

**Power, the Party and the People:
the significance of humiliation in representations
of the German Democratic Republic**

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I, Phillip George Leask, 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.

Abstract

This thesis reconsiders the nature of humiliation, defining it as an exercise of power, and argues that the SED consciously and as a matter of habit used humiliation to seek to shape people's lives in the GDR. It seeks to understand the processes that led to this happening and the consequences of it.

The thesis considers different theoretical approaches to humiliation and contrasts it with shame. It argues that humiliation is a demonstrative use of power with a recurring set of elements: stripping of status; arbitrariness or unpredictability on the part of the humiliator; exclusion or rejection of the victim; and a personal sense of injustice matched by the lack of any remedy for the injustice suffered. It suggests that the emotions flowing from an act of humiliation follow a predictable course and the consequences for the victim, and often for the society, are serious and long-lasting.

This understanding of humiliation is applied to a close reading of literary fiction, films, letters, diaries and memoirs from the whole period of the GDR and beyond. These sources suggest that humiliation or the fear of humiliation was a constantly recurring feature of the relationship between the people and representatives of the SED and the State.

The thesis considers the founding myths, the norms and values implied by them, and how and why the Party breached these by humiliating its perceived opponents. It looks at the Party's hostility to Freudian as opposed to Marxist-Leninist ways of understanding human behaviour, analyses different forms of humiliation shown to take place in everyday life and discusses why the Party used humiliation against its own members. It concludes by considering the impact of humiliation on the attempts to develop the GDR as a 'normal' society and discusses some of the present-day implications of this understanding of humiliation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview

In this thesis I reconsider the concept of humiliation and analyse its constituent elements. I suggest that humiliation is a specific exercise of power with predictable consequences that are always destructive. On the basis of this approach, I look at the German Democratic Republic, the GDR, as a case study in humiliation. Using examples of GDR representations, I seek to explain both how power is exercised through humiliation in a general sense and specifically how power was exercised in the GDR and why it took the various forms it did. I argue that the Socialist Unity Party, the SED, exercised power in the GDR through a formal set of laws as well as through force and intimidation combined with more-subtle means of persuasion. Many aspects of this have already been extensively researched. However, the Party's use of humiliation as a weapon to punish people directly as well as to instil fear and, therefore, to ensure compliance, has so far been overlooked. By considering a range of representations (fiction and films, letters, memoirs and other personal records), this thesis will explore the extent of humiliating practices and their effects.

One of the most destructive effects of humiliation is the setting in motion of a cycle of humiliation where, following a change of power relations, the victim becomes the humiliator, whose victims in turn seek revenge and are willing to resort to a further round of humiliation when the opportunity arises. By looking at GDR representations of humiliation, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the problems of transitional periods and of the importance of breaking the cycle of humiliation.

The thesis will also consider the way the processes of humiliation changed as the GDR itself changed over time. The ideologically-driven actions and policies during the 1950s and at key points in the 1960s under Ulbricht gave way to relative liberalisation under Honecker and a reluctant acceptance in the 1970s and 1980s of increasing individualism and 'alternative' ways of behaving and expressing oneself. Despite this, humiliation remained a key weapon in the attempts of the SED to inhibit change and hold on to power. Where the methods used in the early period were often brutally direct, later approaches were more subtle but still highly destructive. Central to this was the Ministry for State Security, the Stasi, which grew enormously in size

and range of activities during the Honecker period.¹ However, while the Stasi was responsible directly for a vast programme of humiliation, what the representations of the GDR suggest is that this took place within a wider context of the acceptance by the authorities of humiliation as one way of exercising power. For many people, the Stasi was certainly the agent of their humiliation. For others, however, the awareness of the possibility of humiliation and the fear of it, in everyday life but also within the SED itself, reflected a sense that they lived in a society which had humiliation built into its very essence. Though the Stasi is referred to in various chapters of the thesis and features in a number of the personal accounts as well as in examples of fiction discussed, this is not a thesis about humiliation by the Stasi as such. It seeks, instead, to look at what lay behind the Stasi and to understand why, according to these representations, humiliation was such a significant feature of life throughout the time of the GDR.

Many of the examples considered in the thesis concern the position of women in the GDR. This is a major subject for discussion in its own right, since the SED was determined to incorporate women fully into the workforce and change their status in society, with results that were not always what it expected.² Similarly, the significance of the use of humiliation as a weapon specifically against women is relevant here.³ A detailed discussion of women and humiliation in the GDR would further broaden our understanding of the exercise of power in the GDR but is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

Aims and contribution to scholarship

The originality of the thesis comes firstly from its reconsideration of the concept of humiliation, establishing it as an act with a set of predictable elements and a number of similarly predictable consequences for its victims. Its originality also arises from the identification of humiliation as a recurring theme in representations of the GDR and the consideration of what this reveals about how power was exercised and experienced over time in the GDR.

¹ See, e.g., the discussion of the research into the Stasi in Jens Gieseke, 'Die Geschichte der Staatsicherheit', in Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach, Ulrich Mählert, eds., *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), pp. 117-125.

² See, e.g., Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*, (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³ See, e.g., Evelin Lindner, *Gender, Humiliation, and Global Security. Dignifying Relationships from Love, Sex, and Parenthood to World Affairs*, (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010).

The thesis therefore aims firstly to contribute to an understanding of the nature of humiliation and the processes that make the consequences of humiliation so serious for individual people and for societies. The thesis argues that humiliation is an exercise of power that has no positive function for the person subject to it. It also argues that humiliation is significant because it is an act that cannot be rescinded, with consequences that can continue over generations. It identifies specific, often very different methods of humiliation, such as the violation of privacy and the infantilisation of a population or a section of it, which are directly relevant to the GDR. The literature relating to the theoretical debate cuts across philosophy, psychology, psychoanalysis, history, sociology and conflict studies and is considered extensively in the theoretical chapter on humiliation. However, in relation to the GDR and representations of the GDR, it is important to note here that, despite uncertainties over the definition of humiliation, there is broad agreement on the central role of power in humiliation.

The second aim of this thesis is to consider, using a broad range of examples over time, in what form and how frequently or consistently humiliation occurs as a theme in representations of the GDR, to identify patterns and different modes of its expression and to explore what this indicates about how power is exercised. This approach is in distinct contrast to the way GDR representations have tended to be viewed, whether it is the aesthetic qualities or the political implications that are being considered. Wolfgang Emmerich, for instance, says that ‘Interesse an der DDR-Literatur war häufig weit *mehr aus dem Interesse am Experiment Sozialismus als an der Literatur* an sich geboren’. Refusing to consider the political connections remained problematic, however: since the SED defined literature as not autonomous, those writers who sought to extract themselves from the SED framework were, in or with their texts, ‘widersprechenden’ and ‘folglich wäre eine Literaturgeschichtsschreibung, die diese machtvoll Systemvorgabe einfach ignorierte und sich auf Text- und Formgeschichte beschränkte, historisch verfehlt’.⁴ A similar approach is adopted by Peter Hohendahl and Patricia Herminhouse. Emphasising the need to look at the works themselves as well as at the historical context and the

⁴ Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1996), pp. 17-20, (highlighted in original).

ideological expectations of the period, they stress that it is possible to understand aspects of the society from textual analysis.⁵

In overviews of literary development in the GDR, the political is never far away. Seeking to bring together aesthetic and political considerations, Eckhard Thiele looks at the impact of developments in the Soviet Union on GDR literature, suggesting that the ‘thaw’ following the death of Stalin in 1953 was not matched by effective de-Stalinisation in the GDR. His conclusion is that the relative freeing of the arts in the Soviet Union over the period 1953 to 1964 was important for the liberalisation there in the 1980s, which represented the fulfilment of the earlier promise. Since the SED resisted de-Stalinisation, largely prevented the early liberalisation and welcomed the downfall of Khrushchev in 1964, there was not a comparable aesthetic development in the GDR in the 1980s.⁶ Wilfried Barner describes the different demands made by the SED on writers, artists and film-makers which reflected modifications or changes in the political line at key times. Party demands created the framework within which editors and critics in the main newspapers and journals, such as *Neues Deutschland*, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, *Weimarer Beiträge*, *Sonntag* and *Sinn und Form* were expected to operate. Editors who did not conform, such as Peter Huchel, editor of *Sinn und Form* up to 1962 and not a member of the SED, could be subjected to humiliating treatment.⁷

A central requirement of the SED was to follow socialist realism, imposed on all communist parties in the 1930s, and to condemn modernism and formalism.⁸ This led to much of the internal criticism of the arts being based on the theoretical work of Georg Lukács, if less overtly after Lukács’ involvement in the Hungarian uprising.⁹ Lukács rejected ‘bourgeois modernism’ while stressing the value of ‘critical realism’, principally from the late nineteenth century, in the move towards socialist realism.¹⁰

⁵ Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Patricia Herminhouse, eds., *Literatur und Literaturtheorie in der DDR*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 8-9.

⁶ Eckhard Thiele, *Literatur nach Stalins Tod : Sowjetliteratur und DDR-Literatur: Ilja Ehrenburg, Stephan Hermlin, Erwin Strittmatter, Christa Wolf, Juri Trifonow*, (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995), pp. 1-22.

⁷ Wilfried Barner, ‘Der Apparat und neue Spielräume: Literarisches Leben in der DDR’, in Wilfried Barner, ed., *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd edition, (München: Beck, 2006), p. 506.

⁸ Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, Andrey Zhdanov and others, *Soviet Writers’ Congress 1934. The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977; facsimile reprint, 1977. First published as *Problems of Soviet Literature*, ed. H.G. Scott, 1935), p. 20.

⁹ Bernhard Spies, ‘Georg Lukács und der Sozialistische Realismus in der DDR’, in Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Frauke Meyer-Gosau, eds., *Literatur in der DDR. Rückblicke*, (München: Text+Kritik, 1991); Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (London: Longman, 2005), 5th edn., pp. 86-88.

¹⁰ Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, translated by John and Necke Mander, (London: Merlin, 1963; first published in German, 1957), p. 60.

The volume of literary criticism in the 1960s edited by Klaus Jarmatz is an example of acceptance of the demands of the Party in accordance with the principles of socialist realism. By 1975, in the period of relative liberalisation before the exclusion of Wolf Biermann in 1976, Jarmatz was able to acknowledge that critics had followed too closely the Party's requirements.¹¹ Considering this period, Lothar Köhn detects new ways of dealing with established themes such as getting to grips with the past, the world of work, the role of women and problems of different generations and of young people. He also observes a shift towards 'banal-ewige Themen wie Liebe, Ehe, wechselnde Aspekte des Alltagsdaseins'.¹² Dennis Tate discusses the tendency at this time, extending through the 1980s and beyond the Wende, for the boundaries between fiction and autobiography to be broken down, so that there was a significant increase in the publication of 'autobiographical narratives pursuing the elusive goal of "subjective authenticity"'. This emphasis on the aesthetic approach, he suggests, was at political risk to writers such as Christa Wolf, Brigitte Reimann, Franz Fühmann, and Günter de Bruyn 'as they explored the limited scope for subjective deviation from ideologically determined norms in fictionalized accounts of their lives thus far.'¹³

Interpretations of the GDR's films take an approach similar to those outlined above, seeking to arrive at conclusions about the society through the films without losing sight of the aesthetic aspects and without disregarding the political context of film production. Joshua Feinstein sees the films as contributing to the founding myths of the GDR and to the construction of collective identity. Some of the films, Feinstein says, reflected the responses of the authorities to profound changes in values and tastes, partly influenced by foreign mass media, which were shaping GDR citizens in a way the SED believed was undesirable. He also sees films as offering 'an avenue for social communication' and 'a mediating function between the sphere of officially tolerated personal and cultural expression and impulses emanating from a society that, despite conformist pressure, remained essentially diverse.'¹⁴ Similarly, Daniela Berghahn, outlining the political commitment first from Lenin and later from Stalin to

¹¹ Klaus Jarmatz, *Forschungsfeld Realismus. Theorie, Geschichte, Gegenwart*, (Berlin; Weimar: 1975), p. 213, quoted in Reinhard Hillich, 'Aufforderung zum Mitdenken. Erwin Strittmatters Roman "Ole Bienkopp"', in Inge Münz-Koenen, ed., *Werke und Wirkungen. DDR-Literatur in der Diskussion*, (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1987), p. 97.

¹² Lothar Köhn, 'Autonomie und Engagement: Erzählprosa der literarischen "Moderne" aus der DDR', in op. cit., Barner, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, p. 702.

¹³ Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives. East German Autobiographical Narratives before and after the End of the GDR*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007), p. 7.

¹⁴ Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949-1989*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 3.

film, says that ‘national film culture played an important role in the GDR’s legitimation’ and that ‘the Party did not stint when it came to supporting this important art form and weapon of class struggle.’ As Berghahn shows, the requirement to follow the principles of socialist realism was imposed on films just as it was on literature, and was equally difficult to adhere to, with a number of popular films, such as Frank Beyer’s *Königskinder* (discussed at length in Chapter 5), having distinctly modernist aspects.¹⁵

Accepting that the films of DEFA (the GDR state film organisation) were central to SED myth-making, Sabine Hake considers the different essentially filmic approaches adopted in ‘realigning the antifascist narrative with the hegemonic perspective of the communist party [...] or the Soviet Army’, exploring male subjectivity, and strengthening the anti-fascist myth through formal innovation. The films she considers in these terms show the importance of the production of ‘political affects’. That is to say, her discussion of the formal aspects of the films is used to analyse film’s ‘central role in forging political identities’.¹⁶ This is also the approach of Peter Zimmermann and Gebhard Moldenhauer when they consider GDR films. Many of the questions they pose for discussion concern the political aspects of DEFA film production, even though they themselves point in principle to the importance of the ‘ästhetische Grundstruktur’ of the films.¹⁷ Stephen Brockmann highlights the political difficulty of having films accepted for distribution even after long periods when their production had been allowed. The films rejected by the SED’s Eleventh Plenum in 1965 were in this category, having been planned and made towards the end of the ‘thaw’ but emerging into a harsher political climate following Khrushchev’s loss of power in the Soviet Union.¹⁸

Since the analysis contained in this thesis suggests that humiliation was frequently a significant theme in GDR representation, what is surprising in the critical

¹⁵ Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall. The cinema of East Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 21-24, 35-38.

¹⁶ Sabine Hake, ‘Political Affects: Antifascism and the Second World War in Frank Beyer and Konrad Wolf’, in Paul Cooke, Marc Silberman, eds., *Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 102-103, 107.

¹⁷ See e.g., Gebhard Moldenhauer, ‘Einleitung’, in Peter Zimmermann, Moldenhauer, Gebhard, eds., *Der geteilte Himmel. Arbeit, Alltag und Geschichte im ost- und westdeutschen Film*, (Konstanz: UVK Medien, 2000), pp. 213-215.

¹⁸ Brockmann, Stephen, *A Critical History of German Film*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2010), pp. 214-215. See also Günter Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED. 1965. Studien und Dokumente. Berlin 1991. 2., erweiterte Auflage*, (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000). This harsher climate is experienced with consternation and disgust by Brigitte Reimann. See: Brigitte Reimann, *Alles Schmeckt nach Abschied. Tagebücher 1964-1970*, (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998), pp. 163-172.

approaches outlined above is its absence as a concern. Even at the level of detail contained in relation to some of the texts or films considered later, incidents of injustice, arbitrariness or overt cruelty are not analysed as acts of humiliation. The result is that questions about how power is exercised and what GDR representations can tell us about this are answered with one of the relevant factors ignored or unnoticed. It is this gap in understanding which the thesis will attempt to fill.

The third aim of the thesis is to widen the perception of how power was exercised under the specific regime of the GDR, a regime which collapsed so suddenly and completely. This will be done by looking at the party that held power over the whole period, the SED, and considering the extent to which its leaders understood the impact of humiliation and were prepared to use humiliation to maintain control not only over the population as a whole but also over party members.

The way power was exercised in the GDR is the subject of a number of sometimes conflicting analyses. As Corey Ross notes, ‘agreement on many of the basic features of the regime and its place in German and European history is still not in sight, and scholarly interpretations remain politically and morally charged.’¹⁹ Though the SED is consistently placed at the centre, there are differences over the role of the Soviet Union in enabling the SED to take and hold power, the extent or range of SED control, the significance of changes over time and the relative autonomy of ordinary people.²⁰ Changes in perceptions of these issues are summarised by Manfred Wilke in the volume by Eppelmann, Faulenbach and Mählert which itself seeks to summarise approaches across the full range of issues and which lists over two thousand relevant works by historians.²¹

The totalitarianism debate outlined by Mike Dennis and Ross is one of the areas of disagreement. Dennis reviews the history of the term, its uses during different stages of the GDR’s development and the attempts of some historians to find an alternative designation by resorting to the term ‘dictatorship’. He says that there is ‘a broad consensus that the GDR was a form of dictatorship in that a monistic power centre enjoyed an extensive domination but, beyond that, opinions vary as to the ingredients of the dictatorship and the appropriate defining adjective.’ Dennis

¹⁹ Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the interpretation of the GDR*, (London: Hodder, 2002), p. 15.

²⁰ On the ‘Sovietization’ debate, see op. cit., Ross, pp. 159-165.

²¹ Manfred Wilke, ‘Die DDR – Wandlungen der historischen Deutung’, in Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach, Ulrich Mählert, eds., *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), pp. 27-37.

concludes that ‘Linz and Stepan’s categorisation of the GDR under Honecker as a post-totalitarian system located along a continuum from totalitarianism to democracy is a more promising approach.’²² In the late 1960s, Peter Ludz suggested that a new technical elite would emerge as a result of economic modernisation and would counterbalance the power of the leadership of the Party. Ludz proposed shifting from ‘totalitarianism’ as a description to ‘consultative authoritarianism’.²³ Ross notes that totalitarianism concepts are ‘fundamentally static’ and unhelpful in explaining change that did take place. For Ross, the term used by Konrad Jarausch, ‘welfare dictatorship’, better accounts for the felt experience of people, particularly during Honecker’s time, of the state as both caring and coercive and reflects ‘the development of a kind of “post-utopian” materialist form of legitimation under Honecker’.²⁴ Mary Fulbrook’s view is that GDR history needs to be considered ‘not merely from the perspective of “dictatorship”, or “communist state”, but also from that of “modern industrial society”’.²⁵

As this debate moves into the area of ‘Alltagsgeschichte’, Fulbrook says that for long periods ‘the GDR functioned not primarily through the overt exercise of coercion – although (again paradoxically) the apparatus of coercion and covert capacity for repression was growing exponentially – but rather through some form of internalisation of, or willingness to play by, the unwritten “rules of the game”.’ She develops, in consequence, the notion of a ‘participatory dictatorship.’²⁶ This in turn links with others investigating the Alltag in the GDR, and with the use of the term ‘Eigen-Sinn’, applied by Alf Lüdtke and taken up by other historians to suggest a sense of one’s personal self that makes it possible to find ways to live a life that is in part separated out from the demands of the SED and its many institutions or structures of domination.²⁷ Jan Palmowski, for instance, looks at the construction of a ‘socialist heimat’ through elements of ‘Eigen-Sinn’ as a way of asserting,

²² Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1990*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), pp. xiii-xvi.

²³ Peter Ludz, *Parteielite im Wandel. Funktionsaufbau, Sozialstruktur und Ideologie der SED-Führung. Eine empirisch-systematische Untersuchung*, (Opladen, 1968), discussed in op. cit., Ross, p. 13, and Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, p. xv.

²⁴ op. cit., Ross, pp. 36-37, 41-42.

²⁵ Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 11.

²⁶ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 4, 12.

²⁷ Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*, (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993); Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, translated by William Templer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1995), pp. 19-20.

appropriating or subverting power at a local level.²⁸ Paul Betts, arguing that the political has to be considered whatever the terminology or categories used, says that while other historians ‘have chosen different binary oppositions, such as individual and collective, social and personal, or domination and self-reliance’, he will retain ‘the older vocabulary of public and private to analyse the dynamics of East German society’.²⁹ Andrew Port’s study of Saalfeld, using the ‘Eigen-Sinn’ concept, points to the relative autonomy of local people but also to the authorities’ success in maintaining stability partly by ensuring there remained a clash of interests across what were effectively new class lines.³⁰

All of these approaches, however they look at the GDR, still find themselves with a central focus on the SED and its mechanisms of control, including the Stasi, suggesting that even when people are asserting most effectively their ‘Eigen-Sinn’, it is the Party that has to be taken into account. Historians such as Hermann Weber have long asserted the centrality of the Party and looked closely at its history, its links with wider Communist history and that of the Soviet Union, and at the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.³¹ Some of these historians also consider the Party’s leaders and their biographies.³² It is here that there are hints that humiliation might be an issue for the Party and for the society it was constructing. Wolfgang Leonhard describes processes of initiating Party members which are clearly humiliating and designed to transmit the capacity and the willingness to humiliate, though it takes him until the end of the 1980s to explicitly recognise what is happening as humiliation. The links in Leonard’s writings between initiation and humiliation are considered at length in Chapter 7 of this thesis. What is significant here is that he is describing a process relevant to the GDR’s early leaders after their return from exile in Moscow. Antonia Grunenberg’s view is that many of these Communist leaders were diminished figures after their experiences of pursuit by the Nazis and the threat of imprisonment or

²⁸ Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 14-15, 223-225.

²⁹ Paul Betts, *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 14.

³⁰ Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 276-279.

³¹ See, e.g., Hermann Weber, ed., *Der Deutsche Kommunismus. Dokumente*, (Köln; Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963); Hermann Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971*, (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1971); Hermann Weber, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, (Munich: DTV, 1986); Hermann Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1990*, 3rd edition, (München: Oldenbourg, 2000).

³² See, e.g., Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*, (Köln, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1962); Hermann Weber, Gerda Weber, *Damals als ich Wunderlich hieß. Vom Parteihochschüler zum kritischen Sozialisten. Die SED-Parteihochschule ‘Karl Marx’ bis 1949*, (Berlin, 2002); Hermann Weber, Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*, (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 2004).

execution in the Soviet Union under Stalin.³³ Though she does not designate what happened to them as humiliation, her description suggests that they were caught up in a cycle of humiliation that was continued, not broken, on their return to Berlin. Leonhard describes the Nazi-Soviet pact in ways which make clear its humiliating impact on German anti-fascists in the Soviet Union. Echoing these points of view, Mike Dennis says that ‘Stalin’s brutal persecution of German Communists in Moscow during the 1930s and early 1940s and the secret protocol in the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact [...] were such politically sensitive aspects of a highly flawed inheritance that they became taboo subjects for GDR historians.’³⁴ Jeffrey Herf implies that there was initially a recognition among the returning leaders of the power of humiliation and of the need to break the cycle. The ‘Aufruf’ of the Communist Party, the KPD, on 13th June 1945, drafted by Anton Ackermann, asked: ‘If, German people, like were to be revenged with like, what would become of you?’ Ironically, he notes, this provided the rationale for imposing a dictatorship in the Soviet Occupation Zone.³⁵

Opposition to the Party and its programme, from within its ranks or from outside, was rigorously suppressed. In the 1950s, show trials took place, where the determination to humiliate the defendant was overt and where the justice system was used to further the aims of the Party.³⁶ In later years and particularly in the Honecker period, though trials and imprisonment were still common, the Stasi sought to control the population through surveillance, intimidation, implied threats and systematic attempts at psychological destruction.³⁷ Large parts of the Stasi’s work were based on the violation of personal privacy. This violation, as is argued in Chapter 2, can be humiliating in itself but is also designed to gather information which can be used to humiliate the subject or others connected to him or her. In the extensive literature about the security forces in the GDR, there is widespread recognition of the damaging personal consequences of the Stasi’s actions for individual people, though these actions are not commonly identified as humiliation.³⁸ Dennis notes that the ‘Stasi

³³ Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus – Ein deutscher Mythos*, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993).

³⁴ op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, (2000), p. 6.

³⁵ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 29-30.

³⁶ Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR. Zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung, 1945-1968. Bericht und Dokumentation*, (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979); Roger Engelmann, Clemens Vollnhals, eds., *Justiz im Dienst der Parteiherrschaft. Rechtspraxis und Staatssicherheit in der DDR*, (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999).

³⁷ On the methods of ‘Zersetzung’, see Jens Gieseke, *Mielke-Konzern. Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945-1990*, (Stuttgart; München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), pp. 186-187.

³⁸ See, e.g., Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2003); K. Behnke, J. Fuchs, eds., *Zersetzung der Seele. Psychologie und Psychiatrie im Dienste der Stasi*, (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995);

image of the enemy was grounded in the theory that psychological characteristics are determined by external conditions and influences rather than by internal or cognitive factors' and that this was the basis for its action to break down personalities and isolate people from others and the society.³⁹ Both Leonhard and Weber point out that the Stasi acted not as the instrument of the State or on its own account but as the 'Schild und Schwert' of the SED, which was directly responsible for the Stasi's actions.⁴⁰ Dennis, looking into this connection in some detail and at the tensions between the two organisations, stresses the importance of the close political and operational links in the 1970s and 1980s between Honecker and Erich Mielke, the head of the Stasi, as well as the more formal organisational methods the Party adopted to ensure it was ultimately dominant.⁴¹ Andreas Glaeser notes Mielke's paranoia resulting from the humiliation by the Party of two of his predecessors, and the detrimental impact of this on those who worked under him.⁴²

Many writers on the Stasi stress both its growth through the 1970s and the way its room for manoeuvre became more restricted from the early 1980s as the range, number and popularity of 'alternative' cultural activities but also overtly political activities made it less and less possible for the Party and the Stasi to control everything.⁴³ Jens Gieseke notes that this was particularly relevant to younger people, since the fear of sanctions 'war geringer als bei Älteren, denen die bitteren Lehren aus Juni-Aufstand und Mauerbau noch in den Knochen steckten'.⁴⁴ Glaeser says that the former Stasi officers he interviewed understood at the time, in the 1970s and 1980s, that they could not solve all the problems they and the society faced – and which were increasing – and that ultimately these needed to be dealt with at a political level, not as matters for the secret police.⁴⁵ At the same time, Glaeser points to the maintenance

Edwin Kratschmer, 'GDR Writers in the Stasi Net', in Martin Kane (ed.), *Legacies and Identity, East and West German Literary Responses to Unification*, (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

³⁹ op. cit., Dennis, *The Stasi*, p. 111; Edwin Kratschmer, 'GDR Writers in the Stasi Net'; Mike Dennis, 'The East German Ministry of State Security and East German Society during the Honecker Era, 1971-1989', in Paul Cooke, Andrew Plowman, eds., *German Writers and the Politics of Culture. Dealing with the Stasi*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Meine Geschichte der DDR*, (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2007), p. 260; op. cit., Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1990*, p. 208.

⁴¹ op. cit., Dennis, *The Stasi*, pp. 46-49.

⁴² Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics. The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 372-373.

⁴³ Dennis, Mike, 'The East German Ministry of State Security and East German Society during the Honecker Era, 1971-1989', in Cooke, Paul; Plowman, Andrew, eds., *German Writers and the Politics of Culture. Dealing with the Stasi*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 6; Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.20; op. cit., Glaeser, pp. 339-346.

⁴⁴ Jens Gieseke, *Mielke-Konzern. Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945-1990*, (Stuttgart; München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), p. 230.

⁴⁵ op. cit., Glaeser, pp. 335-336.

of discipline and commitment within the Stasi throughout this period, until late in 1989.⁴⁶

Relevant to the debates about totalitarianism, the history of everyday life in the GDR and the nature and role of the SED and the Stasi over time, is the concept of ‘normalisation’, developed by Fulbrook and others, with the suggestion that ‘it is fruitful for this period of the GDR’s history to explore questions concerning the relative stabilisation of domestic political structures and processes, the degrees of routinisation and predictability of everyday practices, and to examine, with an anthropological sensitivity, patterns and variations in widespread conceptions of what is held to be “normal”’.⁴⁷

As suggested above, there are hints in the historical debate about the GDR and the nature of the Party that humiliation might be a significant issue, but only rarely is there any recognition of its implications. One of these implications is that humiliation made it impossible to achieve the stabilisation necessary for the society to become and to feel ‘normal’ and enduring. In the context of the normalisation debate, Dorothee Wierling notes that the ‘Hitler Youth generation’ was marked by the ‘anxieties, humiliations, and disorientations of 1945’ and that many of its members transferred their loyalty from one dictatorship to another in order to cope with their feelings.⁴⁸ Wierling also suggests that it is fair to assume that following the rules and routines of the SED’s normalisation process would lead to ‘continuous and growing experience of humiliation’ for ordinary people.⁴⁹ By combining such insights with those of Alltag historians and looking at the nature of humiliation, the occurrence of humiliation in representations of daily life and of life in the Party, this thesis makes it possible to see from a different perspective how the Party exercised power and the consequences of this for the Party’s attempts to normalise GDR society.

Humiliation in context

Humiliation has long been a significant theme in German history. In a way that is both related to and separate from humiliation, shame in response to actions taken or not taken, to obedience, acceptance, complicity or collaboration or simply looking

⁴⁶ op. cit., Glaeser, pp. 328-334, 472-473.

⁴⁷ Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979. The 'Normalisation of Rule'?* (New York, NY; Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), p. 13; op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, p. 9; Jeannete Z. Madarász, *Working in East Germany. Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961-79*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

⁴⁸ Dorothee Wierling, ‘How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?’, in op. cit., Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society*, pp. 205-206.

⁴⁹ op. cit., Wierling, ‘How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?’, p. 219.

away as humiliation takes place, is also a recurring and much-debated theme in German history, most particularly in relation to the Nazi period.⁵⁰ As the two separate states emerged in Germany, there remained problems that would influence future behaviour. These included a whole population familiar with humiliation as a day-to-day reality of state policy and millions of people, to varying degrees, complicit in its use.

In the GDR, the significance attributed by the Party to the vision of socialism and communism handed down by Marx and Engels and refined by Lenin can be seen to be closely connected to the occurrence of humiliation and shame. From inside the Party, the vision is seen to be realisable, since it is based on Marxism-Leninism, a demonstrably true ideology. From outside, it appears as utopian and therefore unrealisable, however inspiring some people found the ideals it was based on. Despite the theoretical position that Marxism meant the pursuit of scientific rather than utopian socialism,⁵¹ one way of interpreting the GDR is that it was an attempt to realise the utopian vision of the few, by force where necessary, but also by seduction and persuasion. The destructive consequences of this attempt emerge as themes in both the imaginative and the personal representations of the GDR. The humiliation of those who are seen to resist or not to share the vision is one such consequence. Another is the damaging action that follows from the fear of humiliation and from attempts to avoid humiliation. Yet another involves shame, as an emotion directly felt or as one sensed and avoided.

As discussed later, humiliation involves exclusion and rejection. A recurring motif in representation of the GDR is the desire to belong and the preparedness to do many things in order to continue to belong. This desire to belong is shown as widespread among ordinary citizens. Underlying it is the fear of exclusion not just from the security of the familiar land and society they were already living in, but also from the promises of the future. Fear of exclusion is portrayed as present even among

⁵⁰ See, e.g., out of the huge range of works: Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide. Hitler's Community, 1918-1945*, (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), and *The Years of Extermination. Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007); the 'Wehrmachtausstellung', *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, from 1995-2000, corrected and renamed *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944* from 2001, (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners, Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, (London: Little, Brown, 1996); in GDR films, *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, Wolfgang Staudte, (DEFA, 1946), *Der Aufenthalt*, Frank Beyer, (DEFA, 1982).

⁵¹ Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, (Allen & Unwin, 1892).

those who are sceptical or cynical about the promises made and about the authorities making them, but who at the same time still hope for a better society and a better life for themselves. To be excluded was to lose one's own hope, as well as that projected on to the population by the regime. It was also to lose one's ordinary life of security, stability, family life, familiar daily activities in a familiar community, and all that these represented for a sense of continuing in being into the future. For many loyal Party members, the prospect of exclusion was too terrible to be faced. In example after example, the interlinking of action intended to impose the fear of humiliation and action designed to avoid humiliation (and therefore exclusion), stands out as a powerful way of shaping the lives of both ordinary people and Party members in the GDR.

Applying to the GDR the understanding of humiliation that is discussed in theoretical terms in this thesis highlights another way in which humiliation involves exclusion and rejection. This is to do with the process of infantilisation. A number of commentators have pointed to the paternalistic nature of the GDR regime. I argue here that paternalism was not simply a matter of habit or of the culture of the SED with no particular ill intent but that it was part of a consistent approach to exercising power that treated the ordinary people of the GDR as children, unable to take full responsibility for their own behaviour and therefore needing to be admonished and corrected by the wiser parental figures of the Party leaders and their Stasi representatives. This deliberate infantilisation was a pernicious form of humiliation. Contrary to the rhetoric about emancipation, dignity and equality of opportunity, infantilisation excluded people from full participation as equals in the society, prevented them from contributing openly, honestly and sceptically to debates about the nature and direction of the society and led to attempts to control or at least inhibit spontaneous expressions of joy or creativity. While this became less and less successful over time, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, analysis of the representations suggests that even in this period, the Party sought to shape cultural expression and control political activity in a way which continued to demonstrate a desire to treat its population as children, sometimes to be pandered to, sometimes to be treated as foolish, wayward or even willfully obtuse or hostile, and therefore in need of a firm parental hand to set them back on the right path. Not surprisingly, many of the 'children' sought to run away from home in order to be able to become fully fledged adults at last.

Choosing examples

The examples chosen for discussion have been taken from a much larger grouping of novels, films and personal accounts. They are intended to be representative of the different periods of the GDR and of different themes, so that it is possible to see how the treatment of a theme evolved with changes in the political climate, from the founding period to the building of the Wall, through the 1960s with conflicting currents of repression, relative liberalisation and further repression as internal and external events intertwined, into the Honecker period with its consumer socialism, its further period of controlled liberalisation until the Biermann affair in 1976, and on into the 1980s as the Party, despite the efforts of the Stasi, found itself confronted by a less controllable, more individualistic, more spontaneous society. With this variety, they are able to suggest how the processes of humiliation changed over time.

The novels and films chosen are, because of the process of approval, funding and production if they appeared in the GDR, sympathetic or at least neutral towards the aim of developing socialism. This continued to be the case even in the 1980s, even though many of the later examples considered issues in a way that would have been unthinkable in the 1950s. Novels published in the West by writers with a commitment to the GDR are similarly not hostile to the aim of developing socialism. I have chosen these because they give a picture, from the inside, of a regime not seen as one where humiliation is institutionally endemic. A different approach altogether would be to compare Western and GDR representations of humiliation in the GDR, but that is not within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, novels and films from the West that are overtly hostile to the GDR and its aims have not been considered.

The early representations include founding texts such as novels by Anna Seghers, Hans Fallada, Bodo Uhse and Willi Bredel, complemented by short stories by the same authors and others such as Friedrich Wolf. These tend to show humiliation as something done to Communists or anti-fascists and stress that it will not be used when they are in power. Thematically, many of the films are relevant here, particularly the anti-fascist films as they develop and change over time. These range from Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946), Falk Harnack's *Das Beil von Wandsbek* and Kurt Maetzig's *Der Rat der Götter* (both 1950) from the founding period, to Frank Beyer's *Königskinder* (1962) and *Nackt unter Wölfen* (1963) in the period of consolidation and relative artistic liberalisation after the building of the

Wall and during the Khrushchev period, Konrad Wolf's *Ich war neunzehn* (1967) after the clampdown of the Party's Eleventh Plenum in 1965, and Beyer's *Der Aufenthalt* (1982), a late reflection on the war and the nature of fascism.

Fiction considered for the 'Bitterfeld' phase with its demand for socialist realism, coinciding with the period of relative liberalisation of the early 1960s, includes works by Erik Neutsch, Christa Wolf, Hermann Kant, Erwin Strittmatter and Günter de Bruyn, all authors still openly committed to the Party and the building of socialism, despite the criticisms that can be drawn out of their texts, and by Stefan Heym, strongly committed to socialism but already identified by the Party as possibly hostile to it. Heym was unable to publish some works written at the time (*5 Tage in Juni*; *Die Architekten*) until much later, and then not in the GDR.

Other examples are thematically based but are also considered in relation to the period in which they arise. These are the 'Alltag' novels and films which demonstrate a certain continuity from the 1960s to the 1970s, despite the rupture between the Ulbricht and Honecker periods. Films such as *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973) and *Solo Sunny* (1979), after Honecker's commitment to consumer socialism and his declaration that there were no taboos provided artists supported socialism in their works, are apparently less ideologically driven and concerned with the Party's policies. However, they still contain a critique of the Party for its narrowness and rigidity in the face of popular desire for greater individual freedom. In this they relate to the 1965 films banned as a result of the 11th Plenum, such as *Karla, Das Kaninchen bin ich* and *Denk bloß nicht, ich heule*. All of these can be seen as 'Alltag' films, as can *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* from 1958, despite their inclusion of more overtly political themes than appear in the 1970s films. The Alltag theme also appears in fiction, from Christa Wolf's 1963 novella *Der geteilte Himmel* (filmed in 1964) to Ulrik Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, Monika Maron's *Flugasche* (1976, published in the West) and Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* (1977).

From the late 1970s, following the exclusion of Wolf Biermann and the clear rupture between the Party and a large number of the GDR's intellectuals in the aftermath of this, many of the novels and films surveyed combine the Alltag with overt, sometimes satirical criticism of the Party. These include Braun's *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* and de Bruyn's *Neue Herrlichkeit* (1984). Rolf Schneider's *November* and Stefan Heym's *Collin* (both 1979) are overt critiques of the Party's role at different historical moments. Both writers were excluded from the Writers' Union and both

novels were published in the West. Other fiction, such as the grouping of Christoph Hein's novels from the 1980s, links personal lives with the impact of history and a critique of the Party, the State and everyday life in the GDR. Relations between the Party and the church are considered in Lothar Warneke's film *Einer trage des anderen Last* (1987), while homosexuality is treated sympathetically for the first time in the GDR in Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989). These late films are significant for being made at all, indicating a broadening of the possibilities for creative artists very late in the 1980s with at least the tacit support of elements of the Party and the State.

In the novels, whatever the overall narrative thrust, humiliation is a constantly recurring theme, sometimes at the centre of the narrative, sometimes in sub-plots. Finding examples, therefore, was less of a problem than reducing the number to a manageable level. Many of the GDR's films do not have humiliation as a theme to the same extent, and in some based on prominent novels (for instance, *Spur der Steine*, which was banned in 1966 for its supposed anti-Party stance), the film excludes examples of humiliation that stand out in the book.⁵² However, many such films remain relevant to the discussion of how the Party sought to gain support for its founding myths and its policies. Some of the banned films from the 1960s, such as *Das Kaninchen bin ich* and *Karla*, do contain clear examples of humiliation and of characters wrestling with its consequences.⁵³

The personal accounts considered here, apart from those formally published, are drawn from the Walter Kempowski Biografienarchiv at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Its voluminous collection is based on invitations in the press to send in letters, diaries or memoirs. It is a mixed, wide-ranging collection because of the different motivations and sympathies of those contributing items. Out of an initial sample of three hundred texts, I selected sixty for further review and chose forty to cover the different periods of the GDR and ensure there were hostile, sympathetic or apparently neutral accounts from people from different occupations, social backgrounds and levels of education, in or from and therefore directly engaged with the GDR. The records chosen are wide-ranging and extensive over time. They include hundreds of letters, a number of diaries, documents dating from the periods being discussed and

⁵² *Spur der Steine*, Frank Beyer, (DEFA, 1965), based on Erik Neutsch, *Spur der Steine*, (Halle, Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1966; first published 1964).

⁵³ *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, Kurt Maetzig, (DEFA, 1965); *Karla*, Hermann Zschoche, (DEFA, 1965). For an account of the banning of the films, see op. cit., Agde, *Kahlschlag*.

memoirs written either shortly after the events described or many years later. It is notable that except where there is open hostility to the regime, people's personal accounts tend to be far less focused on humiliation as a theme than are the fictional accounts. What is common, however, is the sudden, unexpected occurrence of humiliation enacted by the Party or the State which is personally experienced, suffered by a family member or friend, or witnessed. Whether in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, 'normal life' is often shown to be broken up by such events and repaired only with great difficulty, if at all.

Interpreting the examples

It is not suggested here that the novels or personal accounts directly reflect the society or offer an alternative history of the GDR. The novels, despite the pressure to conform to socialist realism, portray in imagined and carefully-constructed form some of the multitude of possible ways that existed or might have existed to be part of the GDR and to interpret one's position in it. As Wolfgang Iser suggests:

As a medium of writing, literature gives presence to what otherwise would remain unavailable. It has gained prominence as a mirror of human plasticity at the moment when many of its former functions have been taken over by other media. If literature permits limitless patternings of human plasticity, it indicates the inveterate urge of human beings to become present to themselves.⁵⁴

In so doing, literature (and film) can move outside the boundaries of groups or societies or nations. Therefore, in the literature of the GDR, there is likely to be much that is not specific to the society of the GDR, and much that is likely to feel relevant to or to evoke a personal response among readers from other societies. This reinforces the point that literature cannot be taken as a reflection or record of life in the GDR. Nevertheless, since the literature of the GDR arises out of the social, political, historical and cultural circumstances of the GDR, it will necessarily be influenced by these circumstances.

A striking feature of the GDR which affects analysis of the texts was how close the Party and State were felt to be in everyday life, even when apparently not impinging on it and even when the particular role of the Stasi is left to one side. Whether in the form of the 'honeycomb state' described by Fulbrook, which involved widespread involvement at all levels in activities that related back to organs of the

⁵⁴ Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary. Charting Literary Anthropology*. (Baltimore, Maryland; London: John Hopkins, 1993), p. xi.

State,⁵⁵ in the choice of reports and articles in the newspapers with their declamatory headlines and constant exhortations, through the requirement to carry out voluntary extra work, in the provision of facilities and entertainment at places of work, or through the demands made upon children at school,⁵⁶ the Party and its ideology and the State with its administration were always close at hand. For film-makers and writers, this took the form of State planning of what could be filmed or published, reinforced by major, highly-publicised Party initiatives that imposed huge pressure on artists. The Bitterfeld Conferences of 1959 and 1964 are one example. Another is the Eleventh Plenum in 1965, which led to a craven confession of faults and failings by the Writers' Union that would make breaking away from the Party's requirements even harder for individual writers. A third came in 1976 with the removal of citizenship from the singer and writer Wolf Biermann while he was in the West, and the subsequent action taken against writers and others who protested against this, setting the tone for the decade to come.⁵⁷ Although writers sometimes benefited briefly from more-liberal moments and although some of the Party's processes were growing less effective in the 1980s, what was published in the GDR appeared after compromises had been made to meet the Party's demands; that is, after censorship or self-censorship.⁵⁸

For the Party as it consciously sought to shape the reception of novels and films, the other target was the imagined audience. Party critics in the main newspapers, in particular, used their authority to seek to impose an official view of a novel or film, based on satisfaction with the subject matter, the description of the building of socialism, the political line adopted in the narration and demonstrated by the characters, and to a much lesser extent the aesthetic aspects of the work. It was common even for members of the Party's Central Committee to express a view on a

⁵⁵ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People's State*, particularly Chapter 11, 'The honeycomb state: The benign and malign diffusion of power'.

⁵⁶ Maxie Wander, a strong supporter of the building of socialism, expresses her despair at the counterproductive demands made by the school that her son write a passage containing the words 'Faschismus, Revanchismus (von ihm Rewangschissmus geschrieben, [...]), Militarismus, Imperialismus, Kommunismus usw.': Maxie Wander, *Leben wär' eine prima Alternativa. Tagebücher und Briefe, herausgegeben von Fred Wander*, (München: DTV, 2004; first published 1979), p. 108.

⁵⁷ Robert Grünbaum, *Die Biermann-Ausbürgerung und ihre Folgen*, op. cit., Eppelmann, *Bilanz und Perspektiven*, pp. 177-178.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Dieter Breuer, *Geschichte der literarischen Zensur in Deutschland*, (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1982), pp. 242-248; Westdickenberg, Michael, *Die "Diktatur des anständigen Buches": das Zensursystem der DDR für belletristische Prosaliteratur in den sechziger Jahren*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004); for a satirical view, Volker Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988; first published 1985), pp. 147-150.

novel or film as a means of ensuring it would be correctly praised or damned.⁵⁹ In this way, there was a struggle for control over what was written and how it would be interpreted, but one where the huge power of the Party was dominant as the arts and their reception were consciously politicised. Until the early 1970s, this was part of the process of infantilisation: the people were told how to read and how they should respond and were expected not to have contrary opinions of their own.⁶⁰

Seeking to understand the way humiliation is presented in the texts requires, therefore, a sense of political, historical and social connections to the text. It requires consideration of the narrative voice, the voice of authority over the text, which might well not be omniscient and might be ironised or challenged within the text. It also requires consideration of the method of narration and the specific use of language and literary devices in order to identify the narrator's attitude to the events or characters depicted.

When humiliation is considered as a theme in examples over time, patterns of events and ways they are interpreted can be identified. The patterns in the novels can be compared with the results of a similar exercise analysing personal accounts. Unless intended for publication, these were not directly affected by Party requirements but were still likely to be influenced by the dominant attitudes to literary form and content. Indeed, as the example of Friedrich Kabelitz indicates, the mere fact of writing a memoir could be dangerous.⁶¹ As with all such documents, the personal accounts do not amount to historical representation.⁶² They include letters written with apparently little attempt to structure or shape them, others designed to achieve a particular result and memoirs written in order to make sense of events retrospectively, to right wrongs or set the record straight. For most of them there is a specific or an imagined audience that does not include the Party or the State. However, what comes through directly and consistently from the personal accounts is an acute awareness among the people of the GDR of the presence and power or potential power of the

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Heinz Wittig, 'Wo sind die Bauern?', in *Neue Deutsche Bauern-Zeitung* 8/1964, quoted in Reinhard Hillich, 'Aufforderung zum Mitdenken. Erwin Strittmatters Roman "Ole Bienkopp"', in op. cit., Münz-Koenen, p. 66.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., the patronising review in *Neues Deutschland*, 05.01.1963, of Irmtraud Morgner's *Ein Haus am Rand der Stadt*; or the collection of reviews, many of them about Erik Neutsch's *Spur der Steine* or Erwin Strittmatters' *Ole Bienkopp*, in Klaus Jarmatz, ed., *Kritik in der Zeit. Der Sozialismus – seine Literatur – ihre Entwicklung*, (Halle, Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1970).

⁶¹ Friedrich Kabelitz, *Lebenserinnerungen Friedrich Kabelitz, 1939-1956*. Original typed manuscript, Kempowski BIO 7043.

⁶² Jaume Aurell, 'Autobiographical Texts as Historiographical Sources: Rereading Fernand Braudel and Annie Kriegel', *Biography*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, (2006), pp. 425-445; Jennifer Jensen Wallach, 'Building a Bridge of Words: The Literary Biography as Historical Source Material', *Biography*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, (2006), pp. 446-461.

State and particularly of the SED apparatus (including but not confined to the Stasi) as the centre of State power. This presence, often depicted in personal terms, is sensed as if it were just off stage, listening for a cue that no one else can hear, readying itself for a sudden appearance that will, in a way no one can predict, cause havoc for the players in the drama and for the spectators as well. In response to this awareness, there are gaps in the narratives, silences that can be filled only by suppositions or, at times, by cross-referencing to comparable fictional narratives with their heightened capacity for interiority and metaphor, their different narrative techniques and their determination to explore concerns that were officially not allowed to be discussed. What is striking over time and across the full range of writing is that fictional representations of humiliation by the Party closely reflect the stories of people writing personal accounts, but extend and amplify them and give a broader significance to what is being recounted. T. S. Eliot says: ‘we had the experience but missed the meaning’.⁶³ The fictional accounts of humiliation in the GDR frequently convey the meaning, or perhaps more than one version of the meaning, that is often missing from the personal accounts.

Structure

Following this introduction, the second chapter sets out a rethinking of the nature of humiliation and relates this to a description of shame, suggesting that while shame can have beneficial effects, humiliation is often experienced as traumatic and that with its many consequences, such as withdrawal, depression, rage and the desire for violent retaliation or revenge, humiliation is never anything but damaging to its victims. The chapter identifies the key elements of humiliation and some of the processes of humiliation, ranging from the violation of personal privacy to infantilisation, which effectively provide a check-list for use in individual case studies.

The third chapter considers how and why the SED (‘the Party’), introduced and sought to embed a set of founding myths for the GDR, often through fictional accounts and films which asserted a commitment by the SED not to engage in acts of humiliation. Other fictional accounts as well as personal accounts are used to suggest why it breached this commitment, and how this difference between theory and

⁶³ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, (London: Faber, 1986), p. 44.

practice undermined a belief in the founding myths and weakened the ethical claim to power asserted by the Party.

The fourth chapter looks from a theoretical perspective at the difficulties that arose from another set of differences between theory and reality. It contrasts the Party's Marxist-Leninist view of how people's behaviour is shaped with a view based on psychoanalytic thinking and considers the implications of the Party's explicit rejection of Freud and Freudianism until the early 1980s. It suggests that the Party was hostile, for ideological reasons, to Freud's drive theory, to his rejection of the Marxist-Leninist view that the emotions are subordinate to reason, and to his accompanying critique of communism, and that the Party's adherence to its ideology contributed to its propensity to use humiliation. The fifth chapter looks in detail at examples of representation that point to a profound underlying commitment among ordinary people to the 'Freudian' way of seeing themselves in the world, with an emphasis on the impact of the emotions and of desire in particular. The examples suggest that when people reacted apparently in accordance with Freudian theory, the Party resorted to humiliation in order to make them behave the way the Party's ideology suggested they should. The examples are also used to demonstrate the Party's related use of infantilisation as a humiliating way of controlling and inhibiting people's behaviour.

The sixth chapter considers examples of the humiliation of ordinary people in their everyday life by the Party and the State and how and why these differ between fictional and personal accounts. It looks at what humiliation meant for the Party's attempt to normalise the society over time and how it impinged on people's attempts to lead a normal life in what they still often felt to be an abnormal society. The seventh and eighth chapters consider in a similar manner how the loyalty of Party members was built and reinforced, often by humiliation within the Party, and how this ensured there were enough members who were willing to carry out acts of humiliation against ordinary people. Chapter 7 stresses the importance of initiation rituals for transmitting the capacity and the willingness to humiliate in the interests of the Party. These chapters suggest that such loyalty prevented many Party critics considering that the Party's structures and practices themselves made reform of the Party, the 'normalisation' of the society and the building of socialism ultimately impossible. It is argued that there were historically specific reasons for some acts of humiliation or for a concentration of these, and that significant changes such as the shift of power

from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in the early 1970s also affected how and why humiliation was carried out. However, it is also noted that serious acts of humiliation with damaging consequences remained a feature of the GDR even to the late 1980s when the regime finally collapsed.

The conclusion of the thesis draws out some implications for the GDR of the willingness to use humiliation, suggesting that ordinary people, the Party and the society all suffered from the consequences of humiliation. Returning to the theoretical discussion of humiliation, I suggest that the consequences of humiliation are so serious, long-lasting and self-perpetuating that, as a concept, it needs to be at the heart of discussions about conflict and conflict resolution if the cycle of humiliation is to be broken. I also point to some of the practical and conceptual difficulties that stand in the way of this happening. I argue that the example of the GDR indicates that fundamental differences between ways of seeing the world, whether in religious or political ideologies, make humiliation more likely and a willingness to avoid its use less likely.

Terminology

Two points of terminology need to be clarified here. The first is the use of the term ‘the Party’. The SED was a party formed by the merger of the Communist and Social Democratic parties in 1945. Initially it promoted a specifically German road to socialism. Following the onset of the Cold War, with renewed pressure on communist parties worldwide to adopt narrow, class-based policies after the period of working with sympathetic parties (in some cases in government, as in France), the SED modelled itself on the Soviet Party and adopted a strict Marxist-Leninist approach.⁶⁴ It became centralised and highly disciplined until, over the years, its further development into a mass party reduced the possibility of strict control from the top down. Despite this, power remained concentrated in the leadership right to the very end. Trained and educated functionaries across the country attempted to implement and enforce the decisions of the leadership and ordinary members were still subject to Party discipline. In using the term ‘the Party’, I am not suggesting that the SED was monolithic or that all its members held strictly to its policies or felt threatened by its disciplinary practices, particularly in its later years.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, many did. I use

⁶⁴ op. cit., Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971*, pp. 11-14.

⁶⁵ See Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR, 1971-1989*, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998), pp. 97-109 on ‘Die Partei’; pp. 315-318 on ‘Die Partei in der Krise’.

the term because it represented a way of thinking and of feeling: people were in ‘the Party’ and knew everything that meant, or they were not. There was a strong emotional content and significance to this, which is discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Secondly, where it is possible to use ‘he or she’ without this being stylistically ugly or awkward, I have done so. In the theoretical chapter on shame and humiliation in particular, some authors quoted use ‘he’, some use ‘she’ and some range between the two. Where I am not quoting, I have chosen to use ‘he’ because the use of ‘she’ for the victim of humiliation can evoke a sense of victims as women and women as victims, probably of men; this is unhelpful in attempting to understand the nature of humiliation and its consequences, despite the gendered aspects of humiliation that are relevant and important.

Chapter 2 A theoretical approach to humiliation

Introduction

In this chapter I consider the nature of humiliation, looking at the various ways it has been defined. I propose a way of describing humiliation which distinguishes it from competing terms or concepts such as shame, embarrassment or degradation, so that its specific elements, processes and consequences can be identified. This approach opens up a new way of understanding the dynamics of humiliation. It enables humiliation to be seen as an act, not an emotion, and makes it possible to understand better what people feel when they have been humiliated and why these feelings can be so personally and socially destructive. It is argued here that humiliation is likely to lead to feelings of rage which, if translated into acts of personal or group revenge, can lead to further humiliation and further destruction. For most victims of humiliation, however, this initial rage is likely to lead only to a realistic understanding of their powerlessness, bringing with it a sense of helplessness that is incapacitating. While ‘normal life’ might apparently be able to be resumed if circumstances change and the humiliation ceases, the fact that the humiliation itself cannot be made not to have happened tends to leave a permanent mark on its victim. The approach outlined in this chapter makes clear, therefore, why the use of humiliation and even the threat of humiliation can be so appealing to people in power.

The approach also suggests that therapeutic responses currently reveal a failure to see the specific nature of humiliation and tend to merge it conceptually with shame. Such responses are likely to be misleading to patients and to perpetuate misunderstandings more generally about the seriousness of humiliation. Redefining humiliation offers the chance for therapists to modify their thinking. Practitioners seeing patients who have been humiliated can then contribute more to the thinking of theorists of power and conflict resolution, historians considering particular regimes, and scholars and critics considering representations of such regimes.

The concept of humiliation

Humiliation is a word often used but rarely defined. It tends to be treated as if it meant much the same as embarrassment or shame or ignominy, or as if being humbled was the same as being humiliated. This arises out of uncertainty over what humiliation is conceptually. For Gabriele Taylor and William Ian Miller, humiliation is an ‘emotion of self-assessment’; for Evelin Lindner, it is the ‘nuclear bomb of the

emotions’ but also ‘the perpetrator’s act, the victim’s feeling, and the social process’; for Diane Trumbull, it is the ‘trauma of disrespect’.¹ Common themes in the consideration of humiliation are that it involves the loss of or lowering of status and that power is central to it. A variety of attitudes to dignity, respect, honour and shame are then expressed in relation to these themes. That humiliation is a feeling is often presented as a given, so obviously true that the assumption itself is not questioned and perhaps not even noticed. By taking the theme of power and looking at status as well as these other considerations in relation to power, it becomes possible to refine the concept of humiliation in a way that exposes its basic elements and its likely consequences. An important conceptual shift that follows from this is to see humiliation not as an emotion but as a process or act that causes a perceptible and often extreme change for the worse in the position of the victim and in the victim’s feelings about himself and his relationship to the world.

The definition I shall use here is that humiliation is an exercise of power against one or more persons which demonstrates an ability or capacity to exercise power and which consistently involves a number of elements: stripping of status or standing in the eyes of others, arbitrariness and unpredictability in the breaching of accepted norms or values, rejection and exclusion, and a personal sense of injustice for which there is no remedy. This definition is helpful for distinguishing between the act itself and the consequences of the act, which include a predictable set of feelings and an equally predictable process of trying to deal with these feelings and the new, lowered status. It makes clear that there is a humiliator with power and a victim who is powerless.

