still hold power. Victims tend to feel defeated, as there is little public initiative to change the current situation. Coupled with this, is the fact that some people are still in support of the dictatorship and perhaps idealise its existence in retrospect.

They, on the other hand, argue that the legacy of Stasi surveillance is dramatised and over-exaggerated. For them, the trauma of the collapse of the state and socio-economic consequences stand in the forefront. Frau F., for example, is particularly concerned about the effect that the fall of the Wall had on those GDR citizens who felt happy and comfortable in the state. In the 1980's she, herself, had wanted a renewed leadership in the GDR. She thinks that the ideologies of socialism and communism were essentially a good idea. Alluding to the increased suicide rates in East Germany in the early 1990's, she emphasised that not all who committed suicide after the fall of the Wall were former Stasi people, but they were simply overwhelmed by the new state system, the novel situation of having a lack of money and unemployment.

She feels that people were tricked by the apparent abundance of material possessions, the fact that in West everything was bright and colourful. She remarked that it never made a difference to her if a plastic bag had colourful writing

on it or if it was plain, after all, what difference did it make? It was disappointing to her that GDR citizens were won over so easily by such superficial material things.

*"If you think about how many people took their lives after the reunification, they were certainly not all members of the state security, but simply because they could not come to terms with the new situation, with unemployment, not being able to afford anything... All these things in the shops and the colours, which were more attractive, ... I do not care whether a bag is grey or white and labelled, but it seems that such a thing mattered to the GDR citizen at the time ... " (Frau F.)*

*"Wenn man sich überlegt, wie viele sich nach der Wende das Leben genommen haben, die waren bestimmt nicht alle bei der Staatssicherheit. Sondern ganz einfach, weil sie mit der neuen Situation, mit der Arbeitslosigkeit, nicht zu Rande gekommen sind. Die sahen zwar alle Dinge in den Geschäften und die bunten Farben, die attraktiver waren, ...das ist meines Erachtens vollkommen egal, ob die Tüte nun grau oder weiß ist und beschriftet, aber auf so was hat der DDR Bürger damals wohl Wert gelegt..." (Frau F.)*

Towards the end of my interview with Frau F., her partner spontaneously joined us. He seemed particularly concerned that the GDR was misrepresented nowadays and immediately challenged whether I would *"distort the past"* - *"die Vergangenheit verzerren"*, in my study. He seemed frustrated with the current situation of the reunified Germany and argued that life in the GDR is entirely misrepresented. He pointed out that now they had to battle existential fears and this led many to regret

the end of the GDR. He says that he valued the security that the state provided the most. All of that is lost now.

Frau F. and her partner are convinced that, if people had anticipated what eventually happened after Germany's reunification, surely they would have seen the *Wende* differently.

*"I suppose, if some people would have foreseen what was in store for them, they would have reacted differently during the reunification." (Frau F.)*

*"Ich nehme an, dass, wenn manch' einer geahnt hätte was auf ihn zukommt, hätte er anders reagiert während der Wende." (Frau F.)*

There appears to be a sense of betrayal felt by those who wanted to ensure the state's reform, as opposed to its collapse. Especially during the emigration wave in 1989 they found it incomprehensible how people could go to such great lengths, just to leave the GDR. One woman told me to think about those images they show on TV of East German refugees who were occupying the FRG's embassy in Prague, in the hope of being sent to the West, in 1989. Obviously, they had been seduced by materialism and financial aspirations of the West. She is disappointed that these people never thought about the GDR citizens they were letting down, the people who had provided them with a good education.

*"When you look at the images of how young people drove to the Prague embassy, with Trabis and sometimes even Wartburgs. They were all well fed, well dressed. The children looked great. You can see they were not badly off. The possibilities, and what they could shop, and that they thought they could possibly earn more, that naturally seduced them. But they did not think of*

*the people of the GDR, who they let down, who had given them a good education.” (Frau J.)*

*"Wenn sie sich mal die Bilder angucken, wie die Jungen Menschen da zur Prager Botschaft gefahren sind, mit Trabis und manchmal sogar Wartburgs. Die waren alle gut genährt, gut gekleidet. Die Kinder sahen blühend aus. Da sah man, es ging ihnen nicht schlecht. Die Möglichkeiten, und was sie einkaufen konnten, und dass sie dachten, sie können vielleicht mehr verdienen, das hat natürlich verführt. Dabei haben sie aber nicht an die Menschen in der DDR gedacht, die sie im Stich lassen, die ihnen eine gute Bildung ermöglicht haben." (Frau J.)*

This statement shows that the former German Democratic Republic is a great case study for the way in which humans interpret a particular social system that they are living in. Rosenberg (1995) critiques people's reluctance to admit their own roles in the dictatorship, hinting at the morally highly ambiguous question of who was a victim or perpetrator. She asserts, "unlike under Hitler, the people who suffered at the hands of East German communism really were East Germans. And although most were pillars of the system in addition to victims, it is natural for people to focus only on their suffering and not on their complicity. Most learned to live within the system, but most also resented it – only communism needed a Wall." (p. 319)

My interlocutors' accounts reflect how varied and at times conflicted East Germans understanding of the past and present are. I argue that it is this large range of impressions within the population, which poses great challenges for the victims in their healing process. Since there is such a huge spectrum of voices; ranging from

supporters of the state still mourning its collapse, to those who had to endure great suffering and distress caused by state violence. And, yet others who are largely indifferent to the dictatorship's legacy, merely adapting to whichever political system happens to be prominent at a given time. This broad range of impressions and personal experiences draws a complex picture of East Germany today.

### Interpersonal Relationships after the Fall of the Wall

Within families, a person's position on the past dictatorship and their role within it shape and impact relationships to this day. One woman who was, despite having had some negative experiences early in life, very much in favour of the state, described the conflicts that dominate the relationships with her relatives. She says that nowadays she is no longer in touch with them (only the bare minimum on holidays) because she knows that when they interact, they get into arguments about their religious orientation and differing worldviews.

A man in his late 60's who was imprisoned and "bought out" - "*rausgekauft*", told me about the disappointment he felt after reunification. When he was in the West, he had always sent parcels to friends and family in the East, spending a lot of money. Then, after the Wende when he visited them, they still expected him to give them gifts despite never making an effort to stay in touch. They never even called, saying that it was "too expensive". He told me that many friendships ended that way. These supposed friends only made an effort while there was something to be gained.

*“So many West Germans say that, they were world-class at accepting (gifts) and saying thank you, but when they didn’t need you anymore, they wanted to have nothing to do with you.” (Herr A.)*

*“Das sagen so viele Westdeutsche, im Nehmen und im Danke-sagen waren sie Weltspitze, aber als sie sie nicht mehr brauchten, wollten sie mit ihnen nichts mehr zu tun haben.” (Herr A.)*

Indeed, while many true friendships persisted over the years, others that had been established out of mere necessity, began to crumble swiftly after the wall fell. These types of relationships were in colloquial terms known as "Vitamin B", "B"- referring to the word *Beziehungen*. In other words, relationships established in order to gain (often mutual) benefits such as the unofficial trading of goods or services, the speeding up of applications to gain permission to do something, such as house construction for example.

Some others may feel the burden of denunciation and betrayal. As illustrated earlier in the case of Herr K., who found out that his own sister had fundamentally betrayed him, but still continues to stay in touch with her, out of a sense of duty - *"because she is family"*. Yet their interactions are difficult and mostly superficial, born out of deep distrust. He says that they have many disagreements and their relationship cannot be described as *"normal"*.

*“Well, it’s not a normal relationship. It is superficial. I feel obligated. Since she’s a relative, I go to see her. My wife takes a more laid-back approach, even though they also end up arguing.”*

*"Na ja, ein normales Verhältnis ist das nicht. Es ist oberflächlich. Ich fühle mich verpflichtet. Es ist ja Verwandtschaft, ich, fahre da schon hin. Meine Frau sieht das ein bisschen lockerer. Obwohl sie auch immer aneinandergeraten..." (Herr K.)*

In the section *Records and Files of the MfS*, I shed some light on the way in which Stasi records and post-reunification revelations impacted and continue to impact East Germans' lives. As I briefly touched upon earlier, those who left the GDR prior to its collapse, either by official emigration (by means of an *Ausreiseantrag*), escape or being bought by the West during imprisonment, all report on challenges in their family relationships and sometimes friendships. Frau T. who had moved to the West in the mid-1980's told me she feels isolated from other East Germans, due to their differing experiences of the state. She is under the impression that East Germans who stayed do not consider her suffering and criticism as valid, since she did not stay until the state collapsed. By now, she and her family have lived in the West for 30 years. Therefore, her extended family thinks she *"has no right to bring up the topic of the GDR"*. She feels that they get defensive when the conversation moves in this direction. (Frau T.)

As illustrated by the examples above, East Germans' experiences of the reunification are multidimensional: they encompass the adjustment to a new social order, the realities of capitalism and along with that socio-economic factors. Further, the psycho-social legacy of dictatorship shapes interpersonal relationships and perceptions of "the East".

## Ossis and Wessis: Germany as a divided country

Regardless of people's stance on the GDR, all my informants agreed that there are still significant cultural differences between East and West Germany. Having been brought up and socialised in two entirely different political and social systems continues to shape German identity. There are still many cliches and preconceptions surrounding "*Ossis and Wessis*". One very common prejudice brought up by East Germans (34 percent) in a 2015 study is that Wessis are arrogant and full of themselves. As I have outlined previously many East Germans take great pride in the positive "Interpersonal Relationships" cultivated in the GDR. Although in recent years there has been a clear trend moving away from these cliches, a recent study (2015) concluded that 71 per cent of East Germans think that there are still significant differences between East and West Germans. (Damm et al. 2015; see also yougov.de). It is clear that it takes more than one generation for some form of cultural adjustment to occur.

Another study conducted 22 years after the reunification showed that there are still some reservations, in particular with regard to travelling to the respective *other side*. This reluctance is particularly true for West Germans, of whom one in five (21 per cent) have never visited East Germany. East Germans, on the other hand, have been a little more mobile, with only nine per cent of the population, who have never visited the West.

### **Identifying as East German and Avoidance Behaviour**

For some of my informants, travelling to the East, still, carries significant (at times negative) meaning and creates feelings of oppression and anxiety. Identifying oneself as being from the East is a sensitive issue for many. In addition, my research

has shown that some form of avoidance behaviour is apparent in those who experienced trauma in the regime, in line with Linden's proposed symptomatic criteria for a condition he calls Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) (Linden et al. 2008; Rosen & Lilienfeld 2008).

For Frau L., identifying as East German is still problematic. She left the GDR in 1981 and has lived in a West German town near Frankfurt am Main for many years now. She feels that West German's perception of East Germans varies by region. Those who live closer to the East German border see them in a rather negative light, because shortly after the reunification, many Easterners moved to the region and were accordingly perceived as a threat (for instance as there were fears that they would "take people's jobs"). In her experience, people living further West, like in Hamburg for example, have a less biased view of the East. She told me that for a long time she suppressed her memories of her childhood in an East German small town.

Indeed, she outlined how she takes great care in protecting her privacy and rarely mentioning her birthplace. She says that she chooses very carefully "*whom she tells what*". The story of her parents' imprisonment is especially something that she rarely discusses. She feels that most people would not understand or be able to empathise with her personal history. Both in the former GDR and the West alike, there are inevitably negative connotations attached to imprisonment and especially former political prisoners continue to experience stigma. When people hear that someone was detained for something, they automatically assume that this person must have committed a serious crime. They are labelled as criminals. She says that

this is partly why she does not recount her personal story lightly. She would for instance, never bring this up in conversation with her work colleagues in her firm, because it would be too personal.

In our conversation, she made clear that such a personal history can only be told within a particular context. It can only be told to someone who has the necessary maturity and background knowledge. She thinks that to the majority of people her story is not understandable. She feels somewhat isolated as not many people can relate to her experience.

*"The further away you get away from the border area, it's a completely different story. I think it's important to know how to deal with your history. I'm happy today that I can deal with it, that today I can decide who I tell about it.*

*And I have also had years where I really did not want to talk about it at all, because I believe that for a large number of people it is inconceivable ... or 'why is someone in prison'? Murder, theft, personal injury, whatever. But the fact that someone is in prison for political reasons,...because he wanted to live differently, these are things you cannot discuss with just anyone, you have to meet the right listeners.*

*If I were to say spontaneously to someone in my office, 'Yes, my parents were also in prison', they would think 'Well, what's wrong with her?' So you cannot just sit down in front of anyone and tell them something like that. It must be done in context, and that must be before people, who also have a certain maturity and age for it, and who have also engaged with the topic.*

*For all the others, it is not the right topic, and it is not comprehensible what it means to be a reunited family with two suitcases, and a father knows that he has a good qualification, but he does not automatically have a job. And who also does not know how to feed his family. Well, and, and ... these fears,...one certainly noticed." (Frau L.)*

*"Je weiter man hier von dem Grenzgebiet wegkommt, ist das ein ganz anderer Umgang. Also denke ich auch, dass es darauf ankommt, wie man umgeht mit der eigenen Geschichte. Ich bin heute froh dass ich heute damit umgehen kann. Das ich heute entscheiden kann, wem ich was erzähle.*

*Und habe aber auch Jahre gehabt, wo ich eigentlich überhaupt nicht drüber sprechen wollte, weil ich glaube, dass für eine Großzahl der Menschen es nicht vorstellbar ist, ... oder 'warum ist jemand im Gefängnis', das verbindet man ja oft mit Mord, Diebstahl, Körperverletzung, wie auch immer. Aber das jemand im Gefängnis ist aus politischen Gründen, und weil er anders leben wollte, das sind so Sachen, da muss man auch auf den richtigen Zuhörer treffen. Wenn ich jetzt spontan jemandem in meinem Büro sagen sollte, 'Ja meine Eltern waren auch mal im Gefängnis', da würden die denken, 'Ja was hat die denn?' Also man kann sich nicht vor irgendjemanden hinsetzen und denen so etwas erzählen. Das muss im Zusammenhang sein, und das muss vor Menschen sein, die auch eine gewisse Reife und auch Alter dafür haben und die sich auch schon mal damit beschäftigt haben. Für alle anderen ist das nicht das richtige Thema und das ist auch nicht nachvollziehbar, was es heißt, als wiederzusammengeflickte Familie die mit zwei Koffern ausreist, und der Vater weiß, dass er einen guten Beruf hat, aber*

*noch lange keine Stelle hat. Und auch nicht weiß, wie er seine Familie ernähren soll. Und ob er auch eine Stelle bekommt, und, und, und...Diese Ängste, ... ich denke das hat man schon mitbekommen." (Frau L.)*

Many of my interviewees, especially those who suffered from state violence, feel alone and misunderstood. Along with this feeling of isolation is the sense that the current reunited state is not doing enough to rehabilitate them and recognise the injustice they experienced. After one interview, for instance, my informant emailed me a series of letters, which he had previously sent to the Berlin senate complaining about the fact that the PDS (now *Die Linken*), a leftist party which partly evolved out of the SED, had some power in Berlin. He forcefully warned them of the possible repercussions this could have. His tone in these letters was very different from the way I had perceived him when we met, he had appeared reserved. From the writing, however, it was easy to gauge that he was very angry. The letters demonstrated that he identifies the presence of these potentially powerful individuals who are linked to the former SED regime, as a continued threat. Their influential position is also a persistent reminder of the denial of injustice that many victims continue to feel. For him, any reminder of his endured suffering triggers a strong emotional response.

Several people who managed to move to the West before 1989 told me that especially their children avoided telling people where they were from, particularly in the early years, in an attempt to adjust to life in the West, very much in line with my own experience. Perhaps this difficulty of identifying as East German can be seen particularly in the younger generation due to the complexity of the political and social code in the East. Which part of "being East German" should young people

who only remember fragments of the GDR identify with? There is much moral ambiguity involved. What was one's parent's role in the system and how was their experience? And would one want to be associated with a dictatorship or is it better to adopt the role of the victim? These are important questions with no simple answers. I argue that one could even speculate that this anxiety points to some intergenerational trauma. My own anxieties about my background may be an example of this.

While some who left the GDR say that they would not choose to move back to the East today, several people even actively avoid travelling there. The aforementioned informant (Frau B.) still associates the East with negative childhood memories. While she likes Berlin and occasionally even visits East Berlin areas like Prenzlauer Berg, she says the city is a special case. If she's, for instance, travelling somewhere on the Autobahn, she will still actively avoid the route that goes through the East. Even now, when certain parts of the Autobahn are much better in the East, she still chooses to travel through the Western towns.

*"I still do not like to go there, I have a few places where I go, I like to go to Erfurt, and I like to go to Berlin or East Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg or that area, but that is a different type of East. Berlin is rather special...So I would exclude Berlin. But, apart from that, I travel relatively little to the East. So if I can choose where to go, whether I drive through the East or whether I go up through Hanover, Braunschweig, I would somehow always choose Hanover. Even though the motorway is great now, but umm .... " ( Frau L.)*

*"Hinfahren tue ich nach wie vor nicht gerne. Es gibt Orte, wo ich hinfahre. Ich bin gerne mal in Erfurt, und ich bin auch gerne mal in Berlin oder Ost-Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg oder so die Ecke, aber ich das ist auch noch mal ein anderer Osten. Berlin ist ja eher speziell....Also Berlin würde ich da außen vornehmen. Also abgesehen davon, reise ich relativ wenig in den Osten. Also wenn ich mir aussuchen kann wo ich hinfahre, ob ich durch den Osten fahre oder ob ich oben, Hannover, Braunschweig fahr', würde ich irgendwie immer wieder Hannover aussuchen. Obwohl die Autobahn jetzt toll ist, aber ähmm...."*  
(Frau L.)

### Beyond the facades



In the following quote, Frau L. eloquently captures how many Germans feel who experienced injustice and suffering in the former GDR. To these individuals, it is difficult

to come to terms with the past, because of several factors, firstly because of the temporal aspect. The German reunification took place 26 years before my fieldwork, a relatively short amount of time. This means that, secondly, a fair amount of people who were actively engaged in the regime, are still active members in German society and even politically active and in decision-making positions. Third, despite

the governmental and non-governmental push towards public engagement and reconciliation of the past, this push has taken place mostly on a superficial public platform as opposed to an individual one. This superficial engagement with the past, which has been criticised extensively by the majority of my interviewees, means that there continues to be a condoning and silencing of negative aspects of the dictatorship.

Here Frau L. explains that she is still not keen on visiting the East. To her, there are still major differences in language, mentality and even the way in which people dress. The East generally evokes negative memories from her childhood. She especially has mixed feelings about the Baltic seaside towns. In recent years this region has seen a fast development, with investors buying and renovating many of the beautiful turn-of-the-century villas. Many new hotels have been built or renewed. Now seaside towns such as Bansin and Heringsdorf, traditionally popular holiday destinations of the GDR, are also beginning to attract a growing number of Western and foreign tourists. She says that the front row of houses along the sea are now renovated, they have beautiful new facades but behind them lie the *real*, old East, with everything that it encompasses.

*"It's just something, ... not burdened, but ... It still matters... even years later*

*...*

*So the last time I was in Warnemünde and Rostock, because we wanted to show our son, I thought that this place does not necessarily attract me.*

*I still do not like Rügen or the Baltic Sea. I have the feeling that the first two rows of houses are redeveloped, and then the East starts again, with all the*

*trimmings. And I find it still ... I do not need Sylt<sup>14</sup> for me to say "Wow", but ... There are great corners too at the Baltic Sea, Bansin and so on, but I find that you are always reminded that it is still the East. For example, we were in Prerow last summer. I think it's the language, the clothes or the mentality, that you feel. I do not think it's completely the same. "(Ms L.)*

*"Es ist einfach noch etwas, ...nicht belastet, aber ...hängt so'n bisschen einfach noch. Also auch noch Jahre später.. Also das letzte Mal als ich in Warnemünde war, was wir unserem Sohn zeigen wollten, und Rostock, hab' ich auch so gedacht. Mich zieht's nicht unbedingt hierher.*

*Ich mag auch immer noch nicht gerne Rügen oder sonst die Ostsee, ich habe da das Gefühl, die ersten zwei Reihen der Häuser sind saniert, und danach fängt dann wieder der Osten an, mit allem drum und dran. Und ich finde es nach wie vor... ich brauche nicht Sylt, um mir zu sagen, um zu sagen "Wow", aber... Es gibt tolle Ecken auch an der Ostsee, Bansin und so weiter, aber ich finde, dass man immer wieder merkt, dass es noch Osten ist.*

*Wir waren jetzt letzten Sommer in Prerow. Ich finde jetzt, sei's die Sprache, die Kleidung oder die Mentalität, das man's immer noch spürt. Ich finde nicht dass es komplett gleich ist." (Frau L.)*

I believe her example is a good illustration of the way those who suffered under state control in the GDR feel today. It reflects their lingering feeling that, although

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<sup>14</sup> West German island in the North Sea known for its luxurious holiday resorts and celebrity holidaymakers.

there have been many changes and a new political system is in power, certain social dynamics continue to exist.

## Chapter Seven: Trauma and Wellbeing in Contemporary East Germany

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the long-term effects of state control and surveillance on East German's wellbeing. I will be shedding light on the way in which citizens perceived, experienced and reported trauma. Ultimately, I will address the question of whether a healing process has been possible, and how this displayed itself.

Anthropological ethnography is useful in examining East Germans' coming to terms with the past, as those who were traumatised most by state violence suffer primarily socially as well as psychologically. Medical Anthropology, more specifically, offers a lens through which to inquire into people's suffering and its social and cultural components. It allows an in-depth understanding of the experienced illness and the social relations of sickness.

### Wohlbefinden

In the case of this study, I explore the concept of wellbeing specifically and investigate East German's *Wohlbefinden*. In interviews, I deliberately avoided dwelling too much on asking about my informants' health – *Gesundheit*. In a culture where western biomedical concepts of medical dualism are very much ingrained, there would have been a danger that something may have been lost in applying such a narrow concept. Therefore, I chose to focus on *Wohlbefinden*, as this term is more inclusive. The concept signifies physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Indeed, I gained a broad impression of my informant's interpretation of their own wellbeing and with that, their suffering experience. The ethnographic examples

below provide an impression of the complex landscape of trauma East Germans are confronted with.

### **Interpretations of wellbeing**

My ethnographic fieldwork revealed that my informant's conception of their personal wellbeing is generally judged within two distinctive time frames: "GDR-times" - "*Zu DDR-Zeiten*" and after the fall the Wall - "*Nach der Wende*". This temporal divide stands out in most East Germans' life story narratives.

As I was told, wellbeing in the GDR also had to be viewed from dual perspectives: perceptions of the private, and the public sphere. Under conditions of intense surveillance and intrusion of the state in most areas of life, those small niches that were "private"- most often the close family and home - gained a higher value and were interpreted very positively. In the comfortable, familiar space of home life and family, personal wellbeing is remembered as having been especially good. Indeed, these close-knit connections to the family are a source of nostalgia, even for many of those who were critical of the state. A further source of comfort was the church. Notably, some of the informants who applied for emigration felt that their involvement with the church significantly improved their wellbeing. This was not always attributed to the practice of religion per se, but rather church provided a space for free expression and a sense of connectedness with like-minded people. The application to emigrate also meant that these individuals were confronted with in-depth Stasi interrogations and constant surveillance, causing increased anxiety and stress. Weekly meetings with church organisations, such as the Junge Gemeinde, provided some relief during this tense period. As one informant told me, it gave her the strength to continue the application process.

Still, others told me that GDR times were the best times of their lives. The stability and security that the state provided was essential to their wellbeing. This changed dramatically as the state collapsed. After the Wende they were forced to enter a new era of their lives, where the new state no longer provided the structure and support that they craved. To them, the end of socialism was a traumatic event.

Today, wellbeing in the GDR continues to be regarded in multiple ways. While some suffered immensely from the state collapse, or rather the aftermath of unemployment and insecurity, others continue to suffer from the trauma of state repression and violence. At times, these two factors may even coincide. Some people who were treated unfairly during socialism may feel that in the new state they are still exposed to injustice and their suffering is not recognised.

In regard to previous trauma, wellbeing may be challenged periodically. Informants often described this in terms of *“sore spots”* - *“Wunder Punkt”*. In other words, they feel well in general, but under certain conditions, they may relive old pain. This is true when they are reminded of their traumatic experience, for example by certain conversations they recall, or by the memories or how the GDR past is interpreted in public discourse. As seen in cases of trauma, particularly PTSD, this seems to be a common occurrence.

The same is true for unresolved issues of injustice and betrayal. Here, my informants reported a challenge to their wellbeing when it came to their disturbed relationships with those friends or family members who either reported on them or betrayed them by abandoning them in favour of the state. And conversely, a particularly positive view of personal wellbeing was provided by those who

consciously recognise how they benefitted from the reunification and value their new freedom. The following section will explore the traumatic impact of state control on the lives of East Germans.

### State terror and its traumatizing consequences

In the beginning of this thesis I gave three ethnographic examples of East Germans' life histories, illustrating the role that the regime played in their lives and its various consequences. For many, but not all of these interlocutors, the mere mentioning of the East Germany's secret police force was associated with traumatic memories.

During the period of my fieldwork, I spoke to three individuals who had been imprisoned as political dissidents in the GDR (or previously Eastern occupied zone). Their stories were ripe with gruesome images of dehumanisation and humiliation, such as being locked up in tiny unhygienic prison cells and forced to partake in interrogations that sometimes lasted days or even weeks, employing torturous techniques like sleep deprivation. In two of these accounts, the victims had already been traumatised by the atrocities of the Second World War and had first-hand experience of the Soviet occupation. Both had been imprisoned by Soviet officials shortly after the war—one in a secret underground prison in Berlin, and the other at the former concentration camp, Sachsenhausen. Those who were sentenced in the GDR were traumatised in multiple ways, often through Stasi surveillance prior to and after imprisonment, as well as the interrogation period and time in prison.

Other traumatic experiences were linked directly to surveillance and active repression, as I outlined earlier. Significantly, these individuals felt that they were never "safe" because the Stasi's power was so almighty. With this came the

systematic instillation of overall fear and a distrustful atmosphere amongst friends and family, leaving victims feeling lonely and isolated, unsure of their own sense of self or the true intentions of others (Trobisch-Lütge 2010). Coupled with this fear, was the general pressure to conform within the population, a manifestation of the internalisation of years of state control. As I discussed in chapter two, these symptoms are characteristic of systematic state terror.

### A person's role in the System: Personal and wider repercussions

Further traumatic events ensued after the fall of the Wall and Germany's reunification. These events came in two forms. For some, the breakdown of the GDR meant an end to a state system they had helped to build over the years. Here, ideals that were once valued were, virtually overnight, apparently no longer valid. Thus, even after the first wave of euphoria about newly acquired freedoms, disillusionment set in fast when state-owned companies closed down and unemployment rates started soaring. Many found it hard to adjust to the new system. To those who were made redundant, it was a great shock from which some still have not managed to recover. As the ideal of being a productive member of society held such high value in the GDR, being unemployed meant a severe loss of purpose and value as a human being.

Second, the integration of the "*Neue Bundesländer*" into the Federal Republic of Germany brought front and centre a new democratic political system which condemned such extreme state control. Those who once thought they were helping the communist cause, were suddenly labelled as offenders. Another dimension was added when the records of the *Staatssicherheit* were made available. This new and

startling information created unexpected controversies regarding an individual's roles and responsibilities within the regime; but most significantly for this study, it also elicited traumatic responses from those who were spied upon. Here, it must be emphasised that in the aftermath of the SED-regime, it is difficult to apply the usual roles of "perpetrator versus victim". The lines between the two are often blurred since the Stasi received so much support and assistance from the general population (Fuchs 1990). "Not everyone listed in (a) file as an informer was a scoundrel. Many informers reported tremendously harmful information on close friends and family – without realising it. The poison of the information in the files only sometimes reflected a corresponding evil on the part of its provider. The Stasi files reveal a system of mad genius. Officials boasted that even the purest soul would eventually turn into an informer, and they were nearly right." (Rosenberg 1995, p. 298).

Therefore, it can be concluded that East German trauma (about the state and state control) is multifaceted. This is the case both, in the nature of the trauma experienced and, as I will elaborate in the following section, in the possibilities of healing and transcendence required to overcoming it.

### Anxiety and Trauma

This ethnographic study of life under extreme state control in the former GDR and its aftermath has shown that East Germans were exposed to numerous traumatic incidences caused either directly or indirectly by state terror. In recent years, abundant literature has emerged which features narrative accounts and testimonies of trauma experiences in the GDR (see, for example, Hoffmann 2012; Michael 1994;

Paul 2008; Knabe 2012). Various authors, in particular psychiatrists and psychologists, have discussed how the *Zersetzung* method had devastating and long-lasting effects on peoples' lives, breaking apart families and friendships and leaving victims with severe psychological damage. Authors include Peters 1991; Seidler & Froese 2006; Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009; Trobisch-Lütge 2010; Priebe et al. 1996 and Freyberger et al. 2003.

Psychiatrist Stefan Trobisch-Lütge specialises in the therapy of political trauma of the former GDR. In "*Das späte Gift*" he describes the nature of his patients' psychological traumas and stresses that in most cases the psychological wounds are still painful more than 20 years after the end of socialism. Indeed, some East Germans only begin to feel the long-term affects of their trauma now. The title of the book "*Late Venom*" alludes to his argument that the *Stasi*'s surveillance and repression poisons people's souls and their social relationships many years later, still impacting many peoples' lives negatively.