This definition is also helpful for distinguishing between humiliation and shame. Shame is generally accepted as involving a person’s sense of being in breach of norms that he believes he should live up to. These are personally and socially determined norms, values or expectations that he has agreed to, not always consciously, and internalised. Shame involves a personal sense of having done wrong in relation to these, actively or by omission. Taylor notes that shame introduces a real

¹ Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt. Emotions of Self-assessment*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 1; William Ian Miller, *Humiliation, and other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. x; Evelin Lindner, *Making Enemies. Humiliation and International Conflict*, (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger Security International, 2006), pp. xiii-xiv; Lindner says later that it is ‘feelings of humiliation and fear of humiliation’ that are the ‘the nuclear bomb of the emotions’: Evelin Lindner, *Emotion and Conflict. How Human Rights Can Dignify Emotion and Help Us Wage Good Conflict*, (Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger, 2009), p. 6; Diane W. Trumbull, ‘Humiliation: The Trauma of Disrespect’, pp. 643-660 in *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 2008, Vol. 36, No. 4.

or imagined audience or observer and that for a person to feel shame, two things need to happen. Firstly, ‘only by seeing what he is doing through the other’s eyes does he recognize the nature of his action, and so it is crucial, it seems, that there be some other through whose eyes he can look at his action.’² Secondly, whether the person feeling shame thinks the observer is critical or not, ‘she must identify with some critical view of herself’.³ Taylor suggests that the critical view can come from perceiving herself as having done something wrong and being seen this way by the audience, or through doing something which in her eyes would wrongly be approved of by the audience, while knowing she was doing it to gain or keep their approval.⁴

Both humiliation and shame involve a loss of status. They differ in significant ways, however. The person feeling shame feels responsible for the lowering of his position in relation to other people, while the victim of humiliation feels the lowering has been imposed unjustly from outside; that is to say, shame involves a sense that one has done wrong, while humiliation involves a sense that one has been wronged, that one is the victim of an exercise of power that is unjust. Hartling and Luchetta suggest that ‘shame can serve an appropriate adaptive function by inhibiting aggression or protecting an individual from unnecessary personal exposure. In contrast, humiliation has not been identified as serving an adaptive function.’⁵ It is possible in most cases to recover from shame. The person feeling shame can take action to restore his standing by changing his behaviour and by repentance, remorse and possibly restitution. This is not so for the victim of humiliation, who remains subject to the power of the humiliator. Sometimes, however, the feeling of shame is so extreme that the impact of it remains and the shamed person finds it impossible to regain a good enough opinion of himself to be able to function effectively in the society again. At other times, it may be impossible to reverse the damage done by the shaming behaviour because, for instance, the victim has died or suffered irreparable loss. When this is so, the sense of shame for something done or not done is likely to remain and to undermine the ability to function effectively.

Despite their differences, shame and humiliation are often connected, particularly when someone feels shame for having participated in humiliating someone else or for

² op. cit., Taylor, p. 58.

³ op. cit., Taylor, p. 61.

⁴ *Ibid.* .

⁵ Linda M. Hartling, Tracy Luchetta, ‘Humiliation: Assessing the Impact of Derision, Degradation, and Debasing’, pp. 259-278 in *Journal of Primary Prevention*, Volume 19, No. 4, 1999, p. 263.

having failed to intervene when humiliation was taking place. There are a number of examples of this in the GDR texts considered in later chapters, where either Party members or ordinary people subsequently regret and feel long-lasting, damaging shame for their part in acts of humiliation. There is a further connection between humiliation and shame when the victim of humiliation identifies, if only partly consciously, with the values of the humiliator. Such defensive identification causes the victim to feel a sense of shame for his supposed actions or deficiencies, as if he has in fact done something wrong, should be blamed by those above him for it and therefore is rightly punished. By ceasing to see what has been done as humiliation, the person concerned can take it upon himself to repent and improve; in so doing, he believes he has avoided the far worse consequences of humiliation, particularly rejection and exclusion. Dennis Smith notes that:

Those suffering from humiliation may act upon their own perceptions and feelings, adapting their perceptions of 'who they are' and their patterns of thought and behaviour so they conform more closely to the views of those causing them to suffer. If this self-adaptation is 'successful', three things follow: humiliation turns into shame, the suffering becomes a 'just' punishment and the prospect of forgiveness and even reward for successful adaptation comes into view.⁶

The examples in later chapters suggest that the belief in the possibility of forgiveness is illusory, since it is entirely in the hands of the person with the power, the humiliator, to accept this redefinition or not and to persist with the humiliation or not. The victim, in reality, remains powerless and already rejected. As Grunenberg points out, a feature of the show trials in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in the communist states of eastern Europe after the war was the apparent desire of the defendants to confess, often cravenly, to wrongdoing.⁷ As discussed in the later Chapter on the Party and humiliation, this was also the pattern in trials in the GDR. In all of these cases, however, there was still no mercy shown to the defendants, despite their protestations of guilt and shame.

Humiliation as an exercise of power

There is a demonstrative aspect to the power involved in humiliation. What is overtly if not always consciously demonstrated is the inequality between the person

⁶ Dennis Smith, 'Globalization, Degradation and the Dynamics of Humiliation', pp. 371-380 in *Current Sociology*, 2008, Vol. 56, No. 3, p. 373.

⁷ Antonia Grunenberg, *Die Lust an der Schuld. Von der Macht der Vergangenheit über die Gegenwart*, (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2001), pp. 50-51.

with the power and the person without it and the helplessness of the victim in the face of the humiliator. This is not to say, however, that every exercise of power involves humiliation. In a society, power is often used to enforce laws or customs to which the population generally has given implicit or explicit consent on the basis of equality of status for all concerned. A violation of the agreed laws can lead to punishment or a requirement for compensation or restitution. It can also lead, at least temporarily, to a loss of status and standing in the eyes of others and possibly to feelings of shame for having done what the perpetrator himself feels is wrong. However, the possibility both of punishment and of the loss of status are known about and accepted in advance. Humiliation is likely to occur here only when there is an arbitrary, possibly vindictive, extension of the punishment outside the previously understood limits, as in ‘cruel and unusual punishment’, which is banned in many jurisdictions.

Theorists of humiliation broadly accept that power is central to it, but draw different conclusions from this. Richard Rorty’s view emerges from his argument that there is no social goal more important than avoiding cruelty.⁸ In support of this argument, he develops the idea of the ‘liberal ironist’. Liberal ironists ‘hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease.’⁹ They see humiliation as ‘that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans.’¹⁰ Rorty thus uses the term ‘humiliation’ to describe both the act of the humiliator and the pain of the victim. This is not helpful to an understanding of humiliation since it does not explain either the content of the act of humiliation or the feelings of the victim. Lindner, who has written extensively on humiliation and particularly its role in wars and other violent conflicts, takes a somewhat different approach:

Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honor, or dignity. [...] Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It may involve acts of force, including violent force. [...] Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of humiliation as a process is that the victim is forced into passivity, acted upon, and made helpless.¹¹

This definition contains the idea of humiliation as an exercise of power and, by implication, most of the other elements included in my definition, except the absence of any recourse to justice, for which the word ‘helpless’ is not strong enough.

⁸ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 65.

⁹ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. xv.

¹⁰ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 92.

¹¹ op. cit., Lindner (2009), p. 55.

However, Lindner further suggests that the word ‘humiliation’ is used in three different ways in everyday language: ‘First, it signifies an act, second, a feeling, and third, a process: “I humiliate you, you feel humiliated, and the entire process is one of humiliation.”’¹² A more productive way of expressing this is that humiliation is an act which is done to someone and which leads to a particular and quite predictable set of feelings in the victim: ‘I perpetrate an act of humiliation on you; because of this act, you experience an objective change in your position and a set of feelings that are likely to include anger and a sense of powerlessness.’ Through this approach, the apparently contradictory ways of understanding humiliation are reconciled: the exercise of power can be seen to be at the heart of humiliation, while the position of the victim can be considered in terms of the consequences of the exercise of power.

It follows from this that the victim of an act of humiliation should be described not as feeling but as being humiliated, as the victim of an act of power. It is important to bear in mind the transitive sense of the verb ‘to humiliate’: humiliation is something active that is done by one person to another, even if through institutions or directed, in principle, at groups. It leaves the victim with a sense of having been humiliated, as subject to something that has actually happened, like being robbed or physically attacked. He does not need to describe his new position as feeling humiliated, any more than he would describe himself as feeling robbed or feeling physically attacked. If instead the victim sees that he is objectively in a new position that involves the enforced loss of status, rejection or exclusion, and injustice for which there is no remedy, then it is evident to him that he is not responsible for what has been done and therefore should not feel shame or guilt. Using Rorty’s terminology, it seems more helpful to describe humiliation not as ‘that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans’¹³ but as ‘that special exercise of power which the brutes do not share with the humans.’ Attention can then shift to the special set of circumstances and the likely feelings of the victim, which go beyond pain though they are likely to include it.

Respect and humiliation

Power is related to respect, or the lack of it, and respect and self-respect are often considered central to discussions of humiliation. Avishai Margalit defines humiliation

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *op. cit.*, Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 92.

as ‘any sort of behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured’.¹⁴ Anthony Quinton, on the other hand, emphasising that power is at the heart of humiliation, suggests that humiliation involves the humiliator in not giving the other person respect, rather than injuring that person’s self-respect: ‘The humiliator fails to respect his victims, to give them the respect which is their due. [...] It has nothing directly to do with the victim’s resolve to live up to certain ideal standards of conduct.’¹⁵ To some extent, this is just a confusion of terminology. Margalit says that self-respect is ‘the respect a human being deserves for the very fact of being human’, which moves the attention, and therefore the responsibility, from what is internal to the person to the way he is seen or treated by people externally.¹⁶ However, Quinton’s distinction is important, since self-respect is related particularly to feelings of shame rather than to the feelings arising from being humiliated. This highlights again the interplay between humiliation and shame. The avoiding action taken by people fearing humiliation (by someone, externally) can lead to them doing things they accept, internally, are wrong, for which they feel shame and a consequent loss of self-respect. At the same time, the humiliator can seek to impose feelings of shame by asserting that the victim is responsible for his own humiliation, and the victim may accept blame, and therefore shame, as a defence against the overwhelming consequences of humiliation.

Humiliation and violation of privacy

People in their everyday life make assumptions that some of what they do or say is public, freely viewed, heard or commented on by others they might or might not know, while other aspects of their life are private and inaccessible to outsiders. Margalit’s view is that violation of privacy by the state (though this would also apply to violations by individuals or private businesses or agencies) must be considered humiliation because it restricts individuals’ control, against their will, over what is supposed to be within their control. For Margalit, such a state condemns itself: ‘A society that permits institutional surveillance of the private sphere – by means of

¹⁴ Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, trans. Naomi Goldblum, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1996) p. 9.

¹⁵ Anthony Quinton, ‘Humiliation’, pp. 77-89 in *Social Research* 64:1, Spring 1997; special issue discussing Margalit’s *The Decent Society*, p. 82.

¹⁶ op. cit., Margalit, p. 19.

wiretapping, for example, or censoring letters, or other sorts of detective work – is doing many shameful things. One of these, though not the only one, is humiliation.¹⁷

Margalit points out that the purpose of the violation of privacy in totalitarian regimes is not just to identify opposition to the regime but also to gather information that can be used to blackmail the victim since, if published, this would embarrass, shame or humiliate the victim. Humiliation then can take two forms. Firstly, if the information is revealed, ‘it will present her in a bad light that is liable to lead to her rejection from society.’ Secondly, the victim ‘may be forced into a nasty compromise – a compromise of her integrity – in which she gives in to the regime in order to prevent it from revealing this information.’ Therefore, he says, the act of violation is not in itself intended to humiliate the victim, but the violation of privacy is an efficient and powerful tool intended to serve other means of humiliation.¹⁸ This is the way humiliation is used in the post-Wende film about the Stasi in the GDR, *Das Leben der Anderen*.¹⁹

Violation of privacy by the state, as in the GDR, can also have a normalising effect. Where a state, after a time of rupture, is seeking to establish itself as normal, it is in part seeking to ensure its citizens share a set of norms which it is proposing for them or imposing on them. As Margalit argues, establishing a system of surveillance that violates privacy is a way of confining the ‘normal’ to what is acceptable to the state and rejecting as outsiders those who have been shown by the surveillance not to conform to what is required. This is in itself a way of controlling the population through humiliation or the threat of it, since even the knowledge of the possibility of being spied on is likely to restrict the scope of a person’s action and sense of an autonomous self. It is one way for the authorities to demonstrate their power to those who thought they were beyond its reach. Given this significance, Margalit says that it can be seen that ‘the violation of privacy is a paradigmatic act of humiliation.’²⁰

Humiliation and the arbitrary breach of norms

Humiliation involves the reduction of status for someone who did not or was not allowed to give his consent to the norms or values of the person with the power to reduce his status, or who has seen the norms he believed he had consented to

¹⁷ op. cit., Margalit, p. 204.

¹⁸ op. cit., Margalit, p. 205.

¹⁹ *Das Leben der Anderen*, Florian von Donnersmarck, (2006).

²⁰ op. cit., Margalit, p. 210.

arbitrarily changed or reinterpreted, often with retrospective effect. It is because of this that people subject to humiliation feel they have been wronged, rather than that they have done wrong. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which Margalit quotes as an example of ‘institutional humiliation by law’, were an exercise of power by the Nazis that both assigned an identity to citizens without their agreement and then stripped them of their status as Germans.²¹

In the circumstances of humiliation, the power of the humiliator is irresistible. The particular case of resisters, people who do not share the norms in the first place, is considered later in this chapter. Except for them, a refusal to be humiliated is likely to be no more than a denial of reality, a defence against the overwhelming feelings resulting from humiliation. One way to apparently avoid being humiliated is to accept, retrospectively, the norms as they have been redefined by the person with the power, to acknowledge being in breach of them and having acted wrongly. The victim can then attribute his diminished status to his own actions and agree to live with it. Alternatively, he can seek to recover his former status and feelings about himself by expressing remorse and seeking to make amends. However, humiliation cannot be refused by an effort of will since, as noted earlier, the attempt to redefine what has happened as shame, not humiliation, might well be rejected by the person who has the power to humiliate.

Humiliation and the significance of exclusion

One of the elements central to humiliation is some form of rejection or exclusion. This involves, for the victim, both a qualitative change for the worse in the way he can live and the undermining of his sense of himself as a self-determining being interacting equally with others in the society of which he felt he was a part. The Nuremberg Laws were explicit about their purpose of excluding Germans who were Jewish from German society. The mass rape of German women by Soviet troops involved humiliation on a vast scale.²² Though it is not always immediately apparent, at least to the outsider, the rejection or exclusion involved in humiliation is absolute: it is not limited in time, whatever comes after. The act of humiliation has happened

²¹ op. cit., Margalit, pp. 127-129, 1.

²² Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 146; Antony Beevor, *Berlin. The Downfall. 1945*, (London: Viking, 2002), pp. 409-415; op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 8-9, p. 42.

and, along with the emotions and consequences flowing from it, cannot be made not to have happened. As Jean Améry says:

Die Grenzen meines Körpers sind die Grenzen meines Ichs. Die Hautoberfläche schließt mich ab gegen die fremde Welt: auf ihr darf ich, wenn ich Vertrauen haben soll, nur zu spüren bekommen, was ich spüren *will*.

Mit dem ersten Schlag aber bricht dieses Weltvertrauen zusammen.

[...] In nahezu allen Lebenslagen wird die körperliche Versehrung zusammen mit der Hilfserwartung empfunden: jene erfährt Ausgleich durch diese. Mit dem ersten Schlag der Polizeifaust aber, gegen den es keine Wehr geben kann und den keine helfende Hand parieren wird, endigt ein Teil unseres Lebens und ist niemals wieder zu erwecken.²³

After such a 'first blow', whether metaphorical or literal, 'forgiveness' offered by the victim or even by the humiliator does not undo what has been done but merely confirms the existing power relations. Later re-inclusion in the society or social group as an apparent equal does not end or overcome the fact of the humiliation but only creates a new situation that is likely to be based on a reversal of power relations and the establishment of a different society. This may provide comfort and financial recompense to the victim and even a sense that rebuilding his life is possible, but it does not wipe away the fact of having suffered the pain of the humiliating act in the first place. A striking image of the long-term impact of humiliation comes from Christoph Hein's late GDR novel *Der Tangospieler*. Dallow, the humiliated protagonist, feels when he is released from prison that he has been permanently changed and has acquired a harelip: 'Er wußte, daß ihn diese zwei Jahre fortan und auf irgendeine Weise bis zu seinem Tod begleiten würden. Er würde immer der Mann sein, der zwei Jahre gesessen hatte, unvergeßlich ihm und den anderen. Das ist wie ein Hasenscharte, sagte er sich, man muß lernen, damit zu leben.'²⁴ Even his subsequent re-employment in a higher-status job does not eliminate this feeling.

Similarly, resorting to self-exclusion is likely to be at best a partially successful way of avoiding humiliation, not a way of refusing it or recovering from it. Apparent self-exclusion and making a fresh start, through emigration, for instance, is again likely to involve using denial as a defence. What is denied here is the rejection and exclusion already taking place or the damage arising from living with the fear of rejection and exclusion or of the 'first blow'. In such cases, self-exclusion might be a

²³ Jean Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*, in *Werke*, Band 2, Goellner Scheit, ed., (Stuttgart: Klett-Kota, 2002), pp. 67-68. The same point is made in Hans Fallada's *Jede stirbt für sich allein*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988; first published in 1946), p. 280.

²⁴ Christoph Hein, *Der Tangospieler*, (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1989), p. 63.

relatively effective way of limiting the psychological damage, though there can still be serious consequences for those left behind, and for the person who has left as he thinks about his actions in relation to them.

Rejection and exclusion imply an earlier sense of belonging and being accepted as belonging even if this is seen, in retrospect, to have been an illusion. Logically, there is no way back from humiliation to where you were or thought you were before, since being allowed to rejoin the society or organisation that rejected the humiliated person makes clear the inequality of power that subsists. This helps to explain the power not just of humiliation but also of the fear of humiliation, which is the fear of being shown – at someone else’s discretion or whim – not to belong or have belonged, and having to deal with the consequences of being exposed in this way. For the potential victim, it is better to do all sorts of things to avoid facing up to the possibility that he might not belong. Central to this avoidance is an implicit or explicit and highly defensive assertion that he is living normally, not in fear of humiliation and the rejection or exclusion that accompanies it. This is matched by a refusal to allow in anything which threatens to contradict such an assertion.

The necessary presence of a humiliator

The fear of humiliation implies the presence of someone with more power who is willing to use it unjustly. Humiliation requires there to be a humiliator, someone who does more than the observer involved in shame. This is relevant in the case of people who feel particularly vulnerable in a society, through age or disability or illness. Quinton suggests that where there is no human agent, for instance when someone is incontinent, ‘the humiliated person is made to look inferior in the eyes of the observing public, whether or not the humiliating factor is a human being and whether or not he intends to humiliate.’²⁵ However, it is probable that it is the response of the observers – expressed as disgust or contempt or ridicule or simply turning away – that makes the vulnerable person feel he is being humiliated through unjust rejection and a loss of status. If no one is seen to respond, what the person feels is the fear of humiliation, of the response he is sure will come sooner or later. If he is alone and able to deal with matters alone, or with someone utterly accepting who shares his values and norms, has a commitment to dignity and respect and does not exercise

²⁵ op. cit., Quinton, p. 8.

power over him because of his problem or incapacity, there is no disembodied ‘humiliating factor’ and no humiliation.

Infantilisation: a specific form of humiliation

Humiliation can take a number of forms. A significant one is to treat as children people who should be accepted as fully adult and autonomous. This can apply in families as well as in societies, affecting large sections of a population, and the humiliator is the parental figure (usually the father figure, in practice) and those representing him and acting in accordance with his wishes.

Infantilisation is often disguised or rationalised as well-meaning generosity on the part of those who consider that they know better and are therefore more suited to making decisions for those seen as below them. Infantilisation is easier to recognise in dictatorial regimes, most particularly those with a totalising ideology that allows no questioning except by a specialist elite who are allowed to interpret a set of basic texts or expressions of the ideology. This applies to societies based on religious views as well as to those based on a political ideology such as Marxism-Leninism.²⁶

All the elements of humiliation are present in infantilisation. Infantilisation is an exercise of power that imposes a lower status on people than that enjoyed by those with the power. It conflicts with stated or implied norms or values which claim to give everyone equal status, equal dignity and the opportunity to be fully autonomous, self-determining beings and is seen by its victims as arbitrary and unpredictable behaviour. It excludes its victims from their rightful position as competent adults and is perceived by them as injustice for which there is no remedy.

At the level of the family, infantilisation often takes the form of a dominant parent refusing to allow a child to increase his or her areas of autonomous action. Control is maintained for far longer than can normally be justified over matters of dress, behaviour and money, but also opinions and the right to question authority. Just as the violation of privacy – a humiliating act in itself – can lead on to additional acts of humiliation, such as blackmail or public exposure, so infantilisation can provide the opportunity for further humiliation, such as child abuse. At the level of society,

²⁶ Monarchies also have infantilisation built into them, since ordinary people are excluded by accident of birth from a range of honours and privileges which inevitably carry a certain power with them. Consumer societies display aspects of infantilisation based partly on market forces that promote a celebrity and designer culture. Additionally, ways of governing that promote a presidential style are supposedly closer to ‘the people’ but in fact increasingly restrict the access of ordinary people to power, persuading them at the same time that they would not be fit to take on the high responsibilities of government.

infantilisation can be seen in the refusal to allow ‘ordinary people’ the right to question key texts and beliefs and to challenge the rights of those who assert an entitlement to power.

Limiting what can be discussed and the manner of discussion or representation is a common aspect of infantilisation. This is often supported by censorship of what is being produced and what can be allowed in from the outside world, in order to protect the population or designated sections of it from supposedly harmful influences. In both families and societies, the same terminology tends to recur, in attempts to justify the use of power and the difference between those with the power and those subject to it. The authority of the parental figure is presented as absolute, unable to be questioned or challenged. The parental figure also tends to be presented as kind, concerned, protective, benevolent and deserving of being revered by the ‘children’, with a personality cult being actively promoted. Recent history has many examples: Hitler, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh (‘Uncle Ho’), Sukarno with his ‘guided democracy’ in Indonesia, de Gaulle at the end of the war and again in the overthrow of the Fourth Republic in France, Ulbricht and Honecker in the GDR and numerous religious or political dictators in many parts of the world.²⁷

Humiliation and unpredictability

Unpredictability is a central element of humiliation since it reinforces the power of the humiliator and highlights the weakness of the victim, whose sense of self and integrity are constantly threatened, even when the threats appear to exist only at a background level. The awareness of unpredictability brings with it the fear that power will be used unpredictably and that humiliation might result whatever avoiding action is taken. Fulbrook suggests that the concept of ‘normalisation’ may refer also to ‘the ways in which people are able to predict the parameters of their situation and be prepared to behave “as if” they accepted the dominant norms in order to achieve certain goals, and to the routinisation of structures and institutions – to the stability and predictability of the social world.’²⁸ What is implied here is that people see themselves as potential victims and act accordingly, as people who do not have power. Their concern is that they might not properly understand the norms they are

²⁷ In the GDR, at a time when the ‘cult of the personality’ in relation to Stalin was regularly criticised, the SED’s paper, *Neues Deutschland*, on the occasion of Walter Ulbricht’s seventieth birthday, devoted the whole of the first seven pages on of 30th June 1963, the first six pages the next day and many pages on subsequent days to glorifying Ulbricht and his life: *Neues Deutschland*, 30.06.1963, 01.07.1963, 02.07.1963.

²⁸ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, p. 9.

trying to comply with, or that they might not be totally complying with them because the norms are fluid and under the control of someone else who will not always spell out clearly how things are changing. The attempt to predict implies an understanding that things are unpredictable and that it is possible to predict wrongly – with all the consequences of a forced loss of status and the rejection or exclusion from ‘normal’ life that are part of humiliation.

Unpredictability, as an element of humiliation, also has a continuing effect on the humiliator. This is because the humiliator, after the early establishment of a position of power over those who have been or who could be humiliated, tends to become paranoid about his position or the potential for it to be undermined. Included in his world view is the sense that his victory is never complete. This makes it predictable that he will act in ways that are unpredictable to his potential or actual victims. The only predictable aspect of his behaviour is that he will continue to humiliate those subject to his power. Scarry, talking of ‘false motive’ in her discussion of torture, provides a way of understanding the humiliator’s willingness to inflict pain. She suggests that in the face of the victim’s pain the torturer is vulnerable and therefore finds a way to ‘feel’ the pain safely by blaming the victim for the burden he, the torturer, has to carry.²⁹ For the humiliator, the society is fragile and under attack. It has to be saved, even if it is regrettable that the opponents of the society make it necessary to inflict pain and suffering. The humiliator can see himself as suffering on behalf of the society for its long-term benefit.

Additionally, the humiliator persists with humiliation because he is aware that the capacity or desire to humiliate can be transmitted through the social system from one centre of power to another. There is always someone above him or, in the case of the highest leaders, conspiring around him, who may become a source of his own humiliation. He must, therefore, constantly demonstrate his loyalty and his determination to continue humiliating those beneath him.

Transmitting the desire to humiliate

Initiation rituals often provide an example of the transmission of the capacity or desire to humiliate. Miller stresses the power relations involved in initiation rituals, which are ‘imposed by an authority that has the power to demand compliance with the terms of the ritual.’ However, he considers that, even though there is humiliation

²⁹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York: OUP, 1985), p. 59.

involved, the initiation ritual allows for ‘the attainment of honour as a group member of good standing.’³⁰ Like Miller, Margalit says that many initiation rituals include humiliating elements and that the humiliation in these instances ‘is directed not against people with a marginal status in the society but against people with a liminal status – that is, people in a transition stage between two social categories, on the way up in the social hierarchy.’³¹ While both Miller and Margalit see the rituals as leading to an enhanced status for the participant or victim, Margalit is critical of them in terms of their wider social significance:

The meaning of these humiliating rites is that you are not worthy of the fraternity you are joining until you have passed excruciating initiation trials. [...] A decent society is incompatible with liminal humiliation even if it is taken as a temporary menace en route to great fraternity. Humiliation is humiliation, and fraternity should not be attained at the price of it.³²

Another way of looking at this is that the ‘great fraternity’ is in fact only apparent, not real, and that the initiation rituals are a demonstration of power, arbitrariness and the rigidity of the hierarchy of the organisation the participant or victim is seeking to enter. The person apparently accepted after the initiation is in fact a lesser member in terms of the established and continuing hierarchy and power structure, and is likely to be acting with the ever-present sense that the power of those above him might be arbitrarily and unpredictably used against him. His membership or his participation depends on his having been humiliated, on his fear of further humiliation, and on being prepared to prove himself by humiliating those who come after him, who will also be inferior to him.³³ To the extent that there is fraternity, as in an army (or a Marxist-Leninist party), it is likely to involve a curious inversion: the initiate is welcomed into a brotherhood of the excluded or self-excluded, who see themselves as different from, not part of, the ‘ordinary’ society, and as living by different rules. Even in such cases, however, the hierarchy of power remains as rigid and significant as ever, and the process of humiliating, fearing humiliation and being prepared to humiliate outsiders or even members lower in the hierarchy remains central. This process is discussed further in Chapter 7 in relation to initiating members into the Party and ensuring they have the capacity and the willingness to humiliate others below them.

³⁰ op. cit., William Ian Miller, p. 164.

³¹ op. cit., Margalit, pp. 195-196.

³² op. cit., Margalit, pp. 196.

³³ Thomas Kühne argues this in relation to the training of young men in Nazi Germany: op. cit., Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*, pp. 7, 51-52, 163-165.

Humiliation, injustice and the significance of resistance

The particular exercise of power that is humiliation leaves the victim with a clear perception that an injustice has been done and conveys to him that he has no recourse to the justice system to remedy this injustice. The person with the power has decided what can be done and, through the reduction of status and exclusion of the victim, rendered the question of access to justice not relevant. Again, the Nuremberg Laws are an example from German history. The Nuremberg trials, on the other hand – and further war crimes trials since then – could be seen in different ways according to the views of the accused. Those who feel shame at what they have done and therefore accept the norms or laws of those trying them, might recognise the process as justice; those who do not might see it as a politically motivated attempt to humiliate them.

Political interference that denies independence to the judiciary undermines the concept of ‘justice as fairness’ (discussed in Chapter 3), since the implicit contract underpinning it is breached with impunity by those who hold executive power. In the GDR, there was a substantial gap between the formal commitment to justice and the reality of political domination of the justice system. Dennis suggests that even reforms intended to give greater certainty could not eliminate this underlying institutional injustice:

While the judicial reform of 1963 signally failed to remove the arbitrary and highly political nature of so many judicial decisions, this process, together with the codification of family and labour law, the Criminal Code of 1968 and the new economic legislation, did at least introduce an element of predictability and regularity into the legal system.³⁴

In systems of government where substantial inequalities of power are entrenched, such as a centuries-old patriarchal society, a long-lasting dictatorship, a monarchy or a theocracy, a sense of lower status is often internalised by many people or sections of the population. For those in such societies who do not accept the principles behind their subjection, a continuing rejection of the system (including active or passive resistance or even just the desire for resistance) involves a denial of the possibility of humiliation and provides, at least initially, a rare demonstration that an attempt to humiliate can be warded off. These ‘resisters’ see their capture, trial, punishment or exclusion in any form as predictable consequences of the power struggle they are involved in; they see themselves not as victims of injustice but as temporarily defeated. The French Communist Party, for instance, highlighting its role in the

³⁴ op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 115.

Resistance, liked to refer to itself proudly as ‘le parti des futurs fusillés’. The response of those in power, therefore, is to respond with acts of torture or other cruel and unusual punishment, in order to demonstrate their power to humiliate those who deny that this can be done.

It is true that even in the most authoritarian or hierarchical societies, there will still be extensive areas of at least implicit agreement to a set of rules, if only to make it possible for people to live from one day to the next in some reasonably predictable way, with an economy that functions and a set of social relations that holds the society, or sections of it, together. The ordinary person’s desire for the predictable and stable, and the need felt by those in power for this to be supported in order to maintain the stability of their own position, can lead to an implicit social contract that has its own commitment to ‘justice as fairness’, though the remit of the contract is usually strictly limited. This raises the prospect that even in such societies there will be a justice system that is accepted as operating according to an agreed set of rules and not simply as an arm of an arbitrary executive authority. An unpredictable breach of these rules in order to strip someone of status or to exclude him in some way will be a humiliating act which, by its nature, disallows recourse to the justice system.

Such unpredictable breaches can run parallel to the predictable tyrannical acts of those who have imposed the wider set of rules that all are required to live by. Apparently paradoxically, even though these tyrannical acts also offer no recourse to the justice system, they are, to the extent that they are predictable and not arbitrary, humiliating neither to those who have agreed to the rules nor to those who are opposed to them: they are simply an exercise of power. It is necessary to look behind this, however, at the process of the original imposition of power which will almost certainly have involved significant humiliation, and to ask how the new implied agreement was reached and how the new values implicitly or explicitly contained in it were transmitted through the generations, particularly from the founding generation to those born into the new system. Such questions are directly relevant to the GDR.

The consequences of humiliation

It is possible for humiliation to be relatively trivial and to have no serious long-term effects on those subject to it. People shrug off or learn to live with minor episodes, even if these cause anger or frustration. In such cases, the loss of status suffered, the sense of rejection and the feeling of injustice are not perceived to be of

major significance for the victim, who may deny they have occurred at all. Repeated minor acts of humiliation, on the other hand, can have a cumulative effect and become undeniable.

However, any act of humiliation may be experienced as a traumatic event. Humiliation is so serious because it can have a direct, life-changing effect on the victim. It destroys illusions about himself that he could not have known in advance were illusions; it demonstrates to him and to others that his efforts to construct a sense of self that he can approve of are futile and laughable. It presents him with an image of himself which is at least in part defined by someone external to him and which leaves him feeling personally diminished. Humiliation involves punishment without guilt and literal or metaphorical imprisonment without a fair trial, or indeed any trial at all. It can lead to feelings of what Ehlers, Maercker and Boos, in their 1996 study of former GDR political prisoners, call 'interpersonal traumatization'.³⁵ In contrast to many examples of shame, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the victim of humiliation to find non-destructive ways to respond or recover. The victim tends to pass relatively predictably through different stages, moving from a sense of bewildered helplessness to rage and from there to either revolt, resistance or submission.

The first stage involves surprise and shock at what has happened, dismay and disorientation because of the rejection or exclusion involved, grief at the loss sustained and bewilderment at the injustice suffered and the way it has come about. Even at this point, the damage caused to the sense of self by humiliation can be significant. Margaret Cohen suggests that a person's integrity can be compromised by giving in to 'physically and psychically painful situations that tempt us to fly apart'.³⁶ Humiliation usually leads to a feeling of invasion rather than one of flying apart, but this is equally destructive of the person's sense of self. Arthur Ripstein says that many crimes include or are an act of humiliation, which 'challenges the victim's sense of himself or herself as a self-determining being'.³⁷ This is because 'the criminal claims a prerogative that rightly belongs to someone else. In so doing, the criminal also

³⁵ Anke Ehlers, Andreas Maercker, Anne Boos, 'Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Following Political Imprisonment: The Role of Mental Defeat, Alienation, and Perceived Permanent Change', pp. 45-55 in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 109, No. 1, p. 53.

³⁶ Margaret Cohen, *Sent before my Time. A Child Psychotherapist's View of Life on a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit*, (London; New York: Karnac, 2003), p. 69.

³⁷ Arthur Ripstein, 'Responses to Humiliation', pp. 90-111, in *Social Research* 64:1, (Spring 1997), p. 96.

invades the victim's privacy in a way that is humiliating.'³⁸ This sense of invasion, of personal boundaries illegitimately crossed and of the self being forcibly 're-described' and diminished as a result, is central to the personally destructive power of humiliation.

After the initial shock, the next stage frequently involves rage and a desire to lash out at the humiliator. At this point, the victim may move in one of two directions. Firstly, the rage may become focused on a desire for retaliation and revenge. As Lindner says: 'Rage turned outward can express itself in violence, even in mass violence when leaders are available to forge narratives of group humiliation. Some people hide their anger and carefully plan revenge. The person who plans for 'cold' revenge may become the leader of a particularly dangerous movement.'³⁹ Because Lindner overlooks in her definition of humiliation the lack of recourse to the justice system, she does not explicitly identify the importance of the victim's sense of injustice as a cause of anger. Those Lindner refers to elsewhere as 'humiliation entrepreneurs' use this anger at injustice and the sense of impotence that flows from it as a way of building support for violent, retaliatory action, sometimes with the aim of overthrowing those holding on to power, sometimes with a more nihilistic approach.⁴⁰ Either way, the anger, hate and violence can be both physically and psychologically damaging to the victims of humiliation, and a cycle of humiliation and retaliation may be set up, leading to further suffering and destruction.

As suggested earlier, resistance is somewhat different from revolt as a response to humiliation. The Ehlers study highlights 'mental defeat' but also alienation and feelings of permanent change as indicators that political prisoners will experience Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) after their release.⁴¹ Political imprisonment will involve humiliation unless it is accepted – and thereby at least mentally resisted – by the prisoner as an expected, if unfortunate, consequence of political activity. Mental defeat, contrasted with 'the perception of oneself as an autonomous human being', was common and is a logical consequence of humiliation.⁴² It showed up in the study as the strongest predictor of the severity of subsequent PTSD symptoms. In other words, mental defeat is more likely even than 'perceived threat to life' to lead to

³⁸ op. cit., Ripstein, p. 97.

³⁹ op. cit., Lindner (2009), p. 55.

⁴⁰ op. cit., Lindner, (2006), p. xv.

⁴¹ op. cit., Ehlers, pp. 51-52.

⁴² op. cit., Ehlers, p. 45.

severe PTSD symptoms.⁴³ The authors note that the results are in line with their hypothesis (which is also mine) that ‘perceived threat to one’s psychological autonomy is an important aspect of the psychological severity of trauma that is intentionally inflicted by other people.’⁴⁴ Significantly, the study suggests that resistance based on political commitment and understanding leads to a ‘better long-term outcome’ in relation to the impact of potentially traumatic events and the likelihood of depression, and tends to confirm the findings of similar studies by Basoglu.⁴⁵

The anger resulting from humiliation may lead to mental or other resistance but may also be turned inwards if it is matched by a realistic sense of powerlessness. The sense of powerlessness can then lead to various responses, some of which can overlap. These include strategies of avoidance: looking away from reality, self-deception and denial over what has happened and how, and refusing to face up to the new, reduced circumstances. The victim may become indifferent to the fate of others around him or actively cruel, even towards those who have suffered the same humiliation, since this restores some sense of power to him.

A further shift involves moving in the direction of the humiliator. As discussed earlier, resorting to a sense of shame is one way of seeking to control what is uncontrollable by admitting or claiming one’s part in it: the victim blames himself for doing wrong, not the person who has wronged him. Similarly, feelings of guilt imply an acceptance of an external authority with agreed rules. Since the rules have been broken, the victim accepts that the authority is entitled to punish him. Feeling guilt (like feeling shame) in response to humiliation is a way of trying to make sense of the inexplicable, of trying to impose a pattern on what otherwise appears as random, arbitrary behaviour. Blaming oneself provides an explanation for what has happened; it also excuses the humiliator, and it is therefore in the interest of the humiliator to develop a sense of guilt or shame in the victim, a sense of at least partial responsibility that causes him to accept his humiliation as just.

Other related responses at this stage may include self-abasement, self-redescription to attempt or ensure compliance with the apparent requirements of the humiliator, or complicity, collusion and collaboration with the humiliator. However,

⁴³ op. cit., Ehlers, p.51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ op. cit., Ehlers, pp. 46, 52.

for all of these, the power relations will be confirmed rather than changed and the humiliated person will remain in a position of submission, no matter how much he denies the fact of his humiliation. An apparent exception might be the approach adopted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa following the ending of the systematic humiliation that was Apartheid. However, even here what is being reached is a kind of truce, based on a willingness to admit past crimes on the one hand and a willingness not to demand justice on the other. While this might turn out to be a successful way of preventing a cycle of humiliation being established, it still leaves individual victims knowing what was done to them, powerless to reverse it, and in a position of submission because they have ultimately no choice but to go along with the process, no matter how angry they may still feel. As Ripstein notes: ‘Punishment serves to denounce the criminal act, and to distance society from it. As a result it serves to avoid society acquiescing in that humiliation. [...] To fail to punish a crime is to turn a private humiliation into a public one.’⁴⁶ There is a parallel here with religious conventions of confession and forgiveness, where the person professing shame or guilt is absolved, while the continuing position of his victim is not considered of primary significance. Required rather than self-imposed acts of confession, on the other hand, like enforced rituals of self-criticism in communist parties, can become humiliating acts themselves, leaving the person concerned in a position of lower standing and raging – usually secretly – against the injustice perpetrated.

The sense of powerlessness among victims of humiliation can also lead to paranoia, despair or depression, closing off from the world physically and psychologically, and metaphorically creating a hard skin or shell as a way of controlling what is allowed in or out. As Smith says, another form of submitting to the humiliator or acquiescing in one’s humiliation involves ‘splitting yourself into an inner and an outer self, protecting the inner self from the deeper effects of humiliation so that it can deal with the challenge of escaping from or rejecting it.’⁴⁷ Finally, when none of the strategies proves effective and the reality of the victim’s position becomes overwhelming to him, he might reach the stage of personal fragmentation and disintegration, involving severe difficulties in day-to-day functioning at either an individual or a social level.

⁴⁶ op. cit., Ripstein, p. 103.

⁴⁷ op. cit., Smith, p. 377.

Therapeutic responses to humiliation

The serious consequences of humiliation, whether by the state, a parent or someone else able to exercise power, are widely acknowledged in the therapeutic community as well as more widely. For Donald C. Klein, the experience of humiliation and the fear of humiliation ‘are implicated in a variety of mental illnesses and engender rage which is manifested in anti-social behaviour, murder and suicide.’⁴⁸ This has implications for those working professionally with someone who has been humiliated. It requires them to be clearer about what it is they are dealing with and what can be done to manage the personal consequences of humiliation.

Therapists attempt to deal with the personal consequences that arise from living with the contradictory feelings, experiences and defences resulting from humiliation. Lacking a theory of humiliation or a sense that it is qualitatively different from shame, some are misled into suggesting that the therapy can ‘heal’ the humiliation they identify in their patients. Their efforts are not helped by Freud, who did not write specifically about humiliation. Though the term appears on a number of occasions in the English translation, the German original ranges across a number of words which have their primary meaning as ‘shame’, ‘shaming’ or ‘embarrassment’. Where the word that specifically means ‘humiliation’ is used – ‘Demütigung’ – the context suggests that what is being referred to (in relation to ‘mental masochists’) is a sense of self-abasement or invited degradation.⁴⁹

Helen Block Lewis uses the terms ‘humiliated fury’ and ‘shame-rage’ as synonyms, in a way that is suggestive of the consequences of humiliation more than of shame. However, she does not does not recognise the specific consequences (including shame) for her patients that result from humiliation. Her view that shame is ‘seen as a means by which people try to preserve their loving relationships to others’, can apply when the victim of humiliation seeks to shift the blame from the humiliator to himself but it denies the underlying power relations involved in humiliation.⁵⁰ In noting that ‘many of Freud’s hysterical patients were actually victims of sexual abuse

⁴⁸ Donald C. Klein, ‘The Humiliation Dynamic: An Overview’, pp. 93-121 in *Journal of Primary Prevention*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1991, p. 93.

⁴⁹ ‘In der Sexualkonstitution so vieler Menschen gibt es eine masochistische Komponente, die durch die Verkehrung ins Gegenteil der aggressiven, sadistischen entstanden ist. Man heißt solche Menschen “ideelle” Masochisten, wenn sie die Lust nicht in dem ihnen zugefügten körperlichen Schmerz, sondern in der Demütigung und seelischen Peinigung suchen.’ Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 2/3, (London: Imago, 1942), p. 165.

⁵⁰ Helen Block Lewis, ed., *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*, (Hillsdale, NJ; London: Erlbaum, 1987), p. 2.

by father-figures’, she implies that Freud failed see that his patients had been humiliated. However, she criticises Freud for turning away from considering shame further, rather than for not understanding the nature of humiliation, a criticism which highlights her own misperception.⁵¹

Rena Moses-Hrushovski, while acknowledging that her humiliated patients have suffered terribly from brutality or sexual abuse, nevertheless classifies their defences as ‘pathological’.⁵² Frequently using the terms shame and humiliation as virtually synonymous, she suggests that the blaming processes used by her patients ‘are efforts to shift the direction of shame and guilt away from themselves in order to avoid painful experiences’.⁵³ Paul Gilbert (whose approach is cognitive behavioural therapy) notes overlaps and clear differences between shame and humiliation, including powerlessness and a sense of injustice in humiliation, and suggests that ‘in humiliation-based problems there is a focus on the harm done by others.’⁵⁴ However, ‘healing humiliation’ is given by Gilbert as a goal of therapy. Discussing one of a number of possible interventions, he says that some patients may fear their destructive actions or loss of control:

In these situations it can be useful to explore ways of gaining emotional control and make it clear that in working with humiliation this is not an encouragement to act out these feelings but to heal them. In this context it is useful to note that aggression can often be a response to feeling fearfully powerless.⁵⁵

If the therapist were to accept that humiliation is an act done to the victim (here, the patient), rather than an emotion in itself, then he or she could acknowledge the therapeutic task as helping the patient come to terms with the overwhelming feelings resulting from this act. At the same time, the therapist needs to accept that the humiliating act itself cannot be reversed, and that the exercise of power contained in it was a fact that cannot be undone. In other words, by understanding humiliation in this way, the therapist no longer risks misleading the patient into thinking humiliation can be ‘healed’. It is notable that many of Gilbert’s proposed interventions seek to deal not so much with the humiliation as with the rage and hatred arising from it, as if this is ultimately all that can be done. Gilbert implicitly accepts this when talking of a

⁵¹ op. cit., Block Lewis, pp. 4-5.

⁵² Rena Moses-Hrushovski, *Deployment: Hiding behind Power Struggles as a Character Defense*, (Northvale, New Jersey; London: Jason Aronson, 1994), p.xix.

⁵³ op. cit., Moses-Hrushovski, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Paul Gilbert, ‘Shame and humiliation in the treatment of complex cases’, pp. 241-271 in Nicholas Tarrier, Adrian Wells, Gillian Haddock, eds., *Treating complex cases: The cognitive behavioural therapy approach*, (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1998), p. 259.

⁵⁵ op. cit., Gilbert, pp. 262-263.

patient possibly choosing to leave a job where he was being humiliated. For the patient, such a move represents an admission of powerlessness and a clear victory for the humiliator; there is no justice involved, only the possibility of starting again elsewhere and trying to manage the remaining feelings of rage and hatred or, in this case, depression, arising from the humiliation. Even Ehlers, Maercker and Boos, whose study of former GDR political prisoners highlights the long-term effects of humiliating acts and the possibility of permanent change for the victim, offer unconvincing suggestions for treatment, as if humiliation can be domesticated:

PTSD patients who experience mental defeat may benefit from cognitive therapy, which encourages them to reevaluate the implications of mental defeat for their view of themselves. Those who experience an overall feeling of alienation or permanent change are likely to benefit from interventions that encourage them to reestablish contact with friends and family and to take up activities again that they used to enjoy before the trauma [...] ⁵⁶

The psychoanalyst Phil Mollon suggests that ‘the cure for states of shame and humiliation is empathy’ with oneself or from another. ⁵⁷ This might be true for shame but is not for humiliation, in the sense that humiliation is an act perpetrated upon someone and thus, after the event, not amenable to empathy. This is even clearer when the humiliating acts are continuing and the victim is constantly confronted by his impotence. Heinz Kohut says that narcissistic rage arising from a narcissistic injury (which would include humiliation) needs to be dominated by the ego in a transitional process from the unhealthy or undesirable or unacceptable to the acceptable ‘mature aggression’. ⁵⁸ However, his seeking of ways to employ this aggression ‘in the service of the realistic ambitions and purposes of a securely established self and in the service of the cherished ideals and goals of a superego’ is a denial of the objective position in which the victim of humiliation finds himself. Equally, it is inconceivable that the victim of humiliation can increase his ‘empathy for the targets of his rage’ through understanding better the dynamics leading to his rage. ⁵⁹ As Jean Améry said about the suggestion that his preoccupation with anti-semitism and the Holocaust meant he was mentally ill or suffering from hysteria: ‘I know that what oppresses me is no neurosis, but rather precisely reflected reality.’

⁵⁶ op. cit., Ehlers, p. 54.

⁵⁷ Phil Mollon, *Shame and Jealousy: the hidden turmoils*, (London: Karnac, 2002), p. 20.

⁵⁸ Heinz Kohut, ‘Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage’, in Paul H. Ornstein, ed., *The Search for the Self. Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950-1978*, Volume 2, (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), pp. 652-652.

⁵⁹ op. cit., Kohut, p. 654.

Those were no hysteric hallucinations when I heard the Germans call for the Jews to “die like a dog!”⁶⁰

Hartling and Luchetta suggest that when it is clear how much humiliation or the fear of humiliation is contributing to a patient’s psychological problems, treatment could focus on:

untangling and resolving the debilitating consequences of the individual's actual or perceived experience; restoring the individual's sense of self to a more optimal level of self-respect and self-worth; strengthening the individual's resistance or resilience in the face of possible, frequently inevitable, future humiliations; and empowering individuals to challenge and change social and environmental factors which are likely to support or promote humiliating social practices.⁶¹

This approach accepts the seriousness of humiliation and its consequences. It suggests that anyone concerned with the way power is exercised needs to acknowledge the specificity of humiliation and recognise the results of the exercise of power that is the act of humiliation. These results include a sense of irreversible loss and rejection, anger at injustice and depressed resignation in the face of the unpredictable use of power. The representations of life in the GDR that are discussed in subsequent chapters suggest that such feelings were widespread and that seeing them as resulting from humiliation can contribute to a new understanding of the behaviour of the Party and its members as they exercised power and sought to build their version of socialism in the GDR.

⁶⁰ Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limit. Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, translated by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, (London: Granta, 1999; first published 1980), p. 96.

⁶¹ *op. cit.*, Hartling, p. 273.

Chapter 3 Humiliation and the Founding Myths

Introduction

This chapter looks at the importance to the Party, and to its attempts to create a normal society, of a set of founding myths for the GDR and suggests that the Party understood the need not to engage in acts of humiliation. It considers the different views of justice that prevailed and the way the SED's Marxist-Leninist approach to socialist justice was a contributor to humiliation despite the Party's commitment to equal rights, dignity and respect in the myths and in the laws that were established. A number of the individual myths are discussed and an attempt is made to draw out the reasons for humiliation taking place, despite values that appeared to be shared between the Party and ordinary people. The concluding section of the chapter considers both the apparent rejection of the myths by ordinary people in the long term and the way the founding myths nevertheless had an impact which outlasted the GDR itself.

The background to the myths

A founding mythology was important to the GDR since the new state lacked what Feinstein calls 'the mythic origins of nationhood' and therefore any sense of collective identity.¹ Rorty suggests that what binds societies together are common vocabularies and common hopes. The vocabularies are, typically, 'parasitic on the hopes – in the sense that the principal function of the vocabularies is to tell stories about future outcomes which compensate for present sacrifices.'² Since in a new or accidental state like the GDR there is not initially an accepted or common vocabulary, a re-interpretation of the past and the present becomes an important component of developing a belief in a future different from that previously envisaged by most of the population. For the Party, the future would be one where its own vision, based on this re-interpretation, became accepted by the population as 'normal'. A set of founding myths, therefore, would be one component of a process which Fulbrook calls 'normalisation', in the sense (among others) of the attempt by a ruling elite to create over time a shared sense of norms, values and underlying assumptions after a period of rupture, in this case the Nazi period and the second world war.³

¹ op. cit., Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, p. 5.

² op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 86.

³ op. cit., Fulbrook, *Power and Society*, pp. 14-16.

The SED, through these myths, attempted to create or impose a common vocabulary by telling stories about past achievements of the German Communists and their Soviet comrades and about the present relationship between the Party, the people and the Soviet Union. Their aims were to justify their taking of power and to make their offer of ‘future outcomes which compensate for present sacrifices’ convincing after the twelve years during which the Nazis had similarly promoted myths that promised a glorious future.⁴ The need to tell stories that are plausible and appealing highlights the importance of effective narration and explains the significance of the narrative arts in the GDR, particularly literature and film, and the insistence on socialist realism as the appropriate combination of content and form for the myths. The same need also gave rise to people telling their own stories in memoirs, letters and diaries, where they can often be seen wrestling with official interpretations of an immediate past which conflict with their own experience.

Alan Nothnagle says that historical myths are ‘events, processes, or persons from an earlier time, which, typically estranged from their original meanings and contexts, transmit religious or ideological beliefs to a specified group in an easily comprehended, emotionally moving form.’⁵ The ideological beliefs the founding myths sought to transmit were based on the Party’s commitment to Marxist-Leninism and the world view it contained. The myths were in principle historical but because they were also political, there was only a limited need for them to be historically evidence-based. There was a strong, consciously-shaped moral component to the myths. They were designed to bind people to the new state, not just through promises of better material circumstances in the future but also by inculcating a belief that they were already living in a morally superior world.⁶

The Party used a variety of means to promote its founding myths. Mass events were a central part of this throughout the time of the GDR. Monuments and memorials, banners, slogans and even postage stamps stressed the friendship and sacrifice of the Soviet Union and the heroism of the German anti-fascists. Political, economic, social and cultural policies and developments were consistently presented in the press in a way which referred, however obliquely, to the founding myths. Cultural policies were explicitly shaped to ensure that artists, writers and film-makers

⁴ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 86.

⁵ op. cit., Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, p. 6.

⁶ op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 10.

were rewarded for following the Party's approach and reinforcing the myths. However, imposing a set of myths brought with it a set of challenges for the Party. The myths, being at least in part in conflict with people's experience of the Nazi and Weimar periods, would be accepted as if they were true only as long as the promises of benefits at came with them were kept. The strong emphasis on moral superiority also required the Party at all levels to be seen to act consistently in accordance with the principles it professed and not to reward its members with privileges and resources unavailable to those outside the Party.

Since the myths were based on ideology, they involved an unwillingness by the Party to consider that influences other than the political cause people to act as they do, and that their behaviour would often be in conflict with how they 'should' act (an issue discussed in Chapter 4). Responding by using power, including humiliation, to change people's behaviour would be seen by victims and observers alike as conflicting with the Party's principles and procedures and would threaten to undermine the belief in the myths the Party was imposing. Both literary and personal accounts of life in the GDR highlight the contradictions that arose from an authoritarian Party imposing its myths on a sceptical population while failing itself to live up to the demands it made on its members and on ordinary people.

The myths and the commitment not to humiliate

In a short story by Friedrich Wolf, 'Siebzehn Brote', the narrator is a German Communist writer and doctor incorporated into a Red Army unit to carry out propaganda duties.⁷ He saves the lives of a number of German soldiers captured near the end of the battle for Stalingrad. In an intricate fashion, he finds himself dealing also with the issues of shame and humiliation and devises a way to prevent the humiliation of his compatriots. The story takes place principally on 21st January 1943, a date whose significance is noted early on but not explained until later. The narrator meets a German officer who is fit and healthy and concerned to know whether he can be imprisoned in Tashkent where it will be warm enough for him to indulge his passion for cultivating roses. However, conditions for the ordinary German soldiers the narrator subsequently encounters are desperate: 'sie lagen völlig apathisch und kraftlos in einem Hohlweg im Schnee. Ihre ausgemergelten Gesichter waren grau bis grauschwarz. Offenbar hatten sie sich seit Tagen nicht gewaschen und auch nichts

⁷ Friedrich Wolf, 'Siebzehn Brote', in *Erzähler der DDR*, Band 1, (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau, 1985), pp. 9-15.

gegessen.’⁸ The narrator knows that his compatriots will die if they are not fed, but also knows that food is scarce and that his Soviet friends have already made huge sacrifices to defeat the Germans. In his attempt to find a way to get food for the soldiers, he goes from one Red Army officer to another and then to a group of ordinary Soviet soldiers. All are shown to be admirable men, a recurring motif that indicates the narrator’s view of the Soviet Union. The regimental commander, for instance, is a heroic Soviet figure on a grand scale, ‘ein Genosse aus dem “Kusbass”, dem sibirischen Kohlenbekken, ein ungewöhnlich kräftiger, breitschultriger Mann, ein echter “sibirischer Bär”.’⁹ He delegates his staff officer, Tolja, ‘einen hochaufgeschossenen, dunkelhaarigen jungen Oberleutnant mit munteren Augen’ to help the narrator.¹⁰ Tolja is bursting with life and, as they are driving along ‘über die frostknirschende Steppe’, sings ‘aus voller Kehle’ a song proclaiming his love for Odessa (like Siberia, one of the symbolically important parts of the huge Soviet territory).¹¹ The Red Army unit they find in a ruined village near where the German soldiers are waiting is made up of generous, thoughtful, disciplined and well-equipped soldiers.

The combination of ebullience, thoughtfulness and generosity is central to the story but also, the narrator implies, to the Soviet way of life. It is all the more admirable, given the terrible things that have been done to the Soviet Union. When the regimental commander stands looking silently at the map spread out in front of him, the narrator projects his own concerns on to him, revealing his personal sense of shame: ‘Dachte der Kommandeur an die ‘verbrannte Erde’ rings um Stalingrad? War er vielleicht vorher in der Ukraine und im Donbass gewesen und hatte dort die bis auf den Grund eingeäscherten Dörfer und Städte gesehen?’¹² It is here that the significance of the date becomes clear: it is the anniversary of Lenin’s death. The reader is shown Lenin as the symbol of international solidarity; Lenin as the friend of Germany, rejected by the socialists but with a watchful eye on the German workers and a paternal hand on the shoulder of one of the German Communists’ heroic and tragic founding figures, Karl Liebknecht; and Lenin as the cause for a commemoration ceremony, even for the Soviet soldiers camped in the ruins. The

⁸ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 10.

⁹ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 11.

¹⁰ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 12.

¹¹ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 13.

¹² op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 11.

narrator, introduced as a living example of international solidarity, is invited to address the Soviet soldiers. He describes his own background in the struggle to support from within Germany ‘den ersten Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat’ and his anguish at seeing German workers fighting against it. He refers to Lenin’s emphasis on the importance of patience and education in winning people over to the struggle and relates this directly to his own efforts to convince his compatriots, here in the Soviet Union, ‘Schluß zu machen mit diesem verbrecherischen Hitlerkrieg!’¹³ It is then that a Russian saying occurs to him: ‘Einen am Boden Liegenden trete man nicht’.¹⁴ He uses this to demonstrate the position of his compatriots who are mostly, he stresses, ‘Arbeiter und Arbeitersöhne’ (more victims than perpetrators, it is implied, in a clear engagement with the argument in the GDR about where blame lay for the Hitler period and the war), whose need now is for help from the soldiers of the Red Army. The clear implication is that the humiliation or brutal or contemptuous treatment of those who are already defeated must be avoided. In accordance with the new morality of the workers and peasants’ state, fairness and dignity must prevail, not arbitrary punishment or the desire for revenge resulting from earlier humiliation of the Red Army by the Germans. Only in this way can the cycle of humiliation, revenge and further humiliation be broken.

The soldiers agree to provide the ‘siebzehn Brote’ of the story’s title to the German soldiers.¹⁵ The gift of food and drink brings the Germans back to life. An undertaking is given that they will be taken to the nearest field hospital. The narrator explains to his compatriots what has happened and the significance of it, that Soviet-German friendship is possible on the basis of international, Leninist, working-class solidarity. For him this has been a necessary part of the process of overcoming his own shame, of coming to terms with the ‘Welle von Dankbarkeit, Scham und Hilflosigkeit’ that he feels when he recalls what Germany – or at least the German working class – owes the Soviet Union.¹⁶ His wish to have converted or convinced his compatriots to put international solidarity above patriotism and to change sides in the war is conveyed by a shift of terminology as the story develops, with references to ‘Hitlersoldaten’ giving way to ‘die deutschen Soldaten’.¹⁷

¹³ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The saying also appears in Vassily Grossmann’s *Life and Fate*, (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 697.

¹⁵ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 15.

¹⁶ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, p. 14.

¹⁷ op. cit., Friedrich Wolf, pp. 11, 15.

In this short story, many of the founding myths of the GDR are sketched out and reinforced. Soviet friendship towards the ‘real’ Germany of the oppressed but politically conscious working class points to the need for international solidarity in support of the patriotic, self-sacrificing struggle in the Soviet Union. It is suggested that recognition by the Germans of their shame for their anti-Soviet actions, combined with a positive choice to support the Soviet Union, offers the possibility of redemption, while the magnanimous, forgiving nature of the Soviet Union is shown by the way the Red Army soldiers resist the temptation to humiliate the defeated Germans. The narrator’s direct involvement in the Red Army highlights the fact of German anti-fascist resistance to Hitler and, through the linking of Lenin and Liebknecht, the importance of the role played historically by the German Communists. Significantly, however, the narrator knows that doubts remain: the German soldiers might not have understood or accepted this message. Perhaps, it can be inferred, the population of the new GDR more widely might have difficulty accepting the view that the Soviet Union is their friend and that the cycle of humiliation has been broken.

The commitment not to humiliate is a recurrent feature of GDR representation. It is contained, for instance, in a 1999 memoir by Hans Fricke, a commander in the border guards. Despite his later criticism of aspects of Party policy and practice, Fricke remained committed to the GDR and to building socialism. There is consistency in the narrative, as Fricke seeks to avoid exculpating or justifying himself, while revealing a gradual shift towards a better understanding and a sense of regret that this did not come sooner. Part of Fricke’s technique is to point to positive events and the absence of damaging actions. Some of these cases involve a rejection of humiliation as a tactic. He reports that during a brief period on duty in Strafvollzugsanstalt Torgau at the beginning of the 1950s, the officer in charge stressed that there was to be no revenge or mistreatment in the prison, reminding the police and guards that they represented a humane and just order:

Nachdem er uns in bewegenden Worten seinen langen Leidensweg durch die Hölle faschistischer Konzentrationslager geschildert hatte, erklärte er, daß unsere neue antifaschistisch-demokratische Ordnung nicht gleiches mit Gleichem vergelten werde. Er forderte all VP-Angehörigen auf, sich stets

dessen bewußt zu sein, daß sie eine menschliche und gerechte Ordnung repräsentieren.¹⁸

Commitment to the highest moral standards and to not humiliating the defeated enemy is at the heart of Willi Bredel's *Die Prüfung*, where Communist prisoners of the Nazis in the early years of Nazi power are brutally humiliated but maintain their sense of self-respect and the certainty that their cause will eventually prevail.¹⁹ From the beginning, a calm, deliberate style is adopted to convey the importance of the Party as an abstract entity to which real, individual people give their loyalty. Both the narrator and many of the characters talk somewhat reverently about or on behalf of the Party, identifying with the Party's voice as a way of conveying to the imagined audience the strength of what is otherwise abstract and impersonal.

In the early descriptions, things stand for themselves but also for something much more significant. Chemnitz is not just a location, it is also an industrial area where the Party has a base that needs rebuilding. Hamburg has well-known landmarks and people going about their daily business, but also the harbour and the vast industrial area teeming with the organised but now oppressed working class, where the Party still has a presence. The narrative circles around a number of key words: 'Aufgabe', 'Arbeit', 'Genossen', 'Mitkämpfer' on the one hand; 'Spitzel', 'Terror', 'Verrat', 'Mißhandlungen', 'Verhaftungen' on the other.²⁰ To make the sympathies of the narrator doubly clear, a socialist vision is spelt out, in which the harbour and the workers are again at the centre, and in which industry, decency and shared pleasures are central.²¹ Virtue is consistently shown to reside with the Communists, evil with the Nazis. This is confirmed by non-communist prisoners who are impressed by the way the Communists conduct themselves. Miesicke, the accidental victim, has been brutally humiliated by the Nazis. His treatment is described as 'diese ihm unfäßbare, rohe Demütigung' and is shown to have irrevocably changed his life.²² In the common cell, he marvels at the Communists' patience, dignity and passionate interest in political discussions. ('Leidenschaftlich' is a word used here and elsewhere to convey the narrator's approval of their commitment to one another and to humanity more widely.) Miesicke's description echoes the earlier vision of the socialist future:

¹⁸ Hans Fricke, *Davor, Dabei, Danach – ein ehemaliger Kommandeur der Grenztruppen der DDR berichtet*, (1999), Kempowski BIO 6846UF, p. 68.

¹⁹ Willi Bredel, *Die Prüfung*, (Berlin; Weimar: Reclam, 1981; first published 1934; in SBZ 1946).

²⁰ op. cit., Bredel, pp. 7-8, 41-42.

²¹ op. cit., Bredel, p. 10.

²² op. cit., Bredel, p. 55.

‘im Gefängnis benehmen sie sich manierlich und kultiviert, rezitieren Klassiker und singen Songs, verhöhnen die Unwissenheit und appellieren an die Vernunft.’²³ Since it is not a vision he has heard spelt out, the passage underlines the power of the vision to seep into the consciousness even of those lacking political awareness.

The certainty that reason can prevail over the emotions is a recurring theme in the novel; it is the basis of the prisoners’ conviction that communism will defeat fascism. In this same cell where most of the Communist prisoners are confined, a discussion takes place about how they should treat the prison guards and commanders when they have defeated the Nazis. All of them have been subjected to appalling torture. Conscious of the danger of the cycle of humiliation, all but one of them vote against taking their revenge. Walter Kreibel, himself a Communist who has spent time in this cell after being kept for weeks in complete darkness and months in solitary confinement, is puzzled and fascinated by this decision when he recounts it later:

‘Die Genossen haben abgestimmt. Ich war damals noch in Einzelhaft. Und nur einer war für Mißhandlungen; alle anderen für schnelles Erschießen. Ist das nicht erschütternd? Du mußt wissen, sie sind fast alle mißhandelt worden. Aber keiner will Rache. Vernichtung, jahwohl, aber keine Rache. Ist das nicht erschütternd?’²⁴

The prisoners themselves are surprised, even embarrassed, by their decision: ‘Es ist, als fürchte sich einer vor dem anderen, für sich zu human zu gelten.’²⁵ As Communists, the narrator suggests, they are intrinsically better than they realise or even want to be.

This opposition to humiliation was supported by the conversion narratives, accounts by German prisoners of war who were convinced to change sides by the training and re-education on offer from the Soviet forces or, more usually, from the members of the NKFD, the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland. The autobiography of Joachim Goellner, for instance, expresses the gratitude of one such prisoner to the committed anti-fascists who introduced him to the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and – unfortunately, he says, looking back from much later – Stalin.²⁶ Goellner is impressed by the ‘tiefe Menschlichkeit’ of the Soviet people in the face of poverty and privation and their lack of a desire to humiliate their enemies. Though some of them saw the Germans as fascists who had attacked their country and killed their

²³ op. cit., Bredel, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ op. cit., Bredel, p. 262.

²⁵ op. cit., Bredel, p. 149.

²⁶ Joachim Goellner, *Autobiographie ‘Die wundersame Reise des Odysseus des XX. Jahrhunderts’*, (2003), Kempowski BIO 6860/1.

loved ones, this was not typical of the Soviet people, 'die uns allgemein keine Rachegefühle der Vergeltung entgegenbrachten'.²⁷ As if echoing Wolf's story, he notes that 'Teilweise war unsere minimale Verpflegung mehr gesichert als unter den vielen dezimierten Sowjetfamilien infolge des über sie mit Elend und Leid hereingebrochenen Raubkrieges'. There is an ironical reversal of positions here, however: 'So kam es nicht selten vor, daß einige Sowjetbürger bei uns am Lagerzaun nach Brot bettelten'.²⁸ As is discussed in Chapter 7, Goellner's understanding of the importance of not engaging in humiliation does not subsequently prevent his own humiliation by the Party.

A later example of the presentation of the myths and the underlying commitment not to humiliate comes from Konrad Wolf's 1968 film, *Ich war neunzehn*. This was heavily based on Wolf's own diaries but creates a fictionalised version where specific film techniques, such as the use of black and white film, moving cameras and untrained actors, are used to evoke feelings of authenticity in the imagined audience, to convince them of the truth of the subjective observations of the protagonist, Gregor Hacker, and to attempt to create a collective memory of the events.²⁹ The film was highly praised in the GDR and played to large audiences. As Südkamp notes, the State saw the film as particularly valuable for young people, since it conveyed to them a sense of the anti-fascist foundation of the GDR and helped to justify the SED's hold on power.³⁰

As in Friedrich Wolf's story, the hero and narrator is an anti-fascist German, brought up in the Soviet Union travelling with the Red Army and carrying out propaganda duties with a view to persuading German soldiers to surrender. He personifies the desired German-Soviet friendship. Late in the film on the symbolically important 1st May, the Russians are providing dinner, music and wine for a group of German Communists just out of prison in Brandenburg. Almost all have suffered terribly. Suddenly one of the Germans stands up and vents his fury at the Nazis for the humiliation he has suffered. The Nazis must be eliminated, root and branch, he shrieks, otherwise the same will happen again in twenty years. The General, another calm, compassionate Soviet figure contrasted with the raging, ruined German, says he

²⁷ op. cit., Goellner 6860/1, p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Holger Südkamp, 'Ich war neunzehn.' *Zur filmischen und politischen Bedeutung von Konrad Wolfs DEFA-Film*, Europäische-Geschichtsdarstellungen, Jahrgang 2, Heft 3, (Düsseldorf: Heinrich Heine Universität, 2005), pp. 9-10.

³⁰ op. cit., Südkamp, p. 12.

understands his feelings but the Soviet Union will not seek revenge and will break the cycle of humiliation. The German Communists must do likewise, he implies, since ‘mit Gefühlen kann man keine Politik machen. Und Rache ist ein schlechter Ratgeber, besonders für die Zukunft.’³¹

As an underlying principle of all the myths, the commitment of the victors not to humiliate their enemies is of particular significance for the Party. Stating the commitment positioned the Party not just as a supporter of the Soviet Union but also as one of the victors in the joint struggle against fascism. It intertwined the Soviet Union and the German Communists as if they were equally committed to justice and a higher morality, while asserting that the anti-fascist Germans were, in their own right, ready, able and entitled to set about designing a radically different and better future for the population of the GDR.

The offer of redemption

In the founding myths of the GDR, anti-fascism was central. The anti-fascist myth was intended to honour past actions and help shape future actions. According to the myth, the people of the Soviet Occupation Zone (the SBZ) and then the GDR represented the anti-fascist Germans, while the Party represented the active and politically conscious anti-fascist Germans. Nothnagle says that ‘the myth of the GDR’s “antifascist legacy” was the *raison d’être* of both the Party and the state from beginning to end.’³² The myth, Dennis notes, bestowed redemption from outside.³³ It did not require individual citizens, except for a relatively small number seen as the ‘volksfeindliche’ other, to acknowledge responsibility for past actions.³⁴ Nothnagle, also pointing to the offer of redemption, suggests that through the anti-fascist myth, ‘repentant Germans were offered a great and unexpected gift by the SED and the Soviet authorities: actually to become that which they now wished they had been all along – antifascists.’³⁵ Grunenberg makes clear that there was an anti-capitalist aspect to the anti-fascist myth and its redemptive offer:

Die Strategie der Kommunisten war äußerst erfolgreich: Sie sprachen von Kollektivschuld, verlangten Sühne, boten aber gleichzeitig Vergebung an. [...] Sie delegierten einen großen Teil der Schuld an ‘das kapitalistische Wirtschaftssystem’ und seine Führer und unterstützten damit eine von vielen

³¹ *Ich war neunzehn*, Konrad Wolf, (DEFA, 1967).

³² op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 93.

³³ op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 15.

³⁴ op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 171.

³⁵ op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 101.

gehegte Auffassung, die Deutschen seien Opfer gewissenloser Kapitalisten geworden, die sich mit 'den Faschisten' verbündet hätten.³⁶

Effectively, the population of the GDR was being offered through the myth a new social contract: we, the Party, grant you, the people, all the benefits of a new identity in an anti-capitalist society based on equal dignity and opportunity, by absolving you of responsibility for the war and its conduct; in return (and by implication, even if it is painful to you), you absolve the Soviet Union (and us) of any responsibility for German suffering on the Eastern Front and during the defeat and occupation of Germany and for the loss of the eastern territories. This can be seen as institutionalised denial of the reality of the war and the involvement with Nazism of much of the population of the new state. This denial also built in the impossibility for ordinary people of dealing with the trauma of the Eastern Front since, as Nothnagle says, 'the utter renunciation of the Nazi cause and acceptance of the Soviet victory meant that German war victims had no legitimate place in public memory'.³⁷

There are indications in both the fiction and the personal accounts of the GDR of the problem this enforced denial gives rise to. Just as 'Stalingrad' stands for heroism and the triumph of justice on the Communist side, so it represents for many ordinary people the ultimate nightmare. This inability to express their feelings was frequently felt as humiliation in a complex way. It involved living constantly in a state of cognitive dissonance: knowing and denying the knowledge of what the German forces had done to the Soviet people, not just 'ordinary' acts of war but large-scale and deliberate acts of humiliation; knowing and denying what had happened in the extermination camps; knowing and denying that Hitler and the Nazis as a whole had led them, willingly or not, to ignore or deny earlier values and that, contrary to what had been promised to them, they now had to endure defeat and humiliation themselves, made worse by the personal involvement that came from understanding that their fathers, husbands and sons were caught up in vast and apparently never-ending human suffering and that whole populations were being driven out of their Heimat in the east as the Front came ever closer.

People responded to this cognitive dissonance in at least two ways. Whereas one strategy for denying humiliation involves identifying with the humiliator and

³⁶ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 132.

³⁷ op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 163; on the early processes for ensuring this, with public debates in 1948, see Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad. Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), pp. 40-44.

expressing shame for one's actions, as discussed in the theoretical chapter on humiliation, there are hints in the representation that the opposite took place: people proclaimed their humiliation and so avoided shame for their complicity in the actions of the Nazis.³⁸ Some of the examples, such as Christoph Hein's *Horns Ende*, discussed in subsequent chapters, and the memoir of Friedrich Kabelitz referred to below, are suggestive of this but further social history research is needed to provide greater certainty. From the accounts it can be tentatively inferred that interpreting actions of the Soviet Union or the German Communists as humiliating allowed people to feel not guilty and responsible but merely defeated. Their abject condition could then be seen as someone else's doing, not their own, and their argument was buttressed by actual experiences of humiliation at the hands of the Red Army.

At the same time, in order to escape from the emotional consequences of being humiliated, there was a tendency to respond to the cognitive dissonance by attempting to believe in the SED's myths. Seeking redemption in such circumstances required those concerned to continue to accept two contradictory propositions simultaneously: the myths which offered redemption for sins committed, and a counter myth of humiliation and innocence. Of these, it was more difficult to fully accept the GDR's founding myths and, unsurprisingly, the 'Eastern Front' as a concept or myth in its own right long remained part of the unacknowledged emotional bedrock of the GDR upon which other myths, especially the anti-fascist myth and the myth of eternal Soviet friendship and sacrifice, were overlaid. Nevertheless, Morina suggests, over time the myths do seem to have been able to co-exist.³⁹ With the change of leadership from Ulbricht to Honecker, both the role of the Soviet Union and the crimes of the Germans on the Eastern Front were gradually allowed to have less significance in the GDR:

Honecker's politics of memory reinforced the master narrative of the Ulbricht years – albeit with significantly less enthusiasm and care for selected historical details [...]. Eventually, just like the SED's ideology of antifascism, the official memory of the war against the Soviet Union became formulaic under Honecker, creating little more than a petty caricature of the unprecedented historical event it claimed to represent.⁴⁰

³⁸ See, e.g., on the 'victimhood' debate and the 'Bund der Vertriebenen': Tim Bergfelder, 'Shadowlands', in op. cit., Cooke, *Screening War*, p. 124; Graham Jackman, ed., 'The End of a Taboo? The Experience of Bombing and Expulsion in Contemporary German 'Gedächtniskultur'', Special No., *German Life and Letters*, Vol. LVII No. 4, 2004.

³⁹ op. cit., Morina, pp. 252-258.

⁴⁰ op. cit., Morina, p. 176.

The myth of the anti-fascist hero

To be convincing in the early years, the anti-fascist myth required anti-fascist heroes. Bodo Uhse's *Die Patrioten* (discussed at length in Chapter 5) contains a number of such heroes. In March 1943 when, after Stalingrad, the war has turned in favour of the Soviet Union and initial steps are being taken to rebuild the KPD and its influence, Maria is waiting to be parachuted into Germany from the Soviet Union. She describes, with extravagant use of adjectives – a recurring device designed to show approval of the person or action concerned – the new model being who, after being nurtured in Moscow, will emerge from the heroic struggles to come:

Er ist nicht mehr aus unserer Zeit, dachte sie, er gehört schon der Zukunft an. So werden die Menschen sein, wenn sie Mensch geworden sind. Und aus dem Anblick des jungen Helmut Wiegler, 1925 in Berlin geboren, später nach der Sowjetunion ausgewandert, an der Schulen des jungen Riesen Moskau erzogen und ausgebildet, erwuchs in ihr an diesem Märztag im Kriegsjahr 1943 auf dem Flugplatz vor Moskau die Vision eines neuen Geschlechts sorgenfreier, starker, furchtloser Menschen.⁴¹

The older Peter Wittkamp, who returns to Germany with Maria and Helmut, is another of the anti-fascist heroes. All three are supported within Germany by courageous Party members who know they are risking their lives but are willing to do so to bring forward the victory of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Hitler.

While it is not surprising that the anti-fascist myth brought both benefits and contradictory and unresolved feelings to ordinary people in the GDR, what is perhaps surprising is that even for the individual Communists who had been involved or were supposed to have been involved in anti-fascism, the reality was damagingly different from the myth. They were required to live with the assumption of their own heroism and to live the life of the mythical hero, regardless of what they had in fact done, endured or failed to endure. The commitment not to humiliate that underpins the GDR's myths is closely linked to the portrayal of the Communists as anti-fascist heroes who are unshakeable in their beliefs, who know but can overcome fear and who are unable to be broken physically or mentally by their ordeals. They are, it is suggested, unable to be humiliated because when they are brutally treated they know that this is something they have accepted in advance as likely, not something which conflicts with their beliefs and expectations. Brutal treatment is therefore not something which brings with it a sense of injustice. As discussed in Chapter 2,

⁴¹ Bodo Uhse, *Die Patrioten, Erstes Buch: Abschied und Heimkehr*, (Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, 1955), pp. 8-9.

humiliation does not take place when those who are the apparent victims do not share a commitment to the prevailing laws and conception of justice but seek to resist or overthrow them. In *Das siebte Kreuz*, the charismatic Communist Wallau calmly goes to his death. In *Die Prüfung*, Torsten's similarly charismatic presence and indomitable air cannot fail to impress the SS who are about to beat him into insensibility: 'Interessiert mustern die SS-Leute den Gefangenen. Sie scheinen überrascht zu sein. Er tritt mit stolzer Haltung aus dem dunklen Kasten und sieht den SS-Leuten fest und gerade ins Gesicht.'⁴² Torsten expects to die. 'Wir Kommunisten sind Tote auf Urlaub!' he says to himself, echoing Eugen Leviné who was executed after the defeat of the Munich Republic in 1919.⁴³

Such calmness and acceptance in the face of torture and death is not usual human behaviour.⁴⁴ Julia Hell points to the importance of linking a political reading of the foundation texts to a psychoanalytic reading in order to identify the conscious and unconscious fantasies involved in 'ideological formation', and 'the work of fantasy in ideology'.⁴⁵ She stresses the ideological importance in the anti-fascist mythology of the physical body of the Communist hero and of fantasies surrounding the body:

the body is [...] the site of fantasies, of a whole fantasmatic history that is both social and individual. And it is that specific power of ideology – to draw on those fantasies, to mobilize them for a political project – that was involved in the Communists' attempt to occupy the empty locus of power.⁴⁶

Using Slavoj Žižek's concept of the 'sublime body',⁴⁷ Hell suggests that 'the sublime body of the Communist' is presented in religious terms, like the body of the Christian martyr: 'In the struggle against fascism, the Communist body becomes a body-in-pain, refracted through a register mobilizing a dense network of religious connotations. This peculiar inflection points to an absolutely central element of the SED's official discourse of antifascism: its iconography of martyrdom and redemption.'⁴⁸ This is clear in the portrayal of Torsten and in *Das siebte Kreuz* with its overt imagery of the crucifixion and the central role played by Wallau, who is recaptured but cannot be defeated. Grunenberg also points to the religious imagery

⁴² op. cit., Bredel, p. 45.

⁴³ op. cit., Bredel, p. 42; Ben Fowkes, *Communism in Germany under the Weimar Republic*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 33.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 8; op. cit., Ehlers.

⁴⁵ op. cit., Hell, *Post-fascist Fantasies*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ op. cit., Hell, pp. 255-256.

⁴⁷ op. cit., Hell, p. 19.

⁴⁸ op. cit., Hell, pp. 33-34.

used when evoking the anti-fascist struggle. She suggests that the aesthetic symbolism in representation of anti-fascism operated on a number of levels and that it ‘überhöhte den anti-faschistischen Kampf in der symbolischen Dreiheit von Kämpfen – Sterben – Siegen, bis er die Realität vollständig überdeckte’.⁴⁹ In the myth, the ordinary worker is thus identified with the figure of Christ and his sacrifice for mankind.⁵⁰ Such sacrifice involves not humiliation but an awareness that humiliation is possible for others who are weak and a readiness to assume willingly the suffering that is a consequence of fighting for a just cause. As a result, the burden of suffering and sacrifice will be removed from future generations, who will neither humiliate nor be humiliated but will learn from the lessons of the heroes.

‘In Fleisch und Blut’: the myth and reality of the Communist body

The Communist body was a symbol of the physical invincibility of the Party that was held up as an example to those outside the Party. As Wolfgang Leonhard, a German Communist who grew up in exile in the Soviet Union, makes clear, it was in the physical body of individual Party members that the imprinting of belief in the Party and its ideals took place. In his memoir *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*, Leonhard discusses his experiences in Kazakhstan when Germans in the Soviet Union during the war were sent into internal exile. Many of these experiences were terrible and deeply shocking, but when asked about them he replies positively, since ‘Ich war erzogen worden, mir das Gute in der Sowjetunion zu merken und das Schlechte zu vergessen. Das war mir in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen.’⁵¹ Similarly, when he and the other members of the ‘Gruppe Ulbricht’ are about to leave Moscow for Germany in 1945 to help organise the post-war Germany in the Soviet Zone, Leonhard notes that almost no one else knows about their departure and that: ‘Wir hatten natürlich auch nichts gesagt – eine Angewohnheit, die uns schon in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen war.’⁵² Such mythologizing of the body is clear in Ulbricht’s announcement at the SED’s Fifth Party Conference in 1958 of his ten commandments for the new socialist morality, one of which says: ‘Du sollst Deine Kinder im Geiste des Friedens und des Sozialismus zu allseitig gebildeten, charakterfesten und körperlich gestählten Menschen erziehen.’⁵³ There is an echo of this commandment in Erik Neutsch’s *Spur*

⁴⁹ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 177.

⁵⁰ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 178.

⁵¹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 182.

⁵² op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 341.

⁵³ op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, p. 237.

der Steine, when the Party Secretary, Werner Horrath, told he looks worn out, says: ‘Das ist nur der Schein, der äussere Schein. Unter der Haut bin ich noch stahlhart’.⁵⁴ Horrath’s view of himself is confirmed by the works manager, Trutmann: ‘Dieser Mann war nicht zu besiegen, in ihm saß die Partei wie das Leben im Körper eines Tieres, überdauerte sogar noch das Bewußtsein.’⁵⁵ In the novels, important Party characters are often shown as scarred but battle-hardened by their experiences. In *Spur der Steine*, Hermann Jansen, the professional revolutionary has only one eye; the other, a glass eye, is ‘tief unter einer Narbe eingekeilt, bleibt starr’.⁵⁶ Similarly, Wunschgetreu in Erwin Strittmatter’s *Ole Bienkopp* has a scar which makes him appear to be smiling or grimacing. These are examples of what in psychoanalytic terms are referred to as ‘body storylines’: experiences which have left an inscription on the body and which find their expression physically, rather than in words.⁵⁷ The body of the anti-fascist hero like Jansen or the desperately loyal convert like Wunschgetreu is marked for all to see and understand. For Hannes Balla, the sense of the ‘Spur der Steine’ on the landscape and in his ‘body memory’, both the direct result of his physical labour, indicates that he has imprinted himself on the nation and that the nation has imprinted itself on him.⁵⁸ These frequently recurring descriptions are part of the narrators’ attempts to convey, through images that are beyond the reach of words but can only be expressed through words, a sense of the almost mystical strength of the Party.

The reality of the physical and mental condition of the anti-fascist hero was frequently represented as very different from the portrayal of indomitability. Wallau in *Das siebte Kreuz* and Torsten in *Die Prüfung* stand out as the ones who have successfully resisted the torture inflicted on them, while others among their comrades have been defeated and, in the end, humiliated. In the cell next to Torsten’s is another Communist, John Tetzlin, a veteran of the 1923 uprising in Hamburg and a stereotypical Communist hero, ‘ein Koloß von Kerl, mit mächtigen Schultern’.⁵⁹ However, Tetzlin is in a state of despair, ravaged not so much by the torture he has undergone as by the knowledge of his weakness in the face of what both he and the Party were entitled to expect of him:

⁵⁴ Erik Neutsch, *Spur der Steine*, (Halle, Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1966), p. 97.

⁵⁵ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 315.

⁵⁶ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 220.

⁵⁷ Maggie Turp, *Psychosomatic Health. The Body and the Word*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), Chapter 12.

⁵⁸ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 391, 418.

⁵⁹ op. cit., Bredel, p. 52.

Du bist ein miserabler Kommunist, John Tetzlin, ein gemeiner Hundsfott. Zehn Jahre bist du organisiert, zehn Jahre, zehn Jahre, und gibst deinen Org.-Leiter der Polizei preis, verrätst den Namen deines Mitarbeiters, den Namen eines guten, mutigen Genossen. [...] Gewiß, sie haben dich geschlagen, haben dich gequält, gefoltert, aber du weißt genau, was andere Revolutionäre litten, ohne zum Verräter zu werden. Du weißt genau, daß viele sterben mußten und doch ihre Genossen nicht verrieten, daß sie sich totfoltern ließen, aber ihren Henkern ins Gesicht spuckten.⁶⁰

Tetzlin cannot come to terms with the gap between the way others see him as ‘einen stahlharten Bolschewiken’⁶¹ and his perception of himself as a traitor. Tetzlin’s only way to save the Party from further betrayal is to hang himself in his cell.⁶²

In *Die Prüfung*, the narrative voice encourages the reader to accept that by displaying unacceptable weakness, Tetzlin has effectively excluded himself from the Party and made his death the only possible way of trying to make amends. The narrator does not acknowledge that the Communist body as such can be as vulnerable as any other body. Other narrators adopt a more nuanced approach which challenges the myth of the Communist body. Horrath’s claim in *Spur der Steine* to be ‘stahlhart’ is mocked by the description of him later, broken and ageing, after his defeat.⁶³

Horrath, recognising the physical, mental and emotional damage the Party wreaks on its members through humiliation, says to the newly-created heroic figure, Hannes Balla: ‘Du bist voller Illusionen. Der Kampf frißt den ganzen Menschen. Selbst seine Liebe.’⁶⁴ Manfred, in Christa Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel*, extends this image, referring to the way the imprinting on the body of the need for constant effort leads to a personal distortion of values and to ‘diese Selbstzerfleischungen’,⁶⁵ an image made directly relevant when the determined, idealistic Meternagel is shown, after all his efforts, to be ‘schwerkrank’,⁶⁶ his face ‘erschöpftes’⁶⁷ and, as Karin McPherson says, ‘reduced from an active, resilient man who brings about vital changes in the factory, to a weak invalid’.⁶⁸

The weakness of the supposed heroes was not confined to those tortured by the Nazis. Grunenberg says that the Communists who survived both the Nazis and exile

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *op. cit.*, Bredel, p. 56.

⁶³ *op. cit.*, Neutsch, p. 877.

⁶⁴ *op. cit.*, Neutsch, p. 768.

⁶⁵ Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, (Munich: DTV, 1973), p. 175.

⁶⁶ *op. cit.*, Christa Wolf, p. 196.

⁶⁷ *op. cit.*, Christa Wolf, p. 198.

⁶⁸ Karin McPherson, *Christa Wolf, Der geteilte Himmel*, (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1995), p. 72.

in the Soviet Union were diminished physically and in terms of their vision: ‘Die übriggebliebenen Anti-Faschisten waren keine Himmelsstürmer, die ausgreifend die Welt “gestalten” wollten. Sie waren körperlich und geistig schwach, demütig, unterwürfig und empfangen die Befehle der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht dankbar als Geschenk.’⁶⁹ While in Moscow, they lived ‘in ständiger panischer Angst vor der Vernichtung’.⁷⁰ In this respect, Leonhard sees the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 as particularly destructive. There were immediate changes in Soviet propaganda, with anti-fascism no longer mentioned. In the library where he read foreign literature, books by anti-fascist authors disappeared and Nazi newspapers were on display.⁷¹

Stefan Heym’s novel *Die Architekten* contains scenes set in Moscow where German Communist exiles wait in dread of arrest and accusations of counter-revolutionary activity. The central figure, Arnold Sundstrom, is portrayed exactly as Grunenberg describes the real-life Communist exiles, as a weak, obsequious figure with no central vision or sense of self he can hold on to in the face of humiliation and the fear of humiliation. By contrast, Julian Goltz, a former member of the Reichstag and a close friend of Sundstrom, has been arrested because of Sundstrom’s weakness. Following the Nazi-Soviet Pact, he is being taken by train to be handed over to the Nazis. He realises that his comrades will put him on trial when he reaches the German prison. Aware of their dedication and the way they think, he is tormented by the impossibility and the undesirability in political terms of explaining to them the reality of what is happening in the Soviet Union: ‘Und warhaftig, es wäre besser für die Genossen, wenn sie von all dem nichts erführen...’⁷² Since he can find no answer to the question of how to reconcile his belief in the cause with the reality he has endured, he jumps off the bridge which forms the border, knowing he will be shot by both sides.⁷³ His self-sacrifice denies the possibility of humiliation. His destroyed body is the shield he has placed between the reality of Soviet life and the unswerving belief in the Soviet Union of his suffering comrades inside Germany. Like the death of Tetzlin in *Die Prüfung*, however, this is not the type of heroic sacrifice celebrated in the myth of the anti-fascist hero and the cult of the Communist body.

⁶⁹ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 120.

⁷⁰ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 77.

⁷¹ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Der Schock des Hitler-Stalin-Paktes*, (München: Knesbeck & Schuler, 1989), pp. 70-78.

⁷² Stefan Heym, *Die Architekten* (München: Bertelsmann, 2000), p. 11.

⁷³ op. cit., Heym, *Die Architekten*, p. 18.

As survivors of acts of humiliation from before and during their time in the Soviet Union, the Communist leaders coming back from Moscow showed many of the marks of humiliation, including extreme suspicion of possible enemies, paranoia and a readiness to humiliate others in the future. Crucially, in order to survive in the Soviet Union they had been required to identify, at least in part, with the humiliator, the Party led by Stalin, and to interpret many of their own actions, however innocent, as being worthy of shame. They could not, in order to keep on living, express or even allow themselves to feel rage against Stalin and the Soviet Party. Hell notes the absurdities this led to in the early years of the GDR: ‘at all Party meetings, Stalin was voted honorary chair and a seat left empty in his honour’.⁷⁴ The GDR leaders lived in and imposed a state of denial, since it was impossible for them to admit to themselves or anyone else the reality of what had happened to them, to the Party and to the Soviet Union. This helps to explain a number of things which are otherwise puzzling: firstly, the constant exaggeration and distortion of reality in the founding myths and in the language of their representation in some of the novels; secondly, why there was such a bitter struggle against other Party members who had spent their exile not in the Soviet Union; and finally, the gulf between the sense of justice implied in the founding myths and the different conception of justice demonstrated by the rigidity and harshness of the exercise of power by the Party under the domination of the Moscow exiles. As Grunenberg says:

Wer unter solchen Bedingungen jahrelang lebte, um zu überleben, verlor jegliches Selbstbewußtsein; seine Würde ging im angstvollen Unterwerfungsgestus verloren. [...] Er konnte der inneren Stimme, die ihm sagte, was gerecht und ungerecht war, nicht mehr trauen, nicht mehr seiner eigenen Erfahrung; er konnte sich kein Urteil mehr bilden. Seine Urteilsfähigkeit und das Vermögen, die Welt zu interpretieren, hatte er einer höheren Instanz preisgegeben.⁷⁵

The problem for the myths arising from differing conceptions of justice

The founding myths of the GDR were based on a conception of justice that promised equal dignity and respect and equal access to opportunities in the new society. This is spelt out in Anna Seghers’ *Das siebte Kreuz* which, for Hermann Kant is ‘*the book of human dignity*’.⁷⁶ Its characters are carefully, deliberately presented as figures in a landscape which the narrator creates out of the area around Mainz and the

⁷⁴ op. cit., Hell, p. 29.

⁷⁵ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, pp. 77-78.

⁷⁶ Hermann Kant, *My Alphabet of GDR Literature*, (Morgantown, West Virginia: Department of Foreign Languages, West Virginia University, 1981), p. 1.

Main and Rhine. This is a landscape, the narrator insists, that is not just physical but is also filled with centuries of history and social activity and shaped by people and their struggles.⁷⁷ It has a teeming, active, varied population trying to come to terms with both the ordinariness and the awfulness of the new Nazi regime. There is an avoidance of stereotypes and moral absolutes, and an acceptance that most people are a mix of what is acknowledged as good and bad. There are occasional striking images of the sort which do not find their way into many GDR novels until the 1970s and 1980s. A description of a prostitute says, for instance: ‘In ihren Augen glühte es auf, wie wenn man in einen Totenkopf ein Licht steckt.’⁷⁸ Such an approach builds sympathy for a wide range of people and adds weight to the narrator’s assertion that it is the Communists who understand the ordinary people and their struggles and suffering and who are the true bearers of dignity and decency.

Balanced against this is the mortal threat not just to individual Communists but also to the Party and to Communism as such and, therefore, to the possibility of dignity and justice in society. The landscape the narrator constructs becomes the site of a specific struggle to make hope for the future possible, through the determined and almost entirely futile efforts of seven Communist prisoners to escape from the terrible indignity of a Nazi concentration camp. Where elsewhere repetition in the text is used to develop a sense of range and depth and complexity, here it is used to stress the relentlessness of a struggle which is far more significant than the lives of those who die because of it. As one of the prisoners in the camp suggests, the Communists cannot be humiliated since they are willingly risking their lives, secure in the knowledge that others after them will carry on the struggle: ‘Wenn man kämpft und fällt und ein anderer nimmt die Fahne und kämpft und fällt auch, und der nächste nimmt sie und muß dann auch fallen, das ist ein natürlicher Ablauf, denn geschenkt wird uns gar nichts.’ Much worse is that the Nazis have become so powerful that they are destroying a whole generation, leaving a ‘Niemandland’ between the generations, ‘durch das die alten Erfahrungen nicht mehr dringen konnten’, as the next generations are formed by the Hitler Youth and take as their own the values of Nazism. The Communists who are being killed, one by one, are faced with the terrible question: ‘Wenn aber niemand die Fahne mehr abnehmen will, weil er ihre

⁷⁷ op. cit., Seghers, pp. 12, 320.

⁷⁸ op. cit., Seghers, p. 201.

Bedeutung gar nicht kennt?’⁷⁹ As an answer to the question, one of the prisoners, Georg Heisler, manages not to be recaptured and his triumph is made to stand for the victory of the human spirit.

The story of Georg is constructed to show that the best can be brought out in people if they are on the right side – the side of the Communists – and allow themselves to develop strength through co-operative organisation for the benefit of the whole. Working with and for others requires discipline, dedication, courage and self-abnegation. The narrator makes clear that doing the right thing, in these terms, is not just to ensure a better future for others, but also something that immediately makes life better for those doing it: Frau Fiedler, who feels an upsurge of joy at being involved again in Communist activism, despite its dangers; Kress and his wife whose marriage is transformed for the better by their help for Georg and the awareness of the danger they are in; and a number of doubters, or those who have kept their heads down and who suddenly find fulfilment, release and a sense of restored dignity through action, even when it is life-threatening.

Das siebte Kreuz is a novel about a struggle for justice in the face of an overwhelmingly powerful regime. The narrator assumes that the reader will accept this struggle as just. Having projected the possibility of failure for consideration by the reader, the narrator concludes that something essential in the human spirit can never be defeated, no matter how powerful the forces are which are trying to crush it: ‘Wir fühlten alle, wie tief und furchtbar die äusseren Mächte in den Menschen hineingreifen können bis in sein Innersten, aber wir fühlten auch, dass es im Innersten etwas gab, was unangreifbar war und unverletzbar.’⁸⁰ In terms of myth-making for the SED, this is a powerful claim that the Communists are the bearers of justice and dignity.

Similarly, in Willi Bredel’s *Die Prüfung*, the Communists demonstrate their belief in eventual justice and dignity, whatever their privations in the Nazi prison. The vision of the future that Torsten has is initially one of restorative justice: what has been unjustly taken away from the workers, directly by the Nazis or indirectly by the capitalist system, will be reclaimed, and dignity itself will be restored to the working class:

⁷⁹ op. cit., Seghers, pp. 167-168.

⁸⁰ op. cit., Seghers, p. 416.

Alles wird einmal uns gehören. In den schönen Villen und Parks am Wasser werden die Invaliden der Arbeit sich erholen, die Kinder der Werktätigen werden dort aufwachsen...

Die Nazis haben den Arbeitervereinen ihre paar Segelboote und Kanus gestohlen. Alle Segelboote, alle Motorboote, alle Kanus werden einmal den Werktätigen gehören. Sie haben den Arbeitern die Gewerkschaftshäuser und Arbeiterheime genommen. Die schönsten Gebäude werden einmal Arbeiterklubs werden.⁸¹

After his own torture and on hearing the continuing torture of his comrades, Torsten envisages a more violent settling of accounts. The lyrical language is abandoned for a harsher tone:

Mein Gott, was werden wir später mit diesen vertierten Halunken machen, die kaltschnäuzig Menschen zu Tode prügeln? Was werden wir mit ihnen machen, wenn sie uns am Tage der Abrechnung in die Hände fallen. Das ist gewiß, die kommende deutsche Revolution wird nicht an Humanität zugrunde gehen, ein zweiter November 1918 kommt bestimmt nicht wieder. Bestimmt nicht. Bestimmt nicht.⁸²

Here, in a founding text, is a clear statement that the guarantee of dignity and equality for all that Communists offered would apply in practice only to people with a commitment to the new State, not to its actual or perceived enemies. The 1949 Constitution of the GDR demonstrates the tension between the aim to be inclusive and the Party's felt need to exclude sections of the population it considered antagonistic to the vision and programme of the SED. Article 6, for instance, declares initially that 'Alle Bürger sind vor dem Gesetz gleichberechtigt'.⁸³ However, it immediately undercuts this commitment by defining a wide range of activities, those which can be defined as opposing the ethos and approach of the GDR, as criminal:

Boykotthetze gegen demokratische Einrichtungen und Organisationen, Mordhetze gegen demokratische Politiker, Bekundung von Glaubens-, Rassen-, Völkerhaß, militaristische Propaganda sowie Kriegshetze und alle sonstigen Handlungen, die sich gegen die Gleichberechtigung richten, sind Verbrechen im Sinne des Strafgesetzbuches.⁸⁴

This gives representatives of the State great scope for redefining or, in Rorty's terms, 're-describing' ordinary democratic or social activities as in conflict with the Constitution and allows them to impose humiliating punishments, including exclusion from society, extending beyond any period of imprisonment prescribed in the criminal code: 'Wer wegen Begehung dieser Verbrechen bestraft ist, kann weder im

⁸¹ op. cit., Bredel, p. 10.

⁸² op. cit., Bredel, p. 74.

⁸³ op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, p. 158.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

öffentlichen Dienst noch in leitenden Stellen im wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Leben tätig sein. Er verliert das Recht, zu wählen und gewählt zu werden.’⁸⁵ Rorty says that redescription often humiliates, in that it is a demonstration of the capacity to inflict pain and a sense of powerlessness.⁸⁶ Such arbitrary or unpredictable redescription or redefinition also excludes the victim from a particular position in the society. Since the person with the power to redefine also has the power to prevent any attempt at redress despite the legal guarantees given, the victim is humiliated. It is in this sense that the 1949 Constitution allocated to representatives of the State the opportunity to humiliate the State’s perceived enemies, despite a contrary commitment in the founding myths.

The 1968 Constitution is even more explicit than the 1949 Constitution in its guarantees of various rights and the respect for individual dignity, which should make humiliation by the Party or the State impossible.⁸⁷ However, such apparent certainty is undermined by Article 1, which ensures a class-based approach, confirms the power of the Party over the State and therefore excludes and potentially punishes all who wish to see a different approach: ‘Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist [...] die politische Organisation der Werktätigen in Stadt und Land, die gemeinsam unter Führung der Arbeiterklasse und ihrer marxistisch-leninistischen Partei den Sozialismus verwirklichen.’⁸⁸ For the SED, the class-based understanding of the nature of power and therefore of justice was at its core: ‘Eine m. P. [marxistisch-leninistische Partei] unserer Epoche ist eine revolutionäre Partei, die ihre gesamte Tätigkeit auf die Vorbereitung des Proletariats ‘zur Eroberung der Staatsmacht, und zwar zur Eroberung der Macht in der Form der Diktatur des Proletariats’ (Lenin) richtet.’⁸⁹ From 1949 to late 1989, the Party was able to use and develop the organs of the State as extensions of its own structures, and the power of the State as its own power. Acts of humiliation were likely to result from the frequently unpredictable intervention of the Party acting as the State, or from the State acting as an arm of the Party. Such acts were inevitably humiliating, since they were in conflict with the Party’s commitments to the rule of law in the GDR’s myths and legal structures and

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *op. cit.*, Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 90.

⁸⁷ e.g., Articles 19 and 20, in *op. cit.*, Weber, *Dokumente*, p. 300.

⁸⁸ *op. cit.*, Weber, *Dokumente*, p. 299.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

with the belief of ordinary people in such commitments and their emotional attachment to them.

Emotional attachments were significant in the development of the founding myths. For those desiring change after the catastrophe of the Nazi period, the myths were powerful and attractive, as some of the personal accounts make clear. Some of the early enthusiasm arose partly because, during the early years of the Soviet occupation, it was not clear to ordinary people and even to many Party members that a strictly Marxist-Leninist party would emerge out of the competing and apparently co-operating communist and social-democratic parties. The SED after the merger of the two parties initially showed itself prepared to pursue a specifically German path to socialism, in line with Anton Ackermann's theses. This gradually changed as the Cold War developed (through Western as well as Soviet actions) and Stalin and Zhdanov declared the inevitability of the struggle between capitalism and socialism. The SED, through the political skills and organisational practices of former top Communists, particularly the former Moscow exiles, moved to a centralised, Leninist form of organisation along the lines of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, discarded the Ackermann programme and purged the Party of those seen to be showing oppositional or social-democratic tendencies.⁹⁰ The expulsion of Yugoslavia from the international Communist movement was the opportunity for the SED to confirm its loyalty to Moscow and openly declare its new ideological position: 'Als "wichtigste Lehre" für sich selbst erklärte die SED-Führung, die eigene Partei müsse schleunigst eine Partei neuen Typus werden, die "unerschütterlich und kompromißlos auf dem Boden des Marxismus-Leninismus steht".'⁹¹

What Mike Dennis calls the 'undoubted primacy of politics over law' follows logically from this ideological position which was maintained until the last year of the GDR.⁹² According to Dennis, Erich Mielke, then head of the Stasi, declared in 1979: 'Power is the most important position from which to fulfil the historical mission of the working class, to establish Communist society... Socialist law is an important instrument of exercising, enhancing and consolidating power.'⁹³ Similarly, Urack, the representative of the Stasi in Stefan Heym's novel about shame at complicity in humiliation, *Collin*, uses Marxist dialectics to define justice as what maintains the

⁹⁰ op. cit., Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971*, p. 13.

⁹¹ op. cit., Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971*, p. 14.

⁹² Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), p. 61.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

power needed to build socialism: “‘Unrecht ist eben nicht gleich Unrecht, alles hängt davon ab, wer etwas tut und zu welchem Zweck.’”⁹⁴ Much later, moving from incoherence to icy lucidity in a way that causes his colleagues to shudder with fear, he explicitly justifies the use of illegal acts by the State and regrets the rehabilitation of his political enemies: “‘falsch sei nicht gewesen, daß man irgendwelche Leute fälschlich verhaftet, fälschlich angeklagt, fälschlich abgeurteilt habe; wie könne falsch sein, was für die Diktatur des Proletariats getan werde?’”⁹⁵

There is a clear gap here between Marxist-Leninist ideology and John Rawls’s theory of ‘justice as fairness’. What Rawls calls his guiding idea is that the principles of justice for a society arise from an imagined original agreement. These are the principles ‘that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association. [...] This way of regarding the principles of justice I shall call justice as fairness.’⁹⁶ In justice as fairness, no one knows the position or views or interests of the others, so that the principles of justice ‘are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.’⁹⁷ This is seen as likely to bring about the basis for the fairest possible and most equal distribution of goods (in the widest sense) in a society. As Michael Sandel notes, ‘Rawls argues that distributive justice is not about rewarding virtue or moral desert. Instead, it’s about meeting the legitimate expectations that arise once the rules of the game are in place.’⁹⁸ The rules of the game in the GDR, as determined by the SED, however, had more to do with keeping the Party in power than with meeting the legitimate expectations of ordinary people.

Fictional and personal representations of the GDR suggest that ordinary people believed – without expressing it so literally – that there was a commitment from both the Party and the people to a view of justice as fairness and to the rules of the game following from it, and that they saw these rules being arbitrarily broken by the SED throughout the time of the GDR. In line with Barrington Moore’s theory that ‘every human society does have a conception of unjust punishment and a specific way of deciding why the punishment is unjust’, they appeared to feel that their sense of what

⁹⁴ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 98.

⁹⁵ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 234.

⁹⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (London; Oxford; New York: OUP, 1973), p. 11.

⁹⁷ op. cit., Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 161.

justice meant in the specific circumstances of the GDR had universal applicability.⁹⁹ When Peter Urack in Heym's *Collin* declares to his Stasi father that "Gewalt ist Gewalt, Unrecht ist Unrecht, damals wie Heute, drüben wie hier", he is echoing what is expressed in many memoirs and letters.¹⁰⁰ In February 1954, Ruth Meier, a young, non-political woman living in Schönebeck (Elbe), describes key events from the previous year in a letter to a group of friends, where it is taken as a given that what has happened to her family is unjust: 'Das Jahr 1953 hat uns unendlich viel Sorgen und Kummer gemacht. Im Februar 1953 wurde mein Mann wegen Boykotttheze verhaftet und ist heute, nach nunmehr 12 Monaten noch nicht wieder zu Haus.'¹⁰¹ Fricke, the former officer of the border guards, criticises the misuse of Article 6 of the Constitution, while also saying this was understandable because of the GDR's perceived need to fight for its survival. He acknowledges, in retrospect, that the justice system was partisan, that the proclaimed commitment to fighting for justice was a lie and that this was ultimately fatal to the GDR.¹⁰²

Concerns about injustice or the failure to abide by the rule of law and the sense of justice as fairness implied in the founding myths appear in the novels throughout the period of the GDR. In Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*, when Manfred is the victim of a clear and apparently arbitrary injustice, his friend Martin encourages him into action:

Aber das nützte Manfred nichts. Ihm galt schon als bewiesen: Sie brauchten ihn nicht. Da gab es irgendwelche Leute, die konnten große Hoffnungen eines Menschen mit einem Federstrich vernichten. Dieses ganze Gerede von Gerechtigkeit war nichts weiter als Gerede.¹⁰³

Similarly, in Monika Maron's *Flugasche* (discussed at length in Chapter 6), the journalist Josefa Nadler's obsession with injustice is rooted in the humiliation of her grand-parents under the Nazis. Her obsession turns to rage as her struggle against injustice in the GDR is blocked by those concerned with abstract concepts and a constantly postponed better future rather than with justice and equal dignity in the present. She sees herself as the victim of injustice with no possibility of redress, and her sense of impotence leads her to a position of extreme mental instability. She can

⁹⁹ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice. The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 31.

¹⁰⁰ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 97.

¹⁰¹ Ruth Meier, letter 26.02.1954, in '31 Originalbände Klassenrundbriefe von ehemaligen Schülerinnen einer Oberschule in Schönebeck an der Elbe (bei Magdeburg). Jahre 1950-2001', Kempowski BIO 6383. See other personal accounts in Chapter 6.

¹⁰² op. cit., Hans Fricke, p. 59.

¹⁰³ op. cit., Christa Wolf, p. 110.

return to some sense of normality only by abandoning her fight and accepting defeat and a lower position in society, a classic trajectory for someone who has been humiliated. As if commenting on Josefa's position, Kruschkatz, the Party realist in Christoph Hein's *Horns Ende*, asserts that there is no remedy available to Horn other than acceptance of his humiliation by the Party and declares that justice requires the greater good of society, even if the innocent suffer: 'Nun, auch das Gesetz ist nicht fehlerlos. Das schrecklichste Opfer, das der Gang der Geschichte fordert, ist der Tod von Schuldlosen. Es ist der Blutzoll, den der Fortschritt kostet.'¹⁰⁴ Political intervention in the justice system is thus acknowledged as a fact of life, a desirable one for the Party but an undesirable and threatening one for all who believed that the principles underlying the founding myths of the GDR were the principles of justice as fairness.

Soviet friendship: an implausible myth?

Nazi propaganda about the Soviet Union, along with people's experience of humiliation by the Red Army and Soviet authorities, made it difficult for the Party to argue convincingly that the Soviet Union was and, objectively, always had been the friend of the east German people. Some fictional and personal accounts endorse the myth but many others are ambivalent at best and some personal accounts display overt hostility to the Soviet Union. As is discussed in Chapter 8, Erwin Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp* is critical of the Party and its Leninist structures and practices.¹⁰⁵ However, several incidents in this novel demonstrate a view that the Germans could rely on the Red Army and its internationalism even at the height of the war. A flashback to Ole's earlier life shows him in a punishment battalion as the Red Army approaches. The officer commanding the battalion calls upon them to retreat: "über die Neiße, in die Heimat!" Ole responds: "Seine Heimat ist nicht unsere Heimat!" and gives himself and his companions into the custody of the Red Army, not with a white flag of surrender but with the red flag of international socialism.¹⁰⁶ When Ole returns home to the ruins of Blumenau, his village, he is looked after by a number of friendly, peaceable Red Army soldiers who treat him as family, in a part of the narrative which shows no signs of the irony and satire that are a feature of the novel and which, consequently, reads as part of a conversation with the Party and its

¹⁰⁴ op. cit., Hein, *Horns Ende*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁵ Erwin Strittmatter, *Ole Bienkopp*, (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1965).

¹⁰⁶ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 53.

censors rather than with the ordinary reader.¹⁰⁷ A more ambivalent account comes from Neutsch's *Spur der Steine*. Kati Klee and Hannes Balla are on a trip to study new methods of pouring concrete, a visit which highlights to them the wonders of development in the Soviet Union and how much they owe to the Soviet Union, economically but also spiritually. In Moscow they are approached by a black marketeer. They recoil in revulsion and with a sense of shame, which is shame for the people in Moscow not being the way they felt they should be in accordance with the GDR's myths. Klee is particularly disturbed because of her memories of Russians in Germany at the end of the war and the debt she feels she owes them: 'Von ihnen war sie aus einer feuchten Kellerhöhle befreit worden, aus Schneewittchens Sarg, von ihnen hatte sie ein eigenes Bett erhalten und Puppen zum achten Geburtstag.'¹⁰⁸

Some personal accounts suggest that positive things about the Russians have to be weighed against both the individual acts of humiliation and the sense that the Soviet Union was treating the occupied zone and then the GDR in a humiliating fashion through, for instance, dismantling factories and infrastructure and taking them back to the Soviet Union. Jürgen Teilmann, working after the war as an apprentice in the shipyards in Rostock, treats this exploitative relationship as an accepted fact of life: 'Die Neptun-Werft hatte man von der Demontage ausgenommen, weil die Russen hier eine Werft für ihre Kriegsschiffe brauchten, die sie als Kriegsbeute erhalten hatten.'¹⁰⁹ Teilmann's overall view of the Russians, or at least of the ordinary soldier, is positive: 'Ebenso typisch ist auch die Reaktion des gemeinen russischen Soldaten, der nur seine Oberen fürchtet, sonst aber freundlich und gutartig ist. Einen Haß auf die Deutschen oder etwa den üblichen Hochmut des Siegers kannte er nicht.'¹¹⁰ Even his description of hiding the women and girls from the Red Army and of rape and plunder does not shift him from this position:

Die Vergewaltigungen waren überall an der Tagesordnung. So etwa nach zwei Wochen hörte das auf. Die Russen wurden in Kasernen zusammengefaßt und da beaufsichtigt. Das Herumtreiben einzelner war vorbei. Für uns war das eine sehr aufregende Zeit. Im Rückblick muß man aber sagen, daß es 'nur' bei Plünderungen und Vergewaltigungen blieb. Sie sind allgemein eine Begleiterscheinung des Krieges. Daß die Russen aber persönlich Rache geübt

¹⁰⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁸ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 810.

¹⁰⁹ Jürgen Teilmann, *Aus meiner Zeit. Autobiographie*, (1993), Kempowski BIO 6599.

¹¹⁰ op. cit., Teilmann, p. 91.

hätten, daß sie Frauen verschleppt oder gar getötet hätten, hatten wir zwar immer befürchtet, das blieb in unserer Gegend aber aus.¹¹¹

This is a curious account in a number of ways. Rape is clearly an example of humiliation, being a demonstrative use of power that strips its victim of status, conflicts with assumed norms, both involves and is likely to lead to rejection and is injustice with no remedy. Teilmann does not recognise this. His language is mostly very matter-of-fact in a way which itself might be seen as humiliating by victims of the rapes. His inclusivity, with the use of ‘uns’ is in fact exclusive of women, and this is made clearer by the use of the word ‘aufregend’, which jars with the facts he has described. Additionally, Teilmann does not recognise the short and long-term consequences of such humiliation. Morina, for instance, drawing on Norman Naimark’s view of the rapes as making it ultimately impossible for the SED to gain legitimacy, says the experience of mass rape was fundamental for memory formation in the GDR in relation to the Eastern Front.¹¹²

Acts of humiliation are central to a long memoir by Friedrich Kabelitz, apparently written in the late 1950s.¹¹³ The memoir depicts the difficulties faced by those not underlyingly hostile to the GDR regime as they sought to find a way to live without friction and resentment in the new state. It conveys complex and often contradictory attitudes and an underlying anti-communism that is sharpened by Kabelitz’s experiences. It portrays someone who both professes acceptance of the SED’s views of the Soviet Union and the Red Army and understands that his feelings towards ‘the Russians’ in fact range from admiration and warmth to overt hostility. Kabelitz represents those who would like things to be the way they are told they are but who find their desires conflict with the reality of life in the GDR.

Kabelitz says in a handwritten preface that on long winter evenings in the occupied zone and the GDR he started writing down what he had experienced during and after the war, not intending it to be published. He made no secret of what he was writing, but mistakenly talked about it to someone he had long thought of as a friend, whose large family he had often helped out: ‘Für ein paar Groschen verriet mich dieser falscher Freund an den Staatssicherheitsdienst’. On 18th March 1955, Kabelitz was arrested, the manuscript seized, and he was sentenced on 22nd July to four years’

¹¹¹ op. cit., Teilmann, p. 53.

¹¹² op. cit., Morina, p. 32; Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹¹³ Friedrich Kabelitz, *Lebenserinnerungen Friedrich Kabelitz, 1939-1956*, Kempowski BIO 7043.

imprisonment for his supposedly hostile attitude to the Soviet Union, the Party and the State. It is likely that his position as a former member of the SPD who was hostile to the merger with the KPD was also taken into account, though this is implied rather than stated.¹¹⁴ After his release, Kabelitz set about writing his story again, but there is an embittered edge to much of the narration, which he completes after leaving the GDR for the West. Nevertheless, ambivalence rather than hostility towards the Soviet Union, or specifically towards the ‘Russians’, is a recurring theme in the manuscript and it takes a long time for him to reject finally the myth of Soviet friendship and benevolence.

Kabelitz was badly injured early in the war and spent much of the rest of it not on active service but in logistics operations on the Eastern Front. He is aware of the Red Army approaching as the Germans retreat: ‘Iwan kam immer näher. [...] Iwan war da.’¹¹⁵ For a while, like the fictional character Ole Bienkopp, he is in a punishment battalion, laying mines and barbed-wire barriers and shoring up trenches and fortifications. Some of his fellow soldiers disappear in the night in the direction of the Russian lines, while some from the corresponding Soviet punishment battalion come over to the Germans.¹¹⁶ When his punishment is over, he is moved to an infantry battalion. Leaflets are dropped on the troops, signed by German generals in Soviet captivity, urging them to abandon their weapons and go home, saying that the war is not against the German people but against the ‘Hitler-clique’ and declaring that national boundaries from before the war would be respected. The result is not in accordance with the later myth, however:

Natürlich haben wir im vertrauten Kreise auch über diese Blätter gesprochen, aber niemals habe ich entdecken können, daß auch nur ein Landser dieser verlogenen Propaganda glaubte. Im Gegenteil, wir wussten alle, was unserer Heimat bevorstand, wenn es dem Iwan gelingen sollte, in diese einzudringen. Im übrigen sorgte Freund Iwan durch den Abwurf der Blätter dafür, daß wir immer genügend Papier für hinterlistige Zwecke hatten.¹¹⁷

After being injured again and sent to various locations further west, he is finally taken prisoner near Magdeburg by the Americans (who, he notes, have many watches on their wrists – an allusion to the complaint made against the Red Army that they stole all the watches they could). He initially is kept outdoors in terrible conditions, then sent to a better camp in Hildesheim and on to Bingen where, to his disgust, the

¹¹⁴ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 230.