Bomberg and Trobisch-Lütge emphasize that GDR - traumatising must be considered within the cultural-historical context of the SED-dictatorship, in order to grasp its complexity. Due to the coercive nature of the *Stasi*'s extensive surveillance of the population, it is not easy to distinguish who was "actively" repressed (e.g., through the use of the *Zersetzung* method). It cannot always be proven either. *Stasi* files are not always available or may be incomplete. This lack of evidence makes dealing with trauma all the more difficult. After the collapse of the GDR, political traumatising was initially barely ever diagnosed or recognised, especially in relation to the effects of imprisonment. In 1999, only 5% of those affected, were

officially recognised (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.38, see also Freyberger et al. 2003).

Trobisch-Lütge emphasises that it is extremely difficult to pin down to what extent a person is traumatised and from where exactly this trauma originates, particularly amongst those East Germans who had not been imprisoned. Those who were under long-term surveillance, or even those to whom it had merely been suggested that they were being watched, might also suffer from severe psychological symptoms (2010, p.30). The fact that their suspicions cannot always be proven exacerbates the problems at hand, as patients feel that the public is not taking them seriously.

Maercker et al. (2013) have found that patients diagnosed with PTSD caused by political persecution in the GDR, feel that they receive very little recognition and acceptance from their surroundings, compared to other PTSD sufferers.

Only in recent years, has the public recognition of victim's suffering gained more momentum, as is evidenced by a growing body of psychology and psychiatric literature, which engages with patient's case vignettes of therapy and long-term implications of imprisonment and persecution (see for example Plänklers T., Bahrke U., Waltzer M. et al. 2005; Behnke, K. & Trobisch, S. 1998; Trobisch-Lütge, 2010; Seidler & Froese 2006). The advancing engagement of medical professionals with the field has also finally brought some advancements in disputes concerning compensation (in 2008 new state regulations came into power) (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.41-42). Still, victim support organisations remain critical of the public processes and lack of recognition of SED-dictatorship victim's suffering. Patient's extreme social distrust, then, not only makes their personal encounters problematic but also causes great difficulty in psychotherapy. Trobisch-Lütge

highlights the severe consequences of political trauma, which include PTSD, depression, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms (2010, p. 29-30).

There are numerous empirical studies investigating the effect of GDR persecution and imprisonment on patient's health. Most of these studies are concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of political trauma. There is clear evidence that persecution and especially imprisonment lead to a high rate of depression, personality disorders and other mental health issues (Bauer et al. 1993; Bauer & Priebe 1994; Priebe et al. 1993; Priebe et al. 1994; Bandemer-Greulich et al. 1998). Indeed, at least one-third of former political prisoners still suffer severely from PTSD, to this day (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.61). A review of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate that those affected, continue to suffer long-term mental-health and social limitations (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.63).

Patients suffer from a deformation of self-organisation, leading to a serious change in personality. Symptoms include distancing, isolation, self-destructive behaviour and great difficulties in judging internal and external realities. When trauma does not heal, long-term post-traumatic stress and related dissociative disorders are likely to occur. A general phenomenon seen in this particular group of politically traumatised individuals is their damaged social communication skills and their difficulties in interacting normally in everyday social relationships (Trobisch-Lütge 2010, p.89).

While it is abundantly clear that state control in the GDR has left the population with significant trauma, the type of trauma and anxiety they experience can hardly be summed up into one East German condition. Instead, as Plänklers et al. (2005)

and Trobisch-Lütge (2010) have shown, the landscape of trauma in East Germany is very complex. The patient cases that they present illustrate the complexity of trauma, which sometimes combines previous negative personal experiences in family relationships and upbringing with the long-term debilitating consequences of state-sponsored violence. This combination has given rise to a multitude of traumatic incidences. Yet, as I have shown, the state's intrusion into citizens' everyday lives was so intense that it is extremely difficult to separate institutional from personal trauma. As we have seen, state control directly incorporated and used GDR citizens in its self-perpetuating system, which created deeply intertwined negative experiences involving family and state. Indeed, while many of the symptoms experienced by my informants and those described in existing literature show similarities with PTSD, the question remains as to whether or not it is possible to talk of a collective form of post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by all East Germans as a result of their history of more than 40 years of repression and state violence.

The study of trauma is a relatively recent one, which is still constantly expanded.

First accounts of trauma were recorded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:

"Shellshock" emerged in the first World War out of an exposure to extreme violence. Situations where a person is unable to escape a threat, their survival is dependent on mere fate and they feel totally powerless, make them particularly vulnerable to trauma (Fischer & Riedesser 1999, p. 132). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first officially recognised as a psychiatric disorder in 1980 when it was added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009). More recently the research field of PTSD has expanded greatly and

now includes findings of physical evidence (Neuroendocrinological and Psychobiological), as well as the psychological and social impact trauma (Van der Kolk 1996; Kirmeyer et al. 2007; Shalev et al. 2000). Rosen and Lilienfeld (2008) have critically evaluated the existing literature of PTSD and concluded that much about the condition is still unknown. Research indicates that the currently existing definition of PTSD as it is found in the DSM is still insufficient in covering the complexity of PTSD as a mental illness, suggesting that new sub-categories are necessary in illustrating the broad spectrum of symptoms. The disorder, as well as the use of the term "trauma", remain contested for anthropologists and psychologists alike (Shalev et al. 2000; Young 1995; Antze & Lambek 1996; Alexander et al. 2004; Kirmayer et al. 2007; Fassin & Rechtman 2009; Argenti-Pillen 2016)<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, trauma is a profoundly moral and political concept. After the second World War, in Germany, there was a reluctance of medical professionals to officially recognise the effects of extreme trauma that victims of the Holocaust had been exposed to (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.40). Especially, investigations into extreme trauma continue to be a highly challenged field of study. Bohleber speaks of a "strange ambivalence" when it comes to the clinical and theoretical analysis of trauma as a result of socio-political violence, and as literature indicates this is certainly a great concern for politically traumatised East Germans who feel marginalised and isolated in their suffering (Mearcker 2013; Trobisch-Lütge 2010). Both, their recognition or denial of status as "victims" of the SED-regime carries heavy moral judgement, as I will explore further in the following section.

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<sup>15</sup> There is a large body of literature on the study of trauma, here I just mention some of the key texts.

## A condition of East German Angst?

*“If we have learned anything from the long history of post-traumatic studies, and the shorter history of PTSD, it is that multiple factors and their complex interrelations result in variable outcomes that are unlikely to be explained by a single disorder in nature.” (Rosen & Lilienfeld 2008, p. 858)*

Many scholars are now broadening their approach to trauma and other disorders that arise from it. Michael Linden (2003) proposed a new sub-category, which he found to be very prevalent among (although not limited to) citizens of the former GDR. This condition is merely one type of post-traumatic experience that is widely evidenced amongst East Germans. He describes what he calls "post-traumatic embitterment disorder", a cluster of symptoms that are similar to PTSD yet possess some distinct and unique features characterised by a strong feeling of embitterment. Among his patients, he encountered numerous East Germans who experienced the end of socialism and Germany's reunification as especially challenging. He found that these strong feelings of embitterment often grew out of a direct threat to a person's basic beliefs. Linden (2003) outlines how feelings of embitterment were experienced by the majority of the East German population:

*“The model of violation of basic beliefs can explain why the prevalence of this disorder must increase in times of social change, and the German reunification is a good example. Just as PTSD can be observed in higher rates in times of war or in populations exposed to major catastrophes that threaten the life of many people, so social changes can be expected to increase the risk of PTED. During the nineties most East Germans underwent enormous changes in their biographies, almost everybody had to cope with fundamental changes in their work situation and in their families,*

*and many saw their value systems called into question. Even those who seem to be better off today than before live under greater uncertainty in respect to their individual future compared to their lives under the socialist regime. There are men and women who feel that much of their life has been wasted because of the old system, and even those who hoped for a new beginning in the new system often found that they were cheated, let down, or set aside" (Linden 2003, p.200).*

Post-traumatic embitterment disorder is unique in the sense that patients feel not only a "threat to personal integrity as a key feature of the disorder but any violation of basic beliefs" (Linden et al. 2007). Moreover, contrary to Ehlers & Clark's (2000) definition of PTSD, patients with PTED tend to express embitterment as the main emotion, not anger as it is common in PTSD. Linden et al. (2003; 2008) contrast the two conditions as such:

*"There are similarities like their reactive nature, their prolonged course, intrusions and a multitude of additional symptoms. However, PTSD is the result of an initial anxiety or panic provoking event and can, in essence, be understood as an anxiety disorder. In contrast, PTED is a disorder characterised by embitterment, hostility, aggression, etc. Clinically these are very distinct phenomena which also need different treatment approaches." (2008 p.55).*

As the example of diagnostic differentiation outlined above demonstrates, trauma is a multidimensional concept and its aftermath can take many shapes and forms. As Trobisch-Lütge (2010), Plänkers et al. (2005) and Linden et al. (2005; 2008) demonstrate, from a psychological standpoint East Germans have dealt in a

multitude of ways with life under socially and psychologically adverse conditions. In the GDR state control that was practised by means of the Stasi's sophisticated psychological methods of repression, creating conditions of normalised social control. Further, the fundamental social and political transition of the region, make East Germany a unique area of investigation. Taking these particular circumstances into consideration, I argue that one condition may not suffice as a diagnosis since the East German example is so multi-faceted in the way trauma is and was experienced. More often than not, traumatic experiences were repeated or ongoing. One could say that in the case of my informants' traumatic incidents accumulated, not exclusively originating in state control. Plänkers et al. (2005) have also emphasized East Germans' varied psychological responses to the GDR past and the transition to the united Germany. They describe that an exposure to the repressive dictatorship on the one hand, could cause extensive damage to people's psychological wellbeing. On the other, some East Germans suffered even more after the collapse of the regime and mourned the loss of a "supportive system". In such cases, they mention mechanisms of "psychological decompensation" – sometimes referred to as "*Wendekrankheit*", which may be characterized by high levels of anxiety particularly amongst men and a high number of eating disorders especially amongst women (see Plänkers et al. 2005, p. 14). Nevertheless, they stress that the case of the GDR is unique in that the symptoms and expression of trauma are unspecific and are highly dependent on individual factors.

Littlewood (2002) has critically approached the question of what should be considered pathological behaviour and what social meaning particular pathologies take on. He writes "rather than assume that a salient 'pathology' necessarily

presents an image of its society, we can start more modestly from the idea that where some general category of illness (or other loss of personal agency as in witchcraft accusations or latah) is locally recognised, this category is then deployed through the practical interests of experts, victims and others” (Littlewood 2002, p. 76). Indeed, trauma is morally complex, as it is highly dependent on the way suffering is judged by individuals and institutions in relation to their own experiences and agendas. “Thus trauma, often unbeknownst to those who promote it, reinvents “good“and “bad“ victim, or at least a ranking of legitimacy among victims“ (Fassin & Rechtman 2009, p.282).

Littlewood (2002) also sheds light on the moral ambiguity of trauma, while looking at the example of PTSD in war veterans in the US. The diagnosis and recognition of trauma as an illness<sup>16</sup>, placed soldiers in new moral landscape where they were suddenly regarded as the sufferers. “The diagnosis of PTSD allowed those soldiers guilty of sexual massacre and rape in Vietnam to become victims in their turn, victims of the “trauma“of war in general; atrocity becomes the natural act of the traumatized” (Littlewood 2002, p. 124).

As Fassin and Rechtman (2009) rightly say “trauma today is a moral judgement“. In the case of the GDR the question of legitimacy among victims is particularly morally complex, firstly due to the blurred lines between victims and perpetrators, and secondly due to their ambivalent public image (e.g. how these individuals are seen in East and West Germany, Internationally but also the morally ambiguous image of self-proclaimed victims and state employees). Because who is to say that a Stasi

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<sup>16</sup> Facilitated by US war veteran associations.

collaborator who was pressured and observed by his colleagues at the MfS, did not suffer the same trauma as a political dissident? Such judgements are highly personal and political in the case of East Germany. In the *Empire of Trauma*, Fassin and Rechtman explore the history of trauma as psychiatric, social, and political category. In particular, they examine how and whether victims of trauma are recognized. Using a multitude of ethnographic examples, they demonstrate the moral complexity of trauma. Indeed, they believe that “the truth of trauma lies in (...) the moral economy of contemporary societies” (Fassin & Rechtman 2009, p.276). In their view trauma is not merely a label for a psychiatric condition, but rather “the product of a new relationship to time and memory, to mourning and obligations, to misfortune and the misfortunate.” (Fassin & Rechtman 2009, p.276) This inevitably evokes the question of who is considered a victim and perhaps more to the point, who’s suffering is deemed as legitimate? Trauma gives legitimacy to people’s suffering, even though their suffering is not necessarily confined to the experience of a single negative event. Often-times people already suffered a multitude of traumas prior to the event which is deemed “legitimately traumatic” by society. “Trauma is not only silent on these realities, it actually obscures them. As a focus of consensus, it eliminates individual features. We can therefore understand that it is claimed by victims themselves, that is, by members of society who define themselves as victims. Trauma offers a language in which to speak of the wounds of the past – of slavery, colonization, or apartheid” (Fassin & Rechtman 2009, p.281). As I have illustrated in my interlocutors’ personal accounts, East Germans suffered a multitude of traumas, therefore I look to Scaer’s approach to being trauma viewed on a spectrum, rather than necessarily originating from a single event.

## East German Trauma spectrum and “Little traumas”

Robert Scaer (2005) takes a unique approach to trauma. He argues that trauma is not at all an unusual occurrence across societies. Indeed, he claims that social control is intimately intertwined with the systematic inflicting of trauma.

Persecution and discrimination in all modern societies are used as a method of controlling populations. This is achieved in various ways, including the distribution and redistribution of wealth, the law and how it is unequally applied, and in the alienating or usurping of religious institutions to meet political objectives.

A certain amount of control is, of course, essential to ensure that a population is managed and safe—in other words, in order to ensure that chaos does not ensue.

When this control creates conditions where individuals can no longer act autonomously, are confined and experience helplessness, traumatic experiences may proliferate. Scaer writes, “the concept of ‘control’ in this sense intrinsically implies a reduction in options and a subtle movement away from empowerment and towards helplessness” (Scaer, 2005 p.127).

Scaer describes how fear is used as one such method of control—for instance, in states of war in order to elicit certain behaviours from the populace. But fear and helplessness are used by many institutions as a means to an end (e.g., in the workplace). These methods of social control are commonly condoned by societies and on the surface appear to be a “normal” part of a given culture.

He states that “in this state of compromised control and relative helplessness, the seeds are sown for traumatisation by little experiences that might appear to be

trivial but for their unique meaning to the well-being of the individual - a meaning that is based on the person's cumulative life experience." (Scaer, 2005 p.127).