¹¹⁵ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 128.

¹¹⁶ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 144.

¹¹⁷ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 145.

prisoners are put into the hands of the French. Nothing Kabelitz says about the Russians compares with his description of the French, for whom he feels hatred and contempt: ‘Ohne das Bollwerk des deutschen Volkes würdet Ihr schon längst eine Domäne des Kommunismus geworden sein, Ihr Franzosen, die ich meine! [...] Ihr seid die grössten Stänker der Welt.’¹¹⁸ Released eventually because of his injuries, Kabelitz makes his way with great difficulty into the Soviet Occupation Zone, visits his fiancée near Magdeburg then goes to Berlin to find his brother and his brother’s wife, who are starving there. Late one night in Berlin, returning home through an area that feels desolate and threatening, he picks up an iron bar. A car comes by and stops, someone gets out and comes towards him and appears to be carrying a knife. The man speaks broken German to him, then with a Russian curse, tries to attack him. Kabelitz hits him over the head with the iron bar and escapes. The other man in the car calls out, ‘Alexij’, drags the injured man back to the car and drives off. Curiously and implausibly, Kabelitz refuses to believe that they could be Russians: ‘Das waren sicher zwei deutsche Banditen, die in russischen Uniformen steckten, russisch sprachen und Uniform und Sprache nur zur Tarnung benutzten, wie es in den ostzonal Zeitungen zu lesen war.’¹¹⁹ He contrasts this with another time when he is trying to get to Magdeburg. A Russian helps him to get on a train that he should not be allowed on to and a Russian woman (a doctor, and probably Jewish, he says) is helpful and generous towards him in the compartment of the train.¹²⁰ Similarly, he gets his residence permit thanks to another helpful Russian officer.

Kabelitz settles happily into the Magdeburg area. Since he speaks Russian, he is encouraged to work as an interpreter or for the police. Instead, with an eye to the future, he plants an orchard of 5,000 trees on land he owns. As he has his own car, he makes money as a driver, noting that there are so few vans or lorries because ‘Alles was einigermaßen war, hatten unsere “Freunde”, die Russen, sich genommen.’¹²¹ Further contradicting the SED’s myths, Kabelitz suggests that German ambivalence about the Russians is matched by an underlying fear of the Germans by the Russians. The wife of a Russian he knows insists on a German rather than a Russian headstone for their dead child, since she is convinced that:

¹¹⁸ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 200.

¹¹⁹ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 226.

¹²⁰ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 227.

¹²¹ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 230.

wenn die Russen eines Tages nicht mehr in Magdeburg seien, wir Deutschen dann sämtliche russischen Gräber, auch das ihres Kindes zerstören würden. [...] Die gleiche Frau sagte mir, daß sie vor den Westalliierten im Falle eines Krieges keine Angst hätte, aber die deutschen Partisanen würden über sie herfallen und nicht einer von den Russen, die in Deutschland sind, würde seine Heimat wiedersehen.¹²²

Similarly, another Russian officer – they chat while fishing together – tells Kabelitz that he is afraid not of the Americans but of the Germans. In both cases, Kabelitz reassures the Russians that there is now friendship between Germany and the Soviet Union and that in any case, the USSR is too strong.¹²³ However, when he tries to sum up the experience of living with the Russians, he immediately contradicts himself:

Zwischen der Bevölkerung der S.B.Z. und den Angehörigen der Roten Armee war, bis auf einige Ausnahme, die in der Regel aus verkommen Weibern und einigen Saufbolden bestanden, ein schlechtes Verhältnis. Schuld daran war hauptsächlich das banditenhafte Verhalten ~~der asiatischen Horden~~.¹²⁴

It is here, conflicting with much of the rest of the narrative, that Kabelitz reveals his underlying attitudes, using (if then seeking to delete) racist terminology from Nazi propaganda about the people of the Soviet Union and making disparaging comments about his fellow Germans if they have established good relations with the Red Army soldiers. Looking back at the period in 1945 when the American and Soviet Zones were separated by the Elbe, he is also critical of the Red Army:

In Magdeburg ist es wiederholt vorgekommen, daß vom östlich der Elbe gelegenen Stadtteil Crakau Mädchen im Alter von zwölf Jahre ab sich in die Elbe warfen, um schwimmend das amerikanische Ufer zu erreichen. Dabei wurden sie von den Russen beschossen. Gelang es diesen geschändeten Kindern das rettende Ufer zu erreichen, dann wurden sie sofort von Amerikanern in Decken gepackt und zum nächsten Krankenhaus gebracht.¹²⁵

While he clearly holds the Russians responsible here, again he seeks a way of shifting the blame away from them as he talks of further attacks over the years:

Auch später, als man annehmen konnte, daß die rauhen Übergriffe des Krieges abflauen mußten, wagte sich kein weibliches Wesen bei beginnender Dunkelheit auf die Straße. Immer wieder hörte man von Verbrechen, welche an Frauen und Mädchen begangen wurden. Einmal wurden am hellen Tag eine Mutter und ihre dreizehn-jährige Tochter von fünf Banditen in russischer Uniform vom Rade gerissen und beide vergewaltigt.¹²⁶

¹²² op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 242.

¹²³ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 242-244.

¹²⁴ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 245. The words are crossed out in pencil in the manuscript and above them is scrawled 'vieler Russen'.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Kabelitz's account suggests that not only he but also many ordinary people commonly believed that the perpetrators of such crimes were Germans in Russian uniforms.¹²⁷ When the perpetrator is undeniably Russian, what emerges is the suddenness and unpredictability of the humiliating attacks, in conflict with what had apparently been accepted by both sides as normal ways of behaving. He mentions a Russian lieutenant who was billeted with a woman doctor and who had behaved perfectly well until he was suddenly transferred to another unit:

Bevor er abreiste, verlangte er von der Frau des Hauses, sie solle sich ihm hingeben. Als sie dieses ablehnte, faßte der Russe ihr zweijähriges Kind, hielt es aus dem Fenster und drohte, das Kind fallen zu lassen, wenn die Mutter ihm nichts seinen Willen täte. In der Kreisstadt Burg bei Magdeburg riß ein Russe eine Krankenschwester vom Rade, vergewaltigte und erwürgte sie.¹²⁸

In another incident in spring, 1945, echoing the one with the iron bar in Berlin, Kabelitz is going home with a young woman and they are waiting at an isolated station for a train. The Russian soldier on duty decides that the young woman 'solle mit ihm gehen'. Kabelitz persuades the soldier they should go somewhere more remote, to one of the destroyed railway carriages. When the soldier grabs the woman, Kabelitz attacks him, beats him up badly and smashes his rifle. He knows that if he is caught he will be in trouble. With a nice Freudian slip in his typing, he merges sexual desire, violence and the revolution in his neologism, 'Konterrevolutionär', declaring: 'Natürlich wäre der arme Iwan der Überfallene gewesen und ich ein Faschist und Konterrevolutionär'.¹²⁹

Kabelitz again reveals his deep hostility to the regime and the Soviet authorities behind it when he talks, with the impotent rage of the person who feels he has been humiliated, of his frustration at the failure of the events of 17th June 1953 to free the people:

Aber diesmal konnte sich alle diese Volksausbeuter und Verdummer noch auf ihren großen Freund, den Iwan, verlassen. Der konnte es sich nicht leisten, solch ein schönes Sprungbrett nach dem Westen aus der Hand zu lassen. Außerdem brauchte er dieses Land, um es noch mehr auszupressen, noch mehr aus diesem gequälten Volk herauszuholen, um damit ein Loch im eigenen Land zu stopfen.¹³⁰

Turning the Party's terminology and world view against it, Kabelitz expresses his contempt for the SED, which would have been crushed by the 'Rad der Geschichte' if

¹²⁷ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 246.

¹²⁸ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 245-246.

¹²⁹ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 247-248.

¹³⁰ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 257.

the Soviet Union had not intervened. This, he says, exposes the lies behind the myth and the ultimately fatal inability of the Party to convince the people that Communism will bring them benefits:

Dein großer Bruder hat durch sein Verhalten in diesem ungleichen Kampf ganz deutlich gezeigt (sic), was seine Parolen vom Menschenrecht, von Nichteinmischung in die Belange anderer Völker usw. wert sind, und sich selbst die Maske vom Gesicht gerissen. Noch etwas habt ihr Iwans an diesem 17.6.1953 erreicht. Ihr habt bestimmt das deutsche Volk befreit, nicht nur von unseren Fabriken, Maschinen und was ihr sonst alles weggeschleppt habe, sondern – das ist für uns Deutsche wichtig – ihr habt das deutsche Volk vom Kommunismus kuriert. Damit habt ihr selbst den Grundstein zu eurem Untergang gelegt.¹³¹

Even so, as head of the ‘sogenannte Friedenskomitee’ Kabelitz actively canvasses households to help the SED’s campaign to rebuild the prestige of the Soviet Union. He finds himself confronted by a family where the woman insists on telling him her story. Since they were unable to leave Königsberg before the Red Army arrived, she was put to work with a number of other German women and their children. All were raped repeatedly, including a woman over seventy. Two eleven-year-old girls, one of them her daughter, were raped and one of them almost killed. As a result, Kabelitz abandons his propaganda work and is reported to the Staatssicherheitsdienst by a couple of ‘100% SED Leute’. Kabelitz’s anger and bitterness at what he feels is an act of humiliation is greatly increased when one of these is subsequently convicted of fraud relating to the LPG which he founded but is apparently given a far lighter sentence than if he had not been a Party member.¹³²

Kabelitz’s personal experiences of humiliation, arising from his arrest, trial and imprisonment, also conflict with the foundation myths. His time in the Stasi prison in Magdeburg is remarkably similar to that of the Communist prisoners of the Nazis described by Willi Bredel, except that here it is the Communists doing exactly what their fictitious counterparts resolved in *Die Prüfung* not to do:

Eine rothaarige Frau in Uniform mit Uffz.Rangabzeichen öffnete das Tor und brüllte mich auch schon wie eine Nutte an: ‘Gaffen Sie nicht so herum, sondern stellen Sie in die Ecke!’ Dort mußte ich mich dann auch noch umdrehen und mit dem Gesicht zur Wand schauen. Nach kurzer Zeit wieder ein Brüllen – ich wurde in eine kleinen fensterlose Zelle gestoßen. Im Dunkel tastete ich um mich und entdeckte einen Schemel, auf den ich mich setzte. Kaum saß ich, da

¹³¹ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 257-258.

¹³² op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 262-265.

wurde die Tür aufgerissen, und wieder brüllte mich einer an: ‘Sie Idiot! Wer hat Ihnen gesagt, Sie sollen sich setzen?’¹³³

After a long period of interrogation, he says he has been reduced to such a state that he willingly signs the statement they write out for him, referring later to his interrogators as those who ‘mich seit Monaten mit mittelalterlichen Methoden geschunden und gequält haben’.¹³⁴ Kabelitz is sentenced to four years in prison for ‘Boykotthetze’. His house and fruit-growing business are confiscated and he is required to pay towards the cost of taking these into state ownership.

In prison, Kabelitz discovers fellow-prisoners who have such powers of resistance that they are unable to be humiliated. In contrast to the portrayal in *Die Prüfung*, these are not Communists but Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their position makes clear, in his eyes, the direct line from one dictatorship to another:

Dieselben Bibelforscher, die bereits unter der Diktatur des Nationalsozialismus die Zuchthäuser füllten, gingen hier unter der Diktatur des Proletariats den gleichen Weg. Aber Hut ab vor diesen Männern! Was man bei ihnen an Zuversicht und Glauben fand, war manchmal nicht zu fassen. Trotz Terror in der Behandlung gingen diese Gefangenen ihres Glaubens nicht einen Schritt von ihrem Weg ab.¹³⁵

Their belief in their religion is analogous to the faith of the Communists in the Party and in the better future they are sure they will experience. When Kabelitz asks one of them, a young man of twenty-three who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison when he was only seventeen years old, if it is not difficult to know he has to spend the best years of his life behind prison walls, the response is: “‘Nein. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall, denn diese schwere Zeit hier auf dieser Erde ist für mich eine Prüfungszeit, um in der Ewigkeit bestehen zu können.’”¹³⁶

At the end of April 1956, as a presidential act of clemency (and presumably as a response to Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ denouncing Stalin), Kabelitz is released and told his property will be returned. However, it soon becomes clear that he will only be given his house back if he agrees to work for the Stasi.¹³⁷ He refuses and instead pursues all the supposedly applicable legal processes to recover his house. When nothing comes of this, he abandons the GDR for the West in June 1956 and subsequently becomes a committed European, hostile to national borders and

¹³³ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 271-272.

¹³⁴ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 288.

¹³⁵ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 292.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ op. cit., Kabelitz, pp. 311-313.

divisions. His belief in the founding myths of the GDR has completely disappeared, wiped out by his own experience of the reality behind the myths. Only his new belief in a better future provides him with some consolation, some way to deny the purposelessness and destructiveness of what was done to him and to combat the anger and bitterness he feels towards the SED and the Soviet Union. He expresses, in a combination of irony and disgust, his thanks to his creator: ‘daß ich erst durch die Schule des Bolschewismus gehen mußte, um dies zu erkennen. Auch für den Preis, daß ich Haus und Hof verloren habe und nun ein neues Leben beginnen muß.’¹³⁸

Two decades later, Peter Erdmann, imprisoned for making and distributing leaflets expressing solidarity with Wolf Biermann, provides a very negative view of the myth of Soviet friendship. In the prison with him there is a young man from one of the Soviet Asian republics where his father is a high Party official. He had deserted from the army while in the GDR and was caught trying to escape to the West. In a manner again reminiscent of the descriptions of the Nazis in *Die Prüfung*, he is brutally treated by the prison warders:

Bevor er in die Sowjetunion ausgeliefert wurde, hatte er das Pech, bei einer Vorführung, als er eine lange Treppe runtermusste, ‘gefallen worden zu sein’, d. h. er wurde von den Schließern die Treppe runter geschmissen. Er zog sich mehrere Brüche zu und wurde dann noch nicht vollkommen ausgeheilt den sowjetischen Justizorganen ausgeliefert.¹³⁹

He then tries but fails to kill himself, which Erdmann sees as unfortunate, adding in words that make clear his view of the Soviet authorities and of the GDR myth: ‘Ich möchte nicht wissen, wie er bei unseren “Freunden” behandelt wurde.’¹⁴⁰ The concept of friendship has been so devalued that the word can only be used ironically.

The fate of the myths

Over the decades, the GDR’s founding myths became part of everyday life, incorporated into the culture but, like its many memorials and monuments, too familiar to be noticed or felt to be significant except at the time of major celebratory events. The acceptable terms for what many people found to be unacceptable decisions or actions – ‘Partei neuen Typus’ for the Leninist Party, modelled on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; ‘Friedensgrenze’ for the new eastern border of the GDR after the loss of the territory to the east; and ‘antifaschistische Schutzwall’

¹³⁸ op. cit., Kabelitz, p. 326.

¹³⁹ Peter Erdmann, Letter of 05.06.2001, in *Stasi Files and related Procedural Files on Peter Erdmann*, Kempowski BIO 6232, p. 6. An extended account of Erdmann is included in Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

for the Berlin wall, for instance – were ignored or subtly mocked. In *Ole Bienkopp*, Franz Bummel refers to Ole's co-op as 'Bauerngemeinschaft neuer *Typhus*' (highlighted in the original).¹⁴¹ Writing about a holiday in the summer of 1967, Rosemarie Schenke says that 'Wir übrigen 6 führen zunächst bis zur Oder-Neiße-Friedensgrenze! (Immer fortschrittlich!)'.¹⁴² The Wall is humorously treated in Stefan Heym's 1981 novel *Ahasver* (published in the West), through an imagined, satirised Stasi report:

Giersch: Da ist einer weg, der Beifuß, Professor Beifuß, sehr bekannter Mann, durch ein Loch in der Mauer.

Dienstst.: Loch in der Mauer? Wo?

Giersch: Nicht in *der* Mauer. In der Leipziger Straße.¹⁴³

The myth of friendship with the Soviet Union was thrown into doubt by the events of June 1953, the crushing of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968 and the missile crisis of the 1980s. Ironically, it was only when the SED overtly separated itself from the Soviet Communist Party in opposition to Gorbachev that people in the GDR looked longingly and hopefully at the Soviet Union as the possible source of their own liberation.

Underpinning the GDR's founding myths was a sense of 'justice as fairness' and a matching commitment not to humiliate one's defeated enemies. However, standing behind all of the myths was the Soviet Union with its determination to shape the new Communist states of central and eastern Europe after the war. The lack of independence of the SED was clear to the population of the GDR from the earliest years. It is not enough in itself, however, to explain the Party's failure to abide by its commitments to justice and to not using humiliation as a weapon against its enemies. The Party's Marxist-Leninist ideology is at least a partial explanation of its resort to class-based justice and the use of power to perpetuate the Party's control. Additionally, Grunenberg's description of the condition of the Moscow exiles at the end of the war as weak, diminished figures without a firm sense of themselves or an understanding of how to determine right from wrong helps to explain the part humiliation played in determining their actions. Grunenberg's points are pertinent to two of the issues particularly problematic for the Communist exiles returning from

¹⁴¹ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 121.

¹⁴² Rosemarie Schenke, letter 03.01.1968, in op. cit., '31 Originalbände Klassenrundbriefe', Kempowski BIO 6383.

¹⁴³ Stefan Heym, *Ahasver*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992. First published 1981), p. 222.

Moscow: the dismantling of German industry and infrastructure by the Soviet authorities and the rape of German women by the Red Army.

Leonhard says there was concern within the Party over the dismantling of two production areas in the Leuna chemical complex. These were important for producing fertiliser and therefore for helping to overcome difficulties in agricultural production. Despite this, Ulbricht refused to discuss the issue of 'Demontage' within the Party.¹⁴⁴ In 1947 the SED offered grovelling thanks to the Soviet authorities when they announced they were ending the dismantling programme.¹⁴⁵ However, when the Demontage resumed after a few weeks, Wilhelm Pieck was put in the position of having to justify this at the Second Party Conference:

Es sind in der letzten Zeit trotzdem weitere Demontagen bekannt geworden, so die Demontage von Gleisanlagen, die sehr ernste Schwierigkeiten im Verkehrs- und Transportwesen hervorrufen. Wir haben auch hier um eine maximale Einschränkung dieser Demontagen ersucht. Die in einer Reihe von Bergwerken vorgenommen Demontagen von Maschinen sind nach den Erklärungen des Marschalls Sokolowski nicht als neue Demontagen anzusehen, sondern bewegen sich in Ergänzung der Demontagen an Bergwerkseinrichtungen, die bei der früher festgelegten Demontage vorläufig belassen wurden...¹⁴⁶

Pieck and the other Party leaders have here been trebly humiliated. Firstly, the Soviet authorities demonstrate their power by redefining the work they are carrying out in a way that asserts that nothing new is happening and leaves the SED unable to object. Secondly, they make clear that they will carry on with the new Demontage regardless of their previous undertakings. Thirdly, Pieck is forced to lie about the reality to his own Party members, knowing, as Leonhard makes clear, that they realise this is what he is doing since they know as well as he does that the Demontage is 'wieder in vollem Gang'.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, the Soviet authorities determined the Party's response to the rapes by the Red Army. When a suggestion is made to the Soviet commander in Kreuzberg that setting up well-regulated brothels might reduce the incidence of rape, the commander dismisses it out of hand and declares to the German official who has suggested it:

'Wenn ich Sie nicht als pflichteifrigen Mitarbeiter schätzte, müßte ich Ihren Vorschlag als Provokation, als Beleidigung für die Ehre der sowjetischen

¹⁴⁴ op. cit., Leonhard, p. 421.

¹⁴⁵ op. cit., Leonhard, p. 469.

¹⁴⁶ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 481.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Armee ansehen. Ich betrachte diese Frage als abgeschlossen und will sie nicht mehr erwähnt haben.¹⁴⁸

At a Party meeting of German Communists, there is a similar response from Ulbricht when a number of members raise the issue of the rapes and ask if abortion can be allowed as a way of solving some of the problems arising from them. Ulbricht dismisses the request and will not permit it to be discussed. This leads, exceptionally, to loud and sustained objections from the floor, which are again firmly rejected by Ulbricht.¹⁴⁹ In June 1945, when he has to speak to the Charlottenburg Communists about the impending re-launch of the KPD, Leonhard himself is confronted by comrades who are angry about the Red Army attacks on the Berlin women and about the impossible position this puts the Communists in. It is not until 1947 that Leonhard understands why it has been so difficult for the Party to respond. An unnamed high Party official tells him of an attempt by the Party to raise the issue with Stalin. Stalin dismissed their concerns as trivial, but when one of the representatives tried again to pursue the issue, Stalin interrupted him: “Ich dulde nicht, daß jemand die Ehre der Roten Armee in den Schmutz zieht.” Damit war das Gespräch beendet.¹⁵⁰

The German Party leaders, who had survived the purges and for whom the hierarchical nature of the Party and subservience to the Soviet Party had become second nature, were powerless in the face of such a decision. Their response to their own humiliation and to that of others was one of denial, behind which, as discussed in Chapters 6 to 8, lurked an aggressive readiness to carry out humiliation themselves. Their denial was one defence against the consequences of humiliation. An equally crippling defence for someone who has been humiliated is to always expect the worst of others, so that nothing comes as a setback or a disappointment. This is a form of psychic retreat with personally devastating consequences. It leaves the person concerned with a mechanistic, wooden approach to other people and without the capacity for real closeness or trust or personal fulfilment. It takes away the possibility of the unexpectedness and life-enhancing experience of love, joy and excitement. Such a defence is clearly demonstrated by the Party leaders coming back from Moscow. It helps to explain their utterly controlling approach, their vocabulary, their willingness to use power mercilessly, their paranoia, joylessness and fear of

¹⁴⁸ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 373.

¹⁴⁹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, pp. 382-383.

¹⁵⁰ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, pp. 482-483.

spontaneity (concealed behind a political critique) and their failure to embody the myths they were imposing on the people of the GDR.

Over the long term, however, the myths did make their mark. As Fulbrook notes, many people in the GDR ‘developed a high sense of moral responsibility – for peace, for the environment, for the nature of their own society and its future. If not quite the “socialist personality” of official propaganda, there were nevertheless distinct traces of socialist idealism as well as Western consumerism to be found among East German citizens.’¹⁵¹ In the post-Wende period it became clear that the myths had gained and retained a certain power to shape the thinking of people brought up in the GDR, whatever their attitude to the Party or to the Soviet Union. Nothnagle says that:

The legacy of myth-building is a distinctive outlook on life, an unmistakably East German use of language, a vast constellation of shattered dreams and hurt feelings, a widespread distrust of Western values, a general inability to look critically at the recent past and at one’s own role in it, a unique setting of priorities molded by forty years of life in a socialist society and unremitting assaults by the SED’s myth-building machine.¹⁵²

As Nothnagle implies, there is much in this that involves a defensive denial of true feelings such as rage at having endured humiliation for so long and shame at involvement in or acceptance of the decades of power being abused. However, the moral position underlying the myths – the commitment to dignity, equality and justice contained in socialism which was contrasted with the inequalities and injustices of capitalism – re-emerged as important for people in eastern Germany. Nothnagle suggests this is effectively a new and powerful myth, the myth of the moral superiority of the GDR: ‘In the memory of thousands of former East German citizens, ex-SED functionaries, and most notably schoolteachers, eastern Germany was and remains morally and ideologically superior to the West.’¹⁵³ Despite the obviously defensive nature of the feelings behind this myth too, there is some irony in its emergence, as if the legacy of the humiliated, paranoid, joyless men returning from Moscow in 1945 was a population with a deeply-internalised sense of superior values to which they, the self-appointed leaders and moral guardians of the people, had only ever paid lip service. After four decades of mythologizing, aspects of the long sought-after ‘socialist personality’ can be seen to have outlived the would-be socialist society itself.

¹⁵¹ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 239-240.

¹⁵² op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 38.

¹⁵³ op. cit., Nothnagle, p. 204.

Chapter 4 The Party's fear of Freud: theoretical background

Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the tensions between Marxist-Leninist and Freudian theories over factors that influence human behaviour, as well as the historical background to the Party's treatment of Freud in the GDR. I argue both that the aggressive drive identified by Freud is a major contributor to the use of humiliation as one way of exercising power and that Communist hostility to Freud and his ideas, including specifically his attitude to sexuality and the erotic drive, also contributed to the Party's willingness to humiliate. Additionally, the Party's ideologically-driven view that the emotions are subordinate to reason is shown to be one of the features that distinguished Marxism-Leninism from Freudianism.

When the Party saw that people did not behave in accordance with Marxism-Leninism and indeed appeared in practice to be driven by desire and other emotions, its response was to seek to change their behaviour through various forms of propaganda such as the myths, by offering therapies that were to replace psychoanalysis, by the use of power, including humiliation, or by instilling a sense in the general population that the failure to behave the way the Party desired could result in various forms of victimisation, again including humiliation. I argue here that one consistent response of the Party was to treat the ordinary people of the GDR as children, unable to take full responsibility for their own behaviour and therefore needing to be compelled to follow the right line by the wiser parental figures of the Party leaders. As is argued in Chapter 2, such deliberate infantilisation is itself a form of humiliation.

A number of specific problems for the Party are considered in this chapter, including the perceived threat posed by spontaneous behaviour; the dispute over whether alienation can occur in socialist society; and the prevalence in artistic representations and in the behaviour of ordinary people of a sense of an inner life, beyond the control of the Party. This lays the basis for discussion in the next two chapters, with examples from GDR representation, of how the Party responded to ordinary people's unacceptable behaviour by acts of humiliation, by building in the fear of humiliation or by the humiliating infantilisation of its population.

The unacknowledged dialogue with Freud

The Party took power, created the GDR in 1949 and buttressed its control with a set of myths to persuade people that the Party was right in its approach. The myths were complemented by a set of laws and punitive measures to convince the remaining doubters. In principle, therefore, the Party was well placed to rule, free of challenges, over a secure, stable society. To its own consternation, or at least that of its leaders, the Party frequently found itself having to face the question: why did ordinary people not behave the way the Party's theory said they should? Despite its insistence that its theory and practice were correct, the Party was constantly contradicted by day-to-day reality. A novel way of thinking about the GDR, therefore, arises from listening to and seeking to interpret the unacknowledged dialogue between Marx, Lenin and Freud that was carried on by the SED over the lifetime of the GDR as the Party sought to marry theory and reality. A striking feature of this dialogue was what was never mentioned: whatever the founding myths might portray, in reality the GDR had emerged out of a period in which events – or, more precisely, the people behind them – demonstrated that aspects of power, aggression and the sexual drive were intertwined, as Freud and psychoanalysts around him had been arguing. A striking feature of this dialogue was what was never mentioned: whatever the founding myths might portray, in reality the GDR had emerged out of a period in which events – or, more precisely, the people behind them – demonstrated that aspects of power, aggression and the sexual drive were intertwined, as Freud and psychoanalysts around him had been arguing. The mass rapes of German women by Soviet troops were one clear example, but the widespread awareness of these connections was required to be denied or repressed.

The dialogue about such 'Freudian' issues was mostly contained within the Party and was heavily influenced by attitudes to Freud in the Soviet Union. The purpose of the dialogue was to prove the superiority of Marxist-Leninist theory to psychoanalysis and to ensure that puzzling aspects of human behaviour were convincingly described in Marxist-Leninist terms. The dialogue was only sometimes about psychoanalysis and its methods as such, though it influenced what forms of therapy were permissible in the GDR. More often, it was about the different and incompatible views espoused by Marxist-Leninists on the one hand and Freud on the other of what causes people to behave the way they do. For the Party, one's class position in relation to the

ownership of the means of production was the underlying factor determining human behaviour. For Freud, aggressive and erotic drives, with their inevitable interconnections, are central to explaining how people behave, and the problems for society arising from these drives precede class relations and will outlast changes to them.¹

Freud and Freudianism in context

Pre-Nazi German culture (taking into account the wider area of Germany and pre-First World War Austria) was full of illustrious figures with a huge impact well beyond Germany and Austria. This culture had long-established, honourable traditions and values which the SED could not ignore or deny and which it therefore sought to claim as part of the pre-history of the GDR. Goethe, Schiller, Heine and Max Liebermann, for instance, all had to be presented as central figures for a newly-emerging 'true' German culture untainted by the Nazi era.² The significant predecessors also included psychoanalysts, most notably Freud. The SED, however, unlike Marxists in the West, was by no means free to seek an accommodation with Freud's thinking; it was compelled to follow the line that had been developed in the Soviet Union since the 1920s.³

Since the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, Marxism-Leninism had come to require from its adherents a belief that history was shaped by the class struggle, that the way people behaved reflected their class position and that a new type of person, the socialist personality, must and would emerge as the society abolished the private ownership of the means of production and changed towards socialism and then communism. In this classless society, willing co-operation would overcome any propensity to aggressiveness. 'The triumph of Marxism-Leninism throughout the world is inevitable,' declared the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Institute of Marxism-Leninism in its Preface to the *Selected Works of Lenin*, 'for it is a doctrine that reflects the laws of history's progressive course and heralds the brighter future towards which mankind is advancing.'⁴ In this there was

¹ See, e.g., Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, (London, 1948), Band XIV, 1948, pp. 471-473, 476-481.

² See Chapter 2, 'In Goethe's Footsteps: The Myth of *Kultur*', in op. cit. Nothnagle; as Wolfgang Emmerich notes, this was also designed to persuade those of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois origins that there was a place for them and their cultural preferences in the GDR: op. cit., Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 84-85.

³ On Western Marxists and Freud, see for an early example: Reuben Osborn, *Marxism and Psycho-analysis*, (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1965), including a 1937 introduction by John Strachey to Reuben Osborn, *Freud and Marx* (London: Gollancz, 1937) and a 1963 introduction by John Strachey.

⁴ V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 25.

no place for personal turmoil not associated with the class struggle, or for any sense that people might make life-changing or history-changing decisions based on anything else, such as their emotions, unless their emotions were used to support their efforts to bring about socialism.⁵ Marxist-Leninists asserted that a fundamental change in human behaviour could be made, that the aggressive or destructive drive could be at least neutralised and, more likely, dissolved into a collective commitment to co-operation and improvement and that Marxism-Leninism proved this was the case. For the SED, according to its dictionary of political terms, feelings or emotions ‘haben immer eine klassenmäßige Grundlage’, positive emotions arise from satisfying personal needs or the requirements of the society and work is the primary source of feelings.⁶ The Party also talks of the unity of thinking and feeling; a unity in which it insists on the primacy of thinking. The emotions must be subordinated to reason, otherwise ‘ein verzerrte Widerspiegelung der objektiven Realität’ is the result.⁷

According to Freud, creating a civilised society is both necessary for personal development and fraught with difficulties. There are no guarantees of success or of the forward march of history and achievements are constantly threatened by the human love of aggression. Reasoned arguments will not in themselves ensure co-operative behaviour. The Christian precept of loving one’s neighbour (which can be seen as the basis of the eventual communist society as well) ignores the neighbour’s ‘Aggressionsneigung’ and therefore his readiness to resort to extreme forms of aggressiveness, sexual and other exploitation, and humiliation and murderous violence if this can be seen to be to his advantage or if circumstances appear to encourage it.⁸ The consequences for society and for our understanding of what influences people’s behaviour are significant: ‘Infolge dieser primären Feindseligkeit der Menschen gegeneinander ist die Kulturgesellschaft beständig vom Zerfall bedroht. Das Interesse der Arbeitsgemeinschaft würde sie nicht zusammenhalten, triebhafte Leidenschaften sind stärker als vernünftige Interessen.’⁹

Das Unbehagen in der Kultur is an attempt to understand why it is so difficult for people to live together comfortably in society. Central to this difficulty, Freud says, are the aggressive and erotic drives which are stronger than our reason in motivating

⁵ Kollektiv von Mitarbeitern des Dietz Verlages, ed., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973), entry on ‘Gefühl (Emotion)’.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ op. cit., Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, p. 471.

⁹ *Ibid.*

us. Considering communist theory here and in later works, Freud argues that private property and class relations are not the basis of the human love of aggression and that, therefore, the communist approach is fundamentally flawed, whether or not the economic basis of communism is sound:

Ich habe nichts mit der wirtschaftlichen Kritik des kommunistischen Systems zu tun, ich kann nicht untersuchen, ob die Abschaffung des privaten Eigentums zweckdienlich und vorteilhaft ist. Aber seine psychologische Voraussetzung vermag ich als haltlose Illusion zu erkennen. Mit der Aufhebung des Privateigentums entzieht man der menschlichen Aggressionslust eines ihrer Werkzeuge, gewiß ein starkes und gewiß nicht das stärkste. An den Unterschieden von Macht und Einfluß, welche die Aggression für ihre Absichten mißbraucht, daran hat man nichts geändert, auch an ihrem Wesen nicht.¹⁰

Freud's critique of Marxism-Leninism acknowledges the innovative, creative aspects of what is being attempted and the way it draws attention to the influence of economic relations on intellectual, ethical and artistic endeavours. However, changing class relations, he argues, will not eliminate mankind's sexual and aggressive desires. History shows, Freud says, that the attempt to bind a large number of people together in love or solidarity implies the need for others who will be the target of or outlet for their inevitable feelings of aggression. Just as Christians are intolerant of outsiders and anti-Semitism is part of the dream of German world supremacy, so there is a comparable approach as theory turns into practice under communism in the Soviet Union: 'man erkennt als begreiflich, daß der Versuch, eine neue kommunistische Kultur in Rußland aufzurichten, in der Verfolgung der Bourgeois seine psychologische Unterstützung findet. Man fragt sich nur besorgt, was die Sowjets anfangen werden, nachdem sie ihre Bourgeois ausgerottet haben.'¹¹ What can be drawn from Freud's thinking here is that the aggressive drive leads to the humiliation of those seen as the 'other' and that humiliation serves to both create and confirm the 'otherness' of those who are the targets of aggression.

Freud, having dismissed the view that aggression would be diminished or eliminated by a change in class relations, points out that the erotic drive would also remain central, with all its potential for causing aggression in society: 'Räumt man das persönliche Anrecht auf dingliche Güter weg, so bleibt noch das Vorrecht aus sexuellen Beziehungen, das die Quelle der stärksten Mißgunst und der heftigsten

¹⁰ op. cit., Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, pp. 472-473. See also: Sigmund Freud, 'Über eine Weltanschauung', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, (London: Imago, 1940), p. 193.

¹¹ op. cit., Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, p. 473.

Feindseligkeit unter den sonst gleichgestellten Menschen werden muß.’ If, he says, with a reference to passages in the *Communist Manifesto*, this problem is resolved through the full liberation of sexual life, which would also mean dispensing with the family, ‘die Keimzelle der Kultur’, then society would develop in directions that are impossible to predict but which would still not change what it underlyingly means to be human.¹²

In the early years after the Bolshevik revolution, during the period of social and artistic experimentation in the new Soviet Union, there was still an openness to psychoanalysis as part of the attempt to establish a Marxist psychology and the Bolshevik authorities were initially receptive to Freudian thought as one possible way of explaining human behaviour.¹³ Traditional sexual and family relations were challenged, since sexuality was seen as an important and influential element of human behaviour, just as it was by Freud (though with different conclusions drawn). Alexandra Kollontai, a prominent Bolshevik and director of its Women’s Sections, promoted a new socialist morality and form of love in which sexual relations would be based on both class equality and equality between men and women: ‘The task of proletarian ideology is not to drive Eros from social life, but to rearm him according to the new social formation, and to educate sexual relationships in the spirit of the great new psychological force of comradesly solidarity.’¹⁴ Kollontai’s approach, and Freud’s theory, implied that there was a centrally important area of human activity and self-expression that would inevitably remain outside the control of anyone attempting to impose their political will on society. The response to Kollontai and to what was seen as an ‘epidemic of sexual depravity’ was a demand by the Party for greater moral vigilance and a set of laws based on a repressive, puritanical approach that was profoundly humiliating of those who were its targets, the ‘other’ created by this exercise of power.¹⁵ This approach would subsequently dominate official Marxist-Leninist ideology for many decades.¹⁶

¹² op. cit., Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, p. 473; Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, ‘Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei’, in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Band 4, (Berlin: Dietz, 1969).

¹³ Martin A. Miller, *Freud and the Bolsheviks. Psychoanalysis in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 94.

¹⁴ Alexandra Kollontai, ‘Make Way for Winged Eros: A letter to Working Youth,’ Alix Holt (ed. and trans.), *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1977), quoted in Martin A. Miller, p. 95.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the extreme hostility to homosexuality in the laws and in comments by Maxim Gorky, among others, quoted in op. cit., Martin A. Miller, p. 96

¹⁶ op. cit., Martin A. Miller, p. 95.

In addition to the Party's hostility to Freud because of his emphasis on the drives and specifically his emphasis on sexuality and the search for pleasure, a problem for the Communists was the concept of the unconscious and the idea that a person might have an inner world not subject to external control. Such a concept appeared to conflict with historical materialism and was, therefore, unacceptable. In 1927, for instance, the Soviet linguist V. N. Volosinov argued that the unconscious was a fiction and that 'What we call the "human psyche" and "consciousness" reflects the dialectics of history to a much greater degree than the dialectics of nature. The nature that is present in them is nature already in economic and social refraction.'¹⁷ Bruss and Titunik suggest that Volosinov saw Freud's 'unconscious' as an ideologically deviant aspect of the 'conscious'. Since for Volosinov the 'conscious' was 'inner speech', he could argue that 'the unconscious was linguistic in nature because it was actually an aspect of the conscious, and, in turn, that it was a social phenomenon because it was linguistic. This type of argumentation stood behind Volosinov's charge that Freudianism presented humans in an inherently false, individualistic, asocial, and ahistorical setting.'¹⁸ This became the prevailing view of the unconscious and of Freudianism in Marxist-Leninist theory and more-positive views were excluded.

Freud became politically unacceptable in the Soviet Union during the 1930s and was scarcely mentioned except for his views and approach to be condemned, as in the case of the Soviet writer Mikhail Zoshchenko. In 1943, Zoshchenko published part of his novel, *Before the Sunrise*, which Miller notes is full of Freudian themes. Miller says that Zoshchenko was familiar with Freud's writings, but 'carefully disguised his own positive feelings about psychoanalysis by feigning advocacy for the officially approved theories of Pavlov in order to publish the novel.'¹⁹ Alexander Etkind calls Zoshchenko's novel (translated as '*Before the Sun Rises*') 'unarguably an exceptional work of literature with the mark of psychoanalytic influence', one where Russian culture and psychoanalysis came together again creatively: 'Theirs was indeed a productive encounter, the result of which, this time, was directed against fascism in all its guises: *Before the Sun Rises* was not only an apologia of consciousness but also a testimony to the value of the individual, with all his sufferings, hopes, and

¹⁷ V. N. Volosinov, *Freudianism. A Marxist Critique*, translated by I. R. Titunik, (New York, NY; London: Academic Press, 1976; first published Moscow; Leningrad: State Publishing House, 1927), p. 83.

¹⁸ Neal H. Bruss, I. R. Titunik, 'Preface', in op. cit., V. N. Volosinov, p. vii.

¹⁹ op. cit., Martin A. Miller, p. 115.

strivings.²⁰ Despite the elements of anti-fascism in the novel, however, this was not acceptable to the Party authorities. As Stalinism became harsher again after the war, Zoshchenko and his novel – and, therefore, the attempt to bring Freud and his theories back into public discussion – were utterly condemned in overt acts of humiliation. Zhdanov said in a speech to the Central Committee in 1946, where a decree proscribed two liberal journals and the famous writer Akhmatova as well as Zoshchenko: ‘It is difficult to find anything more disgusting in our literature than the morality preached by Zoshchenko in his novella *Before the Sun Rises*, where he portrays other people and himself as vile, lascivious beasts without shame or conscience.’²¹

Walter Vickery sees the Central Committee decree of 14th August 1946 and Zhdanov’s speech associated with it as setting out the direction that post-war literature in the Soviet Union would take for years to come.²² This ensured that the acceptable way of writing in the Soviet Union and in the Soviet Occupied Zone would be Zhdanov’s favoured socialist realism, from which Freud and Freudian ideas of psychoanalysis would, in principle, be excluded altogether. Freud’s works were not available in the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1989, except for specialist academic research which, until the nineteen-eighties, was required to be strongly critical.²³ The behaviourist approach of the physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov was held up as the model to be followed instead for the development of Marxist-Leninist psychology, a model that was said to be in line with historical materialism.²⁴ Christine Leuenberger, quoting the views of GDR psychoanalysts interviewed after the Wende, says they felt bound to follow behavioural theories and methods because these, with their supposedly material base and their premise that human behaviour is malleable, ‘better served the social goal to produce a new human type.’²⁵

Heike Bernhardt confirms that the Soviet attitudes to Freud and psychoanalysis were accepted in the emerging GDR.²⁶ In 1950, Stalin declared that Pavlov’s

²⁰ Alexander Etkind, *Eros of the Impossible. The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia*, translated by Noah and Maria Rubins (Boulder, Colorado; Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 344-346.

²¹ op. cit., Etkind, p. 346.

²² Walter N. Vickery, ‘Zhdanovism (1946-1953)’, in Max Hayward, Leopold Labedz (ed.), *Literature and Revolution in Soviet Russia 1917-1962*, (London: OUP, 1963), p. 101.

²³ op. cit., Martin A. Miller, p. 150.

²⁴ op. cit., Osborn, p. 50; Martin A. Miller, pp. 70, 116-117.

²⁵ Christine Leuenberger, ‘Socialist psychotherapy and its dissidents’, in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 37, Issue 3, pp. 261-273, published online 17.07.2001, p. 262.

²⁶ Heike Bernhardt, Regine Locket (eds.), *Mit ohne Freud. Zur Geschichte der Psychoanalyse in Ostdeutschland*, (Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2000).

teachings were the sole basis of Soviet psychology. As if to prove the validity of Pavlov's findings on conditioned reflexes, a major conference on Pavlov in the Soviet Union in 1950 was followed almost immediately by the Third Party Conference of the SED which took up the same themes and instigated its own 'Pavlov Campaign', so that 'Neben der Zerstörung der Psychoanalyse war die Durchsetzung der Pawlowschen Ideen als Parteidogma in der Sowjetunion für die DDR entscheidend.'²⁷ Even Robert Havemann, so significant later in the opposition to the SED, made a damning criticism of Freud and of psychoanalysis in 1951, referring to its earlier definitive condemnation in the Soviet Union.²⁸

As the GDR developed, there were a certain number of psychotherapists and modest provision of psychotherapy, but with the emphasis on group therapy and methods derived from Pavlov and dialectical materialism. Freudianism was criticised in the scientific journals as 'scientifically untenable', 'ideological', 'internalist' and 'essentially incompatible with Marxist premises'.²⁹ Freudian concepts and approaches were formally excluded, though since many of the psychotherapists had been trained in Freudian methods in earlier years and were familiar with Freud's writings, his influence remained. Group therapy was in line with the collectivist ethos of the new society.³⁰ Humiliation was built in here, since group therapy also provided opportunities for the Stasi to collect information about what was being said by ordinary people in supposedly confidential group sessions. Bernhardt reports that in December 1982 'Ein Psychotherapeut der Berliner Charité gibt sich als inoffizieller Mitarbeiter der Staatsicherheit den Namen "Sigmund Freud". Er späht seine Kollegen in einer Selbsterfahrungsgruppe aus.'³¹ This striking breach of the confidentiality and privacy of the conversations which all participants in the groups could have expected confirms the view expressed by Margalit that 'the violation of privacy is a paradigmatic act of humiliation', as discussed in Chapter 2.³²

As in the Soviet Union, it was not permitted to publish Freud's works in the GDR. The one exception until 1981 was the publication, in the May 1956 issue of *Neue*

²⁷ Heike Bernhardt, 'Mit Sigmund Freud und Iwan Petrowitsch Pawlow im Kalten Krieg', pp. 172-203, in op. cit., Bernhardt and Lockot, p. 191.

²⁸ op. cit., Bernhardt, 'Mit Sigmund Freud', p. 180.

²⁹ op. cit., Leuenberger, 'Socialist psychotherapy and its dissidents', p. 262.

³⁰ Christine Leuenberger, 'The End of Socialism and the Reinvention of the Self: A Study of the East German Psychotherapeutic Community in Transition', pp. 255-280 in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2002, p. 257.

³¹ op. cit., Bernhardt and Lockot, p. 402.

³² op. cit., Margalit, p. 210.

Deutsche Literatur, of an essay by Arnold Zweig in honour of Freud's 100th birthday, 'Die Natur des Menschen Sigmund Freud', accompanied by Freud's text 'Das Motiv der Kästchenwahl' in the same volume.³³ This was a result partly of the modest thaw after Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', but also of Arnold Zweig's unusual position as an internationally celebrated writer committed to the GDR and as someone who had been personally close to Freud and remained in touch with Freud's daughter, Anna, an important psychoanalyst and theorist in her own right. In the same year, a prominent party functionary, Alexander Mette (who two years later would become a Central Committee member) produced a highly critical biography of Freud, the only biography of Freud to appear in the GDR.³⁴ Not until the late 1970s, and then in strange circumstances, was Freud finally included as part of the German heritage that was important to the GDR. Bernhardt and Locket, quoting from recorded memories of Kurt Höck, explain how this happened: '1978 oder 1979 wird Kurt Höck vom Gesundheitsministerium zu einem Gutachten für ein Buch von Freud aufgefordert, das die Staatssicherheit von einem Kollegen beschlagnahmte. Höck erklärt Freud zum 'deutschen Kulturerbe'. Durch dieses Gutachten wird Freud aus dem Verzeichnis der verbotenen Bücher der DDR herausgenommen.'³⁵

Controls over theoretical development in the GDR gradually loosened during the 1980s. In 1987 the first unhindered contacts between psychotherapists from the GDR and West Germany were allowed.³⁶ By this time, some of Freud's works were being published and commentators were recognising the damage done by previously excluding Freud. Winfried Stange, reviewing two books of Freud's works and about Freud, says that the relevance and value of Freudianism was disputed for decades: 'dafür oder dagegen geäußerte Meinungen – einschließlich der über "Freud und/oder Pawlow" und "Freud und/oder Marx" bilden ein weites Feld'.³⁷ Stange notes that Thom's volume points to the relevance of Freud in the GDR and that it warns the reader against expecting direct solutions to current problems from reading Freud.

Significantly, however, Thom recognises that the development of psychology in line with Marxist-Leninist theory has not met the needs of the people: 'Daß die

³³ op. cit., Bernhardt and Locket, pp. 391-392.

³⁴ op. cit., Bernhardt and Locket, p. 392.

³⁵ op. cit., Bernhardt and Locket, p. 400.

³⁶ op. cit., Bernhardt and Locket, pp. 402-404.

³⁷ Winfried Stange, 'Rezensionen: Achim Thom, Herausgeber, *Sigmund Freud: Psychoanalyse. Ausgewählte Schriften*, (Leipzig: Reclam, 1985); Jan Beránek, *Die Lehre Freuds und der Neofreudismus*, (Berlin: Volk und Gesundheit, 1985), pp. 759-761 in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Vol. 35, No. 8 (1987), p. 759.

Erwartung bestehe, sei wohl verständlich, könne doch die akademische Psychologie auch heute – trotz großer Fortschritte in den letzten Jahrzehnten – viele individuelle Lebensprobleme nicht zufriedenstellend erklären und Hilfe bei ihrer Lösung geben.’³⁸ Thom declares that Freud’s approach is flawed because it is based on naturalist anthropology and the focus is on the individual, in contrast to the emphasis placed by Marxism-Leninism on the historical development of society and of the individual in society. Nevertheless, Stange says, Freud’s theories are helpful in the light of advanced research, particularly into the links between the psyche and somatic symptoms. Freud’s ideas: ‘können helfen, zu bewältigende moralische Probleme im Zusammenhang mit Gesundheit und Krankheit, besonders auch das Denken über psychische Erkrankungen und das Verhalten gegenüber Kranken, theoretisch tiefergehend zu erfassen.’³⁹ A 1987 article by Antal Borbely (from New York) and John Erpenbeck (from East Berlin) goes much further in rehabilitating Freud in the GDR.⁴⁰ Borbely and Erpenbeck declare that Freudian psychoanalysis is ‘eines der herausragenden Ereignisse der Wissenschaftsgeschichte unseres Jahrhunderts’, and that at the present time there is ‘ein verstärktes und weitgefächertes Zurückgehen auf Freud in Psychologie, Psychiatrie, Soziologie, Philosophie, Literatur und Literaturtheorie, Geschichtswissenschaft, Politik festzustellen’.⁴¹ In contrast to what has been said throughout the years of the GDR, they declare that psychoanalysis recognises the dialectical relationship between ways of perceiving the world, as well as the impact on actions, and therefore on the individual’s effective participation in society, of feelings, emotions, motivations and values.⁴²

Such changes in attitudes so late in the history of the GDR only serve to highlight the narrowness of the previous official approach. For so long, the exclusion of Freud and Freudianism (and Freud’s heirs, such as Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan with their further development of psychoanalytic theory and practice), had indicated an unwillingness by the Party to consider whether there was anything beyond dialectical materialism that might cause people to act the way they do, anything unconscious or in an interior world. Whether Freud and other psychoanalytic thinkers were right or not, such an attitude was extraordinarily limiting. The immediate victims of this were

³⁸ op. cit., Stange, p. 760.

³⁹ op. cit., Stange, p. 761.

⁴⁰ Antal Borbely and John Erpenbeck, ‘Vorschläge zu Freud,’ *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1987): pp. 1016-1024.

⁴¹ op. cit., Borbely and Erpenbeck, p. 1016.

⁴² *Ibid.*

people who, as patients, might have benefited from psychoanalysis. The effect was much wider, however. Closing off a whole vocabulary and way of seeing or interpreting the world would inevitably encourage the kind of dogmatic approach condemned after Stalin's death as the cult of the personality but not fundamentally changed in many areas of GDR theory and practice. Neither Party leaders nor Party members could safely venture beyond the official theoretical framework established by Marxism-Leninism; right and wrong were therefore easily determined through analysis of the supposedly objective class position of any specific person at a particular time, and benefits and punishments awarded on this basis. For ordinary members of the society, this required at least lip service to the view that the class struggle was the determining factor in history, that history required the workers and peasants to take control and the Party to play the leading role in the new state. Officially, there was no place for the irrational, for aggression arising from anything other than the class struggle, for envy, greed, sexual inventiveness or covetousness, or for alternative views of science or history.

Unofficially, the Party understood very well what drove people to act and the Stasi used this understanding for operational purposes, many of which involved humiliation. To help with this, the Stasi had its own psychology unit at the Law School in Golm-Eiche near Potsdam. As Dennis notes, the Stasi was interested in 'exploring the motivation of informants not as basic research *per se* but as a branch of "operational psychology", with a view to controlling not only its own staff and informers but also the East German population in general.'⁴³ Behind this determination lay the Party's fear of the consequences of losing control politically, which could come from allowing its own population to lose control, individually or as 'the masses', in the way Freud's theory of the drives suggested they might. For the Party, what was normal behaviour was moderate, limited and predictable. Anything beyond this was undesirable and, in line with the Party's infantilisation of the population, had to be inhibited or tamed for the sake of social stability and the continuation of the Party's rule. One perceived threat to moderate behaviour, spontaneity, is considered in the next section.

⁴³ op. cit., Dennis, *The Stasi*, p. 95.

The threat of spontaneity

Freudianism was not at all the only alternative to Marxism-Leninism during the time of the GDR, but it contained elements that the Party saw as particularly challenging. Among these was Freud's view that people act in accordance with impulses that must necessarily remain outside the control of the Party. Such behaviour included 'spontaneity', a politically unacceptable concept within Marxism-Leninism. 'Spontaneity' is explicitly condemned by Lenin in '*What Is To Be Done?*'.⁴⁴ Lenin used the term when criticising his political opponents in the socialist movement who were attracted to building socialism on the basis of trade union action. Such trade union action, not based on a clear theory or an organised political party, showed a belief in the value of spontaneous action. This would, he said, lead to the working class's 'subordination to bourgeois ideology'.⁴⁵ The Party's task, Lenin said, 'is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy'.⁴⁶ The key mistake of the group opposing this view, Lenin says, is 'its bowing to spontaneity and its failure to understand that the spontaneity of the masses demands a high degree of consciousness from us Social-Democrats'.⁴⁷ Terror, like 'Economism', is to be condemned not for its cruelty and the acts of humiliation it is likely to encompass, but for its '*subservience to spontaneity*'.⁴⁸ This text came to be seen in the Communist movement as a foundation text which specifically condemned spontaneity in all its forms as hostile to the development of socialism.⁴⁹ The Party in the GDR shared this rejection of spontaneity. As Horst Dieter Schlosser explains in his discussion of the use of language in the GDR:

Spontaneität ist in der DDR systematisch diskriminiert worden (etwa als 'charakteristisch für alle vorsozialistischen Gesellschaften'). Damit hatte der Begriff zumindest semantische Berührungen mit (schädlichem) *Subjektivismus*

⁴⁴ V. I. Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?' in op. cit., *Selected Works*, Volume 1, pp. 141, 161.

⁴⁵ op. cit., Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p. 151.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ op. cit., Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p. 161.

⁴⁸ op. cit., Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p. 179, highlighted in original.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, S. V. Utechin, 'Introduction', in S. V. Utechin, ed., '*V. I. Lenin, What Is To Be Done?*' translated by S. V. and Patricia Utechin, (Oxford: Panther, 1970. First published 1963), p. 11; Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Central Committee of the CPSU, 'Preface', in op. cit., Lenin, *Selected Works*, Volume 1, p. 15.

und mit *Anarchie*, während er in hiesigem Sprachgebrauch positiv konnotiert wird und in engem Konnex zu *Kreativität* und *Lebensfreude* steht.⁵⁰

Such an approach explains in part the Party's infantilisation of its population which, as discussed in Chapter 2, was by its nature humiliating. Just as parents often grow anxious when their children are too lively and boisterous, fearing they will get out of hand, so the Party feared what might happen if their 'children' were allowed to enjoy themselves spontaneously. It was important to control and limit *Kreativität* and *Lebensfreude* precisely because beyond these was seen to lie subjectivism, which raised doubts about the validity of historical materialism, and anarchy, which was a challenge to the Party's view on how power should be attained and retained. The fear of spontaneity was a reflection of the Party's sense of the fragility of its hold on its people. This was demonstrated most clearly by the events of June 1953 when the Party leaders (ironically, themselves treated as children by their father figures in the Soviet Union), reacted to the mix of spontaneous and organised expressions of anger and resistance first fearfully and then with the use of force to put the population back in its proper place. The Party made clear in its official public response that those behind the events would be severely punished. However, those simply led astray, like foolish children carried along by the excitement of the events, would be forgiven, while continuing to be treated like children who need help from their parents to understand what they have done wrong:

Ehrliche Arbeiter, die zeitweise irregingen, haben deswegen nicht aufgehört, ehrliche Arbeiter zu sein und sind als solche zu achten. Auch ehrliche Arbeiter, die ihren Irrtum jetzt noch nicht erkennen, haben deswegen nicht aufgehört, ehrliche Arbeiter zu sein und sind als solche zu achten. Gerade sie brauchen jetzt am meisten die Hilfe und Geduld der Partei, gerade sie brauchen heute am meisten die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, auch wenn ihnen das selbst noch nicht klar ist.⁵¹

After a number of announcements of measures the Party will take, there is a particularly infantilising call to arms addressed to its own members:

An die Arbeit, Genossen!

Mit größerer Einsicht, doppelter Energie und fester Disziplin!

Es lebe die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, die Bannerträgerin im Kampfe für Frieden, Einheit und Demokratie!

⁵⁰ Horst Dieter Schlosser, *Die deutsche Sprache in der DDR zwischen Stalinismus und Demokratie. Historische, politische und kommunikative Bedingungen*, (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), p. 16.

⁵¹ Flugblatt der SED zum 17. Juni 1953 (Originell). 'Erklärung des Zentralkomitees der SED: Über die Lage und die unmittelbaren Aufgaben der Partei', Kempowski BIO 6158.

**Es lebe die Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, die
Regierung des Friedens und der Arbeit!**

**Es lebe der Präsident der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Wilhelm
Pieck!**⁵²

The brief sentences, the limited range of the vocabulary, the partly cajoling, partly hectoring tone marked by the insistent exclamation marks, the repetition of 'Es lebe' and the appeal to higher authority work together to suggest the paternal figure asserting his authority over his children, drilling into them the right way to behave when they have threatened to run wild.