Likewise, I argue that it is exactly this culturally-condoned traumatising, which took place on a large scale in the GDR, leading to a wide spectrum individual and societal trauma. In the regime, the majority of the population was exposed to the normalisation of a culture of control, in the form of mass-surveillance and repression. As Scaer writes:

"A spectrum of societal trauma exists, but it is invisible to the eye of the citizen because the sources of that trauma are accepted as "normal" and endorsed by their parent institution" (2005 p.127). Even in the aftermath of socialism's collapse, conditions were fertile ground for further traumatic experiences (unemployment, new political and social order, revelation of Stasi files etc.). In other words, the social contexts which were common in the GDR made people much more vulnerable to responding poorly to unexpected psychological challenges, even under improved circumstances.

Scaer argues that some form of societal trauma exists in most societies, where through an evolution of cultural norms certain extreme behaviours become normalised and over time are regarded as harmless and benign- at least on the surface. One example of society condoned traumatising that comes to my mind is the early sending away of children to boarding schools in Britain. Similarly, in the GDR, babies were separated from their mothers only a few weeks after birth and sent to cribs/nurseries (*Krippe*), while their parents had to return to the workplace

as fast as possible. Plänkner et al. (2005) call this accepted child-rearing practice in the GDR, "society-organised traumatisation" (2005 p.55-70).

"The acceptance of these societal traumas occurs through a process of numbing on the part of the populace and a collective dissociation driven by the cumulative effects of little traumas." (Scaer 2005 p.127) My informants' cases exemplify such an accumulation of little and great traumas. Some interviewees displayed these tendencies of numbing and denial, especially those who were openly in support of the repressive system. One example of this behaviour was the account of Frau F., whose husband had been imprisoned in younger years (for an attempted escape) and was periodically committed to mental health facilities to treat his manic depression. Frau F. was aware that her husband's imprisonment had been an extremely frightening experience. Yet, he never spoke about it in great detail because upon his release the Stasi had forced him to sign a non-disclosure agreement. She knew he was very fearful. At one point the couple became involved in a murder investigation that was conducted in their local neighbourhood. The police would perform in-depth questioning of the immediate neighbours. For Frau F.'s husband, this investigation became a living hell. He had nothing to do with the murder that was being investigated, yet the interrogations forced him to relive past traumas causing severe distress. The investigations went on for some time and his mental health deteriorated, leading him to be readmitted to the mental health institution. A few months later, after he had returned home, another police questioning was announced. The anticipation of the police visit made him so fearful that he had a heart attack and consequently died.

In our interview, Frau F. spent much time describing the police investigation and mentioned that during that same time period the Stasi had approached her to work as an informant. She denied accepting the offer. Yet to me she seemed somewhat morally ambiguous. Not only was she very knowledgeable about the rewards that the Stasi gave to those who reported unofficially, but seemed almost unemotional when she recounted her husband's death. It was as if she mentioned it in passing. She very matter of factly said that surely her husband could have also gotten a heart attack any other way. When I heard this, I was shocked, as her story made me feel uneasy and slightly puzzled. Her behaviour seemed strange since she clearly knew how frightened he had been and was aware of the anxiety that the police questioning evoked.

Upon further thought, however, her way of coping with the situation made more sense. Perhaps she was in denial about the situation and numbing her emotional response was her way of accepting the "normality" of severe state control and the Stasi's investigative methods. After all, she had previously told me of her own fears of state officials and government buildings as a little girl. Her own grandmother had been imprisoned when she was very young, and she had witnessed her return from prison as a broken woman. She was deeply traumatised and never recovered from the experience. Frau F. was quite open about her fears as a child, but it appeared that gradually as an adult she suppressed those fears. Indeed, she was even inclined to become involved in the system herself, when she contemplated joining the Stasi as an informant. Perhaps it was a way of repeating her childhood trauma? Or did this direct involvement with the feared state officials have a cathartic effect on her? These questions remain unanswered, yet Frau F.'s ambiguous story illustrates the

extent to which people numbed their emotions in order to function in a culture of control. Fear forced citizens to comply with the system even to the point of death.

Her husband had already been traumatised by his previous experiences of imprisonment and his experiences in mental institutions—both of which placed him in an extremely precarious and vulnerable position. There was no way to escape; and his confrontation with severe helplessness lead not only to to multiple trauma, but eventually to his untimely death.

### The GDR as a physical and cultural cage

Scaer writes that "almost any social setting where control is lost, and relative helplessness is part of the environment, can easily progress to a traumatic experience"(Scaer 2005, p.132). In the GDR this was true on a large scale because the population's loss of control made them particularly vulnerable to trauma. Citizens were trapped in their own country; their mobility was limited. Playing on the fears of the population, the Wall was proclaimed to provide security, a protection against the fascist enemy. The state intruded and controlled citizens' lives, limiting personal autonomy. Deviant behaviour was punished and the state often acted arbitrarily, causing fear and ultimately leaving the population in a helpless position. As Scaer describes, people are not always aware of their trauma (as it is often seen in cases of childhood abuse and trauma), especially when they do not know life any other way. Under such conditions complicity appears to be the most logical *modus operandi*. Indeed, he says that "societal rituals that are intrinsically traumatising eventually tend to be accepted as the lesser of a variety of evils" (2005, p.132, 133). Hence, individuals are rarely conscious of how their past trauma shapes their physiology, personality, and ongoing life choices.

Even though many of Scaer's examples and claims are certainly arguable and provocative, I believe he makes a valid point in his assertion of what he calls a "*cultural cage*". While social control (to a certain extent) is a necessity to prevent chaos and ensure wellbeing, this control can easily be corrupted and altered to achieve "societal norms that create helplessness in the face of everyday conflicts" (p.149). Ultimately these conditions lead to traumatising in a process of an accumulation of "little traumas". I argue that in the GDR, essentially a police state, this social control was exacerbated, causing multiple traumas large and small. Even as the regime crumbled and the Wall eventually fell, new traumatic situations (social and financial insecurity, revelation of Stasi files, etc.) emerged. This left East Germans ever-more vulnerable to further set-backs.

Furthermore, Scaer explains that from a biological point of view a so-called "freeze/dissociation"<sup>17</sup> Response and its discharge are the core prerequisite for an experience to be traumatising." (2005, p.149) He describes how "animals in captivity are generally unable to initiate the freeze discharge, a trait shared by humans". Therefore, cementing his assertion that "entrapment and helplessness" are the main constituents in large-scale societally condoned trauma, just as like the metal cage in animals, it is the "cultural cage" in humans (2005, p.149).

As previously mentioned, in the GDR this entrapment was literal (confined by borders), psychological and social. The Stasi's system of control evoked the feeling that they were almighty and that nowhere was safe. I agree with Scaer's argument

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<sup>17</sup> The reaction is contrary to the fight-flight response in extremely frightening events. In this case, self-paralysis sets in during situations where one concludes that defeating or escaping the dangerous opponent is impossible.

that trauma is a common occurrence in "organised societies", yet in the case of the socialist dictatorship in East Germany I would argue that conditions were created where proportionately higher levels of traumatisation occurred, simply based on the nature of the social order (repressive dictatorship/police state). I also argue that trauma was multifaceted, not only caused directly by state but also by the unique social dynamics that the system of control generated (e.g. betrayal and denunciation by close relatives and friends, social pressure). Such large-scale traumatisation can cause a multitude of societal problems (e.g. collective anxieties and social distrust). In some societies, this can lead to, or at least contribute to, the collapse of the system. In the GDR the system deteriorated and was ended by the "peaceful revolution" in 1989. Yet, the traumatic experiences did not stop there, and the repercussions of social suffering are noticeable to this day.

Relating this to the theoretical assertions made in chapter 2, I conclude that the governance through terror led to a wide spectrum of individual, collective and cultural trauma (Neal 1998; Smelser 2004; Alexander 2012). In the following section, I explore the way in which my informants coped with their traumatic experiences during GDR-times and since the *Wende*. Here, I demonstrate that the healing process of my informants is not yet completed. Not enough time has passed yet to heal all wounds. This ethnographic study illustrates the way trauma is understood and coped with by individuals.

## Summary: State control, trauma and wellbeing

Among the witnesses of the dictatorship interviewed, the individuals who explicitly regarded the Stasi as a negative aspect of the GDR and were severely affected by its repression (in its various forms), I found two main trends:

### 1) Negative impacts on wellbeing

All interlocutors continue to have negative feelings about the regime of the German Democratic Republic, their personal history or the people who were involved, especially those who spied on them or pressured them to abide by the state doctrine. They still get emotional when discussing topics surrounding the Stasi. They also reported that they are easily angered or frustrated when people defend or justify the GDR regime or other dictatorships. In some, the memory of powerlessness against the arbitrariness of the state is displayed as cynicism, e.g., *"Surveillance, was like bad weather, it was there, people knew it existed, but there was nothing they could do about it" (Herr Z.)*.

The severity of ongoing suffering varies. However, all informants stated that their East German past continues to impact their life, even today. It shapes their identity. As one informant said: *"It is an important part of life experience and worldview" - "Das ist ein wichtiger Teil der Lebenserfahrung und für die Weltsicht" (Herr Z.)*.

Another interlocutor commented that her traumatic childhood experience in the GDR certainly impacts her long-term wellbeing. She feels that the past experience continues to influence her life, it is part of who she is. For many years she suppressed the past, but nowadays she no longer has to.

*“Yes, extremely, well maybe not very extreme ... but in any case it still defines my life. Since it is a piece of oneself. And sometimes you can suppress it quite well, but you do not really need to suppress it anymore nowadays ... One gets over a lot of things.”*

*“Ja ganz extrem, na ja vielleicht ganz extrem auch nicht... aber es bestimmt das Leben auf jeden Fall weiter. Da es ja ein Stück von einem selber ist. Und man kann es manchmal ganz gut verdrängen, aber man braucht es heute eigentlich nicht mehr zu verdrängen... man steckt einiges so weg.” (Frau L.)*

As I explained in previous chapters, suppression of fears and memories was mentioned repeatedly by my informants. And as I have mentioned with regards to conformity, I was told that people had to blank out and ignore certain realities of the regime. For some, this suppression continued for many years after the collapse of the state. Only as people get older and enter retirement age, does an active engagement begin to take place.

Here, an informant recalls an anecdote of a workshop she attended several years ago.

*“People when they are really frightened... They tend to repress their fears...this became very clear to me during a workshop that I attended with Susanne S. The subject was “Stasi in GDR everyday life”. There was a woman there... And Susanne was saying that people were scared of the Stasi. And the woman said, “I was never scared of the Stasi”... I was thinking Ah ...ok... But then she gave an example: she worked in a factory and one of her colleagues had fled to the West. One of the most important things to the*

*GDR state was not to flee to the West. They were concerned with das Loch zu stopfen so that nobody could follow them in the same way. So what they do is, they interrogate everybody around them. To find out exactly how they had gone...what had it involved. And she, was one of the people they interrogated for 15 hours and then as she added that by the way she was eight months pregnant... - Being interrogated for 15 hours when you are eight months pregnant!?... And interrogation is not necessarily pleasant... And it was very obvious... She'd been frightened. But she had been so frightened that she repressed her fears. I repressed them since I was a child. It took me 50 years and psychotherapy to understand and to feel again.... Understand how frightened I had been. And I think this is what happened to a lot of GDR people that they didn't even realise how frightened they were and democracy means nothing to them. It's just a lot of babble, talk..." (Frau M.)*

She deduced from her personal history that this woman had also suppressed her fears. Indeed, those who had the most traumatising and upsetting stories revealed that *"they buried their feelings deep inside"*.

Some still experience a tremendous amount of suffering. Only very few of my informants mentioned that they had received psychotherapeutic help. In some cases, individuals struggle with persistent memories (and dreams) as well as anxieties and embitterment about the injustice they endured. This is also experienced psychosomatically (e.g., via insomnia and gastro-intestinal conditions;

after-effects of imprisonment such a dermatological issues). So, even physical manifestations of their suffering stay with them as a constant reminder of the past.

The memory of powerlessness, both regarding being entirely at the mercy of the state and also their own fear of resistance, continue to rest heavily on their minds. Interpersonal relationships are entered cautiously. Trust continues to be an ambivalent feeling in East Germany. While trust on a personal level may be slowly improving (and is also highly dependent on individual experiences), on a societal level distrust of "otherness" or "outsiders" continues to be more prevalent. This could be seen quite recently with the open critique in the East of the influx of refugees, the rise of neo-nazism, and the growing fears of Islamization (e.g. PEGIDA movement in Dresden and its offshoots). Indeed, the number of right-wing (Neo-Nazi) ideologically motivated crimes (counted number as per citizen) is the highest in Eastern Germany with the regions of Sachsen-Anhalt, Brandenburg and Sachsen leading the ranking (Berth et al. 2014, p.199). One must differentiate between numbers of actual crimes committed and nationalistic opinions. Berth et al.'s (2014) comprehensive long-term study of East Germany offers a detailed review of the topic. What we can gather from such impressions though is that East Germans who already feel disenfranchised and vulnerable are frightened and overwhelmed, as they fear that they will have to make further sacrifices for the state.

Along with this, a widespread scepticism and distrust of the government, the press and other institutions is clearly noticeable. Most recently reports of the growing number of a niche group of "Imperial citizens" have emerged. Part of the extreme right, members of the so-called "*Reichsbürger*" movement do not accept the existence of the Federal Republic Germany. They claim that the German Reich continues to exist to this day and believe that the state borders of 1937 are still legitimate today.

They follow some diffuse ideologies and are not confined to East Germany, but more prevalent there.

The group embodies distrust in the nation-state



and institutional power structures. This photo was taken in Berlin and shows a van parked in a side street, displaying various flags in its windows, including that of the GDR and the German Reich. The symbolism of a diffuse attitude towards political ideology and state power is evident (see Paper issued by Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution Brandenburg 2016, the Economist 2016).

## 2) 'Focussing on the Positives': Resilience and Overcoming suffering

Of the above-mentioned group, several people stood out to me in particular due to the way they approached and reflected on their own personal stories. Although they had gone through some challenging experiences, they made a point to emphasise their positive personality traits.

This group of people shared a common factor: they all either emigrated (or fled) to the West before the borders opened or moved to the West immediately afterwards. Indeed, one could say that they are by nature proactive individuals, who pursued their goal to leave the East behind. Although they openly voiced their dismay over the GDR regime, they tended to focus on the positive gains that emerged from their experiences.

A woman who was granted emigration in 1981 says she feels well and happy now. Many of her friends who also emigrated did so in the early 1980's before the big wave of migration to the West. She says that in those days they had to be particularly courageous. All of them did well for themselves in the West, but they live very consciously and continue to appreciate their freedom. In her circle of friends, all adjusted well to their life in the West and none of them wished to go back.

*"All those who left (the East) have had an incredibly good development here in the West, and they are all very grateful and positive, and when we meet, we often say 'We are doing well!'. I think in our circle of friends, it's all very much appreciate and we live very consciously. And we all get on very well in life. I do not know someone did not like it or wanted to go back. And at the*

*time when we made the emigration request, in the early 1980s, these were people who really needed some courage." (Frau T.)*

*"Alle die weg sind haben eine unglaublich gute Entwicklung hier im Westen gemacht und die sind Alle sehr dankbar und positiv und wenn man sich trifft, wird gesagt 'Mensch geht's uns gut'. Ich denke in unserem Freundeskreis wissen es Alle sehr zu schätzen und leben sehr bewusst. Und kommen sehr gut zurecht im Leben. Ich kenne nicht Einen dem's nicht so ging oder der zurück wollte. Und in der Zeit wo wir den Antrag stellten, Anfang der achtziger Jahre, das waren Menschen die wirklich etwas Mut brauchten."*

*(Frau T.)*

Herr A., who fled to the West thinks the GDR shaped his life in many ways but he chooses to embrace the positive aspects. He likes to hire people from the East because he thinks both East and West Germans can learn a lot from one another. He also sends employees there for conferences and has gotten many positive responses. He thinks that there are a number of positive aspects of the East German work mentality, and he feels that people should learn from one another.

Frau T. told me that she's culturally different from her West German friends—both in her upbringing and approach to society. With her experience she feels especially adept at critically assessing and recognising trends in society and its problems and even nowadays in regard to media and how this is used as a tool to achieve certain means. She often thinks about how this experience impacted and shaped her life.

(Frau T.) Yet, at the same time, she is not sad about having lived through her time in the GDR because she gained inner strength from the experience:

*"I am not sad about this time, it has given me strength. Either I change my life and do not just accept everything. The surveillance ... If I had been here<sup>18</sup> I could never have made the experience."* (Frau T.)

*"Ich bin nicht traurig über diese Zeit, sie hat mir Kraft gegeben. Entweder ich ändere mein Leben und nehme nicht alles hin. Durch die Überwachung. ...Wäre ich hier gewesen hätte ich die Erfahrung nie machen können"*(Frau T.).

*Bauchgefühl und Menschenkenntnis* - what people have gained from Stasi surveillance

Aside from a more critical approach, a further skill gained from the experience of state surveillance is "*Menschenkenntnis*": The special ability to read people. One informant said that she feels like her experience in the GDR has given her a special sense for understanding people's intentions and motivations - a type of gut feeling, which she still retains to this very day. During GDR times she was always careful about who she spoke to. She said that this care was mostly led by her intuition - "*Bauchgefühl*". She can still feel it today and relies on this special sense in many situations. It is something that she has relied on since childhood.

*"This feeling, ... the ability to assess people. This is the positive for me because I learned this in the GDR."* (Frau T.)

*"Dieses Gespür, ...Menschen einschätzen zu können. Das ist das positive für*

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<sup>18</sup> In the West

*mich, weil ich das in der DDR gelernt habe.” (Frau T.)*

Another informant said he believes that he could always trust his instincts when choosing those he would trust, and that he was never really disappointed.

*“You choose your friends. With my circle of friends I was never really disappointed. Perhaps I had a better knowledge of people.”*

*“Man sucht sich ja seine Freunde aus, mit meinem Freundeskreis bin ich eigentlich nie auf die Schnauze gefallen. Vielleicht hatte ich eine bessere Menschenkenntnis.” (Herr A.)*

The concept of *Menschenkenntnis* is extremely interesting and should be unpacked further in future investigations.

### Collective social distrust?

I have briefly outlined some of the difficulties East Germans faced living in the GDR and then later in the reunited Germany. East Germany's transition from the GDR to the reunited FRG caused great upheaval both in peoples' private and professional lives. Obviously, the extent to which people suffered or profited from reunification varies considerably from one individual to another. It depends on their age, their gender, their profession, position in GDR society and also their location. For example, there would have been significant differences between someone who rented a small flat in East Berlin and lived quite independently from relatives compared to someone who owned a house in a small town in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (North-East Germany) and had close relations with their family. Not everyone was able readily to leave behind their past and begin a new life in 1990. The effects of this fragmentation of society are noticeable to this day. Some people

managed to build a comfortable life for themselves, while others continue to struggle to adapt or have simply given up. Even a quarter century after the reunification social differences between West Germans and former GDR citizens are still noticeable, as well as amongst East Germans themselves.

The many forms of distrust apparent amongst East Germans have created a number of social problems, which ultimately impact a person's sense of wellbeing significantly. These issues include suspicion, paranoia, inability to form normal relationships with others, depression and other psychological and physical disorders. Alcohol and substance abuse (as a coping mechanism) is a particularly widespread problem in East Germany, especially in relation to the notion of the two-fold disillusionment discussed earlier. During GDR times and then in the reunited Germany, alcoholism plays a significant role.

In a situation of hopelessness and disillusionment people seek ways to escape their problems, and numbing their feelings with alcohol is one key coping strategy. This strategy has had destructive effects in East Germany and continues to do so. Kochan (2011) in his ethnographic study of GDR drinking culture writes that the state had an alcohol-centred society, where alcohol consumption was seen as a fun, sociable past-time in the relatively monotonous everyday life of the GDR. Alcohol was an invigorating substance that could be used as an exchange product or as a welcome present for any occasion. His argument that drinking was simply an expression of East Germans' worry-free, non-competitive approach to life in a collectivist society is only shedding light on part of the truth. This slightly narrow view may stem from the fact that Kochan himself opened a liquor shop, by the evocative name

*Schnapskultur*, in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg only shortly after publishing his doctoral thesis (Spiegel Online 4/2011).

In reality, the problem of alcoholism in the GDR and now East Germany can hardly be swept under the carpet. In 1988, GDR citizens consumed on average 16.1 litres of high volume spirits a year. This means that they drank on average 23 bottles of hard liquor per person, per year! Internationally, the former GDR ranked as one of the countries with the highest alcohol consumption worldwide (Spiegel Online 4/2011).

I believe that alcohol was a way to escape the realities of Socialism, the rigorous control of every aspect of life, and social pressure to conform.

Even today, East German states (Bundesländer) register significantly more deaths related to alcoholism than West Germany. This alcohol-related mortality is thought to be linked to socio-economic factors affecting the region, as well as the aftermath of GDR drinking culture. The state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for instance, counts an average of 37 alcohol-related deaths per 100 000 people. In comparison, the West German state of Baden-Württemberg registers 13 per 100 000 (Spiegel Online 12/2012).

Just as the issue of distrust has transformed in East Germany over the years, so have the reasons for drinking. While previously the oppression of the population may have played a significant role in alcohol consumption, nowadays East Germany is still dealing with an economic decline, unemployment, and extreme feelings of hopelessness, which lead people to alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism. Trobisch-Lütge (2010) moreover describes the way in which many of his politically

traumatised patients turn to dissociative behaviour in order to escape their trauma leading to alcohol and substance abuse.

In conclusion, the destructive force of distrust can be seen in the examples outlined above. We learn that extreme control and surveillance by a state, even if it is promoted to the population as a measure to ensure security (just as the Wall once was), will eventually have a detrimental effect on human relationships and ultimately challenge their happiness and wellbeing. Having given a basic outline of four types of distrust in East Germany, it can be concluded that, indeed, life in a dictatorship poses a threat to social trust, as well as trust in the state. Even after Germany's reunification, with its transition to a democratic state, the lines of the past are not easily erased. As mentioned above, once trust is broken, it is almost impossible for that relationship to recover. The same underlying suspicion continues to be a factor in many East Germans' lives today, shaping their daily interactions, their closest personal relationships, and ultimately their wellbeing.

## Chapter Eight: Long-term consequences of Mass-surveillance and Repression

In this chapter, I briefly examine what mass surveillance and repression do in the long term to a group or society as a whole. While there is no single, clear-cut answer, I have made it my objective to examine my interviewees' accounts and my other findings from observations in the field. My informant's responses speak for themselves in illustrating the broad range of answers to this question.

Several themes have emerged. First, the widespread normalisation of a culture of control amongst the GDR population, along with the active repression, surveillance and abuse committed by the SED regime (specifically the Ministry for State Security) led to a variety of traumatic experiences (Plänkers et al.2005) Second, these multiple traumatic instances continue to impact East Germans' lives on an individual, and, as I will show, a collective level. I will shed light on one theme that stood out to me in particular: social distrust.

Surveillance cannot be singled out as a factor determining the behaviour of all East Germans, as they all experienced it differently. We must, therefore, differentiate between those who were sceptical of the regime, those who openly questioned it, those who favoured it, and those who were relatively indifferent towards it. For across these groups of people, there are stark differences regarding the extent to which they came into contact with the Stasi. The scale varies from *"they didn't really bother me much"* to *"they destroyed my life"*. Although these are two extremes, it can be said that the majority of people have very negative associations with the Stasi.

To summarise the findings of my ethnographic interviews, below is a list indicating some of the repercussions of mass surveillance for East Germans. The list shows how they reported they felt about surveillance in the GDR (retrospectively) and also the emotions they experienced in the aftermath of Germany's reunification. The list demonstrates the complexity of the situation then and now.

*During GDR-times:*

- Paralysis
- Guarded towards others
- Security
- Order
- Reliance on the system to work/ comfort
- Shame
- Distrust / Trust was even more meaningful, as more was at stake
- Anger
- Disappointment
- Betrayal
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Dissociative behaviour/ escape through alcohol abuse

*Contemporary Germany:*

- Scepticism
- Paranoia
- Cynicism
- Nostalgia (related to order and security)
- Events of the past overshadowing present life
- Shame
- Distrust / Trust
- Anger

- Disappointment
- Disillusionment
- Betrayal
- Fear
- Uncertainty
- Dissociative behaviour/ escape through alcohol or drug abuse

Especially in compensation disputes, it becomes clear how distrustful the affected East Germans still feel. They are often under the impression that they are being treated unfairly and end up embittered (Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.77)

Those who were politically traumatised feel alienated and high levels of distrust, especially towards psychologists, psychotherapists and medical professionals are very common (Bomberg & Trobisch Lütge 2009, p. 55). Trauma sufferers believe that they are not recognised as the victims of an unjust regime, but that their suffering is instead, pathologized subsequently (Trobisch-Lütge 2010).

### Coming to terms with the past and Continued Suffering

As I have shown, suffering from the former socialist dictatorship is a multifaceted affair. People can potentially have had polar opposite experiences of the GDR regime, and yet they could suffer equally in the aftermath or vice versa. A process of *Vergangenheits Aufarbeitung* (coming to terms with the past) is only beginning now. The topic is still a sensitive one and, although the availability of Stasi files moved the process forward, many questions remain unanswered. As interviews revealed, all my informants felt that a public discourse about the dictatorship is still missing. Old wounds do not heal, as those who became victims to the Stasi's repressive techniques feel that their suffering is not recognised and that their perpetrators

were not made accountable for their actions. Worse still, some fear that their tormentors managed to get a foot in the door after the Wende, continuing to work in influential positions. As my ethnographic examples illustrated, this continues to be a source of distress.

### **Social Suffering and its consequences**

The broad spectrum of individual and collective trauma experienced in the former GDR has had far-reaching consequences. Social suffering is an explanatory model for the “immediate personal experience of broad human problems caused by the cruel exercise of political and economic power” (Singer & Baer 2012: 90), I argue that East Germans who were affected by state violence and repression are dealing with the long-term effects of social suffering (Kleinman et al, 1997, ix). Previously, I have shown the effect that surveillance and repression had on the lives of individuals. In particular, I have explored how the emotional scars of the experienced trauma have become a significant constituent in the construction of the sufferer’s identity. In the past, numerous scholars have explored cultural trauma and its consequences (Alexander et al. 2001, Eyerman 2001, Langer 1997, Bombay, Matheson & Anison 2014, Kirmayer, Gone & Moses 2014). For instance, Eyerman (2001) explores in-depth the cultural trauma that arose out of the atrocities of African-American slavery and its impact on the formation of identity.

Langer's (1997) analysis of the narratives of Holocaust survivors, for instance, sheds light on the concept of a durational present, where survivors do not heal from their trauma but experience it rather as "an event to be endured". The traumatic memories become part of the identity of the sufferer. As Langer (1997) writes, “*she is defined, not disabled by, her memory*”.

As outlined above, my informants also continue to experience their suffering in a number of ways, although in varying degrees of intensity. For East Germans, just as Langer and other colleagues have outlined in various contexts, lived trauma is very much ingrained in individual's identities. This is not necessarily interpreted negatively. As mentioned above, several of my informants have told me they gained strength from experience. Some interpret their lived suffering as an asset. They mentioned a certain set of skills they have acquired due to their experience, first and foremost "*Menschenkenntnis*"- a particular ability to read and understand people. They are fine-tuned to understand people and can "*read between the lines*". They have put great emphasis on their ability to know whom they can trust.

But related to this positive interpretation of suffering, is its negative counterpart: distrust. A recent study by Lichter and colleagues has, for example, provided statistical evidence for the lasting effect the Stasi spying (in particular that of unofficial informants – *IM*) continues to have in Germany (Lichter, Löffler & Siegloch 2015). They found that in regions that originally had high numbers of Stasi spies, high levels of social distrust were found. They also recorded statistically lower economical power, higher distrust in the state and its institutions, lower percentage of voters in elections as well as low birth rates. This data could indicate consequences of surveillance, but this should be interpreted with care. The influence of the Stasi past can also be seen in personal interactions as has been illustrated in my ethnographic examples.

### **Suspicion and wariness**

In East Germany, high levels of social distrust were created among the population during the time of socialism. This distrust emerged primarily through the extensive

use of mass surveillance by the socialist state. Living under conditions of suspicion, distrust and fear have shaped East German perceptions of the self (and others); and ultimately resulted in a challenge to their wellbeing, in the long-term.

### Trust: A brief overview

The topics of trust and distrust have been of interest to scholars in many disciplines. Most recently the topic has had a big resurgence (see for example Hardin 2006; Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000). In the light of events involving large-scale electronic surveillance and spying, questions of trust in the state, as well as trust amongst states, have resurfaced. At the same time, such questions have also brought the value of interpersonal trust back into the picture. But what is this enigmatic concept of trust and why is it seemingly so important?

Trust shapes all aspects of human life and pervades all societies (Hardin 2002; Misztal 1996; Luhmann 1979). It is an important component of personal and economic exchanges; moreover, it is essential in any interpersonal relationship from friends and family to business partners (Arrow 1972; Mauss 2000; Misztal 1996). Trust contributes to economic success, and to social stability and cohesion (Knack & Keefer 1997; Hardin 2000; 2002; Putnam 2000). It is a fundamental principle of social order and, according to Locke, stems from the natural sociability of humans (Misztal 1996).