For the Party, the fear in 1953 was of anarchy, of general disorder, of people acting in accordance with their own desires, of Freud's aggressive drive being released uncontrollably against all that the Party stood for, of the Party itself and its members being humiliated.⁵³ Ironically, a fictional portrayal of the events expresses some of the same fear of disorder, putting it in its historical context. Aron Blank, the protagonist in Jurek Becker's *Der Boxer*, is a Jewish camp survivor.⁵⁴ He has changed his name to Arno and declared himself to be six years younger as a way of denying the period of the war and the camps. In Berlin he leads, as Martin Kane says, 'a life of self-erasure and unproductive purposelessness'.⁵⁵ He tells his story to a narrator who is trying to find out more about his life, but he himself seems indifferent to his life, and dependent on the interviews with the narrator for any structure and direction.⁵⁶ Clashing with this is a sudden burst of energy when Aron is out in the streets and sees something disturbing and disruptive going on: the events of 17th June 1953. Feeling terribly threatened, he rushes home to lock himself and his son in their flat, while desperately hoping that the authorities clamp down as soon as possible on those causing the disruption and restore what he knows as 'normality'.⁵⁷ Aron remembers terrible humiliation: pogroms, the horrors of November 1938 and the Nazis coming for him and his family. Sudden change and particularly commotion on the streets is something he can only feel as profoundly threatening. All he needs is stability, certainty and the absence of change. Order, it is suggested, will prevent humiliation; spontaneity and disorder are likely to lead to it. Given this, he will find a

⁵² *Ibid.*, highlighted in the original.

⁵³ See, for instance, the description of the events by Hermann Weber, where he notes the numbers killed, including three SED functionaries: *op. cit.*, Weber, *Die DDR. 1945-1990*, p. 42.

⁵⁴ Jurek Becker, *Der Boxer*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).

⁵⁵ Martin Kane, 'Tales and the Telling: The Novels of Jurek Becker', pp. 163-178, in Martin Kane, ed., *Socialism and the Literary Imagination. Essays on East German Writers*, (New York, NY; Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 164.

⁵⁶ *op. cit.*, Kane, 'Tales and the Telling', p. 171.

⁵⁷ *op. cit.*, Becker, *Der Boxer*, pp. 254-255.

way to survive alone with his son, closed in on himself and shutting out the external society. The horrors of the past are deeply embedded in Aron's psyche, controlling and limiting the way he is able to live. His behaviour hints at the subsequent development of the SED, its leaders traumatised by the past and unwilling or unable to look inward to see how they can manage their own feelings, its family closed in behind the Wall. The threatening outside world has to be kept at bay in order to protect the people from the chaotic feelings and circumstances – and possible acts of humiliation – that might arise if they are ever treated as adult and allowed to fully develop their own potential. What is also hinted at here is an awareness of the long-term damage of the cycle of humiliation. Blinded by his desire for order at all costs, however, Aron cannot see that in a society of unresolved tensions ruled by an ideologically-driven Party determined to hold on to power and not committed to the rule of law, there will be humiliation involved in the imposition of order itself and the cycle of humiliation will be continued, not broken.

The Party, in its understanding of the potential for disorder and the loss of control, implies an acceptance of Freud's view that there are underlying forces in people that are not subject to reasoned argument and can be enormously destructive. As Klaus Behnke point out, at the Stasi University, Stasi officers learned how to take into account the 'Faktor Mensch' in order to make their operational activities more effective. What shocked them was their realisation:

daß es im Menschen etwas gibt, das sich dem kontrollierenden Zugriff entzieht. Sinnvolles menschliches Handeln werde nämlich, wie es in der Studieneinführung heißt, 'nicht durch das Wirken der einen oder anderen psychischen Erscheinung, sondern nur durch das komplexe Zusammenwirken vieler psychischer Erscheinungen ermöglicht.'⁵⁸

Freud argues that only by acknowledging such forces and their power can we consider how to manage them so that people can live in society with some kind of certainty and security. The Party's implied argument is that proscribing consideration of these forces by all except the Party's most trusted operatives is an effective way of eliminating the danger of their expression. As is outlined in the following section, the Party would take the same approach in relation to the concept of alienation.

⁵⁸ Klaus Behnke, 'Lernziel: Zersetzung. Die "Operative Psychologie" in Ausbildung, Forschung und Anwendung', in Klaus Behnke, Jürgen Fuchs, eds., *Zersetzung der Seele. Psychologie und Psychiatrie im Dienste der Stasi*, (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995), p. 13.

Marx, Freud and alienation

Alienation, in the Marxist sense, was meant to be a thing of the past in socialist societies. For Marx, communism would bring the era in which human beings could finally be fully creative and co-operative, when a person would no longer be alienated ('entfremdet') from the results of his work and from others around him as was necessarily the case under capitalism.⁵⁹ Freud argued that this was unrealistic and that civilisation would have to be protected from the aggressive, destructive tendencies of its citizens. For Freud, fantasy and the unpredictable are central to our lives, while coincidence determines much of our fate.⁶⁰ Such a view is incompatible with any totalising theory, including Marxism-Leninism; not only does it deny the necessary forward march of history, it also treats our internal worlds as significant to our individual development in society. Taking up this point, Rorty notes: 'In Freud's account, our conscious private goals are as idiosyncratic as the unconscious obsessions and phobias from which they have branched off.'⁶¹ Drawing heavily on Freud, Rorty presents something like the Marxist vision of a life beyond alienation where we are aware of the common danger of wanting to inflict pain and humiliation on one another.⁶² Instead of hoping that everyone will replace passion or fantasy with reason, Rorty says, we need an alternative hope, 'that chances for fulfillment of idiosyncratic fantasies will be equalized'.⁶³ Despite its acceptance of Marx's long-term vision as its own, this was precisely what the Party in the GDR was not prepared to countenance. Fantasy on its own was difficult enough to squeeze into the framework of socialist realism or the Party's conception of society; idiosyncratic fantasies were outside the bounds of possibility.

The challenge of interiority

Christine Leuenberger's interviewees after the Wende confirm that 'Psychoanalytic concepts such as "the unconscious" and the emphasis on irrational processes were seen as a potential threat to "Scientific Marxism"'.⁶⁴ For creative

⁵⁹ Karl Marx, 'Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844', pp. 510-522, 533-546, in Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. Ergänzungsband*, Vol. 1, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968). See also Bertell Ollman, *Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), pp. 91-95, 116-120.

⁶⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Eine Kinderheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci,' in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd VIII, (London: Imago, 1943), p. 211.

⁶¹ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 35.

⁶² op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 91.

⁶³ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 53.

⁶⁴ op. cit., Leuenberger, 'Socialist psychotherapy and its dissidents', p. 262.

artists, the impact of the official rejection of Freud and of the impact of the emotions and the promotion of what might be called ‘exteriority’, rather than interiority and the exploration of the unconscious, could have been as stultifying as the demand for socialist realism in art. In practice, it was impossible for ordinary people and Party leaders and members not to be motivated in their day-to-day dealings with other people by things other than class position and the associated requirement to build socialism. Likewise, it was impossible for writers to produce fiction that did not develop elements of an inner world in their characters, based on tensions, turmoil and wildly contradictory feelings, and on people’s awareness of their need to make sense of the circumstances of their lives and of their past and present selves. Responding to an editor who asked for more ‘Erdverbundenheit’ from her work, Maxie Wander insisted on the importance of writing not just about ‘Kraftmeier mit der Schippe in der Hand’ but also about ordinary people with their ordinary feelings and discontents.⁶⁵ It was, she said, correct for her to write about things arising out of her own personal and subjective experiences. Wander subsequently became noted for her *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, transcriptions of taped interviews with a range of GDR women who talk about their feelings and aspirations and their personal and working lives.⁶⁶ Going to the heart of the dispute over Freud and Freudian ways of seeing the world, and effectively condemning the Party for its dogmatic approach and its insistence on socialist realism, she asked the critical editor:

Warum der Vorwurf über die ‘Trauer und Melancholie’ in meiner Geschichte? Sind denn das nicht legitime Lebensgefühle? Wohin du schaust, siehst Du Trauer und Melancholie, wenn Du nicht blind bist – warum also ständig Optimismus verlangen. Davon hab ich die Schnauze voll. Die meisten ‘optimistischen’ Bücher sind verlogen.⁶⁷

Pursuing her argument with this editor in a later letter, Maxie Wander asserted that the feelings she was writing about, including ‘Trauer und Empfindsamkeit’, were not just temporarily there on the way to a better future but that they were and would remain a necessary aspect of being human: ‘Ich glaube, daß nur schwache Menschen den ewigen Optimismus und die blinde forsche Heiterkeit brauchen. Wir sollten uns gegen die Trauer und den Schmerz nicht wehren.’⁶⁸

⁶⁵ op. cit., Wander, *Leben wär’ eine prima Alternativa*, p. 110.

⁶⁶ Maxie Wander, *Guten Morgen, du Schöne. Protokolle nach Tonband*, (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980; first published 1977, Berlin).

⁶⁷ op., cit., Wander, *Leben*, p. 110.

⁶⁸ op. cit., Wander, *Leben*, letter 27.01.1972, p. 113.

Conclusion

The GDR was a society forever oriented towards a promised better future. Drawing on the thinking of Marx, its leaders looked forward, in theory, to a future where alienation was overcome and people would live in the realm of freedom. Freud's view that this involved a kind of voluntarism that did not take into account human beings' aggressiveness, drive for power and willingness to humiliate other human beings was, ironically, shared in practice by Lenin, who devised the strategy and tactics for seizing and holding power in the name of the working class and established the structural elements that enabled the communist parties of a number of countries to take power. Lenin, however, failed to solve the problem of how to go one step further, towards Marx's promised land where alienation – and therefore the circumstances that gave rise to humiliation – had been ended. Freud attributed this failure to a misapprehension that class position was the driver of individual action and of history. He foresaw that communist regimes would need to continue imposing their will on their population since the population was not as the Party wanted to believe it should be. The Party insisted that reason was stronger than feelings as a driver of human behaviour and that people must be made to see that this was the case. The Party had no strategy for moving the society from one in which pain and suffering were inflicted by those in power (whether in the preceding 'bourgeois' society or under socialism) to one in which the inflicting of pain was abhorred and the idiosyncratic, creative and expressive aspects of personal development were valued as goals of civilisation. Since it could not deny the evidence that confronted it daily, that people are subject to sexual and aggressive drives rather than reasoned explanation, its leaders responded as Leninist teachings made it likely that they would, with repression and suppression. This, as shown in examples in the next two chapters, resulted in acts of humiliation of ordinary people by the Party and its representatives and in evasive strategies being taken to avoid such humiliation.

The Party's rejection of Freud and of the thinking derived from Freud's writing was also based on its rejection of the idea that people could benefit from individual psychoanalysis or psychotherapy. Well into the 1980s, the Party promoted behavioural therapies which did not look beyond the first apparent cause of mental distress towards any underlying causes. This was a logical result of the Party's hostility to the concept of the unconscious and the Party's rejection, despite the long

tradition of 'Innerlichkeit' in the German philosophical and literary traditions to which they laid claim, of any sense of interiority. The following chapters will suggest through examples that a sense of the unconscious and or interiority continued to play a large part in the thinking and expression of ordinary people in the GDR.

Chapter 5 The Party's fear of Freud: examples from GDR representations

Introduction

Freud argues that what communism will demonstrate even after changing class relations, will be mankind's underlying drives: 'ihren Selbsterhaltungstrieb, ihre Aggressionslust, ihr Liebesbedürfnis, ihren Drang nach Lusterwerb und Unlustvermeidung'.¹ These, he says, will determine how people behave and express themselves in ways that remain beyond the reach of those attempting to impose their own political or ideological approach on society. Examples of representation considered in this chapter point to an underlying sense among ordinary people that it is the Freudian drives, and particularly desire and the emotions more generally, that influence their behaviour far more than the class struggle and appeals to reason. The examples suggest that when people reacted apparently in accordance with Freudian theory, the Party resorted to humiliation in order to make them behave the way the Party's ideology suggested they should.

In this chapter, I discuss the setting up by the Party of the myth of heroic love as a way of seeking to confine the sexual drive in particular to the realm of the rational, the moderate and the predictable. I analyse a number of prominent films and novels which set out key elements of this myth and which were used to make it attractive and persuasive to the population of the GDR. This is followed by a discussion of the reality of sex and sexuality in the GDR, with further examples from film, literature and personal accounts. Examples of humiliation or the fear of humiliation are highlighted, along with the specific process of humiliation through infantilisation.

Heroic love: an additional GDR myth

Discussing the role of fantasy in the construction of ideology, Hell points to historical continuity on the level of the body and the fantasies formed around it between the National Socialist past and the post-fascist present. In the GDR, she says, the post-fascist transcendent Communist body 'was fantasized as non-sexual', as pure rather than impure. This was part of a conscious attempt by the SED to mobilise the fantasies surrounding the body at a social and an individual level to gain support for the Party's assertion of its right to power.² In line with this, the heroes in the

¹ op. cit., Freud, 'Über eine Weltanschauung', p. 194.

² op. cit., Hell, *Post-fascist Fantasies*, p. 255.

foundation novels of the GDR heroes are usually male, disciplined, hardened and ascetic, descending in a direct line from Lenin, and are:

located within a universe which, in the most banal and misogynistic way, equates women with sexuality, tediously unfolding the old paradigm of the idealized woman versus the ('bad') sexualised woman in all those mother figures so essential to the SED's moral project of a socialist reconstruction, whose bodies are 'purified,' that is, desexualised.³

So important was this approach that it effectively led to the emergence of an additional foundation myth in the GDR: the myth of the revolutionary driven only by heroic love, who can always put reason above feelings and the political above the personal, who either sees the temptations of the flesh and resists them or fails to see them at all. The rejection of Freud and Freudianism was necessary for the development of this myth, which complemented the myths of antifascism, of German-Soviet friendship and of cultural continuity and superiority, and which infantilised women in particular, but also men on some occasions. Films such as *Königskinder*, discussed below, convey a determination by the Party to set up, through its cultural production, models of behaviour that would keep both ordinary people and Party members as permanent children, forever submissive to the parental Party leadership.

Frank Beyer's 1962 film, *Königskinder*, tells the story of two children, Magdalena and Michael, and their friend Jürgen, growing up into the time of the Third Reich.⁴ Michael becomes a committed communist, while Jürgen bows to what he sees as necessity by taking a job with someone hostile to communism. Jürgen then conforms to the requirements of the Nazis, though he will later be given the opportunity by Michael to be 'converted' to anti-fascism. When Michael is caught, imprisoned and sent to a punishment battalion on the Eastern Front, the non-political Magdalena is changed into a communist activist who eventually makes her way to Moscow and commits herself to the revolution. Michael himself leads his comrades and fellow-soldiers through to the Red Army lines in support of the ideals of anti-fascism and Soviet communism.

In a reversal of the requirement for form to be secondary to content, this predictable story of revolutionary heroism is transformed by its camerawork, its use of light and shadow, its interweaving of particular motifs and by the repeated but varied use of the melody from the song, 'Es waren zwei Königskinder'. In the

³ op. cit., Hell, p. 33.

⁴ *Königskinder*, Frank Beyer, (DEFA, 1962).

opening scene, a blind victim of the First World War plays the theme tune on a barrel organ. Michael as a young boy waiting by a fountain, takes up the tune on his harmonica. Down a long set of steps (homage to Eisenstein's 1925 film, *Battleship Potemkin* and its Odessa steps scene, iconic in revolutionary mythology as well as in film history) runs a young girl, Magdalena. Michael and Magdalena are joined by Jürgen and the three of them make their way to school. Michael, in bare feet, lifts Magdalena over a stream to save her getting her shoes wet. Michael and Magdalena play on a swing in a deserted funfair and Jürgen, left to keep watch (a position he is often in, despite his own longing to take the place of Michael beside Magdalena), whistles the theme tune to warn them the caretaker is coming. The various motifs are repeated throughout the film. The fountain with its reflections has particular significance since it brings Michael and Magdalena together but also suggests they will be parted. When Magdalena searches for her mirror but does not have it with her, they look in the fountain instead. Later, as Michael is starting to put his political activity ahead of their relationship, they can no longer see each other in the dark, disturbed water. Magdalena's subsequent revolutionary activities are exposed when her fellow worker takes a mirror out of her purse to look at her face and do her make-up and sees Magdalena putting leaflets in her bag. The film's central melody is repeatedly used as a warning between Michael and Magdalena but also by Jürgen to Magdalena in a scene which offers hope of his later redemption. It is also used to suggest a deep longing when Michael plays it on his harmonica behind the lines of the Red Army, after he has managed to cross over from the German trenches, bringing the injured Jürgen with him. Later it is used to suggest the promise of a better future, guided by the Soviet Union, when the Soviet officer on the plane to Moscow with them learns to play the theme on his guitar.

Berghahn notes that there was critical and Party hostility to films such as *Königskinder* which were seen to go beyond the boundaries of socialist realism since they, 'on account of their montage sequences, achronological time structure and highly stylised cinematography, exhibit distinctly modernist aesthetics'.⁵ This is ironic, since it was these very techniques that helped make the film a popular success and, in doing so, strengthened the Party's mythmaking. For all its cinematographic inventiveness, the narrative of *Königskinder* stays close to the Party line and to the

⁵ op. cit., Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 37.

Party's view of how people should behave. It is here that the title is significant: throughout, despite their heroic efforts for the revolution and a number of warm embraces, Michael and Magdalena remain, in terms of sexuality, children, and children as the Party wanted them to be, untouched by infantile sexuality of the sort Freud draws attention to.⁶ The lyrics of the theme song, sung by the boy sopranos of the world-famous Thomanerchor, make clear that the two children and would-be lovers will always remain apart:

Es waren zwei Königskinder
die hatten einander so lieb.
Sie konnten zusammen nicht kommen,
das Wasser war viel zu tief.

Fulbrook notes that in the paternalistic GDR the satisfaction of desire (not necessarily sexual) was constantly put off into an indefinite future and that even in official reports, words such as 'noch nicht' and 'noch, immer noch' frequently appear.⁷ These are the words parents use as their children are growing up, but in the GDR growing up and the fulfilment of desire, even for consumer goods, had to be constantly put off. In *Königskinder*, the relationship between Michael and Magdalena will remain forever unconsummated. Even when Michael is in the Soviet Union, safe and free at last, his playing of the theme on the harmonica represents a link to or a yearning for the pure feelings and innocent experiences of childhood in a better world, not a passionate love for Magdalena in the present. In the final scene, Michael lands at an airfield outside Moscow and – despite sprinting implausibly along the runway with his badly injured arm in an awkward splint – fails to make contact with Magdalena who is being flown out on a dangerous mission to Germany, to which she is fully and heroically committed. The significance of this is not the rejection of a traditional Hollywood or socialist realist happy ending but the refusal to make this failure of contact between the lovers of primary importance; what matters is the revolution, not the personal feelings of those committed to it. The two children will continue to be separated; the Party needs them for more-important matters, and they will be ultimately happy with this. The presence of Jürgen suggests that, like Magdalena, Michael too should not be distracted from his revolutionary responsibilities, in this case the conversion of his childhood companion to a full commitment to the Soviet

⁶ See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, 'Jenseits des Lustprinzips' in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band XIII, (London: Imago, 1940), p. 19.

⁷ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 32.

Union and anti-fascism. In this world where sexuality is absent or not relevant, all members of the original three, and the comradely and revolutionary relations between them, are equally important.

However, the relationship between Michael and Jürgen is not simply comradely or competitive in relation to Magdalena, but also has a homoerotic aspect, something difficult to be open about in the face of the puritanical attitudes passed down by the Party. The clearest example of this is the scene of extreme humiliation of Michael by Jürgen when Michael has been put into the punishment battalion where Jürgen is a sergeant. Jürgen and Michael encounter each other alone in the barracks. Each wishes to speak to the other but cannot bring himself to. The camera conveys with its shifting between the two what the explicit narrative cannot: Jürgen's face is riven with longing, Michael's with confusion and hostility. Michael exposes himself to being denounced by carelessly talking with a fellow soldier, who marks Michael with white paint so he can be identified and arrested. Just as Jürgen previously tried to save Magdalena when he was being sent with fellow troops to arrest her, so he now tries to save Michael by making him crawl along the ground and roll around in muddy water in order to obscure the incriminating white paint on his sleeve. As with Magdalena, Michael does not know what is happening and cannot see Jürgen's suffering and his desire to talk to him and be close to him again. He can only feel Jürgen's cruelty and cannot understand that this cruelty, for Jürgen, is also an attempt to punish himself and rid himself of his unacceptably ambivalent feelings towards Michael. The consequences of this humiliation (which is real for Michael but only partly intended as such by Jürgen) are the saving of Michael's life, of which Michael is oblivious, and further estrangement, leading to incidents in the trenches which are almost fatal to both of them. When Jürgen is knocked unconscious by Michael, enraged by a reference to Magdalena, this saves his life by leaving him incapacitated at the very moment when he would otherwise have led the battalion into action. Michael has unknowingly done for Jürgen what Jürgen knowingly did for him. When Michael heroically organises the saving and surrender of his comrades in the punishment battalion (and the destruction of the accompanying SS battalion), the two of them finally come together again, with the injured Michael supporting the equally injured Jürgen as they make their way towards the Red Army lines. Henceforth they are a couple, connected by deep, scarcely expressible feelings. Even as their friendship is presented as an example of heroic love that has no underlying sensual content, deeper

feelings are hinted at through the recurring use of the theme melody, of light and darkness, of faces highlighted by particular camera angles that suggest sensual longing, and through the images of empty city streets and the deserted funfair, the location of haunting memories and a sense of loss and longing.

Like the anti-fascist films such as *Königskinder*, Bodo Uhse's novel, *Die Patrioten* (discussed in Chapter 3), was seen as an important contributor to strengthening belief in the founding myths of the GDR. Uhse's death in 1963 came in the aftermath of the important Sixth Party Congress which adopted a specifically Leninist programme for the comprehensive building of socialism in the GDR and confirmed the importance of learning from the experience of the Soviet Union, but sought to differentiate the GDR economically from the Soviet approach.⁸ For the Party, confronted by the attempts of artists and writers to take advantage of relative cultural liberalisation and to break out of the strict framework of socialist realism and the demands of the first Bitterfeld Conference, writers such as Uhse were to be singled out for their ideologically correct approach. Uhse was highly praised by the Party's Central Committee in its announcement in *Neues Deutschland* of his death: 'Höhepunkt seines literarischen Schaffens war der 1954 veröffentlichte Roman "Die Patrioten". Dieses Heldenepos vom nationalen Widerstandskampf gegen die faschistische Tyrannei ergriff Millionen deutscher und ausländischer Leser, die heute mit uns um den Autor trauern [...].'⁹ However, *Die Patrioten* is also significant for its development of the myth of heroic love, its portrayal of sexuality and the body and its assertion of a moral position based on reason, not feelings. Central to this is the portrayal of Maria, who is parachuted into Germany with her comrade Helmut, and who has to resist the temptations of love and keep her mind on the one goal, the liberation from a concentration camp of one of the Party's key leaders, Thomas Westfal.

Maria is used in a deliberate, didactic manner by the narrator to demonstrate that for the Party, the sexual drive is dangerous and the feelings around it need to be repressed by true revolutionaries. Desire is to be refused, denied, disowned or displaced. Maria sees herself as implicated in the past and future of the struggle and as devoting herself not to a lover but, through her love of Stalin, to the Soviet Union,

⁸ op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973), entry on 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland (SED)', p. 775; op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the GDR*, pp. 104-105.

⁹ *Neues Deutschland*, 04.07.1963.

the fulfilment of the potential of the October revolution and the full flowering of her own revolutionary consciousness: ‘Sie dachte an Stalin, und der Schmerz des Abschieds wich einer tiefen Ruhe; sie empfand wie ein persönliches Erlebnis die mächtige, weltverändernde Gewalt des Oktober und spürte die formende, gestaltende Kraft des revolutionären Bewußtseins, die sie an sich selber erfahren.’¹⁰ This portrayal is complemented by representations of ‘good’ communists in Hamburg who put their feelings aside to help Maria in her task and by contrasting portrayals of sexually-driven, depraved and therefore brutal Nazis.

Maria is introduced as a courageous young woman who has undertaken a parachute jump as a training exercise in preparation for the return from exile to Germany. She is idealised by the narrator: ‘der Blick ihrer goldbraunen Augen zwischen dichten, langen Wimpern hervor war voll Güte und tiefer menschlicher Wärme’. Hers is a comradely expression, explicitly used to defend herself against Helmut’s somewhat suspect ‘schwärmerische Bewunderung’.¹¹ Helmut is portrayed as subject to his feelings but already hardened and determined to rise above them. When another of their comrades falls badly and breaks his leg, Helmut blames him and ‘hatte kein Mitleid’.¹² Maria is disconcerted as she notices ‘das ebenmäßige, plötzlich abweisend hart gewordene Gesicht des jungen Menschen’, but even when she reproaches him, this ‘klang bei allem Ernste freundschaftlich und warm’. As she looks at him and sees his calm determination, she is able to express once again her comradely admiration for Helmut: ‘Was für ein Geschöpf bist du doch, dachte Maria, welch ein liebenswerter Mensch.’¹³ Here and elsewhere, characters the narrator explicitly approves of are described through the extensive use of complimentary adjectives. These frequently convey little information about the character but are sentimental and conventional, designed to draw in the reader’s sympathy and to ensure identification with the heroic communists. The Soviet pilot teaching Maria and Helmut how to parachute, for instance, is ‘der rundlich kleine, fröhliche Pilot’ who recalls his home in which ‘die zärtlichen Augen der Mutter wie Sterne gestrahlt hatten’.¹⁴ Similarly, Thomas Westfal, the comrade whose escape from a concentration camp Maria is expected to organise, is described as ‘einen älteren Genossen von

¹⁰ op. cit., Uhse, p. 95.

¹¹ op. cit., Uhse, p. 6.

¹² op. cit., Uhse, p. 7.

¹³ op. cit., Uhse, p. 8.

¹⁴ op. cit., Uhse, p. 9.

bedeutendem theoretischem Wissen, mit großer Erfahrung und von besonderer Festigkeit des Charakters'.¹⁵ The other function of these adjectives is to define the communists as emotionally warm without allowing emotional connections to move towards overt, adult sexuality. For instance, when thinking of Helmut, Maria 'spürte die jünglingshafte, zärtlich verehrende Liebe und war besorgt'.¹⁶

The initial interchange between Maria and Helmut sets the tone for the relationship between them and for their behaviour back in Germany. Even before they make their way through the forest they have parachuted into, Peter Wittkamp, the older comrade who is their leader, tells them pointedly that they are comrades and friends: 'Klare Verhältnisse sind notwendig'.¹⁷ In Berlin they engage in a delicate dance around each other, aware of feelings between them and taking care not to let them get in the way of their work.¹⁸

In parallel, Maria thinks from time to time of her husband, killed fighting in Spain. She has lived alone and celibate since his death.¹⁹ Her newly-developing relationship with Maxim in the Soviet Union has been put on hold because of the war. Maria's thoughts about Maxim involve a certain longing, but this is asexual and wrapped in revolutionary fantasies and images. Walking by the Alster in Hamburg, Maria sees the seagulls flying and is strongly affected by them. Bruno, her communist helper in Hamburg, who is also attracted to her, asks what she is thinking about:

'An die Möwen von Leningrad', antwortete Maria, und es war keine Lüge, denn zu den Möwen hatte sie aufgeschaut, wenn sie mit dem schweigsamen Maxim am Ufer der breiten Newa spazierengegangen war, an der 'Aurora' vorbei, aus dem Schatten des klirrenden Winterpalastes hinüberblickend zur spitzen Nadel der Peter-Paul-Festung.²⁰

Her connection to Maxim is a connection to the October Revolution, through the cruiser 'Aurora' which bombarded the Winter Palace during the Bolshevik assault on it. In the background is the Peter and Paul fortress where political prisoners were held. The heroic overrides other possible ways for her love to develop and Maria makes clear that the relationship with Maxim has never been more than platonic: 'Bevor seine scheue, zärtliche Liebe hätte reifen können, war der Krieg gekommen, der Überfall, der Hitlers graue Heere zerstörend in das große Land menschlicher

¹⁵ op. cit., Uhse, p. 141.

¹⁶ op. cit., Uhse, p. 6.

¹⁷ op. cit., Uhse, p. 107.

¹⁸ See, for instance, op. cit., Uhse, pp. 117, 138, 171-173, 228.

¹⁹ op. cit., Uhse, pp. 103, 268.

²⁰ op. cit., Uhse, p. 359.

Hoffnung geführt hatte.²¹ The developing relationship with Bruno is more ambiguous. There is a hint of sexual desire as he sees her gazing up at the seagulls ‘so daß sich ihre Brüste unter der straffgespannten Bluse klar von dem grünlichen Abendhimmel abzeichneten’.²² Nevertheless, Bruno puts the task he has been allotted – to help Maria – ahead of his feelings. For him, ‘das Schönste’ is to talk to her and ‘das Aufblühen ihres Gesichts zu sehen, den rötlichen, unter der dunklen Haut sich breiten Schimmer, das glitzernde golden Funkeln in ihren Augen und die frohe Überraschung auf den sich wölbenden, leicht geöffneten Lippen’.²³ Maria herself is shocked when she realises, as they discuss the writings of Gorki, the attraction they feel for each other.²⁴ Later when Maria is making her way across Hamburg to report to her comrades about her success in freeing Thomas Westfal, she realises she is thinking particularly of Bruno and ‘an den Ausdruck ruhiger gesammelter Kraft in seinem Gesicht mit den hochgewölbten Brauen und dem so lebendigen, klargezeichneten Mund...’.²⁵ She is then caught up in the bombing of Hamburg and the firestorm that results. She makes her way to the waterside and looks up, expecting to see and hear the seagulls, the symbol for her of life and revolutionary energy, but they are no longer there. Instead, emerging from the smoke and the reflections of the fires, Bruno arrives in his boat, his face ‘voller Leben und Entschlossenheit’.²⁶ It is at this point that heroic love triumphs. Bruno says they have to go in search of their comrades and, as they embrace, Maria tells him that Thomas Westfal is free. Helping her over to the boat, Bruno, in the final sentence of the novel, answers the way the dedicated communist must answer: ““Sie müssen alle frei werden”, sagte er und fragte dann: “Kommst du mit?””²⁷

Throughout *Die Patrioten*, the behaviour of Maria, Helmut, Peter Wittkamp and those central to freeing Thomas Westfal is consistent with the constantly stated need to follow the call of reason, not of feelings. This ensures that love is heroic, not sensual or sexual and that heroic love merges into heroic comradeship. Hinrich Sieversen, a former friend of her executed father, explains to Maria, in terms which

²¹ op. cit., Uhse, p. 103.

²² op. cit., Uhse, p. 357.

²³ op. cit., Uhse, p. 357.

²⁴ op. cit., Uhse, p. 362.

²⁵ op. cit., Uhse, p. 577.

²⁶ op. cit., Uhse, pp. 579-80.

²⁷ op. cit., Uhse, p. 580.

appear very defensive about the way men are allowed to relate to one another, how the personal and the political are both important and connected:

‘Und nirgendwo ist geschrieben, daß das Persönliche verschwinden muß, wenn es gut und sauber ist’, beharrte er auf seinem Standpunkt und erregte sich: ‘Die Freundschaft...ja, wo in der Welt hat es eine solche Freundschaft gegeben wie die, welche Marx und Engels vereint hat, eine so dauerhafte, lebendige Verbindung? Das Persönliche – also gut, erst später, im Sozialismus ist wirklich ausreichend Platz dafür da. Aber im Kampf für den Sozialismus, da wird es schon bewährt, und dort bewährt es sich auch.’²⁸

Where a communist fails to live up to the requirements of the Party by giving in to personal feelings or desires, the consequences are often disastrous. Angus Hallstein is persuaded to use his lorry to pick up Thomas Westfal and take him with Maria to the chosen hideout. On his way home, despite instructions not to stop, he pulls up in an isolated hamlet to buy cigarettes since he has given his own to Thomas Westfal. He is questioned by a police officer who, he realises, will report on his identity and location. Shortly after, faced by a road block and knowing he would betray his comrades if interrogated, he chooses to commit suicide rather than be caught. This is not portrayed as a commendable act of self-sacrifice, however. Hallstein, it is made clear, has always had difficulty following reason and clear thinking rather than giving in to his feelings.²⁹ Arising from fear rather than courage, his split-second decision to drive into the canal is, ironically, based on a misreading of his predicament: it is a road accident, not the search for Thomas Westfal, that has led to the roadblock.³⁰

In contrast to the ‘good’ communists, the Nazis and those working for them are shown to be ever ready to give in to lust and to be exploitative and animal-like in following their sexual desire, regardless of the impact of this on their colleagues or families. When Maria meets the Oranienburg guard she is bribing, he pulls her close to him and fondles her breast.³¹ One of the more minor characters, Käthe Steinweg, a secret convert to opposition to the Nazis, watches her Nazi mother setting out to have an affair with a similarly lustful officer.³² While Westfal waits among his fellow-prisoners before his rescue, there is concern about the presence of Gieseler, a former corrupt bank employee. He is seen as a threat since he has a specially close relationship with the guards: ‘Es hieß, daß er mit einigen von ihnen ein

²⁸ op. cit., Uhse, pp. 369-370.

²⁹ op. cit., Uhse, p. 555.

³⁰ op. cit., Uhse, p. 556.

³¹ op. cit., Uhse, p. 232.

³² op. cit., Uhse, p. 338.

homosexuelles Verhältnis unterhalte'.³³ Significantly, it is the sexual drive that appears dangerous here; sexual perversion (homosexuality was viewed as such during Stalin's time at least) links the corrupt petty-bourgeois criminal and the guards who are, by implication, degenerate, unlike the decent workers who are their prisoners.

Power and the sexual drive and a consequent willingness to humiliate are intertwined for the most prominent Nazi, the investigating officer, Otto Hingst. Hingst has been having an affair with his secretary, Waltraud Böckelmann, but has broken this off to stay faithful to his wife. Their relationship as lovers has now been replaced by what Hingst thinks of as 'eine vielleicht noch schmutzigere Beziehung von Kameraderie', with each of them looking at the other as an object of desire.³⁴ Böckelmann has started living with Goetz, someone Hingst uses as a spy, and Hingst cannot hide his jealousy. Goetz is in fact the communist 'Ali', a hero from the Spanish Civil War who has been blackmailed by Hingst to report on his comrades. Attempting to gather information on a rival investigating officer, Hingst arranges for Goetz to be taken into the prison where the communists are held, as if he were a genuine prisoner. In principle, he will have him released soon after. However, Hingst takes advantage of Goetz's absence and of the fact that his own wife is in hospital giving birth to their child, to resume his affair with Böckelmann. While the communists are 'gut und sauber' in their dealings with one another, Hingst and Böckelmann have no need for anything but the physical: 'Sie waren wie Tiere übereinander hergefallen, und noch immer klopfte sein Herz von der Erregung und der physischen Anstrengung dieses Zusammenpralls.' Shortly after, they have sex again and, 'während sie sich mit dem Handtuch anrieb', Böckelmann, ever calculating, suggests they 'verkuppeln' the junior, naive assistant secretary with Goetz.³⁵

The myth of heroic love was taken up by other writers. In Erwin Strittmatter's extraordinarily popular novel *Ole Bienkopp*, discussed below and more fully in Chapter 7, the ageing Ole is transformed by an idyllic relationship with the much younger and implausibly saintly Märkte. When at the village festival Märkte stands in front of Ole and asks him to dance, 'Er stolpert aus einem langen Winter. Er stolpert im Herbst in einen Frühling. Der Schnee ist geschmolzen. Die Vögel singen. Die

³³ op. cit., Uhse, p. 539.

³⁴ op. cit., Uhse, pp. 54-55, 562.

³⁵ op. cit., Uhse, p. 563-564.

Bäche erzählen den Wiesen Geschichten.’³⁶ While the lyrical language is partly satirical, the narrator still identifies with Ole and Märkte and their hopes of happiness. This sets the tone for the description of their relationship which is contrasted with the ruinous sex-based relationship Ole had with Anngret, his wife, and with the behaviour of the other sexually-driven characters, including the sawmiller Ramsch who humiliates first Ole and later Anngret, in the name of desire. When Ole dies, the narrator gives a lyrical description of Märkte living on with their child, and puts her at the centre of the final scene, enduring and growing older with dignity, as the world goes on.³⁷

An example of the darker side of heroic love comes from Heym’s novel *Die Architekten* (discussed briefly in Chapter 3). Sundstrom, in exile in Moscow, takes responsibility for Julia, the daughter of Goltz, for whose death he was partly to blame. He eventually realises he is increasingly sexually attracted to Julia. Taking advantage of his position of power and her dependence on him, he marries her while she is still half-way between childhood and womanhood. For years, even back in Germany, he treats her as a child and tries to run her life and determine her feelings and opinions. Julia comes to see that she has not had the heroic love from Sundstrom that she thought and that she has suffered badly from what he has done to her. As revelations come out about Sundstrom’s political behaviour in Moscow, the relationship falls apart and Julia realises the extent of her humiliation by him. From Sundstrom’s response, it appears Julia has directly accused him of abusing her as a child:

Wäre es nicht anständiger gewesen, hatte sie gefragt, er hätte sie in irgendeinem fernen Sowjetdorf ihr Leben durch harte Arbeit fristen oder sie gar zugrunde gehen lassen, als sie in Luxus und Eleganz großzuziehen und sie für sein Bett und sein schlechtes Gewissen zu benutzen? Sie zu benutzen... Das war eines gewesen, was er wahrhaftig nicht getan hatte. Bewußt wenigstens nicht.³⁸

Beyond his conscious motives, it is suggested, lay his unconscious, which had driven him to act as he had. Looking at this from a Freudian perspective, the relationship between Sundstrom and Julia can be seen as a metaphor for the Party’s infantilising relationship with its people, one of child-abuse. The children – the ordinary people of the GDR – wish the father figure had left them alone to fend for themselves, even if this had turned out to be physically harder. The Party denies any conscious intent, but its unconscious nevertheless is shown to have bypassed its conscious mind.

³⁶ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 385.

³⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 428.

³⁸ op. cit., Heym, *Die Architekten*, p. 363.

Ironically, when Julia is finally able to leave Sundstrom, it is to get together with Daniel Tieck, someone Sundstrom's age and one of his political victims in Moscow. She understands that this might be yet another attempt to find a comforting father figure, but comforts herself with the thought that Tieck lacks the all-knowing confidence and arrogance of Sundstrom.³⁹ Julia believes she has at last fully grown up, but whether this is so remains an open question, since Tieck appears as a somewhat asexual figure, inviting her into a relationship based on the ideologically correct heroic love. It can be seen here that the narrator, hostile to Stalinism but not to the attempt to build socialism in the GDR, retreats from a more comprehensive critique of the regime and does not challenge the humiliating relations of paternal domination.

Returning to Hell's discussion of the role of fantasy in the construction of ideology, it is clear that the myth of heroic love is an assertion of a fantasy about the revolutionary hero who should be a model for the whole population and who is contrasted with the Party's enemies. To love heroically, putting aside sexual indulgence and thinking only of the people and the promised glorious future, is how it is to love as a communist. To indulge in sexuality and sexual fantasies and to give in to desire is likely to indicate reactionary attitudes and hostility to the new socialist state and its Party. As noted in Chapter 4, Kollontai proposed the development under socialism of a new form of sexuality which did not exclude 'Eros' but which was based on 'the great new psychological force of comradely solidarity'.⁴⁰ In the films and novels considered here, there are no examples of this being successful, though the projected relationship between Julia and Tieck comes close to representing it. Instead, the examples suggest that the Party's preferred approach of heroic love attempted to confine its subjects to a pre-adult form of comradeship, and that Eros only appeared when one of the parties to the supposed heroic love was in a position of power and could take advantage for his sexual gratification of the very infantilisation the Party promoted.

The reality of sex and desire in the GDR

As a number of commentators demonstrate and as is clear from personal accounts, the reality of sexual activity and the expression of desire in the GDR was, from the

³⁹ op. cit., Heym, *Die Architekten*, pp. 382-383.

⁴⁰ op. cit., Kollontai, p. 95.

earliest years, very different from the picture painted in films such as *Königskinder* or novels such as *Die Patrioten*. Donna Harsch, from interviews, archival sources and the work of Rudolf Neubert, suggests that sexual activity was far less inhibited and the body more openly displayed than was liked by the ‘prudish’ leading Communists, who had ‘no interest in reviving Weimar debates about sexuality, sexual pleasure, and birth control’ and who downgraded and underfunded marriage and sexual counselling centres.⁴¹ Andrew Port notes that, in line with views in the Soviet Union, the GDR leadership (as opposed to many of the Party’s ordinary members) ‘displayed a decidedly “ascetic” sexual conservatism during the early decades of the new regime: bodies were for production and reproduction, not pleasure.’⁴² Josie McLellan demonstrates that even by the Honecker period in the 1970s, at a time of relative liberalisation that partly paralleled and drew on the ‘sexual revolution’ elsewhere, books offering advice on sex ‘simply assumed that their readers were in a loving, heterosexual, monogamous relationship, and other publications continually stressed that sex without love was an empty activity, at best meaningless and at worst actively damaging’.⁴³ McLellan also points out that while people from the former GDR have sought retrospectively to portray the GDR as a place where sex and romance went hand in hand, there is ‘a great deal of evidence that points towards a disjuncture of public discourse and private behaviour’ and that even official surveys in the 1970s indicated that sex outside monogamous relationships was widespread.⁴⁴ A 1971 joke, brought to the west by travelling relatives, gives one indication of attitudes among ordinary people in the GDR and perhaps an early sense of relative liberalisation after Honecker’s assumption of power: ‘Maurer O. kommt wegen fehlenden Baumaterials früher von der Baustelle heim und erwischt seine Frau im Schlafzimmer mit dem Nachbarn. Seine einzige Reaktion: “Ihr macht hier rum und im HO nebenan gibt’s endlich einmal Orangen!”’⁴⁵

Sex outside monogamous relationships was not just confined to people outside the Party. McLellan discusses the case of a woman in Leipzig who had posed for nude

⁴¹ Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*, (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 221-226; Rudolf Neubert, *Das Neue Ehebuch. Die Ehe als Aufgabe der Gegenwart und Zukunft*, (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1957).

⁴² Andrew I. Port, ‘Love, Lust, and Lies under Communism: Family Values and Adulterous Liaisons in Early East Germany’, pp. 478–505 in *Central European History*, 44, (2011), p. 490.

⁴³ Josie McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism. Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 82.

⁴⁴ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, pp. 82, 97.

⁴⁵ Albrecht Bühler, Kempowski BIO 6894.

photos and was blackmailed by the Stasi to give them information about prostitution in Leipzig; she was able to tell them that most of the prostitutes' clients were State and Party functionaries.⁴⁶ In a clear case of humiliation through the violation of privacy, as discussed in Chapter 2, the woman herself was pushed into prostitution through the Stasi's actions. This, Dennis notes, was not unusual for the Stasi, which knew that the fear of disclosure, for instance of an adulterous relationship, 'left many vulnerable to blackmail', while 'jealousy of a neighbour or work colleague persuaded others to enlist' as 'Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter' (IMs).⁴⁷

Looking at the 'Eastern Bloc' more generally, David Crowley and Susan Reid stress that optimism was a requirement of socialist realist aesthetics, that pessimism was condemned and that it was expected that happiness would be attained 'in the radiant future' through the application of reason. Ascetism and self-denial were expected in the present and joy was 'a kind of abstracted, disembodied higher goal'. The needs or demands of the body and the power of emotions were, therefore, largely ignored:

the satisfaction of everyday, individual, and ephemeral needs associated with bodily gratification was often inadequately provided for by the party-state, which perpetuated – and imposed on the masses – the revolutionary intelligentsia's traditional disdain for 'petit bourgeois' material comfort and suspicion of sensuality.⁴⁸

McLellan identifies hypocrisy even in the GDR's tolerance of and eventual support for the production of nude photographs and erotic publications. These were designed, she says, to win public acceptance for the regime and, later, to bring in foreign currency, but also had other implications. Firstly, they enabled people to move away from the Party's strict control and indulge in fantasies and sexual behaviour beyond what was seen to be acceptable. Secondly, however, they reinforced gender and behavioural stereotypes and represented a confirmation that for all the economic independence offered to women, power remained with the men in the society.⁴⁹

Port's study of adultery in the early years of the GDR confirms the gap between the Party's theoretical position and reality, demonstrating from case studies and GDR publications that adultery was not uncommon, even though it was considered to be

⁴⁶ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, p. 103.

⁴⁷ op. cit., Dennis, *The Stasi*, p. 99

⁴⁸ David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, 'Introduction,' in David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Josie McLellan, 'Even Under Socialism, We Don't Want to Do Without Love,' in op. cit., Crowley, *Pleasures in Socialism*, p. 222-231.

‘an undesirable vestige of the bourgeois past’.⁵⁰ Using archival accounts of cases where wives complained to the Party, Port considers the incidence and significance of adultery by men in a factory in a small industrial town in Thüringen in 1959. In these cases it is Party members, and sometimes officials, who have to explain their behaviour to special meetings of the Party’s factory committee. It is clear that the Party has a strong line on such ‘moral infractions’:

Often assuming an air of moral superiority, the interrogators posed surprisingly lurid and intrusive questions, delving into the most personal areas of the man’s private life. [...] Such queries were generally accompanied by a lecture admonishing the profligate for not ‘finding his way’ to the party for support, and, more seriously, for damaging the reputation of the SED in the eyes of the masses.⁵¹

Punishments involved what would in other circumstances be seen as acts of humiliation: ‘official party sanction, the cancellation of political or professional training, removal from positions of responsibility, and, in the case of white-collar workers, delegation to the shop floor were all customary.’⁵² Apparently paradoxically but in line with the discussion in Chapter 2 of the significance of a shared commitment to norms and values, it is the attitude of the Party member which determines whether such treatment will count as humiliation. Where the member’s commitment to the Party includes an acceptance of the Party’s right to define the way he (the examples here are all men) should lead his private life and according to what moral standards, then it will be shame at breaching those standards and letting down the Party that will be felt. Where there is no such acceptance, the Party will be seen to be interfering inadmissibly and any punishment will be felt as humiliation. Port notes that where the Party member refused to express regret or to break off the adulterous relationship, he might be expelled from the Party. For many this would be felt as a particularly harsh form of humiliation. The same might apply when the Party’s right to punish was accepted but the punishment itself was out of proportion to the act or where higher Party officials were seen to behave in the same way without being punished.

Joachim Goellner, a committed Party member whose memoir is discussed in Chapter 8, is sent back to the shop floor to work in terrible conditions in 1961 because he has divorced his wife and married a younger woman whom he has made pregnant.

⁵⁰ op. cit., Port, ‘Love, Lust and Lies’, p. 485.

⁵¹ op. cit., Port, ‘Love, lust and lies’, p. 484.

⁵² op. cit., Port, ‘Love, lust and lies’, p. 485.

He interprets this as excessive and unjust and is angry at the hypocrisy he sees in the Party. His actions would have been seen differently, he says, if he had been at a level ‘wo höhere Staats- und SED-Funktionäre oft ihre Sekretärinnen schwängerten’.⁵³ He is similarly outraged at the end of the 1960s by the way his boss has made the women below him dependent on him like slaves or like a harem and always takes one of them, ‘seine Lieblingsfrau’, with him wherever he goes, even though there is nothing for her to do there. Again it is the hypocrisy he rails against: ‘Das schien mir mit Ulbrichts ‘Moral-Gesetze’ nicht einzustimmen, weshalb ich dagegen opponierte, Wasser zu predigen und heimlich Wein zu trinken; mehr noch, ohne Verdienste gabs Privilegien.’ He seeks a kind of revenge for his own previous humiliation by complaining to a higher level and having his boss removed, but feels an element of self-disgust for his part in this.⁵⁴

Official attitudes to sexuality were softened slightly during the 1950s and public education was increased by Neubert’s writings which, often in terms that were also common in the West at the time, promoted the importance of sexual satisfaction independently of procreation and highlighted the psychological as well as the physiological aspects of sex.⁵⁵ However, at the top of the Party, attitudes remained hostile to sexual liberalisation at least into the late 1960s. Before and during the Eleventh Plenum in 1965 which severely criticised certain authors and film-makers and banned many of their works, there was harsh criticism of writers and film-makers for supposed pornographic representations and for linking sexuality and brutality and the shedding of inhibitions as if following the Western example.⁵⁶ Wolfgang Engler suggests that behind this criticism lay not just the Party leadership’s puritanism but also its desire to condemn confident protagonists who knew what they hoped for and who insisted on getting it. The leadership, he says, were disturbed by the way young women pursued relationships with married men or left husbands they no longer loved. It was the representation of feelings which the leadership did not want to admit to which so upset them: ‘Was die politischen Zensoren verstörte, war die Unbedingtheit

⁵³ op. cit., Goellner, *Autobiographie*, Kempowski BIO 6860/1, p. 91.

⁵⁴ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁵ op. cit., Harsch, pp. 224-225.

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Engler, ‘Strafgericht über die Moderne – das 11. Plenum im historischen Rückblick’, in op. cit., Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag*, p. 25; Günter Agde, ‘Zur Anatomie eines Tests. Das Gespräch Walter Ulbrichts mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern am 25. November 1965 im Staatsrat der DDR’, in Agde, *Kahlschlag*, p. 145; Erich Honecker, ‘Bericht des Politbüros an die 11. Tagung des ZK der SED. Auszug’, in Agde, *Kahlschlag*, pp. 245-247.

des Gefühls, also gerade das Nichtpornographische. In Wahrheit fanden sie sich mit der Schamlosigkeit viel leichter ab als mit dem Ende der Doppelmoral'.⁵⁷

A significant change in attitudes to sexuality and the body that came late in the Honecker period related to homosexuality. McLellan's research indicates that homosexuality, decriminalised in 1968, long remained a taboo subject and that gay men and lesbians were subject to investigation by the Stasi and sometimes to exclusion from jobs. In 1985, official views were modified and a paper circulated to the Politburo recommended 'a public transformation in normative opinion formation'.⁵⁸ Subsequently, a documentary, *Die andere Liebe*, and a full-length film, *Coming Out*, were approved for production.⁵⁹ For once, the Party was more tolerant than many of its citizens. It pursued policies that accepted difference and would be likely to reduce the incidence of humiliation, since life remained difficult for many gay men and lesbian women in the face of widespread homophobia.⁶⁰

Sex, satire and the Party: *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*

By the 1970s, with Honecker pursuing consumer socialism and attempting to win support through material and social benefits, there was less emphasis on the utopian future or the ascetic heroism of the past and more on the pleasures of the present. This changed environment was reflected in the various 'Alltag' films of the 1970s. These were united, Feinstein argues, by 'their implicit construction of East Germany as an actual, if imperfect, place.' The pretence of these films was 'the normalcy, indeed the banality, of their subject matter. Though inescapably embedded in the society that produced them, these films are less directly concerned with socialism than with basic life issues: love, coming of age, and death.'⁶¹ By the 1970s, GDR film-makers had considerable experience of technical innovation. As Sabine Hake says, this was partly through their encounter with New Wave films from France, Britain, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, which 'gave rise to a cool, modernist aesthetic of alienation, characterized by stark black-and-white cinematography, atonal sound tracks, elliptical editing, surrealist dream sequences, symbolically charged mise-en-scènes, and new approaches to screen acting.' Hake suggests that films using such techniques were viewed with suspicion by the Party but did not necessarily

⁵⁷ op. cit., Engler, p. 25.

⁵⁸ Quoted in McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, p. 135.

⁵⁹ *Coming Out*, Heiner Carow, (DEFA, 1989). The film had its première the night the wall came down.

⁶⁰ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, pp. 134-143.

⁶¹ op. cit., Feinstein, p. 204.

undermine the GDR's ideology and its founding myths, helping rather 'to liberate the affective core of antifascism from the ossification of cinematic illusionism and to redeem the utopia of socialism in aesthetic terms.' The extent to which 'such rescue attempts had system-stabilizing effects' remains an open question, she says.⁶²

Hake's question is relevant to the 1962 film *Königskinder*, discussed earlier in this chapter, and to possibly the most popular film of the GDR, Heiner Carow's 1973 *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. I argue here that what is a breakthrough into a new genre of 'satirical socialist magical realism' also, ultimately, sees desire and sexuality brought back under control by the Party, seductively, effectively and in a way which is humiliating to women. This does not initially appear to be the case. The long love-making scene which is central to the film involves a wonderfully florid fantasy about the uncontrolled nature of desire and the futility of seeking to control it. Here we have escaped into Marx's realm of freedom or the world of Rorty's idiosyncratic fantasies (described in Chapter 4), combined with Freud's unconscious in as uninhibited a form as ever.

The scene starts with Paul's very formal work colleagues appearing on the sofa in the bedroom as a musical trio, sometimes watching the love-making, sometimes not. The song being played urges Paul to go to Paula, stressing that he cannot live on bread alone. The fantasy continues with Paula's decorated bed, containing Paul and Paula, appearing on a barge sailing along the Spree. The barge, a scene of great happiness, is full of admiring and approving people, many of them Paula's family stretching back over time, as well as Paul's same colleagues. A banquet consisting of apples is set out on a long table. Paula, wrapped only in her bridal veil, climbs out of the bed and makes her way along the table; joyful faces look up to her, hands reach out to tug at her veil. Even Paul's colleagues in their suits and ties and hats are enthusiastic participants and help to lift Paula up to where she sits smiling down at them all, her breasts clearly visible through the transparent cloth, while behind her stand the several generations of women from her family, knitting and smiling before gathering up Paul and bringing him to Paula.

This whole fantasy is apparently Paul's, though Paula indulges or encourages it, causing the imagined musicians, for instance, to be suddenly blindfolded. It is also presented as Paula's entire creation, not just because of the way she has lavishly

⁶² Sabine Hake, 'Political Affects: Antifascism and the Second World War in Frank Beyer and Konrad Wolf', in op. cit., Cooke, *Screening War*, pp. 106-107.

decorated her bedroom and prepared a feast on the bed, but because she has managed to bring Paul to her against his will. The previous day, Paul has said he will not be able to come. Paula, asserting that the strength of her desire is enough to compel him to be with her, simply tells him that he will in fact be there, declaring: ‘Ich kann doch hexen. Pass auf!’ The fantasy is so central because everything before it has led up to it, and everything after it – Paul’s conversion to a life based on desire, Paula’s subsequent third pregnancy and death in childbirth – follows inevitably from it. In its form and content and the way these interrelate, the scene is an extreme rejection of socialist realism. As Feinstein says:

Inherent in this phantasmagorical image is nothing less than an alternative understanding of time that contrasted markedly with the regime’s transcendent vision of history. Here Paul, who as a family father and a loyal career man embodies conventional virtue, finds himself unable to resist the vital forces that Paula represents. [...] the guests’ enthusiastic participation in the celebration affirms the life-giving force of sensual love despite its inherently disorderly nature.⁶³

At the same time, the scene contains satirical allusions to everyday life, such as the common hunger for exotic fruits and the ordinariness of the apartment in which the fantasy is created, and to socialist realism in the hazy industrial landscape that is the background to the journey on the river. Paul’s colleagues, the observing musicians, as ‘representatives of the socialist collective are satirically portrayed as intruding into the lovers’ private space’, and can also be seen to reflect Stasi operatives spying on the personal lives of the population.⁶⁴ Their behaviour on the boat exposes the Party’s hypocrisy over sexual matters but also satirises the Party’s literary and film critics as it anticipates their response to the film. As Paul and Paula apparently make love again, one of Paul’s colleagues staring up at them says disapprovingly, ‘Das ist Porno!’ The other answers: ‘Guck doch nicht!’ and sets about enthusiastically biting into an apple as he watches, in one of the recurring satirical references to the garden of Eden. The first hides his face and turns away, only to turn back a moment later and peep from behind his hand. As McLellan observes, criticising films and books as pornographic ‘sent a clear message to the population that those who produced such material were decadent and unrepresentative of the working class.’⁶⁵

⁶³ op. cit., Feinstein, pp. 209-210.

⁶⁴ op. cit., Berghahn, *Hollywood*, p. 200.

⁶⁵ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, p. 100.

Feinstein interprets Paul's colleagues as demonstrating the gap between the world of conformity, represented by Paul, and the world of desire, represented by Paula. He suggests that they 'express obvious displeasure with the wild exuberance of Paula and her clan.'⁶⁶ However, close analysis of the scene shows that they are enthusiastic observers of and willing participants in the sexual fantasy. The only one of them who feels impelled to publicly express his disapproval of what he is seeing, but who at the same time cannot resist looking, appears to be the one who with a malicious smile on his face sets fire to the bed with Paul and Paula in it: desire is consumed by the flames of an unadmitted desire as the Party uses force against its enemies. The same colleague is shown later in the film self-righteously condemning Paul's anti-social behaviour and deriving pleasure from the opportunity to be the instrument of his humiliation in the context of Paul's neglect of his responsibilities at work.

In *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, the magical elements make clear the subversive power of fantasy and specifically the power of desire and the erotic drive, but also the Party's willingness to humiliate those who give in to these. Berghahn notes that 'the general ban on sex on screen was not primarily directed at the display of naked bodies, but at sex as an uncontrollable and hence potentially subversive force'.⁶⁷ McLellan points to the significance of metaphors used, even in frank manuals about sex, which implied that 'like an unruly and vigorous plant, sexuality was something to be pruned, controlled, and tied back. Left to its own devices, it could and would run wild and smother other, more important aspects of life.'⁶⁸ This is a threat implied not only by the fantasy elements of *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* but also by many other scenes in the film.