Trust can be defined as the *belief in the truthful and good-natured intentions of others*. There are many different approaches to defining this concept. Political, economic, psychological, biological, and anthropological theories have been developed to make sense of this. Each discipline explores varying aspects of what

trust means in particular contexts (see Luhmann 2000; Gambetta 2000; Misztal 1996; Hardin 2002; 2004; 2006 for overviews). Upon closer inspection, all these different approaches are intertwined in some way.

Lewis and Weigert (1985) provide a sociological approach to trust and argue, "*an adequate conceptual analysis of trust begins by recognising its multi-faceted character. It has distinct cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions which are merged into a unitary social experience*" (Lewis & Weigert 1985:969). They emphasise that the study of trust is also a study of risk and doubt.

Elster (1993), also sees trust as a social mechanism, driven by peoples' motivations and beliefs. Related to this social mechanism is the idea that trust is the main ingredient in human cooperation (Misztal 1996). It is the basic building block in human relationships. Sahlins (1972) and Mauss (2000) look at trust as a significant factor in exchange relationships, particularly with respect to reciprocity and according obligations.

In *The Gift*, Mauss explores the non-immediate reciprocity in gift-giving,

*"where reward is neither discussed nor consciously calculated at the moment the offering is made. In the long run, however, one expects gifts to be reciprocated. Thus, in primitive and archaic societies, those societies based on gift-relationships, there is no middle path; there is either trust or mistrust"* (Mauss 2000).

An increasing perception of societal distrust and the value of trust as social capital has been a particularly popular topic of investigation. Robert Putnam's bestselling book *Bowling Alone* (2000), about rising distrust and declining social participation in

the United States, really hit a nerve for many Americans. The great success of this book can be traced back to the fact that it deals with an issue concerning many modern societies today.

Notably, Russell Hardin has made trust and distrust his main areas of enquiry (see 2002; 2004; 2006; 2009) looking at trust as *encapsulated interest*, placing high value on a person's desire to continue a particular relationship and therefore acting in the other's interest: "*You encapsulate my interests in your own interests*" (Hardin 2004:6). He also explores trust as a social capital, investigating why it is such an interesting topic to so many scholars. He refers to political scientists such as Brehm, Fukuyama, Rahn and others, and claims that the study of social capital is "*motivated primarily by the linkage between levels of social capital and collective outcomes; high levels of social capital appear to be crucial for such measures of collective well-being as economic development, effective political institutions, low crime rates, and lower incidences of other social problems, such as teen pregnancy and delinquency*" (Brehm and Rahn 1997: 1000; cited in Hardin 2006).

Diego Gambetta has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the topics of trust and distrust (See Gambetta 2000; 2005; 2009) and has been particularly interested in how criminals and the Mafia find ways to trust one another, examining the methods by which they communicate under conditions of extreme suspicion and uncertainty. He explains that criminals create conditions that enforce one another's honesty by engaging in situations where honesty is the best option for all parties involved (Gambetta 2009, p. 37). His study highlights that once individuals share information, especially if it is of a sensitive nature (secrets), trust relationships

are built (2009. P.66). He, furthermore, highlights how powerful information can be regarding issues of privacy and surveillance.

Further anthropological studies have investigated trust cross-culturally and, surprisingly, even ecologically. One comparative study has shown that trust is an important aspect of a forager's internal working models. Hewlett *et al.* (2000) investigated foragers' relationships with the environments they lived in and discovered some culture-specific metaphors which were often based on trustful, nurturing kinship relations. These metaphors were also directly linked with forager economic behaviours, such as no food storage and little subsistence activity.

*“Among some forager groups (Nayaka, Mbuti, and Batik in her study) the parent-child relationship is the primary metaphor (‘forest as parent’) – people view the environment as an ever-providing, loving, and unconditionally supportive parent – whereas in other forager groups the metaphors are linked to sexual relatedness (Canadian Cree) or procreational relatedness (Australian Aborigines)” (Hewlett et al. 2000: 287; see also Bird-David 1993).*

The so-called “meta-metaphors” shared by all foragers, were those of a “giving” and “trusting” environment. This internal working model gives an indication as to how and why foragers build trust-relationships with their environment and others. The social scientific work produced on the meaning and value of trust indicates its importance in human life, cross-culturally. But what happens when bonds of trust get damaged, and trust turns into distrust? How do people manage distrust and uncertainty?

## The flip-side of the coin: Distrust

All of us have found ourselves in situations where our trust of another has been broken. A seemingly strong, trusting relationship, which possibly took years to build, can be tainted within seconds. What may begin as slight doubt, given just enough evidence to support the suspicion, can quickly lead to distrust. Emotions invoked by this shift range from shock, anger, and fear to melancholy about what has been lost. Since trust is such a substantial ingredient in our personal relationships, as soon as distrust creeps in, the relationship is often damaged beyond repair.

Severe breaches of trust can also bring about loneliness and isolation when a person's beliefs are challenged in such a devastating manner that they feel they can no longer rely on anything. Their basic beliefs are challenged to the point where they do not know who or what can be trusted.

In the German language, there is a phrase describing this feeling of helplessness and uncertainty, the inability to carry on because the foundations of a person's confidence in the world are crumbling: *“Den Boden unter den Füßen verlieren.”* This literally means “losing the ground underneath your feet.” The phrase is apt. Indeed, I would argue that this powerful feeling, stemming from betrayal and distrust, has been a part of many East Germans' lives. As Ullmann-Margalit (2004) claims; trust and distrust are complex and multidimensional. In the former GDR and now East Germany, many types of distrust have been apparent. This diversity can be traced back to Germany's unique history of division and reunification and, significantly the close succession of two dictatorships.

## What is distrust and what does it do?

Many definitions of distrust have been discussed in anthropological and other social scientific literature (see Hardin et al. 2004; Gambetta 2000, 2005, 2009). For the purpose of this chapter I believe Edna Ullmann-Margalit's multi-dimensional perspective on distrust applies to East Germany especially well. She thinks trust and distrust exist on multiple levels and explains "full trust" in the following way:

*"When I lack the belief that you intend to act in my best interest with respect to a given matter, I do not trust you. I begin to distrust you when I am in a position to form the actual belief that you do not intend to act in my best interests in that matter. My distrust in you increases when I become suspicious of your intentions, and it increases still further when I come to form the belief that you actually intend to act against my interests in the matter at hand". (Ullmann-Margalit 2004, p.67)*

A more extreme level of distrust is achieved when someone knows your interests, yet still actively goes against them. Ullmann-Margalit (2004) considers the most severe form of distrust to arise from someone acting against your interests *because* they are your interests (2004, p.67). Therefore, distrust involves "an intention component, a right-reason component, and a competence component" (2004, p.67).

In addition to examining the severity of distrust, its origin and to whom or what it is directed, hold significance. Interpersonal distrust can take different shapes and forms other than intergroup distrust, institutional distrust, or distrust in a government (see Kramer 1998; 2004, Hardin 2004). These differing areas can once again overlap or infect one another. Hardin asserts that the level of trust that people

have in government, for example, has a direct impact on the way people trust in other areas of life (Hardin 2004:23). Therefore, it can be said that the more trustworthy a government is, the more trusting are its people to one another. But, what happens when distrust becomes the prevalent feeling in a group or an entire country, as in the GDR?

Kramer (1998; 2004) writes about the way in which distrust can lead to collective paranoia. Social environments, which are highly hierarchical, are likely to foster distrust and suspicion. Interestingly, social distrust is exceptionally pronounced when individuals “feel a heightened sense of self-consciousness, perceive themselves to be under intense evaluative scrutiny, or are uncertain of their status or standing within a social relation“(Kramer 2004, p. 142,143). Research has indicated that when self-consciousness is heightened, people are more likely to make “overly personalistic attributions about others’ intentions and motives” (2004, p.143). The awareness of social categories within a particular social group emphasises this trend, as it significantly impacts how people define themselves within the broader social context (2004, p. 143). People's understanding of their own social standing in a social system is extremely important, as it is highly valued by them and shapes their identity (Burke & Stets 1999). It can also be assumed that lower status groups, within a hierarchy, are more aware of trust relationships than those ‘above’ them in the social hierarchy.

Kramer (2004) suggests that large-scale distrust amongst a social group leads to a form of "collective paranoia". The consequences of this broad-scale distrust are dangerous and far-reaching. They can, for example, produce high levels of moral aggression, an intensely negative reaction that reflects how people feel when they

have been treated in an “unfair, unjust, or, untrustworthy fashion”. Moreover, defensive non-cooperation becomes apparent when moral aggression is a mechanism that compromises collective welfare to minimise the risks of exploitation (Kramer 2004).

Nugent (2015) has studied state paranoia in great detail. He has undertaken research on the APRA in Peru. A group whom the Odria regime regarded as a threat because, amongst other things, they were thought to undermine the government's endeavour of modernization. The government grew increasingly paranoid about the group's power and influence. As a way of ensuring the continuation of state power, he explains how the Peruvian government made a conscious effort to maintain a strict boundary between state and non-state. This idea was proclaimed as an improvement of general wellbeing or "the common good". In the SED-regime, the ideology presumed that the ultimate source of wellbeing was the "collective", which was inherently intertwined with the state. Indeed, as we have seen the state was present in all areas of life and the Stasi's work constantly blurred the lines, between the public and private. Yet, we can also recognise similarities with Nugent's example of Peruvian state paranoia. Just as it was the case in the GDR, there was an inherent distrust towards its citizens and even their police force.

### **The origins of social distrust**

In the following section, I will examine how East Germany's socio-historical conditions brought about severe social distrust among the population.

Knowing the potential consequences of their actions heightened all East Germans' awareness of trust or distrust in social interactions. Trustworthiness was constantly

evaluated, and the social environment was monitored at all times. Being "on guard" was much more prevalent in East German's everyday life, than what most of us experience in modern democratic societies today. Indeed, most people would describe this behaviour as a *normal* part of life. Particularly looking back at it years later, East Germans often speak about it in a casual manner and as one of my informants said "*...It's true, when I look at it today, we constantly had to watch out...but then it was normal. We didn't know it any other way*", again, demonstrating the normalisation of control.

It is estimated that up to one in six people reported for the *Stasi* unofficially (Funder 2003). As I have shown it was therefore not uncommon to work among *Stasi* informants and have friends and family who secretly (but not always willingly) collaborated with the secret police. As mentioned previously, people were known to have "two opinions", one that could be voiced in public among those who were less trustworthy and another in private only among those closest to one another. I would argue that this created a condition of cognitive dissonance to many (Festinger 1957). This is displayed in an example where the line between the private and the public was particularly thin: the home. What could and could not be said in each family, of course, varied immensely, but it can be assumed that even those loyal to socialism felt quite protective of their home and family life (see Hoffmann 2012). Beate Volker and Henk Flap (1997) demonstrate this in their sociological study about neighbourhood relations in the former GDR. Their findings suggest that socialism had a detrimental effect on neighbourhood relations. They investigated blocks of flats in two East German cities - Leipzig and Dresden. During socialism, in an attempt by the state to encourage a "mixing of the classes", people of differing backgrounds

and occupations were moved into the same building. Contrary to the state's expectations, this did not encourage trust amongst neighbours at all. In fact, living in close physical proximity to people considered untrustworthy posed a threat to one's private life and hence created a general atmosphere of distrust. People were aware of the possibility of living amongst *Stasi* informants and were, therefore, more guarded in their neighbourly relations. Völker and Flap conclude: "*We understand these phenomena as the unintended consequences of the Marxist belief system, the Leninist one-party system, and the ensuing and all-encompassing political control (Reve 1969 cited in Völker & Flap 1997). People knew about this control. Because of the far-reaching consequences that allegations of being a class-enemy or of being merely a less-than-eager comrade would cause, because it was far from clear who were the unofficial informants of the Stasi, this control constantly forced people to consider whether others were to be trusted. The risk of being denounced was greater if strangers were concerned, especially dissimilar others or people forced on one by circumstances, such as neighbours and workmates. Neighbours are a special case: because of propinquity, they have access to the private sphere of those who live next door. A major finding of our study corroborates this argument: ties with neighbours and with socially dissimilar others had a greater chance of being loaded with distrust.*" (Völker and Flap 1997:259)

Indeed, the constant state of distrust in GDR society was a mental weight carried by all; yet the way this is accepted and understood still varies widely today. The normalisation of control also meant that the "side-effects" - distrust and suspicion - were rarely openly addressed or even admitted. The real extent of distrust was truly

recognisable to people as the regime unravelled or as they had the opportunity to move away from the GDR.

As one informant told me, the distrust that was rooted in surveillance is something that no one misses. Indeed, she feels that it is a burden she has finally shed. - *“Eine Last die von einem abfällt”* (Frau D.).

She also explained that when her emigration (*Ausreiseantrag*) was finally granted, and she got to the West, she was glad that all the restrictions of everyday life were gone - *“das gedrängte und eingeengte”* - all the pressure and constraint, not knowing who you could trust. In her mind, all those things were done deliberately to control people. Beginning her new life far away from this deep distrust, emphasised this realisation. I argue that, although the immediate threat of denunciation and Stasi psychological (and physical) abuse are gone today, the legacy of a culture of control continues to permeate East German society, primarily with the older generation who experienced the regime.

Süß is spot on in his assertion that the consequences of large-scale denunciation (and *Zersetzung*) led to a severe destruction of trust, confidence and solidarity in groups. Possibilities for career and social development were at times catastrophic for those affected, precisely because of the Stasi's extensive secret work and cooperation with collaborators within the general population, state and social institutions. The ministry's ingenious psychological methods have had a lasting effect on individual and collective wellbeing, affecting it negatively (Süß 1999).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Germany was reunited in the following year. East Germany had to undergo major economic and social transformation. To this day

there is a so-called "psychological gap" between the East and West. Many feel that the national identities of the "two Germanies" differ fundamentally. A 1993 poll revealed that only 22% of West Germans and 11% of East Germans believed they shared a common identity. Interestingly, in 1990, 73% of Easterners still believed that there was only one single German identity, by 1991 this number fell to 40%. Major differences are perceived in East and West Germans' approaches to work and family life, as well as the role of the state (Roller 1994 cited in Misztal 1996) and, as I would add, social communication and social relationships. Especially in compensation disputes, it becomes clear how distrustful the affected East Germans still feel. They are often under the impression that they are being treated unfairly and end up embittered (Linden 2007; Bomberg & Trobisch-Lütge 2009, p.77).

In this ethnographic fieldwork, I have discovered that those East Germans who are particularly nostalgic about the GDR often like to praise the friendly, neighbourly relations and the social cohesion they experienced. I argue that this view is only admitting part of the truth. Upon closer inspection it becomes clear that indeed many friendships were cultivated and maintained in the GDR, but it was primarily done out of sheer necessity, as the right relations (*Beziehungen*) were essential to live a relatively comfortable life in a society characterised by chronic shortages.