Paul, seen by Feinstein as a petit-bourgeois careerist, is in fact shown as entering into an inappropriate marriage on the basis of sexual desire with Ines, the fairground worker, who is out to catch whoever will keep her well. Again there is a satirical point being made here: Paul, the apparent conformist, is driven by his emotions, and specifically by desire, whereas Ines, the daughter of a corrupt owner of a private business, follows the line of reason, opting for what best serves her interests. Paul is enraged by the humiliation he experiences when he returns from military service to find Ines in bed with a naked man. In parallel, Paula chooses an equally unsuitable

⁶⁶ op. cit., Feinstein, p. 210.

⁶⁷ op. cit., Berghahn, *Hollywood*, p. 200.

⁶⁸ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism*, p. 85.

mate in the fairground worker with the beard and Afro hairstyle.⁶⁹ When she comes home from hospital sooner than expected with their baby, she finds him about to make love to a young woman in their apartment and is similarly enraged by this humiliation but also plunged into despair.

Paul's night of sex in his garage with Paula suggests that desire is what determines his behaviour; it is hard to see him giving priority to his career at this point. While Paul declares that he cannot leave Ines because of the impact divorce would have on his job and because of his alleged attachment to his son, the only time he is shown to be apparently close to Ines is when they are lying in bed, having made love, and he expresses his thoroughly petit-bourgeois vision of their future together. Ines lies there, only vaguely interested. Her expression is of utter boredom when Paul starts to make love to her again: her desire is for sex with other men while being materially supported by Paul, a fundamentally humiliating position for him.

There is an ironic comment on the power of sex when Paula, still filled with the rapture of the night in the garage, goes to work at the supermarket and infects everyone there, staff and customers alike, with her joy. The scene of wild enthusiasm and celebration is one of several which demonstrate that only uninhibited sexual activity, not work or a commitment to socialism, can bring about such pleasurable collective interaction. This is a victory for spontaneity, not rational planning. It is Paula's desire for a sexual, and possibly but not necessarily romantic partner that brings her together with Paul, leading ultimately to his rejection of his lifestyle. Feinstein says that Paul's rejection of the 'conventional, materialistic values associated with his previous life in favour of the vitalistic ones Paula embodies' offered a vision that was 'an explicitly private one, at best marginal to the goals and practices of state ideology.'⁷⁰ It is precisely this that the Party was afraid of. Both Feinstein and Berghahn emphasise the huge popularity of the film among ordinary people and the cool or hostile reception by Party critics.⁷¹ Horst Knietzsch, one such critic, said that while Paula was 'a lovable and sympathetic young woman', her 'inner

⁶⁹ The Afro hairstyle is one of several references to contradictions in the official line: here it suggests someone living an alternative, undesirable lifestyle which the State would find threatening; it also evokes the GDR's strong anti-Americanism through its support for the imprisoned black activist Angela Davis, whose hair is exactly like that of the fairground worker: perhaps, therefore, he might be on the right side after all.

⁷⁰ op. cit., Feinstein, p. 211.

⁷¹ op. cit., Feinstein, p. 210; Berghahn, *Hollywood*, pp. 200-203.

richness' was sometimes overshadowed by 'biological interests'.⁷² Emotions, in other words, must be tamed by reason.

Throughout *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, the use of music contributes to the sense of threat to the Party's desired world view. As McLellan says, the Party was anxious about music, other than the classical music of the German cultural tradition, because of its perceived sexual dimension: the authorities 'feared that jazz and Beat might send young people into an uncontrollable sexual frenzy'.⁷³ This connection is obvious enough in the songs performed by the rock band, the Buhdys, at the beginning and end of the film, at the dance where Paul and Paula meet and particularly during the central love-making scene. Similarly, the music is impossibly loud when Paula comes upon the sex scene on her arrival home with the baby. Music is also significant when Paula, after carrying her coal up from the street, comes into her bedroom from the bathroom, to the strains of the theme tune from the film *Exodus*. It is her loneliness in the aftermath of her humiliating rejection that Paula wants to escape from, but her yearning for sex and love is heightened by the presence of the cinema below her with its sounds of love and desire. Using a Western film about Holocaust refugees attempting to reach Israel to suggest this hints at a deeper longing to leave behind her whole life in the GDR, though this is nowhere made explicit.⁷⁴

There is a satirical use of music as well. When Paul takes the reluctant Paula to an open-air concert, the orchestra is playing Beethoven's Violin Concerto, a reference to the GDR's claim to be the heirs to the great tradition of German music, music which is safe for the Party and for the people. However, Paula finds herself initially entranced, then sexually aroused, so that Paul has to fight her off. They leave early and head for his garage in a state of sexual intoxication, with Beethoven no less suggestive of orgasmic sexuality than are the Buhdys elsewhere. Here as in Paula's other sexual encounters with Paul, desire becomes, in Lacan's terms, *jouissance*, Paula's apparent realisation of herself in his desire.⁷⁵ As Lacan suggests, however, this is never enough; desire constantly re-emerges since the ultimate can never be

⁷² Horst Knietzsch, *Neues Deutschland*, 31st March 1973, quoted in op. cit., Feinstein, p. 210.

⁷³ op. cit., McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ There are also implied controversial references to the GDR's policy on Israel and the Palestinians, but these are outside the scope of this discussion.

⁷⁵ Néstor Braunstein, 'Desire and jouissance in the teachings of Lacan,' pp. 102-115 in Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 109-110.

achieved.⁷⁶ Paula's desire for Paul's desire leaves her condemned to long for something forever out of reach.

If music is particularly significant in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, so is silence, or perhaps the refusal to hear. Paula attempts to deal with the bewitching power of the Beethoven concerto by blocking her ears but eventually surrenders to it with tears pouring down her cheeks. Instead of allowing for silence between the movements, she stands up and claps, and the initially hesitant audience slowly and then enthusiastically joins in, as if all have shared in her overtly sexual experience. Paul and Paula also have an agreement to remain silent about the lives they lead outside the time they spend together. Paul immediately breaches this, but Paula blocks her ears, refusing to hear what he is saying. Paula, it is implied, is like the Party: she will never face 'reality' or listen to anything she does not want to hear and, like the Party, believes she can make things happen by deciding they must happen, by the force of her will. Just as the Party fears what it cannot control, so Paula does not want to 'hear' Paul's resistance to her attempt to control him. Similarly, when the process is apparently reversed and Paul in desperation is camped on the landing and stairs outside the entrance to her apartment, Paula will not see or hear him. This is only an apparent reversal: she is refusing to hear him out her own sense of self-preservation. When Paul eventually breaks in, Paula both tries to resist him and clings desperately to him, tearing at his shirt. Desire gets the better of her, but she understands the threat it contains. Giving into it, she condemns herself to her fate, to die in childbirth, to be excluded from the Party's promised future.

A recurring motif in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* which is relevant to the clash between unbounded desire and the Party's determination to assert its control and inhibit its population is the demolition of old housing blocks and the building of new, modern apartments. Life, in the sense of vitality and sexual energy and communal pleasure, goes on in the old buildings, such as the one in which Paula lives; conformism and lifelessness are associated with the new blocks. In the transitional space between the old and the new lies Paul's garage, the site of their early love-making as well as of uncertainty about which direction in life either of them should take. At key moments, another old building implodes and the ratio of new to old steadily increases until there is only Paula's block left to represent sexual

⁷⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse,' pp. 151-153.

liberation, fantasy and spontaneity. Late in the film, when Paul has apparently been talked into a reconciliation with Ines and is climbing into bed with her in their new apartment, he realises he cannot live like this. He throws the wardrobe open, hauls out Ines's hidden lover (in his conservative suit and tie) and pushes him into bed with her. This is timid sex in the regimented new block, not the axe-wielding encounter Paul will have in the old block with Paula where, in the dramatic final fantasy, he breaks down the door of Paula's apartment to get to her, urged on by all the neighbours in the block, who stand around watching and approving or weeping for joy as the couple finally get together, one of the neighbours taking the photo that is used throughout the film to represent the triumph of passion. This is collectivism as the Party never envisaged it. It represents spontaneous action by the masses, always a problem for the Party. With Paula's death, Paul empties the flat and moves to a new apartment where he lives with all the children. Outside, we are shown the final building, Paula's building, vanishing into a cloud of dust. Paul, it appears, has abandoned his career and his wife and opted for a life based on feelings, not on reason.

In the end, however, it is the Party that can be seen to triumph, since there are powerful strands in the film which support rather than undermine its position. Despite the power of the fantasies and the satire, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is ultimately a traditional heterosexual romance, promoting romantic love in line with the Party's understanding of it. Additionally, while as Feinstein says, Paula is not a traditional socialist heroine, she is still shown to be wanting a traditional female role as mother and lover and ordinary worker.⁷⁷ The way Paula is presented can also be seen as an example of infantilisation. Paula is a permanent child, prone to sudden whims, incompetent and even reckless as a mother, living a fantasy life with little apparent self-awareness or sense that she needs to take responsibility for herself or those around her. Here the infantilisation involves a clearly humiliating stereotyping of women. Paula also fits into another stereotype of the *femme fatale* who can capture and destroy men, the dangerous, irresistible witch who must be controlled or destroyed by men. Indeed it is the male doctor (who clearly treats Paula as a permanent child in the way he speaks to and touches her) who points out the choice she faces: to control her sexuality herself or to die as a result of it; that is, as a result of bewitching yet another man. While Paula's death was seen by Party critics as

⁷⁷ op. cit., Feinstein, p. 208; McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, p. 70.

problematic, it disposes of and is a metaphor for the need to destroy a heroine who was both compliant and troublesome, and it proves that the Party is right to be suspicious of the uninhibited expression of desire and the rejection of its own version of a utopian future.⁷⁸ Though Paul's actions might represent a change in gender roles as he takes responsibility for the children, the Party can be satisfied that Paula is no longer around to cause havoc in the society. Finally, having destroyed the physical site of joy and collective interaction and regimented its population in the new, isolating apartment blocks, the Party can expect – whether realistically or not – that uncontrolled desire will no longer be a threat to the people's commitment to socialism. The protagonists are defeated and the viewer, at least the feminist viewer, cannot avoid a sense of having been duped, demeaned and even humiliated by the wonderfully effective cinematography conveying what is ultimately such a crushing message. The Party has presided over the defeat of desire and ensured the future physical isolation of women, the dangerous carriers of that desire who must know their place and accept their subordination if they are to be tolerated in the socialist society.

Sex, satire and the Party: *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*

The Party's expressed hostility to desire and overt expressions of sexuality, as opposed to the idea of romance contained in its myth of heroic love, is a feature of novels and films of the GDR. Novels such as *Die Patrioten* endorse the official Party line. Others, such as Neutsch's *Spur der Steine* and Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* portray the damage done by the Party in holding to this line.⁷⁹ Still others, such as Braun's *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, satirise the Party for its hypocrisy in relation to desire. *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* uses humour pessimistically, suggesting that it cannot be enough to hold back the power of the party and to ward off the looming threat of humiliation.

Hinze-Kunze-Roman, based partly on Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, is considered to be one of the most controversial novels published in the GDR in the 1980s. As Colin Grant says, it represented both a political challenge to ideological orthodoxy and an 'aesthetic challenge to prevailing narrative conventions'.⁸⁰ The narrator, the

⁷⁸ op. cit., Berghahn, *Hollywood*, p. 101.

⁷⁹ Volker Braun, *Unvollendete Geschichte*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977).

⁸⁰ Colin B. Grant, *Literary communication from consensus to rupture: Practice and Theory in Honecker's GDR*, (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), p. 107.

principal characters and a character claiming to be the author engage in a long, fragmented, often scarcely coherent discussion with one another, with the audience and overtly with the Party, frequently about the power of sexual desire and power as an aphrodisiac. Whoever has power, it is suggested, has the life-enhancing opportunity to humiliate those with less power by demanding sex with them. There is no lack of clarity here about the way people are, and Party members among them.

Through the portrayal of the overweight senior functionary Kunze, the Party is criticised for abuse of power. Kunze, uninterested in romantic trappings or language, is addicted to sex. He knows that because of his Party position he is one of the chosen, free to do as he pleases and to see all women as sex objects. Sitting on the platform at a Party event, he muses happily on this:

Gerade jetzt befiel ihn diese Lust: da er unter den Gewählten saß, gerade hier auf seinem erhöhten Platz spürte er diese kommunen Triebe. Er schämte sich nicht. Es war eine Krankheit, mochte man meinen, aber er fühlte sich gesund, und stark, über den Graben zu segeln. Wohin? in die Arme einer Schwarzgelockten. Sie stand am Rednerpult.⁸¹

Kunze is presented on one level as an expansive, boisterous, energetic figure, full of life and enthusiasm. However, his much less lovable side is indicated by the way he treats his underweight driver and supposedly close friend Hinze as his servant and subjects him to repeated humiliation. Hinze has to take him to his various assignations or watch as he picks up women in the street or in the countryside and finds somewhere to have sex with them. Kunze is brutal in his discussion with Hinze about Hinze's wife, Lisa, whom he wants as yet another of his conquests:

KUNZE Du bist schlecht zu ihr. Du bist kein Mensch, ich wette du wichst. Du hast kein Recht auf sie.

HINZE Ja, wie denn –

KUNZE (schrie, außer sich:) Wir haben eine Welt zu gewinnen, und begnügen uns mit einer F–⁸²

Here, references to Freud and Marx and the *Communist Manifesto* are brought together but with deliberate irony, leaving the reader in no doubt that desire is stronger than the commitment to the class struggle.

Humour is used extensively to offer a critique of the Party. Its practices, its wooden language and its denial of the power of desire are all satirised through the

⁸¹ Volker Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988; first published 1985, GDR), pp. 26-27.

⁸² op. cit., Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, p. 35.

figure of Kunze. On one occasion when Kunze is having sex with a woman in a field while Hinze is nearby, listening in, he makes his sexual demands using the Party's planning and production vocabulary: 'Streng dich an. Mach mit. Hab ein Ziel vor den Augen. [...] Du mußt die neue Technik meistern.'⁸³ Hinze and Kunze also engage, with comic effect, in theoretical discussions about the nature of the society they are in. Hinze is often given the opportunity to elaborate ideas that Kunze has brought up. The Party's ideological approach, its attitude to the people, to the temptations of spontaneity and to academic thinking are all satirised, for instance, when Hinze says:

Wir haben dafür die große Idee in ein handliches Format gebracht, so daß sie die spontanen Gedanken ersetzen kann. Man kann die Idee bei sich führen, in der Aktentasche oder der Frühstücksbüchse, für den Fall es konkret wo mangelt. Das ist eine Leistung unserer Philosophen, die Praktiker sind und sich in der Theorie nicht ablenken lassen.⁸⁴

Braun's narrator is a strong presence in the novel. He frequently intervenes to comment on the characters or the action or the nature of the novel itself or to engage in a dialogue with the characters or with the 'author' in a way which mocks socialist realism. When Hinze is in a factory canteen enjoying all the different sorts of food on offer, the narrator and an imagined reader of the novel have a philosophical discussion about the nature of hunger and of freedom and the idea that beyond physical hunger there is a hunger for something more from life that cannot be satisfied without more freedom. Such passages ensured difficulty getting the novel published and hostility when it was finally published.⁸⁵ The narrator incorporates the process of trying to get the novel published into the novel itself, mocking the Frau Prof. Messerle who leads the attempts to get the author to write a different book which she could happily have in her living room with all the other similar books which offer 'eine sichere Bastion gegen die unzuverlässige Wirklichkeit'.⁸⁶ Accusing the author of obscenity and of not understanding romantic love, the professor, growing increasingly wild in her behaviour and, using Freudian terminology as well as the Party's jargon, says that: 'Die Liebe ist die Spontaneität in Person, bzw. in Personen, die der bewußten Führung und Leitung bedürfen. Der Autor hat das Werk nicht geplant bzw. den Plan nicht erfüllt. Er ist ein Opfer seiner Triebe, seiner Antriebe, seiner, nun Sehnsüchte, seiner... wir kennen das alle,

⁸³ op. cit., Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, p. 40.

⁸⁴ op. cit., Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, p. 105.

⁸⁵ See on the critical reception, op. cit., Grant, pp. 107-111, 117-118.

⁸⁶ op. cit., Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, p. 147.

Wunschvorstellungen...'⁸⁷ The characters, and the reader, are suddenly in the world of Rorty's 'idiosyncratic fantasies', rather than in a society calmly and determinedly marching forward towards socialism. The people have escaped from the clutches of the Party and have put aside their fear of humiliation. However, this can also be interpreted as the 'reader' and the 'author' lashing out defiantly but impotently against the Party. The narrator, through his emphasis on the ultimate power of the Party and the effectiveness of its structures and practices in reality, suggests that humour is just another form of defensive denial and that the threat of humiliation remains.

Desire, power and humiliation

The novels suggest consistently, across the decades, that one of the ways the Party responded to desire was through humiliation. Invading people's privacy (itself an act of humiliation, as discussed in Chapter 2) was often used to find out about sexual activity so that the information could be used to blackmail people or punish them for things the Party declared to be hostile to its interests. Desire, the invasion of privacy and humiliation form a theme in a significant sub-plot in Heym's novel *Collin*.

The doctors Christine Roth and her recently divorced husband, Andreas, are both Party members. Despite the divorce and the granting of the apartment to Christine, Andreas still lives there with Christine and their son. Various difficulties arise from his presence: confusion for their child and tension over how he should be looked after; an occasional and immediately regretted flaring up of sexual desire between them; Christine's continuing jealousy of the 'other women' in Andreas's life and his way of both patronising her and scorning her for her 'verkorksten Verhältnisse'.⁸⁸ Eventually Andreas has the possibility of an apartment 'in einem dieser Wohnsilos mit hohen Selbstmordraten und totaler Vereinsamung'.⁸⁹ For Christine, this opens up the prospect or fantasy of bringing her young lover, Peter, the son of the top Stasi official Urack, there to live and be looked after.

Things become more sinister when Christine is phoned by Peter to tell her he has gone to the West. Andreas, witnessing the moment (and enjoying the fact that 'Der weißliche Lichtschein der Lampe machte das dünne Nachthemd durchsichtig'), tells her that he knew about the affair all along, that the Stasi had told him and asked him

⁸⁷ op. cit., Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, pp. 149-150.

⁸⁸ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, pp. 246-248.

⁸⁹ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 158.

to inform on her.⁹⁰ He claims to have refused, but it is obvious to Christine that he is still in touch with the Stasi and has been talking with them about her. This in itself is a clear act of humiliation. Christine, knowing the Party's way of combining its mistrust of sexuality and desire with its political suspicion of its citizens and understanding how it exercises power, is suddenly fearful that the Stasi will take her child away from her. She feels guilt but no shame for not telling them that Peter was thinking of leaving the GDR. She knows it would have been morally unacceptable to betray him. Nevertheless she knows the Party will act against her, however unjust she feels this to be, and that her only choice is to seek to minimise the severity of the punishment. Allowing herself to be transferred out of her clinic to a lower-status job rather than standing her ground and refusing to accept she has done anything wrong is an acceptance of at least a minor humiliation. It is also an example of self-exclusion to avoid further, more-damaging humiliation.

Freud suggests that sexual desire and the desire for power intertwine. This is partly what has happened in the relationship between the Roths in *Collin*. It is also what is shown to happen through the character of Frieda Simson in Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp*. For Simson, power is something she can use for the Party but also for personal ends, so that her actions arise at least as much out of her emotions as out of her conscious political analysis. This portrayal conflicts with the Marxist-Leninist view that it is Frieda's class position (reinforced by her Party education) which will objectively determine her way of exercising her Party functions. If feelings cannot be tamed or dominated by thinking and if desire becomes a cause of action, this can only be the fault of the individual person concerned. Marxism-Leninism cannot come to terms with the Freudian view that someone in Simson's position who is given power and who has a strong aggressive drive and a strong libido will, in the absence of checks on that power, use it for her own ends, to increase her pleasure or reduce her pain, even if this is at someone else's expense. Specifically, Frieda will use her power to humiliate Ole Bienkopp and to threaten other Party members with similar treatment. "Ihr wißt nicht, was ich weiß", she says, 'lächelnd und überlegen', to the rest of the Party group when they question her about dismissing Bienkopp from the leadership of the co-operative.⁹¹

⁹⁰ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 217.

⁹¹ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 418.

An explicit connection is made between Simson's sexual desire and the use of power for her own ends. Though there are elements of stereotyping here of the woman who just needs a man to satisfy her needs, there is also satire which is at her expense and that of the Party, mocking its language and its practices. Her seduction of Wilm Holten ends with her saying, 'Jetzt hast du mir so gut wie die Ehre geraubt. Nimm selbstkritisch Stellung!', a comment both frivolous and suggestive of the power she now has over him because of the Party's disciplinary mechanisms.⁹² It is also significant that her surge of desire arises directly out of her excitement that Wunschgetreu is offering her power when he suggests she might become the local Party secretary.⁹³ She later uses her power over Wilm to keep him from supporting Ole at the Party meeting to discuss disciplining him over starting the co-operative: 'Wilm Holten ist für Bienkopp und seinen Kolchos, aber er darf nicht, wie er will. Wenn man einem Mädchen die Ehre geraubt hat, ist man kein unbescholtener Mensch mehr. Frieda hat ein bißchen gedroht: "Halt den unausgegorenen Rand in der Bienkopp-Sache, sonst holt dich die Kontrollkommission!"'⁹⁴

There is a similar connection between sex and power after the farcical one-night stand Simson initiates with Willi Kraushaar. While they agree to keep quiet about it, it is clear they do not forget it. By implication, it will come back to haunt them, as it does when Simson feels rejected by Kraushaar, who asks her:

'Was gibt's, Friedchen, so sauer?'

Friedchen schleppt an der Verfehlung jener Nacht. Sündenbeladen, fast aussätzig, von allen Seelen verlassen, ohne Hilfe und Unterstützung tappt sie durch ihr trockenes Leben.⁹⁵

After this almost sympathetic portrait, Simson once again turns her sexual frustration into determination to show her power, not at this stage against Kraushaar but against another man who has rejected her: 'Jetzt muß sie unwiderruflich mit diesem Quertreiber Bienkopp nachexerzieren, der darauf aus ist, sie als Mensch und Autorität zu zerstören.'⁹⁶ This determination reaches its logical conclusion when she uses her power over Kraushaar to force him to sign the dismissal notice which effectively destroys Ole Bienkopp.⁹⁷

⁹² op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 151.

⁹³ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 150.

⁹⁴ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 191.

⁹⁵ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 311.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 417.

While there is in the portrayal of Simson overt criticism of the way power is used by the Party, it is significant that it is a woman being portrayed in this position. At this time and much later in the GDR, women were excluded from political influence by the almost exclusively male leadership of the Party.⁹⁸ The critical line being taken in *Ole Bienkopp* in relation to the way the Party exercises power through someone such as Simson is weakened by the traditional male view of the woman using sex to get her way, seducing men and therefore diverting them from their real purpose, which is to implement the Party's orders. Other women in the novel are similarly portrayed. Ole's wife Annagret, for instance, is constantly driven by awareness of her sexual power, in relation to Ole and to the sawmiller, Ramsch, her earlier and later lover. Women are weak, it is suggested, vulnerable to their emotions and therefore not entirely to be trusted with power, while men are rational and reliable, unless led astray by women. Men, by definition it appears, are not driven by sexual desire in the same destructive way as women. Such views strengthen the ideological position of the Party leadership, just as they do in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. They are contradicted in the portrayal of the Party Secretary Horrath in Neutsch's *Spur der Steine* (discussed in Chapter 7) and satirised in works such as Braun's *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, though in each case the Party's position emerges relatively unscathed.

Sex, power and the Party's power

Action based on the emotions rather than on reason was seen as a threat to the Party's power. Humiliation was a tactic used to inhibit the expression of personal feelings and counter this threat. Both Party members and ordinary people in the GDR were subject to humiliation for acting in ways that accorded more with psychoanalytic views than with Marxist-Leninist theory. Ironically, the personal behaviour and statements of Party members, even at the highest level, tended to prove Freud right in much of what he was saying. These show an awareness among the Party leadership of the difficulty of living strictly in accordance with Marxist-Leninist tenets in relation to morality and sexuality, as well as a failure to acknowledge that the way they used power followed logically from Freud's views on the aggressive drive. The Party, of course, was at least in part a prisoner of the historically and nationally specific ideological context. German Marxism grew out of arguments and political disputes over romanticism, idealism, religion, voluntarism and the relative

⁹⁸ See the numbers in op. cit., Harsch, pp. 313-314.

strength of reason and passions.⁹⁹ The SED's forerunner, the KPD, had engaged in attempts to take power, in street battles against social-democrats and Nazis; had been involved in attempts during the Weimar period to liberalise laws relating to sexuality; and had, willingly or not, embraced the closing down of sexual experimentation by the Party in the Soviet Union. It had seen how the Nazis took and used power and how they glorified the Aryan body; had been persecuted by the Nazis, its members killed, imprisoned or forced into exile or underground; and some of its leaders had witnessed the purges, trials and arbitrary use of power in the Soviet Union.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the SED demonstrated in its practice an awareness of human aggressiveness and of the force of the sexual or erotic drive and the associated unpredictability of personal feelings when these are put ahead of reason. The Party could not admit any debt to Freud in this, however. It preferred to assert that it was influenced not by bourgeois theorists but by the new understanding of the world and history demonstrated by the Soviet Union. Nor could the Party admit that the consciousness of ordinary people in the GDR was also the product of a long development of ideas and ideologies in their historical context and of recent history, both the Weimar period and the Nazi period. The reality was that the prevailing ideas in the society could not become, by an effort of will by the Party after 1945, some kind of pure Marxism-Leninism but were bound to be the same mix of bourgeois, liberal, democratic, social-democratic, racist, anti-Semitic, patriarchal and Marxist ideas that had been handed down, reworked and internalised over generations. The result was that the Party leadership lived in a state of conscious denial about how people behaved and why. The alternative would have been too threatening to their ideology and to their claim to a right to power.

One of the ways the Party maintained its position of denial was through humiliation or the refusal to do anything about humiliation. The dismissive attitude adopted to the combination of violent aggression and the use of sex as a weapon during the period of the rapes by Red Army soldiers is one example of this in the formative period of the SED. As McLellan and Port demonstrate and as is clear from Goellner's account, in the 1950s and 1960s, Party morality meant inhibiting sexual expression and limiting it to manageable, acceptable proportions. The novels and

⁹⁹ See, e.g.: Michael Levin, 'Marxism and Romanticism: Marx's debt to German Conservatism,' pp. 400-413 in *Political Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 4, 1974; R. N. Berki, 'Through and Through Hegel: Marx's Road, to Communism,' pp. 654-671 in *Political Studies*, Vol. 38, Issue 4, 1990; Roland Boer, 'Opium, Idols and Revolution: Marx and Engels on Religion,' pp. 698-707 in *Religion Compass*, Volume 5, Issue 11, 2011.

films following the path of ‘heroic love’ represent this period in the same way, suggesting a fear of unbridled sexuality. Despite the liberalisation of the Honecker period, recorded by McLellan and demonstrated by the production of films such as *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, the humiliation of those who did not conform continued, though usually in a more subtle and less brutal fashion than in the earlier decades, as the Party attempted to keep behaviour within the parameters its ideology required. At the same time, the Stasi used its awareness of the power of desire to blackmail and punish people. These victims of humiliation by the Stasi were only vulnerable because of the narrowness of the Party’s attitudes and its refusal, until late in the 1980s, to tackle attitudes among ordinary people which were themselves likely to lead to humiliation.

At a deeper level, the Party’s presentation of its leaders over both the Ulbricht and Honecker periods as wise, magnanimous, paternal figures, contributed to the infantilisation of the population in a way that was permanently humiliating. This kept people in a lower status than was their due and sought to prevent them becoming fully adult, autonomous, self-determining figures. The narrative voice of *Ole Bienkopp* is an example of this approach in GDR representations. Similarly, in an anti-fascist film of the early 1960s, *Königskinder*, and an Alltag film of the 1970s, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, infantilisation is a powerful motif, even when apparently contradicted by modernist techniques in the films. Finally, the Party’s awareness of the power of the aggressive drive is demonstrated throughout the 1950s and 1960s through physical suppression of anyone seen as a threat, and in the more liberal years by a huge growth in the Stasi and its range of activities designed to prevent opposition emerging and to psychologically intimidate people in a humiliating way. Some of the consequences of these approaches, including their impact on attempts to ‘normalise’ the society, are discussed in the next chapter in relation to the everyday life of people in the GDR.

Chapter 6 Humiliation in everyday life

Introduction

Spinoza's epigram, 'there is no hope without fear and no fear without hope', could have been written for the ordinary people of the GDR, who wanted to make the best of what was around them for themselves and their families and who lived with hope but found it always tinged with anxiety about what might be done to them suddenly, unexpectedly, by those with power over their lives.¹ Both personal and fictional accounts indicate that ordinary people were likely to experience or witness humiliation by representatives of the Party or the State in their everyday lives and that they lived with a suppressed or overt fear of such humiliation happening to them or their families. These accounts suggest that the humiliation of the first two decades tended to be more immediately dramatic and forceful. However, other forms of equally incapacitating humiliation continued to be used during the Honecker period as the Party became less and less able in practice to control the increasingly individualistic, fragmented society with its many different social and cultural concerns and ways of self-expression.

Several features of the way power was used against ordinary people led to it being experienced as humiliation: unpredictability and arbitrariness; disproportion in punishments imposed; and the way power was used to redefine people as 'other' – undesirable, hostile, anti-social – and so exclude them, preventing them from living normal lives in the privacy of the home or outside in the society they wanted to feel they were part of. Two aspects of 'normal' are important here. Firstly, there is the process of 'normalisation' of the society which the SED sought to undertake after the rupture caused by the Nazi period and the war. Secondly, there are the norms that emerge during this process or that underpin it. As Fulbrook points out, the process and the norms themselves are based at least in part on a perception of the way things were or ought to have been at some time that preceded the rupture and reflect a desire to establish the way things ought to be for the future.² After the war, the process in both the West and the East was significantly influenced by the norms and intentions of the occupying powers. However, in the GDR the Soviet Union applied more strictly its version of normality, one which attempted to make a much clearer break

¹ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics in Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, translated by Samuel Shirley, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), p. 313.

² op. cit., Fulbrook, 'The Concept of "Normalisation"', p. 14.

with the German past. The SED complied, mostly willingly, with the Soviet approach. This did not involve a return to an actual or imagined set of past norms, except to the extent that the Party already had a vision of what a normal Communist society ought to be from the KPD's political activity during the Weimar period and from its attempts at underground activity during the Nazi period. To this were added some of the pre-Nazi norms and values related to the Party's claim that the GDR was the inheritor of the 'real' German history. However, in the GDR, as opposed to the West, there was no question of attempting to return to an imagined normal. On the contrary, there was a conscious effort by the Party to normalise a new type of society which looked forward, not back: the eventual 'normal' would be the promised utopian future. Even here there was an unacknowledged contradiction: while the normal society would only emerge at an unspecified time in the future, for the Party it was important, in terms of maintaining support and consent, to inculcate a sense that everyday life along the way was indeed normal life.

The personal and fictional accounts from the GDR suggest that, after the Nazi defeat, people in the Soviet Occupation Zone and then the GDR were happy to look forward, rather than consider their role during the Nazi period, and only looked back in order to attach themselves to real or imagined norms that predated the Nazi period, some of which they could see or believe prevailed in the fast-developing West. In the GDR, the norms that both the ordinary people and the leaders brought with them from pre-1933 Germany contributed to or existed side-by-side with those that were implied by the founding myths and accepted by both the Party and, however grudgingly, the general population. In this implicit compromise, however, there were highly contradictory positions. In principle, a commitment to respect for individual dignity and to willing co-operation for the benefit of all was shared by both sides. In practice, ordinary people had a different conception of justice (as discussed in Chapter 3) and a different view of what shaped them and made everyday life worthwhile, one (as discussed in the preceding two chapters) that did not see the class struggle as determining history and their personal behaviour. This chapter considers the tension between these two points of view and a specific response of the Party to it in the form of humiliation and the threat of humiliation in everyday life. It considers issues of individual autonomy and constraint and the interaction and overlap between private

and public lives, accepting, as Paul Betts notes, that private life ‘was never a world apart, but was always shot through by the forces of state and society’.³

Humiliation in the early years: imposing social and economic change

In the early years of the GDR, humiliation frequently took place as part of the process of consolidating power and imposing social and economic change. Examples of this are discussed in the chapter on the founding myths and in Chapters 7 and 8. Among the personal accounts is a memoir describing the purging of teachers and students in a school in 1949-50 for being hostile or potentially hostile to the new regime.⁴ The background to this was the Party’s determination to denazify the teaching profession and ensure that teachers and the education system were committed to supporting Marxism-Leninism and the advancement of students from working class and peasant backgrounds, at the expense of the children of those social groups defined as the class enemy.⁵ This late account is supported by copies of documents from the time of the events, directly relating to the humiliation of several teachers for allowing democratic decision-making in relation to putting up portrait of Stalin, giving equal treatment to students with religious convictions and not preventing students singing an anti-Soviet song. A striking aspect of this account is the sense conveyed fifty years later of how painful the humiliation was, not just to the immediate victims but also to the students who witnessed it. Such a sense is also conveyed by Christine Afifi in her 2003 account of her father’s humiliation in 1952 as the Party increased its control over private businesses in accordance with decisions of the Second Party Conference in 1952 to formally set about building socialism and to take control of and promote heavy industry, with an emphasis on raising productivity.⁶

Walter Klug owned and managed the Walter Klug Eisengießerei in Taucha, outside Leipzig. Despite 75% of the works being destroyed during the war, the firm increased production between 1945 and 1950 from 507 to 1,105 tonnes and the workforce from 56 to 86. A photograph from the period shows a horse-drawn float in a festival procession, with a long banner along the side proclaiming:

³ Paul Betts, *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 4.

⁴ *Ein Abitur im Jahre 1950. Gymnasium Augustum und Lessing-Oberschule Görlitz, 1945-1950. Politisches Sittenbild einer ostdeutschen Schule*, (2001), Kempowski BIO 6189.

⁵ See, for instance, op. cit., Dennis, p. 54; Ross, p. 55; Weber, *Die DDR. 1945-1990*, p. 40.

⁶ Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR.*, (München: DTV, 1999), pp. 147-151.

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However, despite this public commitment or perhaps, Walter Klug's daughter surmises, because of the success of the firm, the SED was busy devising a way to strip Walter Klug of the ownership of the Eisengießerei. A charge of siphoning off state products for private use – 99 eggs, 22 bottles of oil and 12 portions of butter – led to Walter Klug being arrested and imprisoned in 1952. Klug's daughter, Christine Afifi, asserts that this was a trumped-up charge, and the Stasi files attached to her account appear to confirm this. The firm was put under the control of a 'Treuhand', liquidated on the grounds of bankruptcy and then taken into state ownership. What happened was felt by the family as a humiliating attack. This had long-term consequences which become clear from the determined, perhaps obsessive, search by Afifi for justice and public recognition of the wrongs committed. Her account covers the period of the arrest and eventual release as well as the successful attempt to gain restitution of the family firm four decades later. It is an example of the intergenerational transmission of the trauma of humiliation as well as of the way humiliation is extended to family members beyond the one supposedly culpable, something which can be seen to form a pattern in acts of humiliation by the Party and the State.

Following the arrest and imprisonment of her husband, Elfriede Klug sought to publicise the case and seek justice for him and for her family. In response to what she sees as false allegations in the SED paper, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, on 25th November 1952, she writes a long letter of rebuttal which is apparently not published. She writes to the President, Wilhelm Pieck, on 27th December 1952 and again on 22nd January 1953. The reply of 3rd February refers her back to the prosecuting authorities, declaring that the law prevents interference by the President. When Klug is put on trial, a number of the workers from the iron foundry, 'die wie eine große Familie zu uns hielten,' go to court with Elfriede Klug. When it is seen that they are there to support the defendant, they are excluded from the court.⁷

The mother and the children – who cannot understand what is happening and are living in fear – are confined to the house, 'wie Gefangene'.⁸ On 15th April 1953,

⁷ A similar exclusion is depicted in Kurt Maetzig's film, *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, (DEFA, 1965), a victim of the 11th Party Plenum in 1965.

⁸ op. cit., Afifi: letter of 20.05.2003 to Kempowski Archive.

Party officials appear at their home, requiring the mother and the children aged nine and ten to move out within twenty-four hours. Again, the workers are held up as the model of good behaviour: ‘Da meine Mutter schwerbeschädigt war, konnte nur wieder durch die freiwillig Hilfe unserer Arbeiter die schnelle Räumung passieren.’

On 12th May 1953, Elfriede Klug writes to the city housing authorities saying she has nothing to live on, has been refused benefit payments, has two school-age children and is herself seriously disabled by an accident at work. She pleads for support at least for the rent. Shortly after, Walter Klug is released in unusual circumstances. On 17th June 1953, the workers in the foundry, against the objections of those loyal to the Party, stopped work, went to collect Elfriede Klug and set off to the prison in Leipzig, determined to free Walter Klug. For reasons that are not made clear, he was released the next day but many of the workers were arrested: ‘Sie bezahlten ihren mutigen Kampf für Gerechtigkeit mit Zuchthaus und vielen Repressalien gegen ihre Famili’ (sic). The Stasi file included with the documents confirms the workers’ support for Walter Klug: ‘95% der Belegschaft steht hinter den ehemaligen Besitzer, die sich dauernd für die Rückführung des Betriebes in seine Hände einsetzen und dafür sogar politische Forderungen [section of copy illegible] stellte’.⁹

On 14th December 1955 bankruptcy proceedings were taken against the family, who then escaped to the West. The long-term consequences of humiliation are demonstrated in Afifi’s preoccupation over decades with justice, restitution and making good what was done to her father. She keeps constantly in mind both her own feelings and the image of her father on his release:

Ich kann niemals sein gequältes Lächeln in seine rotunterlaufenen Augen vergessen. [...] Die Menschenwürde, die man meinem Vater genommen hat, habe ich immer in seinem traurigen Lächeln gelesen. Er und seine Familie durften niemals wieder, bis zur Wende, 1990, das Gelände der Eisengießerei und das Wohnhaus betreten. [...] Aber dieses „Traurige Lächeln“ gab mir die Kraft für seine Wiedergutmachung nach der Wiedervereinigung zu kämpfen und nicht nur Täter zu suchen.

It was satisfying for her, therefore, that the successful court battle for restitution was concluded on 17th June 1993, exactly forty years after the events of 1953. She herself, however, despite being able to say ‘Ich bin wieder zu Hause’, was still not free of the consequences of the humiliation of her father and her family. She continued to seek

⁹ ‘Betrieb Eisengießerei Klug, Taucha’, file number unclear; stamped BStU 000062, in op. cit., Afifi.

some kind of payback, some impossible return to the way things had been before it all happened. She wrote a number of what are effectively ‘vengeance articles’. The most satisfying was probably the one in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 17th June 1999. The long account is headed: ‘99 Eier zuviel in Kühlschrank – Chef verhaftet’, with subheading, ‘Belegschaft der Gießerei von Walter Klug löste am 17. Juni 1953 den Aufstand in Taucha aus / Tochter lädt zum Treffen ein’. She encloses with her account a copy of the same paper’s article of 25.11.1952, entitled: ‘99 Eier wanderten in Herrn Klugs Kühlschrank’. Nearly four years later there is an article in the magazine, ‘Super illu’, dated 8th May 2003, on the events of 17th June 1953, with subheading: ‘Unsere Arbeiter wollten meinen Vater befreien’. Afifi also uses the Stasi file and the restitution proceedings to show that the case against her father was a carefully planned way of bringing a flourishing firm into state ownership. Among the findings of fact from the restitution proceedings, there is a reference to Herr Stolze, one of the ‘Treuhandler’ in 1955, who admitted that ‘das Unternehmen Klug zielgerichtet in den Konkurs geführt worden sei. Dieser Auftrag sei an ihm als Treuhänder mündlich Ende 1953/Anfang 1954 durch Vertreter der Sozialistischer Einheitspartei Deutschlands ergangen.’¹⁰ Stolze stated that the firm was in a satisfactory contractual position and had no financial problems, having made a profit in the year to February 1953 of around 200,000 Marks. Stolze’s position is the subject of the Stasi report, which declares that he was put into his post by the Party to achieve its aims in relation to the iron foundry, but that he also worked with those hostile to this action and constantly protected them. While this raises a query about the reliability of Stolze as a witness, it further confirms the Party’s role in setting out to seize control of the firm.

The account of the Walter Klug Eisengießerei is at one level the story of the deliberate humiliation of a well-off private owner of a business, someone who could, by definition, be seen as hostile to the interests of the Party and the State, however hard he might try to support their efforts to ensure economic growth. The strategy worked, destroying his position but also, by his daughter’s account, damaging him physically and psychologically. At another level, the account is the story of the humiliation of Walter Klug’s daughter and of the consequences of this: her need to pick over the facts of the case obsessively for fifty years and her inability to put it

¹⁰ Document 09. April 1992, Az. 3IV/3038-Klu Fri-he, in op. cit., Afifi.

behind her. For her, no restitution or reparation could ever achieve what she hoped, to make it all never to have happened.

Humiliation as an experience in everyday life

The accounts also present humiliation by the Party or the State as something experienced, often when they least expected it, by ordinary people, whether they were somewhat opposed to the regime, apparently neutral towards it or even supportive of it. Such humiliation is often hard to explain or to categorise. It appears to happen because power is allocated to officials without accountability and because of a perceived gulf between representatives of the Party or the State and ordinary people. In 1956, for example, when Ingeborg Öhlmeyer is travelling to join her parents in Hamburg, where her son has had specialist eye treatment, she witnesses humiliation which is carried out apparently for the sake of it, as nothing more than a demonstration of power designed to destroy its victim. Öhlmeyer wants to distance herself from everything political. She is acutely aware of the horrors of the Nazi period, but has personally suffered from the shortages of food and clothing in the GDR and has witnessed the threats and pressure faced by her brother-in-law and sister as they manage a 'Kurhaus und Lindenhof' on the Baltic coast. She has herself been pressured to become politically active in the GDR and has finally responded by deciding to leave. The train to the West carries a number of older women and an old man on his own, holding a large funeral wreath. When they reach the border, the passengers are searched and the man with the wreath is taken away. Öhlmeyer is relieved that during the search of her bag, the outside pocket where she has hidden her silver cutlery, buried in 1945 and dug up a year later, is overlooked. There is a sense of tension and fear in the train as it waits and nothing happens. After three quarters of an hour, the old man comes back: 'in den Händen ein Stück vom Pappkarton und darin total zerfleddert sein Kranz. Er schluchzte und weinte immerfort und sagte kein einziges Wort. Was haben die bloß gesucht, Maschinengewehr oder Handgranaten? Welch eine Pein. Wir alle schluckten.'¹¹

In accounts of everyday life in all its banality, humiliation can suddenly appear as an issue. Margarete Kessler, writing in 1964 to one of her sons, both of whom went to the West shortly before the Wall went up, discusses the weather, planting cucumbers

¹¹ Ingeborg Öhlmeyer, *Erinnerungen* (2002), Kempowski BIO 6692 p. 6.

and the benefits of a new washing machine. In the middle of this, she mentions the plight of her daughter Ina:

Ina und Reinhard müssen jetzt „Liebe im Versteck“ spielen. Reinhard hatte Befehl bekommen, entweder das Mädchel fahren lassen oder sein Fliegen aufgeben, und da ist die ganze Schule, die er besucht hat, umsonst und es geht ihm alles verloren. Erstens, die Brüder sind nach dem Westen gegangen, und sie arbeitet noch in einem Privatbetrieb. Auch die Eltern waren nicht genug sozialistisch.

Her letter then concludes: ‘Nun, inzwischen sind meine Bohnen eingekocht und nun geht es ins Bett.’¹² Three weeks later, Kessler says to her son in the middle of chatting about shopping and children: ‘Tante Annel hatte wieder einen Nervenzusammenbruch. Onkel Alfred wurde verhaftet, Sauer Heini und Tamm aus Krauschwitz, sie sollen, wie wir gehört haben, den Staat beleidigt haben, das ist mehr wie schlimm.’¹³

The arbitrary ban on flying, with its political motivation that ignores the rule of law and any sense of justice as fairness, is echoed in Christoph Hein’s post-Wende novel, *Willenbrock*, where it is gradually revealed that the incident which changed Willenbrock’s life was his brother’s escape to the West in a glider. Willenbrock, the outstanding pilot in the local flying club, is at once excluded from the club, banned from flying forever and forced to leave school and work in a factory for two years before he is allowed to study again.¹⁴

In other novels, the examples of humiliation of ordinary people in everyday life often appear in sub-plots. Neutsch’s *Spur der Steine*, a ‘Bitterfeld’ novel, published in 1964 but set in a constantly expanding chemical works in the period from 1959 to July 1961 (that is, before the building of the Wall), depicts the conversion to the Party of the charismatic, anarchistic building worker, Balla, largely through the work of the dedicated but flawed Party Secretary, Horrath. Horrath’s wife, Marianne, is mainly the unseen victim of his affair with the engineer, Kati Klee. However, some prominence is given to a set of incidents where Marianne is approached by a young teacher who is being scapegoated by a senior Party official. The Party official’s twelve-year-old son had slipped away from a holiday camp where she was working and tried to leave for the West. The Party official chooses to deflect blame on to the teacher and uses as proof of her inadequacy the fact that two of her brothers ‘haben

¹² Margarete Kessler, 10.08.1964, in Andreas Kessler, *Fluchtberichte und Alltagsbriefe, die deutsch-deutsche Befindlichkeit betreffend, Mai 1961 bis Dezember 1989*, Kempowski BIO 6780.

¹³ op. cit., Kessler, 30.08.1964.

¹⁴ Christoph Hein, *Willenbrock*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 293-294.

die Republik verraten'.¹⁵ The Party official is shown to be oppressive and apparently brutal to both his wife and his son, and the son is clearly the victim of this terrible marriage. The teacher's own boss turns away and refuses to act, despite the evident abuse of power. Marianne, outraged by the injustice, embarks on an ultimately futile quest to stop the teacher being dismissed. Marianne is clear about the full significance of what has taken place and its long-term consequences:

Er mißbrauchte in kalter Berechnung seine Funktion, opferte ein junges, unerfahrenes Mädchen, das soeben erst die Fachschule verlassen hatte, schüchterte es mit politischen Drohungen ein und zerstörte in ihm die Träume vom Leben, bevor es gelebt hatte. Was aber am schlimmsten war, niemand hinderte ihn daran, niemand zog ihn deswegen zur Rechenschaft.¹⁶

This set of events, spread over one hundred and fifty pages, appears to have little purpose in the novel except to raise questions about the nature of justice and injustice and to stress that Party officials are liable to abuse their power and use humiliation in order to maintain their own standing in the society.¹⁷ The narrator implies that this happens because people who are given power tend to misuse it for their own benefit, since, regardless of the wider context, this is simply the way people are.

A personal account written retrospectively by Ilse Steger after the Wende describes a similar set of humiliations as part of everyday life. Her daughter, born prematurely in 1963, suffered brain damage at birth. None of the health or social work professionals can recommend anything she should do or tell her how best to look after her daughter. The daughter gets a place in a nursery but this is unsatisfactory because the other parents are afraid of the detrimental effects on their children. Eventually a specialist centre for the whole of East Berlin is set up in Lichtenberg and in 1966, when the child is three, her mother is able to take her there. This involves a long, arduous journey, six days a week, since she has to work Monday to Saturday. Despite this, Steger and the other parents voluntarily work at the centre when they can, since it is medically oriented and 'es gab zu diesem Zeitpunkt keine pädagogischen Konzepte speziell für Behinderte.' Because there is no educational help offered to the children, the parents try to devise ways of making things better and try to learn more about looking after the children. Steger seeks advice from a friend in the West. Even to help disabled children, this is not acceptable to the GDR authorities: 'Als ich meine Freundin in West-Berlin um ein Buch auf

¹⁵ op., cit., Neutsch, p. 774

¹⁶ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 776.

¹⁷ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 627-628, 771-776.

diesem Gebiet bat und sie es mir schickte, wurde es abgefangen und beschlagnahmt.¹⁸ In 1980, when her daughter is seventeen and conditions for her are more humane under Honecker's consumer socialism, she is still not beyond the reach of humiliation by officials apparently more concerned with systems than with people. The daughter is required to work in a workshop and is given two weeks to be introduced to the different tasks expected of her. Given her disability, this training period is far too short. The judgement of those above her when she tries to work states, implacably, that 'sie die Arbeitsnorm nicht erreicht hätte und ihr außerdem die Arbeitsmoral fehle'.¹⁹

Humiliation as revenge

Some examples of humiliation in everyday life appear as acts of revenge arising from the frustration of officials at their own impotence. From the various accounts, this appears more likely to happen against the background of apparently inexorable social change in the 1970s. Efforts to build a utopian version of socialism under Ulbricht gave way to a more domesticated, individualistic approach. The Party and the State, bound also by new international agreements, found their power was not limitless. This is suggested by the tussle between officials and Klaus Renft, founder of the legendary rock group, the Klaus Renft Combo.

Renft was not hostile to the GDR as such. In his autobiography, based on interviews, diary entries and extracts from his Stasi file, Renft speaks warmly of his early years growing up among the ruins of Leipzig, with a striking image of normalisation taking place: 'Neben unserem Haus stand eine Ruine, eines Tages wurde sie gesprengt, damit hatten sich die Trümmerbahnen erledigt, und auf dem freien großen Platz spielten wir fortan Fußball. So ist die Welt durchaus in Ordnung: Aus Kriegsplätzen werden Fußballplätze.'²⁰ In his autobiography, this theme recurs as he tries time after time to rationalise what is being done to him by the regime and to make it acceptable within the framework of his own view that the GDR was fundamentally a good place to be.

Having been part of a group banned in the 1960s under Ulbricht, Renft retrains, forms his new group and seeks to remain within the boundaries of the permissible in

¹⁸ Ilse Steger, Elisabeth Lademann, *Kein schönes Land. Wie 50 Jahre Zeitgeschichte unser Leben bestimmten. 2 Freundinnen erinnern sich an die Zeit von 1939 bis 1989*, written 1989-1990, Kempowski BIO 6847, p. 22.

¹⁹ op. cit., Steger, pp. 22-23.

²⁰ Klaus Renft, *Zwischen Liebe und Zorn. Die Autobiographie*. Herausgegeben von Hans-Dieter Schütt, (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1997), Kempowski BIO 6893UF, p. 40.

the relatively more liberal period under Honecker.²¹ He is aware of the precariousness of his position and of the impossibility of predicting how the authorities will react, despite their partial acceptance of the spread of Western musical influences and rock music in particular in the GDR: ‘Ich sagte ja, bei jedem Auftritt zum Schluß wußten wir, das könnte der letzte sein. So hat man alle Kraft in diesen Auftritt gelegt – um Musik so autonom wie möglich zu machen. Es war ein freies Bewegen in Raum und Zeit.’²² In 1975, even before the narrowing down leading to and resulting from the Biermann affair in 1976, they are summoned to meet a Frau Oelschlegel from the Konzert- und Gastspiellieddirektion. Renft secretly records her declaration that ‘Die Texte, die Sie mir übergaben, haben mit unserer sozialistischen Wirklichkeit keine Übereinstimmung. Die Arbeiterklasse wird darin diffamiert und verletzt.’²³ They are banned from performing and their instruments are immediately confiscated. Klaus Renft soon realises to his dismay how humiliation involves not only injustice but also rejection and exclusion and how this adds to the effectiveness of what has been done to him. At the festival for political songs in Berlin in February 1976, he is ostracised by everyone he knows or has worked with: ‘Ich hätte mir von denen, mit denen ich mal gemeinsam solidarisch für Chile war, jetzt auch ein wenig Solidarität gewünscht. Nothing! Ehrlich, man grüßte mich nicht einmal. Das Schlimmste ist, wenn dem Menschen das Gespräch verweigert wird. Totschweigen, Kommunikation verweigern – das war die sozialistische Todesstrafe.’²⁴

In the same year, wanting to marry a Greek woman he has met, Renft applies for permission to go to Greece. He is clear that he does not want to be seen to be leaving the GDR for political reasons, since he still has a utopian belief in its future: ‘In der einen DDR haben wir gelebt, die andere haben wir in der Zeitung gelesen, und von der dritten haben wir geträumt. Diese dritte DDR wollte ich mir nicht nehmen lassen.’ The authorities are not prepared to make it easy for him, however: ‘Scheißspiel: Die einen bei der Stasi hatten mir die Flucht per Hochzeit angeraten, die anderen wollten mich demütigen. Oder es waren ein und dieselben. Schizophrene Truppe.’²⁵ When he is finally allowed to leave, he and his partner pack their things carefully in cartons and crates so that they are not damaged in transit. When they collect them in West

²¹ op. cit., Renft, pp. 66-69, 84-85, 94.

²² op. cit., Renft, p. 161.

²³ op. cit., Renft, p. 106.

²⁴ op. cit., Renft, p. 124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Berlin, ‘da war alles ein einziger Scherbenhaufen. Gute Arbeit hatten die Jungs geleistet!’ He could have howled with rage, he says, then attempts to reduce the impact of this further humiliation by rationalising what has happened: ‘Aber auch das war vielleicht die verständliche Reaktion von kleinen Leuten, die zusehen mußten, wie einer die enge Welt verläßt, in der zu bleiben sie verurteilt waren.’²⁶ Even so, looking back, he is keen to stress the ordinariness and so the acceptability of how they lived in the GDR: ‘Wir sind doch nicht nur vierzig Jahre gepeitscht worden, bei Wasser und Brot. Nein, wir haben wirklich gelebt. Das verstehen die im Westen nicht, aber es gibt keine Gründe, es zu verdrängen, nur weil die Westler das nicht kapieren.’²⁷

Humiliation by the State and ordinary people

Some examples of humiliation in everyday life reflect the failure of the Party to live up to its idealised image of itself. Chapter 3 (the founding myths) demonstrates the Party’s awareness that humiliation had terrible consequences and needed to be avoided. This point is made explicitly in Hans Fallada’s novel, *Jeder stirbt für sich allein*, one of the founding literary texts of the GDR. Escherich, the highly effective Gestapo officer (and former civilian police officer) assigned to investigate the distribution of postcards hostile to the Nazis, is suddenly declared by his brutal superior, a professional Gestapo officer, to be failing, and to be doing so deliberately. From one moment to the next, he is stripped of everything he thought was his due. He is punched in the face and taken down to the cells to become a victim of the brutal SS officers.²⁸ He is subsequently and equally arbitrarily reinstated but will suffer forever from the knowledge of how he was treated and the fear of it happening again. He knows he is still viewed by his superior as his victim or future victim and that nothing can change this or reverse what has been done to him: ‘Escherich arbeitet wie eh und je. Aber wenn ihm auch keiner was ansieht, und wenn er auch hofft, eines Tages wieder ohne Zittern mit seinem Vorgesetzten Prall zu können, Escherich weiß, er wird nie wieder der alte.’²⁹ In words reminiscent of Améry’s view of the impact of the first blow (discussed in Chapter 2), Escherich realises that the first punch in the face was enough to strip him of his illusions about himself and make him understand

²⁶ op. cit., Renft, p. 126.

²⁷ op. cit., Renft, p. 162.

²⁸ op. cit., Fallada, pp. 239-241.

²⁹ op. cit., Fallada, pp. 279-280.

fear for the first time.³⁰ This fear will now be an ineradicable part of his being, reducing him to nothing:

Ein Faustschlag kann ihn in ein heulendes, zitternes, angstvolles Garnichts verwandeln, nicht viel besser als der kleine, stinkende, feige Taschendieb, mit dem er tagelang die Zelle geteilt hat und dessen eiligst geleierte Gebete ihm jetzt noch im Ohr sind. Nicht so sehr viel besser. Nein, gar nicht besser!³¹

When Otto Quangel, who is responsible for the postcards, is finally arrested, the SS officers celebrating his capture get drunk, go down into his cell and one by one break their schnapps glasses on his head, so that blood pours down over him. Escherich, who has been, in Gestapo terms, decent to Quangel, and who has slowly been influenced by his way of thinking and acting, is forced to do the same. Shortly after, filled with shame at his participation in the humiliation of Quangel, Escherich shoots himself.³² The lesson for the SED is clearly stated: humiliation, a tool of the Nazis, is utterly destructive and incompatible with a commitment to dignity and justice.

Thirty years later, the case of Peter Erdmann with its similarities to the fictional case of Quangel calls into question the SED's commitment to dignity and justice and its recognition of the damaging effects of humiliation.³³ Erdmann was born in 1947. In 1976, satisfied with his life, working in a restaurant in Meiningen and living apparently without friction with his second wife from whom he was divorced, he had no problems with being in the GDR. He had served his time in the army and subsequently as a reservist and was a part-time helper ('VP-Helfer') with the local police where he carried out his duties satisfactorily.³⁴ When the singer Wolf Biermann was deprived of his GDR citizenship in 1976 (itself a clear case of humiliation) and prominent intellectuals protested, Erdmann was one of the many ordinary people who also expressed their dissatisfaction.³⁵ He hand-wrote about fifty small placards, saying simply, 'Solidarität mit Biermann', and distributed them in doorways, through letter boxes and on car windscreens. Believing only that the withdrawal of Biermann's citizenship was too great a punishment, he wanted, he says, to get people to write to the government to persuade it to change its mind. After a few

³⁰ op. cit., Améry, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*, pp. 67-68.

³¹ op. cit., Fallada, p. 280.

³² op. cit., Fallada, pp. 300-303.

³³ Peter Erdmann, *Stasi Files and related Procedural Files on Peter Erdmann, with introduction by Peter Erdmann*, Kempowski BIO 6232.

³⁴ Document 066 in op. cit., Erdmann.

³⁵ Robert Grünbaum, *Die Biermann-Ausbürgerung und ihre Folgen*, in op., cit., Eppelmann.

days of fruitless investigations and the extensive use of Stasi Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter (IMs), Erdmann was suddenly arrested. In 1977 he was sentenced to fifteen months in prison ‘wegen staatsfeindlicher Hetze’. The case against him was strengthened by a specific technique involved in the process of humiliation: ‘re-describing’ the person or his earlier actions.³⁶ In 1973, it was claimed at his trial, Peter Erdmann had said in a ‘Kampfmeeting’ organised by the SED to celebrate the founding day of the GDR: ‘So ein Mist, die reden jeden nach dem A... jetzt müßte man Stunk machen. Die spinnen ganz schön rum. Die brauchen noch die Nationalhymne zu spielen. Die sollen froh sein, daß sie noch frei rum laufen dürfen.’³⁷ He was not investigated for this, but it was used to prove his fundamental hostility to the Party and the Government (in that order) and to show that he had hidden this hostility during his work for the State. Erdmann was not permitted to challenge this evidence or cross-examine the relevant witness.

His description of the years after his imprisonment indicates a deep sense of injustice and impotent anger, common consequences of being humiliated.³⁸ Everything seemed to conspire against him. It was stated during his trial that he would be taken back into his job but this did not happen. He was told there were no jobs available in the whole of the ‘Betrieb Meiningen (Gaststätte und Küche)’ or in other positions, though his former colleagues assured him this was not the case. His freedom of movement was limited through the use of a special identity card and he felt that he ‘hatte unter einem unausgesprochenen Berufsverbot zu leiden.’ While he was in prison, his ex-wife, Inge, had another relationship and a child. Nevertheless, he went back to live with her and this seemed the one stable and reasonably satisfactory aspect of his life. Under pressure from her father, Inge moved to an agricultural co-operative but then invited Erdmann to join her there. In total, they lived together for three years after his release from prison until pressure from her father made him leave. Unable to get a job, he was helped for a while by the protestant church, then was employed as a cook. He was forced to move on again when a rumour was put around that he was a Stasi IM.

Unemployed after the Wende, Erdmann felt bitter and vengeful. He decided to look at his Stasi file, and only then discovered, after more than fifteen years, that the

³⁶ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. 90.

³⁷ op. cit., Erdmann, Sheet 399.

³⁸ op. cit., Erdmann, letter 05.06.2001 to Kempowski archive.

single source of information the police had about his actions was his ex-wife, Inge. Her statement says she was not interested in Biermann. She informed on her ex-husband in order to keep him out of trouble: ‘Ich tat dies in der Absicht, meinen geschiedenen Ehemann zu helfen.’³⁹ Despite the success of rehabilitation proceedings and the quashing of the original judgement, Erdmann, like Christine Afifi, remained too deeply affected by what had been done to him to be able to put it behind him. Angry at his ex-wife’s part in his humiliation, he decided to seek revenge. He was advised that he could institute proceedings against the judges in his case and against Inge. When he was assured that she would not go to prison if convicted, he decided to proceed. His motivation was to make them, and specifically Inge, endure being investigated and having to appear in court and thereby suffer at least some of what he had suffered. He sought to respond to humiliation with humiliation.

The proceedings were ultimately unsuccessful for technical reasons and because of the impossibility of proving direct interference by the SED or other political authorities. Nevertheless, Erdmann appears to have partly achieved his aim of unsettling those who did so much damage to him and has the satisfaction of hearing the judges’ careful but scathing comments on legal practice in the GDR. However, though his case dates from the 1970s and not from the Nazi period and though he was not punished as harshly as Quangel (who was executed), it is still clear that his life has been permanently blighted by actions he quite reasonably, if naively, did not anticipate. His position as a quiet supporter of the GDR and someone happy to lead an ordinary, apparently normal life was not enough to save him from being unjustly redescribed as an enemy of the State. Ironically, it can be seen that his naiveté meant that he had no fear of humiliation so took no real steps to avoid it. His bitterness stemmed from the initial shock of what was done to him by the State, the further humiliation he experienced and witnessed in the prison, the dishonesty and vindictiveness with which he was treated when he left prison and the eventual realisation that the source of his humiliation was someone he had trusted, his ex-wife, who, during their subsequent years together, had continued to deceive him over her role.

³⁹ op. cit., Erdmann, p. 302.

Humiliation and shame in *Der fremde Freund* and *Horns Ende*

Peter Erdmann, like others whose accounts are discussed here, was trying to lead a normal life, matching the society's apparent expectations. The difficulty of living a normal life, along with the insistence of ordinary people that such a life is possible, is a feature of Christoph Hein's novels. History and the immediate social conditions in which people live are shown to disrupt and reshape the lives of Hein's characters, within an overt, if multi-layered moral or ethical context. Phil McKnight points to the preoccupation in Hein's work with the need for complex perspectives on historical and social events and interactions. McKnight suggests that understanding pre-existing hierarchical moral categories 'can provide an insight into the nature, functionality and application of guilt, responsibility, regret, justice and punishment of transgressions in society and into how all this determines the present and the future.' In this context, *Der fremde Freund*, *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler* can be seen to 'deal partly with the hypocritical and cynical failure of socialism to inspire people to act according to its very principles'.⁴⁰ David Robinson similarly identifies a focus in Hein's work on 'the inexorable pressure of historical events on relatively helpless individuals, paradoxically emphasising their responsibilities in the face of, and in spite of, history.' These narratives, he suggests, 'identify the individual's temptation to withdraw from society and from history as the most insidious threat to individual happiness.'⁴¹

Historical events and the way history is interpreted and represented do indeed constitute a theme in Hein's work. In *Horns Ende*, history is seen as a broken mirror, its pieces scattered, an image linked to the structure of the narrative with its many points of view which gradually come together to provide a broken-mirror approach to the story of the area and its population.⁴² In *Der fremde Freund* the events of June 1973 and the Party's campaign against religion are a necessary part of the background, while in *Der Tangospieler* the events of the Prague Spring influence personal attitudes and those of the Party. In *Willenbrock* the rupture in German history arising from the fall of the Wall and reunification is seen as causing a rupture in Willenbrock's own life.

⁴⁰ Phil McKnight, 'How the Past Writes the Future: Social Autobiography and the Dynamics of Discrimination in Christoph Hein's "Landnahme" and other Writings,' pp. 63-89 in *German Quarterly*, Vol. 82, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 65-66, 71.

⁴¹ David W. Robinson, *Deconstructing East Germany: Christoph Hein's Literature of Dissent*, (Camden House, 1999), p. 75.

⁴² op. cit., *Horns Ende*, pp. 229-231.

Different commentators have noted other themes. Beth Linklater discusses the meaning of rape in Hein's work and its significance for female identity, a concern relevant to all three of the pre-Wende novels. Georgina Paul observes that 'narratives of the GDR's last decade inscribe the absence of meaning not in political terms, but in terms of the unfulfilled desire for love, for *emotional* relationship' and says that this forms a 'structural principle' in *Der fremde Freund*, *Horns Ende* and *Der Tangospieler*. She suggests that this displacement is 'suggestive of an engagement more than merely intellectual in the dream of human community that was Communism, and a crucially personal disillusionment at the lovelessness of the reality.'⁴³

However, an additional way of considering Hein's novels which complements these interpretations comes from concentrating on how the narrative circles around a key act of humiliation. From this perspective, it can be seen that a single catastrophic event, unpredictable, clearly unjust and involving personally devastating exclusion or rejection, permanently changes the lives of the protagonists in *Der fremde Freund*, *Horns Ende*, *Der Tangospieler* and *Willenbrock*. The humiliating event is inextricably connected with the power relations in the society at a particular moment in the history of the GDR. Of particular significance when looking at the consequences of the act of humiliation is the interplay between exclusion and inclusion, between the rejected and the 'normal' and between humiliation and shame.

In *Der fremde Freund*, Claudia, a hospital doctor, is the first-person narrator, talking about the events of her life and, with apparent insight, about her own feelings and sense of self. Claudia knows how divided she is: '*Ich oder die Person, die vielleicht ich selbst bin, zögert. Ich – behaupten wir es – sehe mich um*', she says about the dream that acts as the prologue to the novel.⁴⁴ The dream might also be '*ein fernes Erinnern*', but Claudia is unwilling initially to look too deeply into her memories, or perhaps her unconscious. Crossing a gorge on a ruined bridge, she, as the dreamer, fixes her gaze on the other side '*um nicht hinunterzublicken.*' She knows what it is she is avoiding: '*Der Blick in die Tiefe. Ich weiß, wenn ich hinuntersehe, falle ich.*'⁴⁵ As Terrance Albrecht notes, this dream sequence points to an underlying contradiction within Claudia between her memories and her desire to forget, while the

⁴³ Georgina Paul, 'Towards *The Politics of Narration*. Narrative theory and GDR prose literature,' in op. cit., Atkins and Kane, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Christoph Hein, *Der fremde Freund*, (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982), p. 5.

⁴⁵ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 6.

image of the bridge as the way of connecting to a sense of her past is evoked again when Claudia eventually returns to her childhood town and has to face the memories it holds for her.⁴⁶

When she is avoiding her memories or her awareness of the impact of the past, Claudia hides behind a metaphorical toughened skin, a recurring image in the novel. With clear references to Freud's work on the unconscious and his *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, she suggests that this toughened skin protects her both from outside influences but also from her own unconscious. There is a truth she cannot and will not face, she says, claiming that this refusal is what people need if they are to have 'Vernunft und Zivilisation'. Her toughened skin protects her from humiliation and having to deal with it: 'Ich verdränge täglich eine Flut von Ereignissen und Gefühlen, die mich demütigen und verletzen. Ohne diese Verdrängungen wäre ich nicht fähig, am Morgen aus dem Bett aufzustehen.'⁴⁷

Apparently central to the narrative is Claudia's brief relationship with Henry, who is the 'fremde Freund' of the title. Henry is assertively an outsider, uncommunicative and undemanding, but prone to aggressive, self-destructive outbursts. Claudia, confident in her ability not to be drawn too close to anyone else and not asking much from any relationship, appears well suited to Henry. However, Claudia finds her sense of identity suddenly shattered when Henry casually mentions that he has a wife. This throws Claudia into confusion in a way she had thought impossible and which she sets out to make impossible again. Initially it is her realisation that she has been humiliated that is shown: she has been rejected or excluded by Henry so that she is no longer one of two equal people exploring their own way to make a relationship work, but merely the mistress of a married man, a banal, ridiculous position to be in. Henry has suddenly changed the rules; he has shown he has the power to do this and that there is nothing she can do about it. Claudia's rage at this humiliation is made more problematic by her sense that her response conflicts with her desired view of herself. She wants to be a woman who does not try to take possession of a man and who will allow no other person to have rights over her. She has armed herself against herself because she senses her vulnerability: 'Im Hintergrund das Wissen um meine stete Bereitschaft, mich aufzugeben, Sehnsucht nach der Infantilität.'⁴⁸ In the space of a

⁴⁶ Terrance Albrecht, *Rezeption und Zeitlichkeit des Werkes Christoph Heins*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 118-120.

⁴⁷ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, pp. 116-117.

⁴⁸ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 68.

few lines, Claudia defensively shifts the blame away from Henry and takes responsibility upon herself, as if it is her rules she has failed to live by, not his. In doing so, she moves from a sense that she has been humiliated to feelings of shame about not having been able to remain her hard, protected self: 'Mir war übel. Mein Gesicht brannte vor Scham.'⁴⁹ She cannot talk to Henry about how she feels and why, and he makes no serious effort to understand, growing angry at her hysterical laughter.

The matter is resolved by Henry chasing Claudia through the woods and raping her. Claudia's emotional turmoil and ambivalence towards both herself and Henry are suggested by her partial embrace of what he is doing to her. The portrayal of Claudia's ambivalence has led to disagreements about this incident, but Linklater, discussing it at length and considering other critics' interpretations, makes a convincing case that it is indeed rape.⁵⁰ The uncertainty can be overcome by noting the pattern that emerges here. After transforming Henry's first humiliation of her into her own shame, Claudia does the same again, shifting the blame from Henry by participating in what he is doing, until she is able to deny that his attack is a further humiliation. This is followed by an implicit agreement not to talk about his announcement or her reaction to it or the rape itself. Everything is again repressed: 'Wir vermieden es beide, miteinander zu sprechen. Er verabschiedete sich fast höflich, und auch ich lächelte ihn freundlich an. Einen Kuß auf die Stirn. Bis bald. Schlaf gut.'⁵¹

Robinson says of *Der fremde Freund*: 'Ostensibly, the plot revolves around the death of Henry, but the novella's real concern is the destruction of Claudia as a fully living person. The bulk of the narrative is Claudia's account of her sterile day-to-day life, culminating in an autobiographical excursus that circles round again to her present condition as a thick skin with nothing inside.'⁵² This overlooks the significance of humiliation in Claudia's life. Structurally, Henry's significance is as a catalyst for Claudia to experience, deny and think about humiliation, and then to remember and reconsider the impact on her life of the humiliation of her close school-friend, Katharina.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ op. cit., Linklater, pp 68-73.

⁵¹ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 71.

⁵² op. cit., Robinson, p. 75.

Considering the possible impact of her past on the way she is now, Claudia mentions to Henry that she once had a friend in the town where she grew up, to whom she had sworn that they would be friends forever.⁵³ She follows this up with a visit to her home town with Henry. As Claudia makes her way through the town, trying to rediscover people and places she knew and to bring her memories to life, Henry acts as the chorus, repeatedly urging: 'Laß das sein', as if trying to protect Claudia from herself. Claudia recalls incident after incident of humiliation or attempted humiliation in their everyday lives at school. The first significant story she tells Henry – and herself – is about the degrading way the sports teacher treated many of them. This teacher and her other sports teacher were, according to Claudia's description, sexually abusing the girls in her school and nothing was done about it. This contrasts with Claudia's memory of her one inspiring teacher, Herr Gerschke, about whom she says: 'Er war gerecht, und das war das höchste Lob, das wir einem Lehrer gaben.'⁵⁴ Herr Gerschke is accused of sexually assaulting one of the girls and is imprisoned. Claudia learns years later that he was wrongly accused and has been rehabilitated.

Another of Claudia's memories of her teachers links her to the events of 1953, which appeared both exciting and farcical to the children because of the appearance of a single Soviet tank in the town. Claudia remembers the shoemaker's wife being taken away and not reappearing. She sensed 'daß auch ein Gespräch etwas Bedrohliches sein konnte. Ich fühlte die Angst der Erwachsenen, miteinander zu reden. [...] Ich lernte zu schweigen.'⁵⁵ This is significant for the way it introduces political and historical events and suggests they are important contributors to the way Claudia acts later. However, its principal function is to introduce, in this political context, Claudia's school friend, Katharina, to whom she swears everlasting loyalty and who is the only one with whom Claudia can discuss the events. The humiliation of Katharina and her family, as it is recalled by Claudia following her own humiliation by Henry, emerges as the central event of the novel, the one which Claudia comes to realise has determined her whole future.

Katharina and her family are religious. A propaganda drive against religion leaves them exposed, pressured, threatened and victimised. Katharina's brothers suffer humiliation: the stripping of their status and exclusion from their positions as a result

⁵³ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 83.

⁵⁴ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 140.

⁵⁵ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 135.

of changes in what is acceptable to the authorities, something over which they have no control and which they and Claudia see as unjust: ‘Sie waren verbittert. Besonders empörte sie, daß die Werksleitung bei Katharinas Brüdern und den anderen Betroffenen banale und lächerliche Vorwände suchte, um Maßnahmen zu rechtfertigen, die willkürlich waren und ohne jede rechtliche Grundlage.’⁵⁶ Initially, Claudia feels guilty because she comes from an atheistic family. She is in a key year at school where she and Katharina should both be selected to progress to the ‘Oberschule’. Katharina (whose brothers have now gone to the West) is not selected and will have to leave school. The process of humiliating Katharina and her family increasingly involves pressure from Claudia’s parents and her teachers on Claudia to separate herself from Katharina.

Eventually, as a result of this pressure, the conformism she has learned and jealousies to do with Katharina’s new boyfriend, Claudia plays a central part in humiliating Katharina. Instead of defending her in the face of specious political arguments, she publicly ridicules her and her beliefs. In doing so, Claudia finally excludes Katharina from the possibility of friendship and loyalty just as Katharina is being excluded from her school and from full participation in society. When Claudia learns that Katharina and her mother have also gone to the West, her response is harsh. Using the terminology of the authorities who have been ultimately responsible for Katharina’s exclusion, she declares: ‘Ich war erleichtert, als ich es hörte, und fast mit Stolz erzählte ich meinem Vater, daß Katharina die Republik verraten habe.’⁵⁷ It is only now, back in her home town, that she starts to realise the impact on the rest of her life of her betrayal of Katharina. She drinks ‘eine Libation für ein Mädchen, das ich so rückhaltlos beliebt hatte, wie ich nie wieder einen Menschen sollte lieben können.’⁵⁸

The return to her home town has confronted Claudia with her memories, making her see that the past cannot be denied but is likely to burst in upon the present, violently and unpredictably.⁵⁹ Henry, on the other hand, who denies the significance of the past (‘Weil es zwecklos ist, sagte er dann, weil es uns unfähig macht zu leben’), represents the unpredictable violence of the present.⁶⁰ Claudia once again experiences

⁵⁶ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 148.

⁵⁷ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 152.

⁵⁸ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 153.

⁵⁹ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 157.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

his violence towards her as directly humiliating. When Henry is driving dangerously and Claudia grabs the wheel, Henry strikes her in the face: deliberately, not just instinctively, she realises. Again Claudia's response is a typical one for a victim of humiliation, combining an angry refusal to forget or forgive with acceptance, repression, denial and withdrawal: 'Ich würde die Ohrfeige nicht vergessen, sie ihm nicht verzeihen. Aber ich wußte auch, daß ich nicht weiter darüber nachdenken würde. [...] Ich will bleiben, was ich bin, eine nette, sehr normale Frau. Es ist nichts geschehen.'⁶¹

Robinson says that to "withdraw" from history is really to submit absolutely to the role of victim (or victimizer) within a given historical reality' and notes that the withdrawal must be illusory, since 'there is no "outside" to history'.⁶² Claudia's 'withdrawal' is certainly shown at this point in *Der fremde Freund* to be illusory. 'History' and Claudia's memory of her part in a specific event demonstrate how her personal, supposedly private life is inextricably bound up with the activities of the State in a very public way. Robinson interprets Claudia's part in destroying her friendship with Katharina not as the cause of Claudia's later withdrawal, 'but as part of a complex historical situation dominated by the political situation of the 1950s, an effect rather than a cause.'⁶³ Albrecht comes close to recognising this event as humiliation, referring to it as carefully-planned 'Manipulation' by the authorities which leads to Claudia's sense of herself as guilty of betrayal, just as her beloved uncle was guilty of betrayal by collaborating with the Nazis, and which permanently changes her.⁶⁴

Claudia's complicity in the humiliation of Katharina is the direct cause of her life-long attempt to repress her feelings of shame at what she has done and to withdraw from society. Claudia's realisation that this is the case has brought with it the possibility that she will change the way she lives, so separate from the society in which she apparently lives a normal life. Henry's violence, however, closes off the one possibility of her opening herself up to people around her. His subsequent death – the perhaps predictable result of an outburst of aggression – is clearly distressing to Claudia, but she insists on denying or suppressing her feelings. She learns to live

⁶¹ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, pp. 161-162.

⁶² op. cit., Robinson, p. 275.

⁶³ op. cit., Robinson, p. 116.

⁶⁴ op. cit., Albrecht, pp. 149-151.

alone again and finds 'Es geht mir gut oder doch zufriedenstellend.'⁶⁵ She would like to get to know a few more landscapes to photograph (though, as ever, not people). She thinks also of having or adopting a child, but knows it is only for herself, to fill the emptiness of her life. For a moment she senses her vulnerability and what she misses:

Meine verlorengegangene Fähigkeit, einen anderen bedingungslos zu lieben. Es ist die Sehnsucht nach Katharina, nach der Kinderliebe, nach einer Freundschaft, zu der nur Kinder fähig sind. Ich vermisse Katharina jetzt sehr. Es ist fünfundzwanzig Jahre her, daß ich sie zum letzten Mal gesehen habe, und ich wollte, wir wären zusammengeblieben.⁶⁶

She realises that her failure to stand by Katharina has left her alone in the world. Once again the image of the impenetrable skin recurs:

Ich bin auf alles eingerichtet, ich bin gegen alles gewappnet, mich wird nichts mehr verletzen. Ich bin unverletzlich geworden. Ich habe in Drachenblut gebadet, und kein Lindenblatt ließ mich irgendwo schutzlos. Aus dieser Haut komme ich nicht mehr heraus. In meiner unverletzbaren Hülle werde ich krepieren an Sehnsucht nach Katharina.⁶⁷

Like so many direct or indirect victims of humiliation, Claudia wants the impossible, for what has happened never to have happened, and to escape from the way her shame at her participation has destroyed her: 'Ich will wieder mit Katharina befreundet sein. Ich möchte aus diesem dicken Fell meiner Ängste und meines Mißtrauens sein. Ich will sie sehen. Ich will Katharina wiederhaben.' She understands she has gone too far on her own for this to be possible: 'Meine undurchlässige Haut ist eine feste Burg.'⁶⁸ She makes no attempt to contact Katharina but settles for a life of denial where everything seems superficial and is expressed in a bland, neutral fashion, as she retreats even further from any meaningful contact with other people and the society around her. More ominously, and despite her claim that 'Ich bin gesund', her plans allow for all eventualities: 'Ich habe eine hervorragenden Frauenarzt, schließlich bin ich Kollegin. Und ich würde, gegebenenfalls, in eine ausgezeichnete Klinik, in die beste aller möglichen Heilanstalten eingeliefert, ich wäre schließlich auch dann noch Kollegin.'⁶⁹ The humiliation and loss of Katharina, Claudia's shame at her part in this and her failure to ever fully recover have left her sliding into deep depression and perhaps on the edge of madness. So effectively has

⁶⁵ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 206.

⁶⁶ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 208.

⁶⁷ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 209.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 212.

she concealed herself from her colleagues behind her toughened skin, that ‘Würde ich Selbstmord begehen, stünden sie vor einem Rätsel.’ Even this she can consider with detachment, almost with amusement: ‘Es wäre eine gelungene Überraschung.’⁷⁰

Like *Der fremde Freund*, Christoph Hein’s *Horns Ende* is a novel about ways of seeing or presenting history, the way events in the past continue to shape people’s everyday lives, the unreliability of memory and the impossibility of withdrawing from history. Again, the narrative structure highlights the importance of humiliation. Claudia is the first-person narrator in *Der fremde Freund*, moving back and forth apparently at random until it becomes clear that she is both inexorably drawn to and avoiding thinking about the central incident in her life, the humiliation of Katharina. *Horns Ende*, by contrast, has six separate first-person narrators speaking at different times, with radically different perspectives on what has taken place, with varying degrees of insight and acceptance of responsibility, and with different views about the nature of narration and of the truth it might convey or conceal. These are complemented by the voice of the dead Horn in a dialogue with Thomas. Thomas, a boy at the time of the main events in the novel, is looking back many years later and, at the urging of Horn or of his own conscience, trying to make sense of what happened. Despite the different perspectives and the way language is used to indicate different views of history, such as ‘Zusammenbruch’ (by Doctor Spodeck) or ‘Befreiung’ (by Kruschkatz, the Party representative) for the end of the war,⁷¹ there is a curious uniformity about the narrative voice. The sentences are frequently short and simple in structure, recounting events in a literal way with an absence of metaphors. Though there is at times a sense of confessions being made, or of self-justification, the uniformity conveys rather a sense of a set of conflicting and unreliable witness statements collected in advance of a trial. This focuses the narrative on the question of guilt or responsibility, specifically for the death of Horn, even as it provides the broken-mirror effect referred to earlier. No matter how fragmented history must be in the telling, it is suggested, nevertheless something specific happened, the death by suicide of Horn as a result of two episodes of humiliation, and the people around Horn are all having to deal with their shame at their part in this, at what they did or failed to do. Dealing with the fact of the suicide is complicated by the lack of agreement among the narrators and the ultimate lack of clarity, as Albrecht notes,

⁷⁰ op. cit., *Der fremde Freund*, p. 208.

⁷¹ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 42

about the circumstances leading to Horn's death.⁷² J. H. Reid's sense of this is that in the dialogue with the reader through a number of narrators, 'truth is a matter for the individual reader to determine.'⁷³

What also emerges from this combination of different narratives is a sense of a town, Bad Guldenberg, where people once came to be healed, that is morally polluted. Both in the Nazi period and in the GDR, its people have been complicit, collectively and individually, in terrible acts which they could have prevented. As a defence against shame for this, they prefer to see themselves as victims – of history, of the Nazis, of the new GDR regime – rather than as perpetrators. In Bad Guldenberg in the 1950s, normal life is portrayed as full of sordid desires, shameful acts, petty but destructive jealousies, hatred, self-disgust, and both minor and highly significant acts of humiliation. The residents of the town are shown to make up an incapacitated community, dumb, inarticulate, passive, caring only about themselves, vicious towards one another, hostile to authority yet cowed by it and ingratiating themselves with its representatives where possible. One way or another, almost all are destroyed by 'Guldenberg', which comes to stand for all of these qualities and to exemplify normal life in the GDR, a point made by McKnight in comparing a later Hein novel, *Landnahme*, also set in Guldenberg, with *Horns Ende*.⁷⁴ In *Horns Ende*, Thomas, one of the narrators, suggests that living in Guldenberg was like living in an infantilised community, where the adults themselves longed to be children again, or sought to live like children, free of responsibility.⁷⁵ For Thomas, however, the reality was a life of fearful helplessness, subservience, dependence and humiliation: 'Ich würde diese Stadt verlassen, verlassen und vergessen, und mit ihr alle mir angetanen Kränkungen und Demütigungen. Ich würde gehen, um endlich zu leben.'⁷⁶

Bad Guldenberg is fiercely condemned by Spodeck, whose own life has been badly damaged by his earlier humiliation by and consequent hatred of his father, something he eventually recognises: 'Denn ich verstand, daß der lebenslange Haß auf ihn mir allein als Entschuldigung für mein weggeworfenes Leben gedient hatte.'⁷⁷ As the self-appointed historian determined to demonstrate the awfulness of Bad

⁷² op. cit., Albrecht, p. 121.

⁷³ J. H. Reid, 'Reading Christoph Hein', in Martin Kane, ed., *Socialism and the Literary Imagination. Essays on East German Writers*, (New York, NY; Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 224.

⁷⁴ op. cit., McKnight, 'How the Past Writes the Future', p. 65.

⁷⁵ Thomas also appears as a narrator in *Landnahme*, but with a different voice and no apparent connection to the events narrated in *Horns Ende*.

⁷⁶ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 93.

Guldenberg, Spodeck stands aloof, judging and condemning. He condemns the town for constantly letting new injustices take place and says that: ‘Der Tod eines Mannes wie Horn sollte ausreichen, um diese Stadt wie ein biblisches Gomorrha auszutilgen.’⁷⁸ However, as Albrecht points out, Spodeck’s earlier humiliation has left him feeling in a permanently inferior, subservient position.⁷⁹ From his position he is powerless to prevent the further shameful or humiliating acts he rails against.

In the early 1950s, Horn, an archaeologist and historian who specialised in digging up what was left over from the past and using it to make a point about the present – something politically dangerous in the GDR – was excluded from the SED and from his post as a prominent historian in Leipzig in the political struggles of the early 1950s, stripped of his doctorate and effectively sent into exile in Bad Guldenberg. This earlier humiliation is followed by another some years later, when he is interrogated and treated as an enemy of the State.⁸⁰ Before any further action can be taken against him, he hangs himself in the woods outside the town. Many of the narratives revolve around this death. Horn comes to stand for some kind of decency, or for the sense of victimhood with which the few similarly decent people of Guldenberg identify. Horn is not idealised, however. He is portrayed as a prickly, difficult character, hard for people to like and unwilling to put himself out to be liked, though it is never made clear if this is the result of his first humiliation. Horn is, in the end, a victim not of the people of Guldenberg who sense that they somehow should have saved him, but of the GDR regime, which is shown as harsh, demanding, unjust and ruthless towards its own as well as to others. There is a desire in the town to blame the Bürgermeister Kruschkatz, the representative of the Party, for Horn’s fate. Though Kruschkatz wants to pass the responsibility back to the people of the town for their subservience and hypocrisy, he does feel shame for his own part in not defending Horn. He himself was vulnerable, Kruschkatz realises, to charges of carelessness or political negligence for tolerating Horn’s further ‘betrayal’. He knows, however, that he did not try to save Horn. In the end, that is what he has to live with, and what empties his life of everything he valued, most particularly his wife, who leaves him because of his part in the death of Horn.

⁷⁸ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ op. cit., Albrecht, p. 132.

⁸⁰ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 224.

There are two other groups of people who are central to the narrative in *Horns Ende*: Herr Gohl and his daughter, Marlene (described as ‘schwachsinnig’), who live outside the town, and the gypsies who come each year and camp in the town.⁸¹ Guldenberg’s truly shocking secret is gradually revealed: during the Nazi period, someone advised the authorities that Gohl had a disabled daughter. The Nazis responded by taking her away, they believed, and killing her. Later in the war there is a great sense of horror in the town when they realise the truth, that Gohl’s wife had pretended to be the daughter and was the one who was killed. The narrator, Gertrude Fischlinger, one of the few residents of Guldenberg who is shown to have maintained her integrity, makes clear that the sense of horror resulted not from the presumed death of Marlene, but from the realisation that the denunciation had led to the death of her mother instead.⁸² After the war, Gohl continues to live apart, ‘fremd und zurückhaltend, verwunderlich und unberührbar, ein ständiger Gast, aber kein Mitbürger.’⁸³ This, and the shame felt in the town, are still not enough to prevent the subsequent rape of his daughter by someone who is never identified.

The other important outsiders are the gypsies, who camp where they are not allowed to and resist all attempts to move them. The gypsies are a group who live outside the ‘normal’ life of the GDR by choice but are also excluded from that normal life by the rest of the population and, it is implied, by the State. In a State with a theoretical commitment to equal dignity, they are the victims of an act of humiliation which has excluded them, arbitrarily ignoring their rights or redefining them as having no rights. McKnight points out that laws enacted against the gypsies in the GDR were extremely repressive and seemed to be intended to drive them out. Gypsies were criminalised as ‘asozial’ and work-shy and seen as a threat to order and were therefore liable for up to two years in prison. A 1956 law required them to show proof of employment and to forego nomadic life or be liable to progressively longer periods of imprisonment and forced labour.⁸⁴

Accepting their position as outsiders, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, the gypsies in *Horns Ende* live a life that flagrantly contradicts all that is pursued and held to be good by the new regime. In this way, the gypsies have a role in the narration as the

⁸¹ I reluctantly adopt the term ‘gypsies’ here for ‘Zigeuner’, since its use by all in the novel is an expression of the prejudices and attitudes of local people towards Roma or Sinti people.

⁸² op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 182.

⁸³ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 185.

⁸⁴ op. cit., McKnight, p. 80.

chorus or, as McKnight says, the ‘narrative glue’, providing a commentary on events in Bad Guldenberg and on the GDR more generally.⁸⁵ For instance, despite their xenophobic rejection of the gypsies, the people on the farms in the area around Bad Guldenberg hire horses from them as the only way to make their farms more efficient. Kruschkatz’s deputy, the cruel and narrow-minded Bachofen, seeks to shift the blame for the failings of the regime on to the gypsies and to justify the local xenophobia by saying their actions undermine efforts to extend the agricultural co-operatives.⁸⁶ Bachofen declares that at least in Hitler’s time there was order.⁸⁷

McKnight suggests that the final disappearance of the gypsies from Bad Guldenberg ‘is linked to the end of the chance of a reformed Socialism, signalling the beginning of the hard line in the late 1950s, the most important historical shift in the history of the GDR.’⁸⁸ I suggest it has a more specific significance than this in the novel, however. The contrasting narration of events and description of people imply that attitudes to the gypsies can be used to determine the worth of individual characters in *Horns Ende*. Outsiders, such as Horn himself and Gohl and his daughter, along with others of uncertain status, such as Thomas as a child, Gertrude Fischlinger and even, in some ways, Kruschkatz, are seen to be better people because of the way they relate to the gypsies. Here, the gypsies are the ‘other’, so it is wonderfully ironic that in the end it is they, the scorned and rejected, the institutionally humiliated, who reject Bad Guldenberg after Horn’s death, as if it is polluted and contaminated.⁸⁹ For once, power has shifted and humiliation has been reversed. The gypsies leave with enhanced status, judging the people of Bad Guldenberg living their supposedly normal lives to be intolerably evil and to have excluded themselves from decent society.

Humiliation and the environment

The various types of humiliation by the Party and the State are relevant to Margalit’s concept of a ‘decent society’, one where the State does not humiliate its citizens.⁹⁰ The concept of a decent society is central to consideration of the callous

⁸⁵ op. cit., McKnight, p. 81.

⁸⁶ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, pp. 158-159.

⁸⁷ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 156.

⁸⁸ Phil McKnight, ‘History and GDR Literature. Amnesia, Fragmentation, Chronicles, Critical Consciousness, and Setting the Course. Reflections on the Mid-1950s: Mankurt, Horn and *Horns Ende*’, pp. 45-75 in Graham Jackman, ed., *Christoph Hein in Perspective*. German Monitor, 51, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 62.

⁸⁹ op. cit., *Horns Ende*, p. 155.

⁹⁰ op. cit., Margalit, p. 1.

disregard for the physical conditions in which people worked and lived that was shown by SED and the GDR State. This disregard existed despite protestations to the contrary and legal provisions protecting the environment and supposedly guaranteeing healthy working conditions.⁹¹ As Axel Goodbody points out, whereas relative environmental conditions improved in West Germany in the 1970s, they worsened in the GDR throughout the 1970s and 1980s. When an environmental movement developed during the 1980s, the government sought to control what people knew, so that by 1982 ‘increasing public interest in pollution statistics caused the authorities to pass legislation making them classified material’.⁹² The true state of the environment and its impact on the health of the GDR’s population – which the Party and State had always known about – became officially accepted only when the Modrow government released data at the end of 1989, showing that:

millions of citizens were being supplied with poisonous drinking water derived from the GDR’s rivers, that the GDR had the highest sulphur dioxide and dust particle emissions in Europe, that half of the children in industrial areas suffered from respiratory diseases and that – despite Honecker’s statements in 1986: ‘Unsere Wälder sind gesund’ and ‘Mit saurem Regen haben wir keine Erfahrung’ – over half of the trees in the country were damaged.⁹³

Many of the GDR’s environmental problems were rooted in the kind of industrialisation that had taken place before the war. Equally, the ruined state of the cities, industry and the economy generally in eastern Germany after the war, combined with the damage done to industry and infrastructure by Soviet ‘Demontage’, and the need to reconfigure supply and distribution lines with the loss of access to the West, required urgent action and made it unsurprising that the SED put huge emphasis on industrial redevelopment. Such an approach was part of the Party’s attempt to make a normal society out of the physical and social wreckage it saw around it. However, there was also a strong ideological reason this. Firstly, in the eyes of the Party, the workers were the force which would overthrow capitalism and build socialism. The workers who were the best organised or easiest to mobilise to support the leading role of the Party were those in large-scale industrial complexes

⁹¹ Anita M. Mallinckrodt, *The Environmental Dialogue in the GDR. Literature, Church, Party, and Interest Groups in Their Socio-Political Context*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 38-39, 43. 90-93; Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 186-222.

⁹² Axel Goodbody, ‘Literature on the Environment in the GDR. Ecological activism and the aesthetics of literary protest,’ pp. 238-260 in Robert Atkins and Martin Kane, eds., *Retrospect and Review. Aspects of the Literature of the GDR 1976-1990*. German Monitor, 40, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), p. 242.

⁹³ op. cit., Goodbody, pp. 241-242. For an account of the impact on health and the Government’s knowledge of this, see op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 108-111.

and mining; they would be the heroic builders of socialism. Secondly, in line with Lenin's view that Communism was 'Soviet Power plus the electrification of the whole country', the economic development model established by the Soviet Union was based on large-scale heavy industry and major infrastructure projects, such as dams and hydro-electric power stations.⁹⁴ It was both natural and necessary for the SED leaders to follow this model.

What was behind this approach to industrialisation was a determination to control nature and to use the earth's resources as intensively and extensively as possible to accelerate the process of industrialisation. Modernisation through industrialisation was seen as necessary to prove the superiority of the Soviet Union and its allies over the capitalist West and to build the necessary arms capacity to fight a possible war against the West. Based originally on urgent need in the Soviet Union, industrialisation became an end in itself, so that the argument over whether caring for the environment took resources away from necessary economic development was hardly even relevant. In the GDR, the shift towards a more consumer-oriented economy from the 1970s under Honecker did not in fact mean that production processes were any cleaner or less wasteful, and electricity continued to be produced mainly by highly-polluting brown-coal power stations.

The fictional and personal accounts of the GDR display a keen sense of problems with the environment and working conditions. Writing in 1950, Sabine Kleber, a teacher in Bitterfeld, says she is off work because of chronic 'Heiserkeit'. She says that Bitterfeld has 'viel Ruß und Schmutz' from its industrial works, though it does not appear to occur to her that this might have anything to do with her throat problems.⁹⁵ Some five years later she is still teaching in Bitterfeld but would like to move, 'da die Stadt und die Umgebung wirklich nicht reizend sind. Das bißchen Wald wird durch die ständig anwachsenden Kohlengruben verschluckt.'⁹⁶ It is ironic that some of the early criticisms of pollution and environmental destruction caused by industrialisation appear in the 'Bitterfeld' novels. The Party attempted at the first Bitterfeld Conference in 1959 (held in a chemical complex in Bitterfeld) to open up writing to industrial and agricultural workers and to impose further requirements on professional writers. Writers were expected to write about the work of building

⁹⁴ V. I. Lenin, 'Our Foreign and Domestic Position and the Tasks of the Party', Speech of 21.11.1920, in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Moscow and London, 1960-1980), vol. 31, p. 419, quoted in op. cit., Goodbody, p. 257.

⁹⁵ Sabine Kleber, letter of 6.11.1950, in op. cit., 31 *Originalbände Klassenrundbriefe*.

⁹⁶ op. cit., Kleber, letter of 25.02.1956.

socialism, to be among the workers and reflect their experience, and to demonstrate, in line with the principles of socialist realism, their commitment to the Party and its aims.⁹⁷ However, as Dennis Tate notes, a crisis occurred in the early 1960s ‘for writers who had volunteered to find out for themselves about GDR industrial life, in the spirit of the “Bitterfelder Weg”, only to find it impossible to fulfil the mandate they had been given to produce optimistic reportage.’⁹⁸ Their problems arose not just from the difficulties of adhering to socialist realism but also from what they saw in practice, both the environmental damage being done by the rush to industrialisation and the terrible conditions in which most of the workers had to work.

The first chapter of Neutsch’s *Spur der Steine* depicts, with echoes of Dickens’s *Bleak House* and Zola’s *Germinal*, a town covered in soot and smog from the sixteen chimneys that prop up the sky. There is no respite, whatever the season: ‘Tag und Nacht wälzt sich der Qualm aus den sechzehn Essenschlünden, Tag und Nacht. Er schwärzt im Winter den Neuschnee auf den Äckern, rußt im Frühling über die weißen Blüten der Kirschbaumzeilen an den Chausseen, trübt sogar im Herbst noch die novemberdunklen Flüsse und umflort im Sommer die heiße gelbe Sonne.’ The streets, the houses, the rivers and the lakes are all horribly polluted, and the people, too, cannot avoid being affected: the industrial residue that has been turned into dust in the streets by the summer sun ‘sickert in die Schuhe der Fußgänger, in jede Ritze der Kleidung, knirscht zwischen den Zähnen. Über allem zieht der Qualm, und die Luft ist geschwängert vom fauligen Geruch der Schwefelgase.’⁹⁹ Though the old chemical works are gradually being replaced by the new, there is no sense of anything healthier resulting or of any perception among ordinary people of ‘normalisation’. Similarly, both working and living conditions for the ordinary workers are shown to be very poor.

In Christa Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel*, Rita is struck by the pollution from industry and the brown coal works which makes it hard to breathe and which is recent, not a leftover from the past.¹⁰⁰ In the novels, a recurring motif is lovers and would-be lovers, short of other places to go, strolling by the rivers and lakes, which, it

⁹⁷ op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, pp. 239-240; entry on ‘Bitterfelder Weg’ in Harald Bühl, Dieter Heinze, Hans Koch, Fred Staufenbiel, eds., *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch*, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1970); Wilfried Barner, ‘Aufbau, Tauwetter, “Kulturrevolution”’: Literarisches Leben in der DDR der Fünfziger Jahre’, in op. cit., Barner, ed., *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*.

⁹⁸ op. cit., Tate, *Shifting Perspectives*, p. 34.

⁹⁹ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁰ op. cit. Christa Wolf, p. 27.

is stressed, are almost invariably anything but romantic locations. Rita's lover, Manfred, says that the river is no longer the way it was in his childhood when the children used to learn to swim there but is now full of industrial waste, poisonous to the fish, impossible to swim in.¹⁰¹ In Erwin Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp*, Märkte has grown up in the worked-out brown-coal areas where it is still the case that: 'in den Tagebaulöchern steht ölig schillerndes Wasser, und der Strand ist gelb vom trockenen Eisenoxyd. Kein Schilf am Rand, kein Vogel im Ried, und auch in der Tiefe des gestorbenen Wassers bewegt sich kein Fisch, nichts.'¹⁰² In Hermann Kant's *Die Aula*, there are references to the polluted, foul-smelling water in the canal, where again there are no fish.¹⁰³ In later novels which are also not 'environmental' novels, there are many similar references. In Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte*, for instance, the polluted river, 'wie grauer Teig' is a recurring feature, seen as a normal part of everyday life by the late 1970s.¹⁰⁴

The environment in which people lived also included the places where they worked. Health and safety received far less attention than might have been expected in a State theoretically run by and for the working class. Fulbrook discusses an accident in a chemical factory in Bitterfeld in 1968 which caused a large number of deaths and injuries and long-term health problems because of gas that was emitted. The report on the accident said that the workers were not wearing appropriate safety clothing and that higher productivity had been given precedence over safety at work. She notes that the trade union files are full of accident reports and that 'Industrial diseases, chronic bronchitis and accidents at work through the use of outdated machinery and unsafe equipment were all integral parts of a failing economy in the later 1970s and 1980s.'¹⁰⁵

It could be argued that the abuse of or callous disregard for the environment and the health of the population in the GDR was so persistent and overt as to amount to a humiliating attack on ordinary people who had no choice but to endure the environment they lived and worked in. I consider that this was not always the case. Humiliation is a demonstrative exercise of power. The failure to take a particular course of action, even when this failure has highly detrimental consequences, might

¹⁰¹ op. cit. Christa Wolf, p. 28.

¹⁰² op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 268.

¹⁰³ Hermann Kant, *Die Aula*, (Berlin; Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1968; first published 1965), pp. 411, 416.

¹⁰⁴ Volker Braun, *Unvollendete Geschichte*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 108.

be morally wrong and at times criminal but is not necessarily a demonstrative exercise of power, designed to reduce people's status or position in society. However, it is likely that this failure in the GDR was often one aspect of a wider disregard for the wishes, needs and desires of ordinary people and that it demonstrated an ideologically-driven, actively-expressed contempt for the individual. This could sometimes amount to humiliation. Certainly it contributed to a political environment in which the humiliation of the individual could be carried out whenever it was deemed necessary, with no second thoughts.

Additionally, what happened in relation to the environment and its damaging health consequences happened because of the power structures, and the power structures worked to create a climate of fear, including particularly the fear of humiliation, which made it less possible for concerned people to bring about improvements. Hans Fricke, a former border guard who later became an industrial inspector in the ministry for coal and energy in the 1980s, says he grew increasingly disillusioned the more he saw of the worsening conditions, the gap between rhetoric and reality and particularly the constant putting back of investment necessary for modernisation. For Fricke, the underlying problem is the fear that officials – who know what is really going on – have of those above them, all the way to the top. He sees this as highly damaging:

Als besonders bedrückend und überaus gefährlich empfand ich die immer offensichtlicher werdende Schönfärberei und unehrliche Berichterstattung. Das begann in den Betriebsabteilungen und setzte sich fort bis ins Ministerium. Die Angst von Abteilungs-, Hauptabteilungsleitern und der Leitung des Ministeriums davor, mit realen und deshalb kritischen Lageeinschätzungen im Ministerrat oder beim zuständigen Abteilungsleiter beziehungsweise beim Sekretär für Wirtschaft des ZK der SED, Günter Mittag, unangenehm aufzufallen, war verbreitet. Sie bestimmte zunehmend ihre Haltung zu den immer offensichtlicher zutage tretenden Problemen und Schwierigkeiten.¹⁰⁶

Fricke does not want to find himself affected by this level of fear and continues to believe he can be a force for good. Sent to inspect the Greifswald nuclear power station in 1987, a year after the explosion at Chernobyl, he is shocked to see the increasing dependence on untrained foreign workers at the plant, even in areas where safety and security are vitally important. He is openly urged by the director, the representative of the Central Committee and a number of leading figures at the plant to report their increasing concern to Günter Mittag. However, his own superior in the

¹⁰⁶ op. cit., Hans Fricke, p. 231.

ministry finds the prospect of this impossible and therefore: 'Nach der Inspektion veranlaßte mich mein direkter Vorgesetzter im Ministerium zwei Monate lang, meinen Bericht für den Minister immer weiter zu kürzen und damit seiner wichtigsten kritischen Aussagen zu berauben.' Fricke uses all his contacts in the Central Committee and, through Party channels, in the ministry to try to get his report taken seriously, but hears nothing. Years later, this experience remains a nightmare for him.¹⁰⁷

Goodbody says that Monika Maron's novel *Flugasche* was based on her own visit to Bitterfeld as a journalist in 1974 and that it was too critical of the disregard for public health and of the estrangement of Party leaders from the people to be allowed to be published in the GDR. However, ironically, 'its very suppression stimulated the attention of the media in the West, and though it was never published in the GDR, the existence of the book and the issues it raised became widely known among ordinary East German citizens.'¹⁰⁸ In *Flugasche*, the journalist Josefa Nadler's sense of injustice over the way ordinary people are treated and how the Party and the State prevent her writing about this is gradually overtaken by a fear or expectation of humiliation. Such fear is justified by the way her boss, Strutzer, himself the victim of humiliation as a child, treats her over her reports that he sees as critical of the regime. The report around which the novel is centred concerns a visit to the town of 'B.', with its chemical works, PVC plant and power station and the smell of ammonium and sulphur-dioxide in the air. Josefa is outraged by the pollution and the impact of this on the health of the inhabitants of B.¹⁰⁹ Most shocking to her is the old power station, which should have been decommissioned but which continues to operate, with appalling conditions for the workers, while investment promised for a new power station is continually postponed. It has now been decided from 'ganz oben' that even when the new power station is operational, the old one will remain in use.¹¹⁰ As if to add insult to injury, the landscape architects have ensured that the new building is sky blue, since an actual blue sky is unknown in B. In this way, normal life has to be lived as a kind of fantasy dreamt up a long way above ordinary people. When Josefa is introduced to Hodriwitzka, the worker who is credited with keeping the old power station going against all the odds, her outrage at the treatment of the workers leads her

¹⁰⁷ op. cit., Hans Fricke, p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ op. cit., Goodbody, p. 244.

¹⁰⁹ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁰ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 19.

to encourage him to write a letter about the conditions to the minister. A week later, Hodriwitzka is knocked down by a bus and killed while cycling home, an event Josefa is reluctant to believe is coincidental.¹¹¹

Josefa wants to introduce her report with what she has been told by the director's press officer: 'B. ist die schmutzigste Stadt Europas'.¹¹² Against her better judgement, she proceeds to write the report as fully and truthfully as possible. Her determination to have the report published leads to a battle that she cannot win with those above her. When she hears of Hodriwitzka's death, she then writes the letter that he might have written. The response to this from higher up leads Strutzer to instigate disciplinary proceedings against her within the Party, where Josefa, already experiencing this as humiliation, refuses to speak. Strutzer then calls her before a meeting of the Party membership where her expulsion is to be discussed. Josefa, opting for self-exclusion, fails to attend.

Feeling so strongly and personally about the horrors of B., Josefa sees that she and Hodriwitzka, along with the inhabitants of B., have been humiliated by what the Party and the State have knowingly and contemptuously done to them. In coming to this conclusion, she raises wider issues, including the nature and the status of work in the GDR. If the working class is in charge, and the most important workers are those in the large factories and complexes, then how is it that they are paid less and forced to work in dangerous, unhealthy conditions, she asks, while those above them are relatively privileged? Equally, what are the implications if those at the top are aware of this as a general point and as specific to B. but continue to do nothing about it?¹¹³ Fulbrook shows that there was indeed awareness in the ministry responsible for health of the problems of pollution and their health consequences but that the difficult economic circumstances and the greater power of the ministry responsible for the economy meant that resources were not allocated to remedial measures.¹¹⁴

Following Margalit's approach that a 'decent society is one whose institutions do not humiliate people', it can be concluded that the State itself is responsible for humiliation that is institutionalised through a set of laws and practices that turn into the humiliating actions of individual representatives of the State.¹¹⁵ For Margalit,

¹¹¹ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, pp. 130-131.

¹¹² op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, pp. 32, 36.

¹¹³ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 133.

¹¹⁴ op. cit., Fulbrook, *The People's State*, pp. 108-111.

¹¹⁵ op. cit., Margalit, p. 1.

though it is only people who can bring about humiliation, ‘they need not actually have any humiliating intent.’¹¹⁶ This would make much of the environmental action or inaction in the GDR into humiliation, without there needing to be the demonstrative element to this use of power which I argue is present in humiliation. What is suggested by the GDR examples, however, is an implied intent by individual functionaries to exercise power in the form of humiliation. Discussing Weber’s ideal types of bureaucracy and feudalism, Margalit suggests that in totalitarian or dictatorial regimes there is a:

monstrous combination of ‘feudal bureaucracy’ – the government of the ‘nomenclatura,’ a government that doesn’t care about anyone who isn’t ‘one of us’ but may be very personal and considerate of the special privileges of ‘our own people.’ This is an administrative system resembling medieval estates where the lower officials are dependent on the higher ones and feel a vassalic loyalty toward them. A feudal bureaucracy is a creation that operates on the two principles of personal relations and impersonal relations, which combine to form inhuman relations.¹¹⁷

In relation to the physical and working environment of the GDR, it is clear from the accounts considered here that the regime is both impersonal and personal in this way. For the Party with its Marxist-Leninist belief in the class struggle as the driving force of history, the collective, advancing confidently towards socialism, was ultimately impersonal and could be felt as such by the Party and the State. The suffering individual could therefore be ignored or, at worst, held in contempt and treated as dispensable. At the same time, what is striking is the highly personal nature of the exercise of power, so that responsibility for humiliation lies with individual people at many levels who have the power to do things differently but have chosen not to. Specific officials not only accept but also assert their responsibility for the actions of the Party or the State and are identified by those below as having this responsibility. In *Flugasche*, it is the minister, who is known for a previous visit to B. and who will be addressed personally by Hodriwitzka in his letter, if he writes it. Josefa writes her letter to the highest council in the land, which she identifies not as an institution or part of a bureaucracy but very personally as a group of men, with only one woman (by implication, Margot Honecker).¹¹⁸ It is a specific official who responds by contacting Strutzer and setting in motion Josefa’s humiliation by the Party. In the case of Fricke’s report on the nuclear power station, his superior is

¹¹⁶ op. cit., Margalit, p. 10.

¹¹⁷ op. cit., Margalit, pp. 217-218.

¹¹⁸ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 159.

fearful of Günter Mittag, who is known to put economic development ahead of safety and environmental concerns.

Such personalisation spills over into the way work is perceived in the GDR. Groups or brigades are rewarded with bonuses. Individual workers are honoured with titles ('Held der Arbeit'), invited to award ceremonies as the guest of the minister, highly praised in the Party press. This is a recurring theme in both *Spur der Steine* and *Flugasche*. Curiously, however, the glorification of hard manual labour appears side by side with a lack of respect which often extends to scorn or contempt for the ordinary worker, expressed in the conditions Josefa says she has seen throughout industry in the GDR. These are often dangerous, lead to severe health problems and are worse than the conditions for non-manual workers.¹¹⁹ This attitude of contempt is also conveyed by descriptions of the Party and State's use of transfers to manual work as a punishment. In the memoir by Joachim Goellner (discussed in Chapter 8), his first humiliation in 1961 involves being dismissed from his job as a cultural organiser and made to work in primitive conditions on the shop floor, resulting in an injury to his arm.¹²⁰ In Hein's post-Wende novel *Willenbrock*, the protagonist is punished when his brother escapes to the West. Part of the punishment is being removed from his studies and put into a factory for two years.¹²¹ For those who suffered from this treatment, there was a sense of injustice and particularly of accepted norms not being respected by those in authority. The arbitrary changing of production norms was central to the events of 17th June 1953. The fictional and personal accounts of the GDR suggest that disputes over norms in this literal sense, but also more abstractly as shared values, continued throughout the life of the GDR and that much of what can be seen on one level as inaction by the authorities in relation to health, safety and environmental matters was often experienced as humiliation by those who had to endure the consequences. Normalisation, in this context, required the acceptance by ordinary people of a physical and working environment which diverged dramatically from what they felt they had been promised, for the present, not just for some time in the future.

¹¹⁹ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, pp. 81-82, 169-170. Port argues that such divisions between levels of workers, and the tensions arising from them, contributed to stability in the GDR by inhibiting the formation of united opposition to the regime. Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

¹²⁰ op. cit., Goellner, Kempowski BIO 6860/1, p. 93.

¹²¹ op. cit., *Willenbrock*, pp. 292-294.

In accounts where the Party or State's attitude to the environment is discussed as a problem, the narrative voice is often single-minded, determined and conveys a sense of dismay, if not rage. In *Flugasche*, there is a first-person narrator for whom the problems of B. and her related humiliating treatment combine with her previous experience of injustice to make her less and less able to live a normal life in the society she feels she is committed to. Only in the very last chapter, a short epilogue, does the narrative voice change to the third person. In a formal style, mimicking a report in a newspaper or an account of a Party meeting, it is noted that on the same day as Josefa Nadler's expulsion from the Party was being considered, the 'Höchste Rat' decided to ignore the economic benefits brought by the old power station and, out of consideration for the health of the residents, to close it down.¹²² A decent society and a normal life are possible after all, it is implied.

Consequences of humiliation for 'normalisation' of the GDR

Fictional and personal accounts of the GDR over its whole life suggest that humiliation and the threat of humiliation in everyday life made it difficult for people to keep in step with the Party's continual attempts to build a normal society in the GDR. The Party's actions undermined the process of adjustment and of turning the abnormal into the normal. Many of the people and fictional characters discussed here were not fundamentally hostile to the concept of the GDR. Many of them found ways for long periods to make do and enjoy life while being aware of the controls around them. As Wierling suggests, however, the 'normal' itself, in the sense of acceptance of routines imposed rather than personally developed, could effectively be humiliating.¹²³ Similarly, Mark Allinson's analysis of 1977, the GDR's 'most normal year', demonstrates that for all the talk of normality and stability, the underlying tension between the ordinary people and the authorities and a failure in terms of the economy, housing provision, and attitudes to the Party and within the Party, meant the society was anything but normal.¹²⁴

Living an ordinary, supposedly normal life meant living a life of partial denial. The problem appears to arise when, in Marxist-Leninist terms, the quantity of denial reaches a point where there is a qualitative change in the nature of the denial, which

¹²² op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 244.

¹²³ op. cit., Wierling, 'How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?', p. 219.

¹²⁴ Mark Allinson, '1977: The GDR's Most Normal Year?', in op. cit., Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society*, pp. 253-277.

might be marked by deciding to go to the West, distributing leaflets protesting about the Biermann affair, speaking too frankly to someone felt to be reliable who turns out not to be, or by a significant decline in mental health. Any of these might also be accompanied by a direct and sometimes violent intervention by the Party or the State, or might have the shadow of such a possible intervention hanging over it.

The SED sought to impose an ideological framework that would constrain and tame the fantasy worlds created in fiction, films, art and music. This is relevant to the way the Party infantilised its population, as discussed in the previous two chapters. Infantilisation undermined the process of normalisation by not permitting ordinary people to have full adult status. Children in relatively open societies are encouraged to play and to construct their own fantasy world as part of growing up. In the GDR, play was both provided and controlled through official organisations, in a way which many greatly enjoyed. However, Wierling suggests, for at least the first generation growing up in the GDR, the early discipline to which they were exposed came to feel like a prison. For them as they grew out of childhood, youth ‘was a concept linked to a very liberating, exciting, playful acting out of passions and dreams, which were almost impossible to control by the state and party authorities’.¹²⁵ This put them in a position of conflict with the authorities who were determined, even in the Honecker era, to maintain their control by using the means available to them, including humiliation.