No doubt, there were many true friendships which have lasted through the years to this day. But, Kollmorgen (2014) sees a particular trend also found in many other postsocialist societies. He believes that the state's forced solidarity and dictated group cohesion led people to be less interested in social cohesion when they finally had the freedom to choose. In democratic societies, people develop social

relationships with others more naturally and are therefore more likely to internalise them.

A recently published study by the Bertelsmann foundation (2014) confirmed these assumptions in a statistical analysis. A long-term study of *social cohesion* was conducted in the 16 German states (*Bundesländer*) from 1990-2012. The study demonstrated significant differences between East and West German states. The authors of this study consider social cohesion to be characterised by stable social relationships, a positive connection with members of the public and a strong sense of community welfare. This was established by asking a number of questions. The aim was to find out, for example, to what extent the participants trusted the people around them, and/or whether they felt that they were treated fairly by the public. The collected data created interesting images of the different regions of Germany, highlighting significant regional variation. They concluded: *“Social cohesion is stronger in all of Germany’s 11 western states than in the 5 eastern ones. In our five-level grouping, the eastern states can be found in the lower mid-range (Brandenburg and Saxony) and at the bottom (Thuringia, Mecklenburg- Western Pomerania and Saxony -Anhalt) of the ranking. The gap between west and east is currently even larger than it was directly after reunification (observation period 1990 to 1995). Unlike in other areas, when it comes to social cohesion Germany’s eastern states have – in relative terms – not caught up with their western counterparts. There has, however, been an increase in social cohesion within the country’s eastern states, despite the extenuating factors found there: a weaker economy, lower employment levels, a higher risk of poverty, a population that is, on average, older than in the west, and a lower degree of urbanization.” (Bertelsmann, 2014, p.66)*

Interestingly, East German states showed lower scores in all the questions asked besides the categories of 'abiding by social norms' and 'identification with local community'. The authors conclude the East German results show strong resemblances with post-socialist states such as the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia (compared to a previous International Bertelsmann study, 2013). Here, people were also less trusting. The authors link this to a culture of control that used to be particularly apparent in socialist countries.

The study furthermore showed that the trend of social cohesion in East Germany declined in recent years. Right after reunification and in the early nineties, the scores were slightly higher than they are now (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014). This decline could be explained by an initial continuation of existing social structures and GDR institutions, which fostered community cohesion (e.g. community holiday homes or leisure clubs).

### **Multi-layered dimensions of distrust in East Germany**

In this section I will briefly shed light on the varying types of distrust I have encountered in my ethnographic fieldwork in East Germany, and how they have challenged personal relationships and impacted people's wellbeing.

Interviews with informants have revealed four main forms of distrust many East Germans have encountered before and after the reunification.

- 1) A predominant area of distrust is characterised by the socialist state's extensive system of control over the population in the GDR, in particular, surveillance conducted by the *Stasi*, using unofficial spies within the population. As mentioned previously, this created an atmosphere of

suspicion and uncertainty. People were wary of expressing their true opinion in public for fear of denunciation. Such guardedness had a significant impact on their social communication and interpersonal relationships in general. Although everyone in the GDR was aware of this control, it must be stressed that the extent to which people were directly affected by this control varied greatly (Kowalczyk 2013).

Although everyday interactions with those outside of the immediate family or friendship group were conducted in an approachable and friendly manner, the actual nature of conversations tended to be marked by quite superficial, phatic communication. Trobisch-Lütge (2010) calls this: *Mauersprache* ("Wall speech"), a particular way of talking in public spaces (e.g. a pub), which meant speaking a lot, but not really saying much at all. Even now, during my fieldwork, I have seen this behaviour frequently. In Berlin, this is not very noticeable, yet in other regions of the East, it appears to be more common. This particular type of phatic communication is one manifestation of East Germany's culture of distrust.

Overall, I would argue that today's social interactions continue to be influenced by East Germans' experiences of the past, regarding the way existing relationships were disturbed by betrayal associated with spying, particularly if those affected gained evidence of their suspicions through viewing their *Stasi* files (Funder 2003). Many family relationships were corrupted by such revelations. Even 25 years later, for those affected, encounters with family members are dictated by feelings of denial, tension and many taboo conversation topics. I would, moreover, speculate that East

Germans who were socialised in the GDR (born before 1970) continue to follow certain patterns of social interactions they grew up with, leading them to enter close personal relationships more cautiously.

2) Second, distrust was felt towards the state GDR. This prevalent feeling among the population peaked in the 1980's (Kowalczyk 2013; Baer 1992). Even many of the most convinced socialists and party members recognised the state's deterioration and financial collapse. Everyday life was dictated by shortages and social pressure as well as increased state control. The population's distrust was further reinforced by the *Stasi's* all-encompassing power, as well as the growing contradictions between the SED party preachings, GDR media reports, and the actual reality of life in the state. Finally, revelations about election fraud led more and more citizen groups to form and rise up against the repression, eventually leading to a peaceful revolution.

It must be noted that there was a large part of the population that wanted to bring about a change in the country by solving existing problems. They were convinced by the political model of socialism and did not necessarily want a reunification with the West and an adoption of capitalism. Yet, the aged and crumbling political leadership was unable to adjust sufficiently to avoid the crisis (Kowalczyk 2013).

3) The third kind of distrust occurred after the fall of the Wall and was directed at the West German government, now responsible for the united country. Many East Germans felt disillusioned after the initial euphoria and

thrill of the *Wende* time. For many the reunification caused great existential uncertainty. State-owned companies were either closed immediately or bought by Western investors, who closed them shortly after. This caused mass unemployment (until then virtually unknown to GDR citizens) and financial instability.

The unfamiliarity with the new political system and the state's expectations towards citizens were cause for insecurity and worry to many. Living in a "competitive society" centred around "the individual" as opposed to "the collective" made them feel "*foreign in their country.*" Many feared being taken advantage of, not being prepared for the "*cutthroat*" mentality of capitalism, and struggling with career and status rivalry. These developments gave rise to new social problems, predominantly featuring anxiety and distrust. West Germans were frequently seen in an untrustworthy light; prejudice in both East and West about the "other" continues to divide the country. East Germans felt as though they were regarded as "*second class citizens*" by the "*arrogant Wessis*". Indeed, even today unjust treatment of the East by the government continues to exist, particularly when it comes to equality in wages and pension.

- 4) The final and most severe form of distrust I outline stems from intense repression and persecution of individuals by the *Stasi*, employing the *Zersetzung* method and imprisonment. Those who were affected by these methods and who have sought out psychiatric help in recent years are primarily diagnosed as "*politically traumatised.*" The resulting type of distrust is by far the most damaging to a people's wellbeing. It is impossible

to know exactly how many East Germans are affected by this (Trobisch-Lütge 2010).

Control techniques consisted of an extremely sophisticated form of psychological torture aimed at generating intense feelings of powerlessness. Official and unofficial employees of the *Stasi* infiltrated their victims' lives and often coercively applied techniques to disorient them, taking away their basic trust in stable norms and rules.

This method was used on people the political leadership considered dissidents. In reality, not every one of them was even politically active or followed some political motive. Sometimes it was sufficient reason to put someone under close observation if they had close contact with the West, through family or friends. No one was safe from persecution, even party members and committed socialists could easily come under the radar of the *Stasi*. Indeed, Ruth Hoffmann's excellent book "*Stasi-Kinder: Aufwachsen im Überwachungsstaat*" (2012) portrays this very well. Here, numerous children of former *Stasi* officials describe their childhood growing up in the GDR and recounting the extreme pressure their parents were under. Many of them lived in buildings primarily occupied by employees of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS)*, ensuring that they would all keep an eye on one another. They had no privacy, and the slightest *faux pas* could have serious consequences. The perpetrators could turn into victims from one moment to the next and vice versa (see also Hoffmann 2012, Kowalczyk 2013).

## Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

In the previous chapters, I have explored surveillance by the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Stasi) and its lasting implications for East Germans. My ethnographic fieldwork has revealed a two-fold argument, exploring the legacy of the Stasi on a collective and an individual scale.

#### **The collective impact of mass spying**

A study of social life under state control in the GDR is also inevitably an exploration of the social nature of dictatorships. The German Democratic Republic was a repressive regime in which the social interactions of its citizens mirror those of other (and previous) dictatorships, yet displaying certain unique characteristics of neo-totalitarianism. The GDR's system of social and political control was highly sophisticated, and the secret police's extensive use of unofficial informants amongst the population created extreme conditions of social pressure and distrust.

#### **Auto-governmentality**

This system of control was perfected in such a way that the principle of Foucault's Panopticon was taken even further. Not only were people self-policing for fear of being watched and suffering the consequences, but they were also constantly observing others. This created the illusion that the Stasi really was all around, just as they had intended. East Germans altered their behaviour, primarily in the public sphere to fit the state-prescribed image of the model socialist citizen. Thus, anyone

who was perceived as even slightly “different”, could easily become the target of scapegoating. The sense of all-encompassing surveillance significantly impacted the way personal relationships were conducted and social processes took place, thus suggesting a type of auto-governmentality being exercised.

But, what was it that led people to conform and become deeply involved in the dictatorship, even if they were not necessarily convinced by socialist ideology? The GDR was, what Zimbardo (2008) calls "a system that creates evil". Of course, that is not to say that all GDR citizens were evil, but instead it means that the dictatorship created conditions where the enforcement of control (with all its aspects) became normalized, this also echoes what other scholars have discussed in the past (see for instance Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, 1977; Dalibert 2013). As the years of the regime went by, social control became more and more incorporated and accepted in everyday life. In the meantime, the Stasi's methods of control had advanced significantly and become more subtle. They were less openly aggressive, yet making use of more sophisticated psychological repressive techniques, causing harm primarily to East Germans' mental wellbeing. Especially to the generation who were born and socialised in the dictatorship, surveillance and control were a regular part of their lives, as they had never experienced anything different. It created detrimental conditions of what Hannah Arendt (1961) called "not thinking".

We cannot assume that Stasi control was constantly on peoples' minds; instead, it became normality. As described previously, the state's presence was often disguised, becoming an inevitable and inescapable part of people's existence within the GDR. Such a disguise could, for instance, be fun—as in communal activities, like work outings or holiday camps. These served the state in gaining a maximum of

insight and influence into people lives, at the same time it created a sense of solidarity and community (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*), which, independent of the state's original intentions, continued to be one of the hallmarks of self-described East German identity and the predominant longing for those who are nostalgic for the past "GDR-times" (*Ostalgie*).

But, on the other hand, conformity in the former GDR came in many different and often potentially unhealthy shapes. These ranged, for instance, from being a SED party member or working for the Stasi, to merely following orders - acting as the model socialist citizen - or as I have shown in some of my informant's examples, shunning those who did not comply. Such social dynamics created extreme pressure - a burden few East Germans could shoulder. For some, this was reflected in the sense of defeat and a resulting conformity because the Stasi's extensive permeation of GDR society blurred the lines between active participant and follower. It is these abstract social conditions which make the study of East Germany particularly intriguing and complex. Individuals' roles within the system were rarely clear-cut. Instead, this investigation has shown that often, "perpetrators" and "victims" were not necessarily separate entities (e.g. those who spied, were spied on themselves).

Relationships, in the end, are complex and interrelated. This also became evident in the aftermath of the breakdown of socialism, through the revelations of Stasi files and the personal consequences that followed. In some cases, revelations impacted an individual's personal life and career substantially (e.g., by being denied certain employment due to previous involvement with the Stasi). The way, then, that individuals relate to the former GDR today are certainly shaped by their own path after the Wall came down. Yet, as all interviewees agreed, there has been a lack of

public discourse accounting for the past. My hope here is that this dissertation and those who assisted me will one day contribute to just such a public discussion.

The dictatorship in many ways corresponds with Arendt's (1961) reflections on the infamous "Banality of evil", where all citizens play a part in the regime, yet no one feels truly responsible. People were conforming with the system, not only in order to avoid punishment but out of comfort or even to gain certain personal benefits or advantages.

I argue that it is the normalisation of control coupled with the comforts of everyday life, which became the most dangerous social dynamic in the dictatorship. As I have shown, those who made certain gains from the dictatorship (in line with Stefes et al.'s Three pillars theory), were more likely to conform and actively participate in the regime. This was certainly true in the GDR. Those who lived relatively comfortable lives (benefiting from the occasional privileges), were less inclined to question the regime or the system of control they were living and perhaps even actively participating in. Comfort made some East Germans complacent; it prevented them from looking beyond the mundanities of everyday life. As I have shown in my exploration of privacy, this complacency is undoubtedly translatable to contemporary life too. As Bauman argues, our desire for a sense of community (nowadays replicated through social media) and personal comforts and conveniences (Arendt) leads to our decreasing engagement with public political discourses and diminished valuing of democracy (see Foa and Monk 2016). A warped concept of privacy only being one symptom of this trend (see also Betts 2010). In other words, if basic needs are met, people are likely to accept their fate. Of course, in the GDR citizens did eventually rise up against the regime, once the

discrepancies between state ideology and reality grew to an extent that was hard to ignore. Yet, even under these circumstances, a large proportion of the population was in favour of state reforms, but not necessarily an incorporation to the FRG.

There were state-prescribed rules and people followed them for the most part, at least outwardly. My interviewees' accounts revealed that people lived their lives in two different spaces, that of the public (work, school, some friendships, holiday outings) and that of the home or whichever private niche they could find. For many their family represented this space and privacy was valued highly. The family indeed became a "protective refuge for most people" (Betts 201, p.49), where a strong sense of cohesion and an emphasis placed on trust were paramount. These strong relationships are certainly remembered dearly and nostalgically by many East Germans today.

While there was certainly a deep, widespread fear of the possible negative repercussions of resistance, conformity with the dictatorship and the blind obedience displayed by many stemmed from simply blanking out certain realities to come to terms with their situation. Survival was the main objective, especially where questions of morality remained ambiguous. Certainly, some recognised the dangerous tendencies of the dictatorship and were critical of it. As I have shown, these people suffered incredibly, both by Stasi repression as well as the social pressure exerted by fellow GDR citizens.

The results are trauma and a vast destruction of social trust, leaving a burden on interpersonal relationships and general wellbeing of the population. Collectively this

causes ongoing social suffering. This is displayed in examples of collective anxiety and distrust.

In this thesis, I have shown how individuals describe and deal with their trauma. In various examples, I have outlined how anxiety and distrust continue to determine lives, as seen even in small examples such as still avoiding travel through the East, or simply being reminded of something related to the GDR in a movie or tv program resulting in anger and frustration. I was often told of "sore spots" - "*wunde Punkte*", certain topics or memories which triggered pain. For some of my informants suffering is still very much in the forefront of their lives. Some reported having psychosomatic disorders, sleeplessness or nightmares, anxiety, paranoia and deep-seated distrust. In these individuals' narratives, their personal suffering is repeatedly mentioned. They emphasised their discomfort and at times sense of deep isolation. In the least, there was certainly the sense that they felt they were repeatedly confronted with injustice.

A further dimension was added when age was considered. Not only were my older interviewees (70+ years) potentially traumatised by WWII as well as by the socialist regime; they have also reached an age where, especially after retirement, they tended to spend a significant amount of time reflecting on their lives. The trauma they had lived through many years previously only really came to the forefront at retirement age when they began to actively engage with the past.

What struck me most amongst individuals who reported having experienced some form of trauma caused by the wider consequences of state control, was a narrative of resilience and hope. Here, trust was emphasised over distrust. Several people

who I interviewed who had experienced betrayal and rejection, in the end focused on those who had proven trustworthy and reliable even under adverse conditions. This group of interviewees, despite their undoubtedly painful experiences, had positive interpretations of the effects of their suffering. They stressed the strength that they gained from the experience, interpreting their East German identity and past as an asset. They often mentioned special skills that they gained, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships and the critical assessment of other people's intentions: a better "*Menschenkenntnis*" - a knowledge of people, as it were.

That is not to say that their trauma has completely healed; but, rather, it sheds light on the way they deal with it in an everyday context. I argue that the emotional scars of their past experiences are undoubtedly still present. Yet, in the group of East Germans I have interviewed in-depth, these two differing types of coping mechanisms have emerged.

As mentioned above, while I would be reluctant in determining a single East German condition or illness, I agree with Scaer's argument that trauma is a "continuum of variably negative life events occurring over the lifespan, including events that may be accepted as "normal" in the context of our daily experience because they are endorsed and perpetuated by our own cultural institutions." (2005, p. 2). In my East German case study of Stasi surveillance and violence, the normalisation of state-control provided the backdrop for many such traumatic instances. Further painful experiences stemmed from Germany's reunification and its aftermath, including the availability of Stasi records. This ethnographic exploration has provided an insight into the multifaceted nature of trauma caused by state control and the way in which this can lead to "societal damage". As Scaer (2005) outlines, this is "based on the

effects that insidious and recurrent trauma may have on the structure and function of the brain, the stability of the mind, and the health of the body. Trauma as a ubiquitous societal experience therefore far exceeds the definition of a psychiatric disease." Thus, the findings of this ethnographic fieldwork show that mass surveillance and a culture that condones extreme state control negatively impacts individual and societal wellbeing.

### **Legacy of the Stasi in people's minds: Individual consequences**

Having conducted ethnographic fieldwork and collected numerous life histories, I have seen a vast range of personal reactions to the mass surveillance practised in East Germany. I follow other authors (Plänkens T., Bahrke U., Waltzer M. Et al. 2005) in their reluctance to summarise East German's experience of suffering into a single condition. It would be problematic to label everyone with having some kind of "East German Angst", since, as I have shown, individual experiences of the regime varied greatly. It can indeed be said that the experience of mass surveillance did elicit high levels of distrust and trauma. Indeed, Linden's concept of Post Traumatic Embitterment Disorder (PTED) is extremely useful in distinguishing the types of trauma experienced by individuals; yet it cannot necessarily be applied to the population as a whole. Therefore, I made it my objective to be first and foremost descriptive in my approach. Like Plänkens T., Bahrke U., Waltzer M. et al. (2005), I have chosen to present how my informants, all of whom came into direct contact with the Stasi and were spied upon (and/or spied themselves), experienced life under these difficult conditions and how this experience of surveillance has continued to shape their paths until today. I have deliberately taken an ethnographic approach to illustrate and make sense of these East Germans' unique experiences.

In Chapter Three (Ethnographic Vignettes), I presented three life histories that for me exemplify several themes that repeatedly emerged in my conversations with informants. First, I examine individual approaches to state doctrine and the enforcement of control. I have explored how some people saw socialism as a source of hope for a better future after the war, while others perceived it as a further threatening, restrictive regime. This outlook also shaped the way they understood state control and along with that, conformity.

Here, moreover, I also outlined some of the meanings of Conformity in the GDR and how this conformity both impacted individuals' everyday lives and has lived on in many East Germans' minds. What did privacy mean then, and what does it mean now? I have examined how this concept has shifted significantly, especially when viewed cross-generationally. I argue that small spaces of privacy were valued highly in the mass-surveillance society ("having two opinions" - one in public and one at home), while today privacy is no longer protected so vigorously because it is perceived to be less threatened, or at least otherwise threatened.

Comforts and the conveniences of everyday life eliminate the urgency for critical discourse. Because of this truism, I argue that, in the same way, that some East Germans became apathetic in the face of state control (originally stemming from a deep-seated fear of the consequences of resistance), nowadays an open critique of the freedom inhibiting and potentially controlling forces "online" is rare because convenience is favoured. Albeit these social dynamics took place on very different scales, there is a similar process at play.

Hannah Arendt's provocative account of Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961) in part examines this process. She wrote how Eichmann, the man who was charged guilty for his responsibility in the large-scale homicide in the Third Reich, was actually a rather dull and ordinary character. Contrary to what could be expected, he was no grand mastermind, but instead a colourless bureaucrat. In his narratives, she found that he did not reflect much on the wider consequences of his actions. Instead, he was enveloped in a system where evil deeds were normalised, where he was "merely doing his job". In her claims regarding the "banality of evil", she outlined the dangers of *convenience* in a physical, emotional, and intellectual sense. In her opinion, a convenient life fosters the broad acceptance of clichés and ideologies. As exemplified by Eichmann, convenience leads to a culture of "not thinking".

Arendt examined his accounts and found that in his personal narrative he was entirely pre-occupied with own life and career. She described how he did not question the wider consequences of his deeds, and when pressed further by the court, he often responded in clichés. Therefore, when Arendt spoke of *banality*, she meant the unreflected acceptance, even normalisation, of evil acts. Arendt concludes that Eichmann's intentions were insignificant, in the sense that he had no real intentions as he did not think or reflect critically about his actions. Albeit this is a dramatic example, it matches my argument of how convenience can lead to apathy.

Nonetheless, one must not lose sight of the other contributing factors that elicited apathy. I have shown, for example, that some GDR citizens were undoubtedly convinced by the socialist cause and acted in line with their convictions; they believed that state control was necessary. Yet others were driven by fear more than

anything else. As I have shown in detail, conformity was (unlike today) for the most part, forced. Those who were frightened of the negative repercussions of resistance certainly had valid reasons for conforming. Accounts of Stasi active surveillance and violence, house searches, interrogations and imprisonment provide only a glimpse into the frightening reality that many GDR citizens experienced.

Through various accounts, I have demonstrated how those who suffered severely, even today feel that "not much has changed". In their opinion, a "coming to terms with the past" has only taken place superficially. East Germans who were exposed to extreme state violence and repression today fear the survival of "old structures", meaning that former Stasi employees still possess influential powers in society.

Furthermore, I have shown how the availability of Stasi records is received by those who were surveilled. In my conversations, I found that some actively engage with their personal history, while others placed greater emphasis on moving forward and leaving behind the past, or simply on avoiding viewing their files altogether for fear of what could be revealed. As demonstrated in numerous narratives, painful betrayal became a turning point in many peoples' lives, further, intensifying conditions of distrust. As I learnt from one informant (see Frau L.), the capacity for forgiveness in the face of betrayal is also impacted by age. She found that her parents, who had spent the vast majority of their lives in the dictatorship, had greater capacity for forgiveness. They understood the conditions of living in the regime better than her, who had only experienced childhood there. She felt betrayed and hurt by the people who should have been there to support her in the difficult situation she was exposed to as a child. For her, it has been harder to come to terms with the past. Her parents on the other take a more nuanced view and

understand the moral ambiguity of the situation in the GDR. Nevertheless, Frau L. found her own way of coping with the traumatic past.

Now, I will move onto the final (and perhaps from a Medical Anthropology perspective) most significant question: the possibility of healing trauma. I have presented the complexity of East Germans' perceptions of Stasi surveillance. It has come to the forefront that a repressive regime like the GDR, which violates individuals' basic freedoms, inevitably affects wellbeing negatively. While some people openly voice their discomfort and have reflected on their suffering extensively, others suppress it and only through in-depth discussions allow themselves to reveal their emotional world. Perhaps future research could reveal, whether East Germans are in fact stuck within a situation of permanent liminality, while the trauma process still continues to unravel. Perhaps more time needs to pass before a socio-political transition is underway, a generational turnover can take place and a healing process can occur (Sztompka 2004). The former GDR serves as a case study of how mass surveillance causes long-term suffering. Coupled with a breadth of differing experiences before and after the fall of the Wall, it has created a complex landscape of trauma and anxiety.

## Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, a number of key themes emerged from my ethnographic fieldwork amongst former East Germans. Formal interviews and recording of life histories "Zeitzeugengespräche", have revealed that the legacy of the Stasi in East Germany is two-fold, there is the collective level and the individual level, and they diverge considerably.

On a collective level, I have shown how socialist doctrine was instilled in the population, starting with children from very young age. There was a complex and far-reaching propaganda machinery in place and state efforts to create the perfect new socialist human being. It was the secret police's main aim to enforce this. I have demonstrated how the dictatorship pressured everyone to be productive and active members of society and thereby ensuring that they were unwillingly and sometimes unknowingly deeply ingrained in a system of social control. The system undoubtedly had some positive sides which upheld the regime for a long time. Especially when people had relatively comfortable lives and benefitted personally from the regime, they felt less inclined to question it. These are the aspects that people remain nostalgic about (e.g., social cohesion or *Zusammenhalt*). But as we have seen, the regime's dark sides continue to haunt some East Germans to this day. I argue that on a collective level, conditions of state control and repression have caused high levels of social suffering that are displayed in examples of collective anxiety and distrust.

On an individual level, I have shown examples of the way state control and repression impact personal wellbeing adversely. My informants' accounts reflect the way in which the Stasi's surveillance and control became (seemingly) all-encompassing. In line with Foucault's idea of the panopticon, it led East Germans to self-police and, significantly, it led them to constantly monitor one another, fundamentally impacting interpersonal relationships. State violence and repression, coupled with social pressure to conform, caused a great deal of anxiety and trauma. For some this means ongoing suffering and dealing with distrust.

Yet, as I have found, a small group of people have transformed these negative experiences into positive ones, becoming 'resilient'. Despite their narratives of traumatic past experiences and the recurrent mentioning of "sore spots" (related to feelings of betrayal and injustice), the overall interpretation of their current wellbeing ("*Wohlbefinden*") is mostly positive. They judge their quality of life as better and continue to recognise the positive aspects they gained living in a democracy. They are hopeful and aware that one can better one's own situation. They feel that that they have gained strength from their traumatic experience, allowing them to be a 'better self'. This was described in terms of having gained special skills, especially related to their ability to read and understand people (*Menschenkenntnis*) and societal and political trends.

## Personal Reflections

During my fieldwork I often encountered silence. When people for example asked me what my PhD research was about and I mentioned the word “surveillance”, they were generally rather quick to change the topic of conversation, or they would simply say *“Ah well, that was such a long time ago...”*, indicating that they had no interest in discussing the issue any further. I wondered why they were so reluctant to speak to me. Yet, examining ethnographic studies in other contexts of state-control, persecution and repression, it has been shown that silence is a common response. Das has written extensively the way in which violence evokes silence (see for example Das 2000; 2007). In a recent article Pillen (2016) also shed light on how trauma leads to speechlessness and even to the loss of language. She writes, “A momentary descent into inhumanity—where pain destroys language and carnage leads to an inarticulate state of cries—is mirrored by the sounds of battle, onslaught, or strike action. In its aftermath, as linguistic expression continues to fail, such dehumanization appears as an injury to mankind’s linguistic accomplishments” (Pillen 2016, p. 96).

Indeed, for some of my informants their memories were so painful that they were unable to put their distress into words. But, viewing their stories before the backdrop of decades of state-imposed silencing and self-policing, their reluctance to speak makes sense. At the same time, I also found myself stalling in conversations, holding back questions I wanted to ask but was too afraid to address.

Many a time, I feared I was making a person uncomfortable or reminding them of painful experiences. On other occasions, when I interviewed people whom I knew well, something else was holding me back. Perhaps the fear of discovering something unexpected that would put the person in front of me, into an entirely new light. In many ways I could understand my informants's choice of leaving the past behind and preferring not to read their files, in order to avoid disappointment.

With some distance to my fieldwork, I realise that my personal role in the investigation is more impactful than I anticipated. It seems that I am, myself, part of this intergenerational struggle of coming to terms with the past. Perhaps the suffering by those around me - friends and family - have shaped also me as person and eventually led me on this journey in the first place. Conducting this research certainly confronted me with my own East German identity and often made me wonder what I would have done in a particular situation. What would my life have been like if the wall had continued to exist? What would have been my role in that system of ongoing surveillance?

It can be said that my fieldwork definitely changed the way I identify as East German, as it has forced me to overcome my irrational fear of admitting my background. I was able to shed my anxiety partly because my informants indirectly forced me to admit where I am from. Though, more importantly my broadened understanding of the experiences that the people around me had lived through - the trauma and suffering they endured- has led me to see my own fears in perspective. All of a sudden, they seemed childish and pointless. Hearing the incredible stories of East Germans and how they mastered life under such adverse conditions, also erased some of my own preconceptions and clichés I held about

"Ossis". It showed me that social relationships were (and remain) very complex in East Germany. Perpetrators could turn into victims within a moment's notice and vice versa. There are no simple truths. Similarly, exploring the motivations of certain behaviours led me to understand that seemingly irrational agendas made a lot more sense once one knew what a person had lived through in the Nazi regime and Second World War.



Additionally, becoming aware of the necessity of this research—that is, knowing that there are still so many unanswered questions—gave me confidence in the necessity of my own work, but also in my role as a "*partial insider*" and anthropologist. Without a doubt, it is my wish to continue my engagement with researching East Germany in the future, as I feel that this study has merely scratched the surface of the many themes and issues, which may help us understand surveillance, state-control and its impact on wellbeing.

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## Appendix:

Photos in order of appearance:

- 1) View from my home in East Berlin (1989)
- 2) Bautzen Prison Memorial (2016)
- 3) Shelves of Records at the Stasi File Archive in Berlin (2014)
- 4) Stasi File Archive – Department for searching for records, for example via addresses or names (2016)
- 5) Sample Agreement to provide services for the MfS (2016)
- 6) Sample Stasi Report (BStU) (2016)
- 7) Baltic Seaside Town Bansin (2015)
- 8) Van parked in Berlin displaying various flags in the windows (including GDR and the German Reich)
- 9) Polaroid photo taken of my family and I on our first visit to West Berlin (1989) (with permission).