Normalisation depends on a commitment to or a determination to believe that there is a shared set of norms, so that for both the rulers and the ruled, the hoped-for “return” to the “way things were” will eventually conform to an agreed ‘conception of how they “ought to be” in the future.’¹²⁶ According to the accounts considered here, acts of humiliation revealed that there was an unbridgeable gulf between the norms of Marxism-Leninism and those carried over from earlier periods by ordinary people. As long as both sides could ignore this gulf or pretend it did not exist, apparent progress towards normalisation could continue under the direction of the SED. Forcing people to acknowledge the gulf would frustrate or undermine the process of normalisation, from the point of view of ordinary people as well as from that of the Party. Humiliation in everyday life, therefore, was likely to be a self-defeating use of power over the long term. In the following two chapters, I consider

¹²⁵ op. cit., Wierling, ‘How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?’, pp. 211-212.

¹²⁶ op. cit., Fulbrook, ‘The Concept of “Normalisation”’, p. 14.

how it came about that enough individual members of the Party, despite their own values and experiences that were often similar to those of ordinary people, were willing to impose humiliation and the fear of humiliation on their fellow citizens in the name of Marxism-Leninism.

Chapter 7 Humiliation in the Party

Introduction

If the Party used humiliation and the fear of humiliation to shape the lives of its citizens over the whole period of the GDR, what needs to be considered is how it ensured that enough of its members were prepared to participate in this process. This chapter considers how and why the Party, as an organisational entity with powerful leaders and as an object members clung to with a strong emotional attachment, was prepared to humiliate its own members and how, despite this, it built such loyalty to the Party that idealistic members engaged in acts contrary to their own values. The chapter suggests that the process of initiation into the Party helped to create an acceptance of the need for humiliation and of a hierarchy where power could be exercised from the top down. The attitude to power that resulted from this among ordinary members could then be reinforced by strict Party discipline, including the use of humiliation or the threat of it. Just as ordinary people were incapacitated by power being exercised in this way, so Party members found themselves disoriented and often paralysed by it and unable to reconcile the contradictions they could not avoid seeing. They resorted to carrying out orders from above, no matter how destructive these might be, simply to protect themselves. This undermined the effectiveness of their everyday work and reduced their credibility among people who were not Party members. When action was taken against them for supposed errors, they felt this was unjust but were powerless to resist and were consumed by impotent rage at their humiliation.

Arbitrariness and exclusion: elements of humiliation of Party members

Humiliation has a number of interconnecting elements, but the fictional and the personal accounts of the humiliation of Party members highlight the importance of two of these in particular: arbitrariness or unpredictability on the one hand and rejection or exclusion on the other. Early examples of unpredictability come from the 1950s, a period that included the events of June 1953 that briefly threatened the supremacy of the Party, and the inner-Party power struggle that consolidated Ulbricht's position and prevented effective de-Stalinisation. Former social democrats, for instance, found entirely unexpectedly, if naively, that they were being singled out for punishment for anti-Party activities once the SED had rejected a specifically German road to socialism and moved to follow the Soviet model of a Marxist-

Leninist Party.¹ Similarly, many Jewish members were suddenly and unpredictably subject to humiliation in the early 1950s, in line with Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaign.² Other events which made it difficult for Party members to know what line to adopt include Khrushchev's speech condemning Stalin in 1956, the show trials of the late 1950s and, in terms of cultural policies, the 11th Plenum of 1965 and the exclusion of Wolf Biermann in 1976. Such events were not rare. There were at all times throughout the life of the GDR sudden policy changes imposed unexpectedly on members at Party Conferences or Plenums or arising from meetings of the Politburo, which confused and disoriented ordinary members, put them suddenly in the wrong and left them fearing disciplinary action by the Party.

Another element of humiliation was rejection, often linked to exclusion from a particular position within the Party or from the Party altogether. There is a significant example of this in Strittmatter's novel of agricultural life and the development of co-operatives in the 1950s, *Ole Bienkopp*. This concerns the Party's District Secretary Wunschgetreu and his shame over his part in the humiliation of a former veteran Party member. What happens to Wunschgetreu and how he changes form an aspect of the novel that is overlooked by the critics, yet it is crucial to an understanding of how the Party operates and what the consequences of this can be. In a novel where satirical portraits, observations and self-conscious asides by the narrator abound, the story of Wunschgetreu, apart from the sense of caricature offered by the choice of his name (a feature of the novel), stands out for its directness and straightforwardness. It invites the reader to see that this apparently minor set of incidents is significant to an understanding of the way the Party works and maintains a hold on its members.

Wunschgetreu's problem is that he had 'vor vielen Wintern vorgenommen, ein guter Genosse zu werden.'³ His story is the familiar post-war conversion narrative which here, as elsewhere, is put forward as a positive aspect of the way the Party operates. Having survived the battle of Stalingrad, Wunschgetreu is transformed by being re-educated in a Soviet prison camp by Soviet teachers in the 'Antifa-Schule' and moves rapidly in the direction of the Party.⁴ The Party becomes his life and what he must believe in; loyalty to it guides his every action. Determined to adhere strictly

¹ See, e.g., op. cit., Weber, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands 1946-1971*, pp. 11-13; Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR. Zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung, 1945-1968. Bericht und Dokumentation*, (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979), pp. 118-120, 275, 284.

² op. cit., Dennis, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 31-32; Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 3, 6, 14-16, 80; op. cit., Thiele, p. 86.

³ op. cit., Strittmatter, , p. 320.

⁴ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 325-326.

to the Party line, he denounces a bookseller who is a veteran Party member for anti-Soviet views because of a remark that not all Soviet novels are necessarily good. In a few short sentences, the narrator portrays the veteran Party member as open-hearted, cosmopolitan, thoughtful and therefore open to suspicion. Furthermore, he had spent the war in the emigrant community in England and was known to receive postcards from Czechoslovakia. In the context of increased Stalinisation and a new round of purges and show trials in the early 1950s, this background was enough for Wunschgetreu to set in motion the process that led to the bookseller's arrest and imprisonment, despite everything he had done for the Party as one of its 'Vorbilder und Helden'.⁵

In later years after the condemnation of Stalin in 1956, Wunschgetreu is haunted by the knowledge of the old Party member's early death, by his sense of responsibility for it and by his realisation that there is nothing that can be done to reverse the act of humiliation or overcome its consequences, which include his own shame:

Wo war der Genosse? Er war gestorben, nicht im Untersuchungsgefängnis, nein, später, als er schon wieder frei war. Mann hatte ihm nicht nachweisen können, daß er irgendwo feindlich zu denken gelernt hatte. Und die Kritik an einem sowjetischen Buch war keine Feindlichkeit, im Gegenteil. Das wußte jetzt auch Wunschgetreu, aber was half's! Es nutzte nichts, daß er sich einredete, der Genosse sei nicht vom Kummer, sondern vom Alter gefällt worden.⁶

Although the old comrade did not die in the prison where he was being investigated, Wunschgetreu knows that he did spend time in prison, that he might well have died there, and that he, Wunschgetreu, was responsible for his imprisonment.

Wunschgetreu recognises that his early death could have been the consequence of his humiliation and the exclusion, rejection and injustice it involved. Wunschgetreu's misery cannot even be assuaged by tears: 'Da weinte Wunschgetreu wirklich. Nicht vor der Frau des alten Genossen, auch nicht vor seiner Frau, sondern im Büro, und das hatte er verschlossen. Und er weinte nicht wie ein Kind, nein, es war ein trockenes, tränenloses Röcheln.'⁷ His perception now that he does not have the capacity to decide what is right or wrong or how he should behave, and that he cannot make up for past mistakes, threatens to paralyse him. He senses that what the Party

⁵ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 327-328.

⁶ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 328.

⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 329.

says at any one moment, as if it were absolute, might be changed overnight, replaced by a new orthodoxy, without adequate explanation or admission that the Party leadership had previously made a mistake. Now, some years later and after the changes brought about by Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin, Wunschgetreu finds it impossible to reconcile the contradiction between his desire to remain forever a faultless Party member and his understanding that he can no longer be sure what this requires of him. This is itself a form of humiliation by the Party, similar to the infantilisation of the population discussed in earlier chapters.

Many of the texts suggest that this uncertainty over what is likely to be required is a common contributor both to low-level anxiety and to real fear. In Heym's *Die Architekten*, Sundstrom, a survivor of emigration in Moscow and a long-time supporter of Stalin, fears something terrible will happen to him when he is summoned to see Tolkening, the Bezirkssekretär. In the narration of this scene, Party language is used self-consciously, conveying to the reader a sense of the gap between acting mechanically and acting thoughtfully. Sundstrom is shown to act like a submissive Party functionary, unable to let himself think what might be right or wrong or stray from the linguistic and conceptual requirements of the Party, even when he sees their absurdity. Though he is afraid he is about to be humiliated, he is so knowing and cynical and aware of his weakness after previous acts of humiliation he has suffered, witnessed or even caused, that he is ready to change in whatever direction is required of him. He believes there are no subjective conditions, nothing in his own attitude or actions, that should lead him to feel anxious, but is concerned about what are known 'im Fachjargon' as '*Objektive Umstände*'. His problem is that while subjective faults can be remedied 'durch eine entsprechende Dosis Selbstkritik, in der richtigen Sprache und bei richtiger Gelegenheit vorgebracht', it is impossible to get around 'objective conditions':

Objektive Umstände jedoch lagen jenseits der Fähigkeit eines einzelnen Genossen, diese zu korrigieren; bevor man überhaupt begriff, was sich ereignet hatte, wurde man schon zu deren Opfer, verlor Rang und Stellung und die Anerkennung seiner Arbeit, und lange Jahre treuer Pflichterfüllung erwiesen sich als nichts als vergeudete Zeit.⁸

Sundstrom with his many years of Party activity and his direct knowledge of what was required for Communists like him to survive in Moscow under Stalin, including his betrayal of other comrades during the time of the purges and show trials in the

⁸ op. cit., Heym, *Die Architekten*, pp. 187-188.

1930s, feels threatened by these unpredictable changes and has an anticipatory sense of impotence, helplessness and injustice, all components or consequences of humiliation.

Such fictional accounts of the power of even the threat of humiliation to shape the behaviour of Party members reflect and act as a commentary on some of the personal accounts. The writer Erich Loest tries to gain some understanding of what happened to him by using a third-person narrative to gain distance from his own subjective interpretations. He says he felt his life had been transformed by his conversion to Communism after his infatuation as a boy and a very young man with Nazism. He worked enthusiastically for the Party paper in Leipzig as well as writing his first novel. However, when the novel was published in 1950, a review in the Soviet German-language newspaper condemned it. He was summoned to explain himself to the Party, dismissed from his post and sent to do manual work. He felt ‘gedemütigt’ by this apparently arbitrary use of power and the exclusion and injustice it involved, about which he was acutely aware he could do nothing.⁹ He decided he would seek revenge, a frequent response to humiliation, through his writing.¹⁰ While Loest’s autobiographical works must be seen as consciously subjective and driven by his desire to right the wrongs done to him, this very subjectivity is an indication of the consequences of humiliation, the rage that drives its victims to lash out in any way possible, no matter how ineffectually, at those who are responsible. His writings, therefore, attest to the long-term impact on his feelings and sense of self, regardless of his interpretation of the events he is describing.

Loest says he was slowly brought back into the Party fold where he was desperate to be, but again was severely punished when he responded to the events of June 1953 by pressing for a serious discussion within the Party. His most dramatic humiliation came in 1957, during the period which saw the show trials of senior Party figures such as Walter Janka and Wolfgang Harich for allegedly organising to overthrow the Party leadership.¹¹ In relation to Loest, Joachim-Rüdiger Groth says that ‘Das Ziel der Partei stand fest: Ausschaltung unbequemer Kritiker durch Verleumdung, falsche Anschuldigung, Demütigung, Verhaftung, Anklage, Verurteilung.’¹² Loest was

⁹ Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß. Ein Lebenslauf*, (Leipzig: Linden-Verlag, 1981/90), pp. 147-149.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, Loest, p. 152.

¹¹ *op. cit.*, Weber, ed., *Die DDR 1945-1990*, pp. 47-49; Wilfried Barner, ‘Aufbau, Tauwetter, “Kulturrevolution”’: Literarisches Leben in der DDR der Fünfziger Jahre’, in Barner, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, p. 281.

¹² Joachim-Rüdiger Groth, *Widersprüche: Literatur und Politik in der DDR 1949-1989. Zusammenhänge, Werke, Dokumente*, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 47.

arrested for alleged involvement in anti-state activities and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. As a way of confirming to him the absoluteness of his humiliation and the impotence of his rage against it, his chosen route to revenge was blocked off: he was forbidden to write while in prison.

For people such as Loest and fictional characters such as Wunschgetreu and Sundstrom, the arbitrariness and unpredictability of those above them in the Party are represented as the most likely cause of humiliation. The fear of humiliation, however, for a committed member of the Party, is above all the fear of rejection and exclusion, of a life-changing event which is not of one's own choosing and which cannot be reversed. The loss of connection to the Party is frequently shown as a more fearful prospect than physical suffering or personal emotional loss. An important component of the power of the Party arose from the depth of the commitment of individual members to the Party and their continuing loyalty, which frequently outlasted even severe humiliation.

The importance of loyalty to the Party

Party members were loyal to a set of ideas and ideals which they saw as being passed down directly to them, via the Party's newspapers, journals and education courses, from the revered figures of Marx, Engels, Lenin and, until after his death, Stalin. Their loyalty was also to a conception of what it was to be a Communist, by which they meant a set of practices and traditions derived from the experiences of the Weimar period in particular. Loyalty also became much more personal, involving loyalty to the Party leaders who, however inaccessible they might be, were not felt to be remote from the individual member, to those in leadership positions who were encountered more frequently and to fellow members in the local cell or branch. In the accounts, whether fictional or personal, and most clearly in GDR films, the constant use of the term 'Genosse' as a form of address between Party members and of the 'du' form conveys a sense of personal familiarity and closeness and of mutual understanding, commitment and loyalty.

Unconditional loyalty in the face of humiliation is a theme of Heym's *Collin*, a fictionalised version of the circumstances around one of the show trials of the late 1950s and the personal and political consequences of it. Hans Collin, a well-known if somewhat faded novelist, long-time Communist and veteran of the Spanish Civil War, is writing his autobiography while lying ill in a specialist clinic for particularly

valuable Party members. The narrative confronts, as Dennis Tate argues, the problem of autobiographical truthfulness, gradually focusing on the humiliation in a show trial of Havelka, said to be based on Walter Janka and his trial in 1957.¹³ Collin slowly comes to face his own role in the trial, where he sat silently and did not challenge the supposed facts of the case against Havelka, which he knew to be false.¹⁴ He eventually, if reluctantly and against his continuing resistance, feels shame for his complicity in this humiliation.¹⁵ He is brought to this position partly by a long-running dialogue in the clinic with another patient, the top Stasi official Urack, who was the cause of Collin's original silence in the court and who had required him to be there in order to force him to betray his own conscience.¹⁶

A long sub-plot concerns a humiliating interrogation and trial earlier in the 1950s of another of Urack's victims, Faber, a member of the Politburo of the Party. Collin accuses himself of not standing by Faber but tries to resist feeling shame for this.¹⁷ Faber, broken by eighteen months of interrogation, eventually signed a confession. Urack, fearing the loss of control his illness is likely to bring and sensing that others might do to him what he has done to so many Party members, is suddenly haunted by his memories of how he treated Faber. He wants Collin to record his thoughts about Faber so that Faber, long dead, will believe him at last. He also wants to record his own sense of futility at the way things are rendered meaningless by decisions higher up that could not have been predicted. In this case the unpredictable behaviour comes not from the SED but from the Soviet Communist Party in the form of Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956:

‘Faber. Obwohl er vorbestimmt war dafür. Das Urteil war korrekt, geheimes Urteil in geheimem Prozeß: Verräter, Agent, Renegat. Weißt du, was wirklich tragisch war daran? Daß alles auf einmal sinnlos wurde, die ganzen Pläne, die lange Vorbereitung, die Verhöre, das Verfahren, die Beweise. Auf einmal hatte sich etwas geändert: die Zeit. Das ist Dialektik. Die Dialektik tickt unter dir wie die Uhr im Zündwerk, du kannst den schönsten Apparat haben, du weißt trotzdem nie, wann plötzlich alles anders ist.’¹⁸

What is significant in this novel of far-reaching acts of humiliation and feelings of shame, however, is the continuing loyalty of Party members. This is driven by the fear of humiliation and particularly of the exclusion that humiliation is seen to bring.

¹³ op. cit., Tate, *Shifting Perspectives*, pp. 136-142.

¹⁴ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, pp. 145, 194-195.

¹⁵ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, pp. 270, 280.

¹⁶ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 242.

¹⁷ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, pp. 125, 128-130.

¹⁸ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 218.

Collin cannot contemplate any other home for himself but the Party. It is this which made him stay silent at Havelka's trial: the Party is too important, in a historical sense but also to him personally. Faber himself fought for so long to believe in the Party and his place in it until he was finally tortured beyond what he could endure. Afterwards he is a broken figure, excluded from everything he wanted to be part of and to believe in and with nowhere else to go. Havelka, too, remains committed to the Party. After six years in prison, he refused the chance to go to the West and now, as Collin malevolently says when he is trying to defend himself against his emerging feelings of shame, is 'so kaputt, daß er schon wieder gläubig geworden ist.'¹⁹ There is an echo here of the actual trial of Janka and Harich, during which Harich, desperate not to be utterly rejected by the Party, offered his thanks to the Stasi for catching him as early as they did: 'Wenn man mich nicht festgenommen hätte, dann wäre ich heute nicht reif für die zehn Jahre, die der Herr Generalstaatsanwalt beantragt hat, sondern für den Galgen, und deshalb sage ich... der Staatssicherheit dafür, für deren Wachsamkeit, meinen Dank.'²⁰

Humiliation: a test of loyalty for the 'converted'

The reasons for joining the Party were often an important indicator of the likelihood of long-term loyalty to it. The Nazi period was disastrous for the membership and organisation of the Party, and the occupation of eastern Germany by the Red Army confirmed for many people their ingrained hostility to communism, arising from the propaganda of the Nazis or their experience of the Weimar period. Under the protection and tutelage of the Soviet authorities, Party membership was rebuilt by the merger with the SDP but also by the process late in the war and during the early years after 1945 of 'conversion' to the ideals of the Party of young former supporters of the Third Reich, such as Erich Loest, and of members of the Wehrmacht who were prisoners of war in the Soviet Union.

Conversion narratives are a feature of many of the novels and films. They are frequently shown as highly personal, arising from or giving rise to friendship and loyalty on a personal level, and then to the ideals of the Party. This is the basis of the conversion of Jürgen in the film *Königskinder*, as discussed in Chapter 5. It applies also in Konrad Wolf's 1967 film *Ich war neunzehn*, in which Gregor Hacker

¹⁹ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 159.

²⁰ op. cit., Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus*, p. 142.

eventually persuades fleeing German soldiers to surrender. When his small Red Army unit is attacked by the SS, one of the soldiers he has already converted takes up arms to help resist the attack, accepting by implication Gregor's communist ideals. The significance of this short scene is emphasised by the juxtaposition of the developing warmth between the two men with the battle itself, seen from the top of a small hill and therefore looking down on the SS. At the end of the scene, the camera turns to consider the body of one of Gregor's Soviet comrades who, it is made clear, has given his life for a better communist Germany. In the novels, conversion narratives sometimes stand out because they have little apparent relevance to the principal story but are there to make a political point. In Heym's *Collin*, for instance, the introduction of Collin's mother-in-law provides an opportunity to give an account of her time during and after the bombing of Dresden in February 1945 and her answer to the question of how a just future would become possible: 'Nun auf einmal, hungrig und hilflos, das Kind an der Hand und gefolgt von Frau Beback, erkannte sie, daß es nur eine richtige Antwort gab auf die Fragen, und trat bei erster Gelegenheit der Partei bei und stürzte sich in die Parteiarbeit'.²¹ This account has an additional function, however, which is to contrast the idealism of the converts with the subsequent humiliating practice of the Party.

Conversion to the Party is a theme in Neutsch's novel *Spur der Steine*. Werner Horrath, the Party Secretary for the huge chemical complex where the novel is set in the late 1950s, was himself a convert at the end of the war. He sees it as his responsibility to convert the next generation. Again this is shown on a very personal level, suggesting by the point of view and the emphasis on the long process, that the Party has time to give to every single potential recruit, and that the desired result can be achieved by providing an example of correct behaviour as well as by arguing for the Party's position and its ideals. The novel depicts the eventual conversion of Hannes Balla, through the work of Horrath and the young engineer Kati Klee. Balla is initially the leader of a hard-working but lawless, anarchic group with no affiliations or commitment to either East or West but distinct hostility to the Party. He becomes the leader of a socialist brigade, then a Party member, then 'Held der Arbeit' and finally a roving representative of the State, spreading innovation across the GDR. This is a successful conversion, since Balla is tested at many points along the way and

²¹ op. cit., Heym, *Collin*, p. 205.

eventually develops inner strength, consistency and an unshakeable loyalty to the Party. Max Walter Schulz is full of praise for this depiction of Balla:

Am Ende der Handlung erscheint uns Balla durchaus nicht als ein zahm und weise gewordener Naturbursche. Er hat nur auf der Schkonaer Universität des Lebens gelernt, seine unverwüstliche Kraft gegen die Verwüstlichkeit des Lebens einzusetzen: solidarisch mit der Kraft und Klugheit seiner herrschenden Klasse. [...] Dieser Zimmerman Balla ist eine starke realistische Figur und insofern auch ein gültiges literarisches Dokument sozialistischer Nationalkultur.²²

Hans Koch also praises Balla highly: ‘Balla ist ein großer Gewinn für unsere Literatur. Balla ist eine der groß angelegten Arbeitergestalten, die in unserer Literatur noch so überaus selten sind – Erbe großer Traditionen der proletarisch-revolutionären und sozialistischen Literatur.’²³ Both Schulz and Koch are less enthusiastic about the character of Horrath, however. For Schulz, Horrath is too cowardly and weak when there is objectively nothing for him to fear. Schulz says that while he is made out to be a victim of ‘Dogmatismus’ (the SED’s euphemism for Stalinism), he suffers only because of his own silence.²⁴ Koch is unhappy with the suggestion that the personal dilemma facing Horrath and Klee is the result of flaws in the society and, by implication, the Party.²⁵ If, however, Horrath’s actions are considered from the point of view of the Party’s tendency to humiliate, then a different picture emerges of a post-war convert whose loyalty is tested to the limit.

Horrath is initially attacked for breaching the Plan in order to raise productivity. The Party’s view is that his actions were beneficial but contrary to the rules and a formal reprimand is put on his file.²⁶ This in itself should not be felt as humiliation, since Horrath accepts the Party’s rules. Nevertheless, the ferocity of the attack and his own underlying sense of justice make him feel that he has been humiliated by being marked out in this way.²⁷ Later he is savagely criticised at a Party meeting for his excessive patience with Balla, leaving him in a state of impotent fury at the apparent injustice. The whispered words of another Party member highlight how commonplace is the Party’s use of humiliation: “‘Tröste dich, das war noch gar nichts. Beim letzten Mal ist der Oberbürgermeister in die Knie gerutscht. Geheult hat er wie ein

²² Max Walter Schulz, ‘Spur der Steine. Roman von Erik Neutsch – eine Betrachtung. 1964’, pp. 621-631 in op. cit., Jarmatz, *Kritik in der Zeit*, p. 627.

²³ Hans Koch, ‘Von der Streitbarkeit des Romans. Prof. Hans Koch schreibt an Erik Neutsch, Rezension zur “Spur der Steine”’, 1964, pp. 610-620 in op. cit., Jarmatz, *Kritik in der Zeit*, p. 611.

²⁴ op. cit., Schulz, p. 627.

²⁵ op. cit., Koch, pp. 610-611.

²⁶ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 165.

²⁷ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 173-174.

Schloßhund...’’²⁸ It is Horrath’s relationship with Klee, however, which causes his eventual downfall. Accepting that the Party has the right to quiz its members about their moral standards, he fails to admit he is the father of Klee’s child and diverts hostility on to her. Later, feeling great shame for this, he sees that it was wrong for the Party to judge the relationship between him and Klee since love is not a collective matter and cannot be a moral failing.²⁹

As a result of these examples of humiliation, and of his loss not just of Klee and his Party position but also of his own marriage, Horrath has to ponder the meaning of his commitment to the Party. He realises it is exemplified by his tireless struggle to convert Balla, just as he was converted at the end of the war. He tells Balla how, having followed Hitler, he looked for something new: “‘Ich fand eine neue Welt für mich, das ist wahr, den Marxismus. [...] Der Sinn trat an die Stelle des Unsinn.’” What remained, however, were ‘der Kult um einen Heiligen’ and the methods of arguing and acting that went along with it. He and his generation have had to fight hard against such things in a way that the new generation represented by Klee and Balla will not have to do. His battle with the Party, he suggests, has been with the remnants of Stalinism, and he feels destroyed by it.³⁰ It is left to the newly-converted Balla, the model for Horrath of how a Party member should be, to convince him that the fight has to go on, even against mistakes in the Party, and that Horrath, out of loyalty, must declare his errors and clarify his position in the Party. By this point in the novel, there has been a shift in the narrative perspective to ensure that Balla’s point of view is pre-eminent and to suggest that what he says about the Party and about the future should be taken as authoritative. The tendency of the Party to humiliate, so central a preoccupation of Horrath, therefore, becomes a lesser concern, one that can be dealt with by working within the Party and following its rules and procedures. Balla’s position in relation to Horrath now represents a generational shift. The Party has moved on, its future is in the hands of its new converts and the relatively minor problems of the older generation will be easily solved. The personal nature of conversion is again shown to be important here, with a reversal of positions, so that the former teacher is now the pupil who has to be helped to find the right way forward.³¹

²⁸ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 196.

²⁹ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 530.

³⁰ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 767-768.

³¹ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 768-770.

Except for the way he has treated Klee, for which he feels profound shame, Horrath is reluctant to see that he is in the wrong or to understand this shift. He has consistently put his commitment to the work that he has carried out for the benefit of the Party above all else, even above the need to be honest with the Party. Declaring his errors, however, requires a confession of lying to the Party; anything else is too subtle. When he makes this confession, he is stripped of his position by his successor, the pitiless Bleibtreu, who asserts the Party line on justice and correct behaviour: “‘Jede moralische Schwäche, mein Lieber, und wäre es nur ein geborgter Pfennig, dient dem Klassenfeind als Angriffspunkt. (...) Sauberkeit und Ehrlichkeit, das gehört zur eisernen Kohorte der Revolution.’”³² Horrath becomes an ordinary building worker, with a new inner strength that comes from Balla and from having become an honest Party member once more. However, he is punished again when he interferes in the name of justice to countermand Bleibtreu’s absurd instructions to the research group of engineers to go outside and help dig ditches. His ejection from the site by Bleibtreu is a clear example of excessive, unreasonable punishment designed to reduce Horrath to the status of an outcast. It is humiliation carried out by someone imbued with an unshakeable, unquestioning loyalty to the Party.³³ Bleibtreu is not, however, left unchallenged in the text. He is consistently portrayed as narrow, dogmatic, spiteful, power-seeking and intellectually and politically limited.³⁴ Unsurprisingly, he is shown to be this way partly because of his own fear of humiliation.³⁵ Jansen, the Regional Party Secretary who is consistently depicted as decent, humane and just, confirms the wisdom of the Party when he makes clear to Balla that Bleibtreu is not acceptable and will soon be replaced. This, of course, will confirm to Bleibtreu that he was right to fear humiliation.

How Horrath reacts to his final humiliation is left open. Since Balla has gained a commitment from Jansen to reconsider Horrath’s case, Balla and Klee both hope he will be reinstated as local Party Secretary. This hope conveys their belief that, despite everything, Horrath will remain loyal to the Party, the Party that is now in the safe hands of the new generation.

³² op. cit., Neutsch, p. 872.

³³ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 903.

³⁴ op. cit., Neutsch, p. 682-683, 901-903.

³⁵ op. cit., Neutsch, pp. 697-698.

Initiation, humiliation and loyalty: *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*

Many of the examples of humiliation suggest that individual members came to understand that the Party would not necessarily reciprocate their loyalty. This failure to reciprocate arises partly from the unequal power relations involved. One way the Party inculcated loyalty was through the process of initiating Party members, particularly those likely to become leading functionaries. This was significant because, as discussed in Chapter 2, initiation rituals frequently have a clear and dangerous purpose: to transmit both the capacity and the desire to humiliate.

In the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, Communist functionaries from outside the Soviet Union were trained to be revolutionaries who could operate in conditions of illegality and extreme danger. Their commitment to the Party and its aims was required to be absolute; personal interests and relationships were seen to be secondary at best and dangerous at worst. Though this approach was made more rigorous under Stalin, it grew out of the experience of the Bolsheviks under Lenin and their need to survive before the revolution, to win the civil war and to ensure the survival of the new Soviet Union. This emotional and physical commitment to the Party, and the willingness to accept torture and brutality as facts of life, are graphically spelt out in Willi Bredel's *Die Prüfung*, Anna Seghers' *Das siebte Kreuz* and Bodo Uhse's *Die Patrioten*.

Wolfgang Leonhard's description of initiation in the Communist International helps to understand how and why revolutionaries were put through a process of humiliation. Leonhard came from a left-wing family and community of like-minded, highly political people, initially in Berlin. His mother, a committed Communist who was excluded from the Party in the 1920s, took him to Moscow in 1935 for both of them to be safe but was subsequently 'purged' and imprisoned for many years. Despite this, he grew up and was educated within the Soviet system, later attended the Comintern school in Soviet Central Asia and returned to Berlin as part of the 'Gruppe Ulbricht' on 30th April 1945 to help organise the post-war Germany in the Soviet Zone. Increasingly disenchanted with the 'Stalinist' way those around him operated, he became interested in the alternative approach in Yugoslavia. When Stalin denounced Tito for deviationism in 1948 and the SED enthusiastically followed suit, Leonhard fled the SBZ in 1949, days before the Politburo was planning to deal with his 'case', and managed to reach Yugoslavia. Though he saw himself as wanting real socialism, he was denounced as a traitor and a Trotskyist and excluded from the SED.

Those who might have been influenced by him in the Party Hochschule where he had been teaching, and in the youth movement where he had played a prominent role, were themselves purged or 're-educated'.

Leonhard's memoir, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*, first published in 1955 in the Federal Republic, was, unsurprisingly, banned in the GDR.³⁶ It can be considered part of GDR representation, however, for several reasons. Firstly, it offers a detailed account of the experience of the Moscow émigrés who would later set up and dominate the GDR in its crucial early period. It also describes the education and training of Communist functionaries from all over the world in the Soviet Union and their consequent practice as Communist revolutionaries with access to power. Additionally, it describes the actions of the 'Gruppe Ulbricht' and other senior Communists in the SBZ. As an account by someone at the heart of the process of establishing Communist power in the GDR who then broke with his former colleagues, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* is written from a particular political point of view and with a clear intention: to point to Stalinism as the problem facing Communists everywhere, but especially in the Soviet Union and the Communist countries of central and eastern Europe. Only Yugoslavia was seeking to escape from Stalinism, and Leonhard was indicating to the people of the GDR that this was an alternative approach to socialism which they needed to know about. His memoir is part of an ongoing argument he is attempting to have with those he has left behind but still feels close to, his comrades of many years standing with whom he shares a belief in Marxism-Leninism.

Taking up a position in this way will inevitably affect Leonhard's interpretation of events. What is significant here, however, is that although he is describing incidents of humiliation which are clearly experienced as such by their victims, he does not identify the process of humiliation as a problem or as something at the heart of the way the Party operates: Stalinism is the problem and therefore the target of his argument. Many years later he does recognise the humiliation that was part of the way the Party operated. Referring to a former student criticising 'Die damalige Atmosphäre in der SED-Parteihochschule 'Karl Marx'', vor allem die erniedrigenden

³⁶ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder*, (Köln, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1962).

Formen der ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik’, he notes that ‘Entwürdigende Selbstzerfleischung verlangte damals der Kommunismus von seinen Anhängern.’³⁷

Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder is filled with examples of humiliation, all based on apparent arbitrariness at the top of the Party hierarchy. A personal example is the arrest and imprisonment of Leonhard’s mother. Wider examples include the abrupt reversal of position and the abandonment of ‘anti-fascism’ overnight upon the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 and, as a consequence of the Pact, the sending back to Nazi Germany of German anti-fascists and the deportation into miserable conditions in Kazakhstan of the vast majority of Germans or those of German descent in the Soviet Union. *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* also offers a striking example of the central part humiliation can play in initiation rituals and processes and of the damaging consequences of this for the people involved and for their organisations. In this case, it is the Party itself which initiates its members and particularly its functionaries in a way which involves humiliating them and then rewarding them with status and honour out so that they are willing and able to repeat this exercise of power over others beneath them in a carefully established hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, this is in line with the approach to psychology with its emphasis on conditioning adopted by Pavlov and his followers. As noted in Chapter 4, Pavlov’s approach, which had to be followed by psychologists under Stalin, involved the complete rejection of anything associated with psychoanalysis. The process of initiation with its humiliations and rewards described by Leonhard can be seen to cause long-term problems for the functionaries involved, for ordinary Party members and for the functioning of the Party as a whole.

It is here that Leonhard’s experience at the Comintern School in 1942-1943 is significant. At the single most important location for Party education and training, where ‘the Party’ is seen and felt by its adherents to be a united international force made up of individual Parties under the leadership and direction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he undergoes a lengthy process of initiation into the ranks of full-time Communist revolutionaries. This process is underpinned by acts of humiliation and by the transmission of the capacity to humiliate. He describes his arrival at the remote school and meeting his new room-mates, including Mischa (Markus) Wolf and Helmut Gennys. They have known one another since they were

³⁷ Wolfgang Leonhard, *Spurensuche. 40 Jahre nach ‘Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder’*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), pp. 233-235.

children and are close friends. Here, however, they have new names (he becomes 'Linden') and are not permitted to speak of what they have been doing or of themselves.³⁸ The first thing that is eliminated for them is their sense of personal closeness and trust. The routine they are required to follow includes lining up in military style every morning for a variety of sporting activities, where their progress is closely monitored. Later they undertake military training. They have many hours of formal lectures, self-study and seminars, covering a wide range of history and politics, but all particularly connected to the Communist movement and its bourgeois or fascist enemies. Communist or socialist opposition leaders or groups are not discussed or mentioned, with the exception of Trotsky, where there are outright expressions of hate, rather than any attempt to consider his ideas.³⁹ The person responsible for the German group in the Comintern School is known as 'Klassner', whose real name is Paul Wandel, acknowledged by Leonhard to be 'ein ausgezeichneter Dozent'. Coldly intelligent, always under control and following the Party line precisely, always able to sacrifice his closest friends and colleagues when the leadership requires him to, he is the model of how they should become:

Infolge seiner überdurchschnittlichen Intelligenz war er imstande, rechtzeitig die leisesten Andeutungen einer ideologischen Schwenkung zu erkennen und dementsprechend zu handeln. Bei einer Veränderung der Linie war er bereit, von einem Tag auf den anderen seine Meinung zu ändern und mit kristallklarer Logik genau das Gegenteil von dem zu vertreten, was er am Tage vorher gesagt hatte.⁴⁰

In some of the exercises the students undertake in the seminars, a whole new vocabulary is introduced to them as their mistakes are described. Terms such as 'Sektierertum', 'Opportunismus' and 'Unterschätzung der Rolle der Arbeiterklasse' allow them to distinguish right from wrong. More significantly, they indicate not just that the students do not have to think for themselves but that they must not think for themselves.⁴¹

Leonhard slowly learns that true closeness is forbidden, that military-style discipline is the norm and that access to information is dependent on one's place in the hierarchy.⁴² He discovers that there are labels for what is acceptable and what is not and that even attempts to organise their own entertainment with music and

³⁸ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, pp. 193-194.

³⁹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 208.

⁴⁰ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 199.

⁴¹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 208.

⁴² op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 213.

dancing have to be redirected into formally organised and mostly tedious evenings singing German folk songs. It still comes as a shock to him to have to internalise one absolute requirement: ‘*Jedes Wort wird politisch gewertet.*’⁴³ For the initiates in the Comintern School, the process they are put through requires them to transform their understanding of themselves and what they can allow themselves to do if they are to become fully-fledged Communist revolutionary leaders.

This process can be – and is required to be – particularly painful, through the technique of criticism and self-criticism, a technique deriving from Lenin’s time and widely used by Communist parties, including the SED, as one way of disciplining Party members. The GDR’s *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* insists that this technique has nothing to do with destructive criticism, ‘die aus einer nihilistischen und skeptizistischen Einstellung folgt und sich im Negativen erschöpft’.⁴⁴ Yet this is far from the experience of Leonard. In a way that is entirely unexpected to him and beyond his understanding of how he should behave, he is required to undergo criticism and self-criticism for indignantly speaking out in defence of another student who was being physically attacked by a much larger, stronger student. In a process he says was ‘wie bei einer Untersuchung der Inquisition’, he is formally arraigned by a grouping of top officials and one of his fellow students and criticised for his actions in this specific incident and for his behaviour more generally: ‘Immer wieder hörte ich die Worte ‘unbolschewistisches Verhalten’, ‘mangelnder Ernst’, ‘Überheblichkeit’.⁴⁵

Leonhard responds in the predictable manner of anyone being humiliated, with dismay and bewilderment and a paralysing sense of helplessness as power is so unexpectedly and so effectively used against him. After an hour of the proceedings, he still does not know what he is meant to have done, but already feels guilty for whatever it is he might have done, a feeling that makes him even more helpless. His fellow student is given the task of detailing his faults, which she does in the same cold tone of the others and ‘im Vollgefühl ihrer Macht’.⁴⁶ To his dismay, he realises she has recorded everything he has said since the day he arrived in the school and that trivial comments made in passing are seen as highly significant, with the potential to endanger his fellow revolutionaries and the whole revolutionary struggle. Leonard’s response to this relentless and apparently logical exposition is to do what many

⁴³ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 224.

⁴⁴ op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, entry for ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik’.

⁴⁵ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 225.

⁴⁶ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 227.

victims of humiliation do: deny the horror of the humiliation and reduce the pain of it by identifying in part with the norms, values or views of the humiliator. In his case, since he believes he has always shared the values of his accusers, he is inclined to accept what they say he has done and to feel guilt and shame for his actions and for their possible consequences.

Combined with these feelings, however, is bewilderment brought on by the unexpectedness and apparent arbitrariness of what is happening. He knows he has always, in his schooling in Moscow and now here at the Comintern School, been treated as a model student. The impact of what is being done to him now, therefore, is devastating: ‘Da ich bisher noch nie eine Kritik und Selbstkritik erlebt hatte und selbst hier auf der Schule noch keine einzige kritische Bemerkung über mein Verhalten gefallen war, traf mich diese massive Anklage geradezu niederschmetternd.’⁴⁷ When Leonhard is invited to respond, he can do little more than stammer a brief acceptance of the justice of the charges and a wish to behave better. The concluding words from the panel seize on his response in a way that continues the process of humiliation: ‘Der Grundtenor war der gleiche: Die Erklärung von Linden ist ein Ausweichen gewesen. Linden hat den Kern des Problems gar nicht erfaßt. Die Erklärung zeigt seine Oberflächlichkeit.’

To Leonhard’s surprise, the session ends suddenly, with no conclusion, no resolution or list of measures to be taken, not even a suggestion of how he should now behave. He feels helpless and trapped, since it has been shown to him that anything he does will be wrong. He is concerned about his immediate future, but what upsets him more is ‘das tiefe Schuldbewußtsein und die scheinbare Ausweglosigkeit, in der ich mich jetzt befand’.⁴⁸ What he does not understand at this point is that the humiliation he has been subjected to can only lead to this position of bewilderment and helplessness, that by its very nature it cannot offer him a way out, a way back to the position he was in before. He is to be made, through this process of initiation, into someone different, someone who is less autonomous, less able to determine his own thoughts and actions and willing to treat others as he himself has been treated.

By the next day, Leonhard’s adjustment to what has been done has developed further. In his class he finds it almost impossible to work except mechanically. When he sees sitting in front of him the young woman who had been on the panel

⁴⁷ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, pp. 229-230.

⁴⁸ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 230.

condemning him, he cannot help feeling that what she did ‘etwas Verabscheuungswürdiges hatte’.⁴⁹ He knows the Party has a duty to help him overcome his faults and weaknesses and expects it to do so, but cannot accept that it has to be done in this way. He then thinks of earlier critical thoughts he has had, and about the experience of being in Moscow during the purges of the 1930s. He resolves to be more careful about everything he does and says, is torn because this seems a dishonest way to behave, but cannot find an alternative: ‘Wie konnte man ehrlich sein, wenn jedes unschuldige Wort, “objektiv gesehen”, als eine feindliche Äußerung gewertet wurde?’⁵⁰ By now his belief has been shaken; he is shocked, like any true believer with doubts that cannot be repressed, by his ‘ketzerischen Gedanken’.

This can be seen retrospectively as a key moment in Wolfgang Leonhard’s rejection of what he sees as Stalinist modes of behaviour and in the long process of his self-exclusion from the Party. The humiliating way of exercising criticism and self-criticism throws into question the initiation process he is being put through. It will also make him feel both rejected by the Party and rejecting of its approach.⁵¹ It is notable that when he is writing this account, at least a decade later and after he has left the GDR, Leonhard confines his criticism to the Party leadership and their Stalinist practices as if the Party itself, outside the leadership, is still the liberating, emancipating force he has always believed it to be.

Leonhard finds himself again at the centre of the same process the next afternoon when his fellow students are invited to say where they stand in relation to the accusations against him, in the light of his unsatisfactory response the previous evening. One by one, over many hours, they are all put in the position of having to condemn him, even the one or two who try to find a way to avoid doing so: ‘Alles verlief ganz planmäßig. Selbst meine beste Freunde mußten mich nun verdammen – und sie taten es. Der Inhalt war durch die Rede Wandels genau vorgezeichnet worden, und alle Angehörigen der Gruppe hielten sich daran.’⁵² Invited to respond, Leonhard recognises his faults honestly but, as a tactical measure, stresses that he will take time to look into what has been said and think seriously about it.

This, it turns out, is the end of the process for him but only the start for his fellow students: ‘In den nächsten Wochen und Monaten haben wir dieses Schauspiel in

⁴⁹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 231.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 232.

⁵² op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 233.

unserer Gruppe noch häufig erlebt, bis schließlich fast alle Schüler durch die Mühle der ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik’ gegangen waren.’⁵³ What happened to them, Leonhard says, was little more than the reinforcement on an individual basis of what they had already absorbed, since the first self-criticism was enough in itself to change both him and the others in his group: ‘Wir waren ernster und vor allem vorsichtiger in unseren Äußerungen geworden. Die stürmischen Begrüßungen, freien Erzählungen, jubelnden Ausrufe unterblieben. Wir Jüngeren, die wir damals zwischen 19 und 22 Jahre alt waren, benahmen uns wie gesetzte, alte Parteifunktionäre, die ihre Worte ruhig und überlegt wählten.’⁵⁴ What has happened to them now is in line with the description by Pierre Clastres of long-term effects of the deliberate, forcible imposition of extreme pain during initiation rituals:

Mais, après l’initiation, et toute souffrance *oubliée* déjà, subsiste un surplus, un surplus irrévocable, les *traces* que laissent sur le corps l’opération du couteau ou de la pierre, les cicatrices des blessures reçues. Un homme initié, c’est un homme marqué. Le but de l’initiation, en son moment tortionnaire, c’est de marquer le corps: dans le rituel initiatique, *la société imprime sa marque sur le corps* des jeunes gens.⁵⁵

Clastres interprets the initiation rites as marking the individual, in a way that cannot be forgotten or reversed, as a full and equal member of the community: ‘Voilà donc le secret que dans l’initiation le groupe révèle aux jeunes gens: “Vous êtes des nôtres. Chacun de vous est semblable à nous, chacun de vous est semblable aux autres. [...] *Et vous ne pourrez pas l’oublier*. Sans cesse, les mêmes marques que nous avons laissées sur votre corps vous le rappelleront.”’⁵⁶ An alternative interpretation is that those with the real or ultimate power will remain higher in the hierarchy, as the use of ‘we’ and ‘you’ demonstrates, despite Clastres’ assertion that all are now equal. They have marked those they have humiliated. The marking, which can be metaphorical as well as literal, demonstrates to the newly initiated that they are permanently changed by their experience: they have joined the ranks of those who have previously been subjected to humiliation, and are by this process transformed into future humiliators themselves.

The students at the Comintern School have been permanently marked; they will be ready to humiliate others below them in the future, but will always live with the knowledge that those still higher above them can, at any time, humiliate them too, a

⁵³ op. cit., Leonhard, *Die Revolution*, p. 234.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ op. cit., Clastres, p. 157, (highlighted in original).

⁵⁶ op. cit., Clastres, p. 158, (highlighted in original).

point demonstrated fictionally by the paranoia of the all-powerful Urack in *Collin*. This is why they no longer behave like uninhibited, enthusiastic young people but like old, wary functionaries; life has become too unpredictably dangerous for them. Ironically, their inhibited behaviour is highly threatening to the Party itself. Communist revolutionaries trained in the Comintern School and elsewhere are intended to be equipped to face up to all predictable dangers without flinching and without having to think what needs to be done. The experience of humiliation and the fear of further humiliation make them realise, however, that there are unpredictable dangers to be faced. This realisation risks leaving them paralysed and helpless at precisely the moment when they need to act without thinking of the personal consequences. Nevertheless, they are powerless to change their behaviour because that would involve changing their attitude to the Party. The process of initiation has shown them how the Party operates and imprinted on them the message that only by operating in this way can the Party be successful in its revolutionary struggle. As Clastres says: ‘La marque est un obstacle à l’oubli, le corps lui-même porte imprimées sur soi les traces du souvenir, *le corps est une mémoire*.’⁵⁷ As noted in the chapter on the founding myths, this image of the physical body bearing the imprint of loyalty to the Party is a recurring one in both personal and fictional accounts and serves to add an almost mystical sense to the concept of ‘the Party’.

Initiation, humiliation and loyalty: examples from the novels

That initiation can be a destructive, narrowing process which can give the Party member the capacity and willingness to humiliate is one of the many themes in Christa Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel*, set in the period immediately preceding the building of the Wall, by which time Ulbricht had strengthened his hold on power and managed to limit destalinisation in the GDR. Rita is being trained as a teacher and, therefore, as one of those chosen to ensure the Party’s line is inculcated into the new generations born into the GDR. She complains of always being told to learn from Mangold, one of their fellow students who has worked extensively elsewhere and feels he is the true representative of the Party. Rita cannot accept this: ‘Das kann ich nicht. Ich will’s auch nicht. *Muß* man wirklich so werden wie er?’⁵⁸ Mangold creates an atmosphere of anxiety and oppression among his fellow students and openly

⁵⁷ op. cit., Clastres, p. 157, (highlighted in original).

⁵⁸ op. cit., Christa Wolf, p. 96.

intimidates their timid teacher in an exercise of power designed to humiliate him publicly and to instil in him the fear of further humiliation. The teacher has the misfortune to misquote an important passage, which Mangold (who knows all the important passages off by heart) notices and remarks on:

Wie der Dozent erschrak bei Mangolds Ton – denn der gab ihm zu verstehen, daß es nicht ohne Bedeutung sein könnte, wenn einer jetzt gerade dieses Zitat falsch wiedergebe! –, wie er rot wurde, wie er nur mit Mühe die Stunde zu Ende brachte, wie Mangold diese Lage ausnutzte und, vor allem, wie wir alle stillhielten, uns nicht anzublicken wagten und nicht den Mut aufbrachten, uns zu wehren...⁵⁹

An opportunity for Mangold to use his power even more effectively arises when Rita's friend Sigrid admits to not reporting that her parents were going to leave for the West and to concealing their disappearance for a fortnight. Since Rita knew about their departure before Sigrid's admission and also did nothing about it, the two of them are threatened by Mangold with expulsion from the university. When the day comes for the events to be discussed in the class, Schwarzenbach, who originally recruited Rita and acts as her guiding figure, is also in attendance. Mangold makes a long and pitiless speech which Rita finds entirely predictable and can listen to coldly, though Sigrid is almost in tears. Rita turns her thoughts to the others in the class:

Merkte denn niemand sonst, wie hohl jedes Wort aus seinem Munde klang? Wie lächerlich sein Pathos war? Ihr war, als könne sie den Mechanismus sehen, der diesen Menschen bewegte.

Sie schämte sich für alle, die vor ihm zu Boden blickten.⁶⁰

Rita is identified here as the voice of narrative authority, both describing and interpreting the events for the reader. It is significant, therefore, that Rita sees the mechanism that operates within the person initiated into such behaviour, and that she identifies shame as the response her fellow students should feel for doing nothing in the face of his humiliating attacks. She is herself powerless and resigned to her own defeat but has risen above it, asserting that Mangold cannot hold on to such power in the long term.

To Rita's surprise, the attack on Mangold that she thought was impossible comes from Schwarzenbach, who asks him who he is speaking for. Mangold is disconcerted but defiant: 'Er spreche für die Genossen, sagte er dann herausfordernd. Es gäbe da

⁵⁹ op. cit., Christa Wolf, p. 97.

⁶⁰ op. cit., Christa Wolf, p. 129.

einen Beschluß...'⁶¹ The more he himself is challenged and isolated by Schwarzenbach, the more he leans on the rigidity of the Party, as it has been instilled in him. When asked to take into account that the Party is also there for Sigrid, he can hardly contain himself: “Das ist doch politisch naiv”, sagte er. Er scheute sich nicht, im Zusammenhang mit der weinenden Sigrid das Wort “Weltimperialismus” auszusprechen. Er jedenfalls habe eine harte Schule in der Partei hinter sich.’⁶² Schwarzenbach’s reply confirms that he sees Mangold as one of the toughened initiates, trained to humiliate others beneath him when he has the power: “Das glaube ich Ihnen”, erwiderte Schwarzenbach schnell, so, als habe sich ihm eine Vermutung bestätigt.’⁶³ At this point Schwarzenbach softens towards Mangold as it is clear he has defeated him. The language shifts away from Mangold’s wooden terminology as Schwarzenbach refers to his own path to political consciousness, through the Party as patient and thoughtful father figure rather than as tyrannical ruler. Ironically, the image of the Party as father figure conveys, apparently contrary to the intent of the narrative voice, that the Party continues to infantilise its members when it is not actively brutalising them. Through the reactions of Rita, her fellow students and of Mangold himself, this version of the Party as the paternal figure is shown to be favoured and the more effective one. To reinforce the point, Schwarzenbach deliberately does not humiliate Mangold or allow him to be humiliated: ‘Schwarzenbach hatte erreicht, daß niemand mit Schadenfreude auf ihn sah.’⁶⁴ He implies the Party can welcome back into the fold those who have gone astray, its lost or misled children. Mangold the Stalinist, however, cannot accept Schwarzenbach’s generosity. When Schwarzenbach later publishes an article critical of Dogmatism (in other words, critical of Stalinist ways of thinking and acting) and is attacked for it, Schwarzenbach sees this as part of a reasonable inner-Party struggle. Rita, however, recognises that ‘Die Leute, die ihn verdächtigen, haben mehr Macht als er’ and that Mangold is using the occasion to try to get his revenge on Schwarzenbach: ‘Auch Mangold trat wieder auf dem Plan.’⁶⁵ The true initiates, it is suggested, understanding that loyalty comes from the bottom up and does not need to be reciprocated, dominate the Party and will determine the fate of all within it.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *op. cit.*, Christa Wolf, p. 130.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *op. cit.*, Christa Wolf, p. 131.

⁶⁵ *op. cit.*, Christa Wolf, p. 185.

The examples considered here from the Ulbricht period of the GDR reflect the power and attitudes of the generations formed personally and politically before and during the war. In both *Spur der Steine* and *Der geteilte Himmel* it is suggested that the younger Party members shaped by the GDR itself might have a more creative, idealistic and less fearful approach. In the Honecker period, this theme of the tension between the generations is taken up in Monika Maron's *Flugasche*, through the difficult relationship between Josefa Nadler and her boss, Strutzer, by whom she feels persecuted. Strutzer's unswerving commitment to the Party line and his willingness to humiliate are shown to follow directly from his humiliation as a boy in a boarding school which had previously been used as a Nazi detention centre. There, apparently in the formative years of the GDR, he was subjected to initiation rituals and sexual abuse. When asked why he did not run away, Strutzer makes clear that he likes the power humiliating initiation rituals lead to: 'Er hätte es damals in Ordnung gefunden, hatte Strutzer geantwortet. Sein Gerechtigkeitsempfinden sei nicht gestört worden. Später, als er zu den Großen gehörte, hatte er den Kleinen die Genitalien geschwärzt.'⁶⁶ Josefa sees the connection between this and the way the Party initiates its members. With the full authority of the narrative voice and the use of short sentences and repetition to make her own disgust clear, Josefa stresses the damage to Strutzer and subsequently to other Party members from his early humiliation: 'Strutzer hat studiert. Strutzer hat die Parteischule besucht. Strutzer hat sich nie wieder für ein Mädchen interessiert, auf das ein Großer ein Auge geworfen hatte. Er konnte sicher unterscheiden, wer ein Großer war und wer ein Kleiner. In der Illustrierten Woche gehörte Strutzer zu den Großen.'⁶⁷ The hierarchy is clearly established and Josefa, a more junior though passionate, loyal and idealistic member of the Party, will always be treated as inferior and of no consequence by Strutzer. Despite the sense of injustice involved, it comes as no surprise to her later when the threat of humiliation he has held over her turns into an act of humiliation. What is depicted here is a constantly repeating pattern of humiliation. It was 'der Tradition des Hauses' from the Nazi period that meant that Strutzer was humiliated and that made him willing in turn to use humiliation.⁶⁸ He thus became an ideal candidate for initiation into the Party and for carrying on the process, even as the society under

⁶⁶ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche* p. 118.

⁶⁷ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ op. cit., Maron, *Flugasche*, p. 118. See also op. cit., Kühne, pp. 51-52, on similar sexual humiliation in Nazi training camps.

Honecker became less rigid and a new generation of Party members grew up without the same set of experiences. It is significant, however, that throughout the second half of the life of the GDR, in the period when there was some liberalisation and a loosening of the Party's control whether it liked it or not, the top Party leaders were still those from the older generation, such as Honecker and Mielke, who had been shaped by experiences before and during the war. Honecker himself had been through the Comintern School in 1930-1931.⁶⁹ The clash between Strutzer and Nadler in *Flugasche* is used to suggest the continuing power of this older generation of leaders and their determination, well into the 1970s, to reject the different ways that the new generations have of seeing the world.

Maintaining loyalty: humiliation and inner-Party discipline

Once loyalty to the Party was established through initiating, educating and training individual members, internal practices ensured it was maintained. One of these was the disciplinary process of criticism and self-criticism, discussed above. Another was democratic centralism, a process attributed to Lenin, whereby decisions are made at the top then fed down through the Party, where everyone is required to implement every decision, and where compliance with this is a test of loyalty to the Party. The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, introducing an English edition of the works of Lenin, says that Lenin made clear that the necessary revolutionary Party would only be strong and united if it adopted the principles of centralism:

the Party must be led from the centre, by the Party Congress, and by the Central Committee between congresses; this implies the strict subordination of the minority to the majority, of lower organisations to higher. 'Refusal to accept the direction of the central bodies is tantamount to refusing to remain in the Party, it is tantamount to disrupting the Party...'⁷⁰

The GDR's official dictionary stresses that democratic centralism is a specifically Leninist requirement for socialist societies and that Lenin's writings 'zur Partei neuen Typus und zur Diktatur des Proletariats sind bis heute ein festes theoretisches Fundament für die Anwendung des d. Z. und dessen fortwährende Vervollkommnung in der Praxis der sozialistischen Staaten.'⁷¹ In principle, those occupying the top posts are accountable to and periodically elected by delegates from lower levels and their

⁶⁹ op. cit., Morina, p. 178.

⁷⁰ op. cit., Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 'Preface', p. 16; the quote is from Lenin, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)', in op. cit., *Selected Works*, Volume 1, p. 404.

⁷¹ op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, 'demokratischer Zentralismus', p. 149.

decisions are affected by the thinking of those below them.⁷² In novels and personal accounts covering both the Ulbricht and the Honecker periods, however, democratic centralism is portrayed as a process where the decisions are made at the top and passed down without taking into account what is happening at lower levels and without adequate explanation. Peter Thompson, tracing the development of democratic centralism in the Soviet Union, says that democratic control from below was replaced by loyalty to the upper echelons of the Party and that two temporal insecurities beset the Soviet bureaucracy: 'Firstly, in the short term, one's job (indeed, one's life) was at the arbitrary disposal of the level above rather than the level below. This resulted in a loyalty to authority rather than to the revolution. Secondly, in the long term, the party became the state and the defence of the state required loyalty to the party.'⁷³

A fictional example of how democratic centralism operated in the 1950s comes from the first exclusion of Ole Bienkopp from the Party for promoting an agricultural co-operative in his village when this was not Party policy. In the presence of the District Secretary Wunschgetreu, Jan Bullert leads the attack on Ole. His approach of praising Ole before condemning him and suggesting he is too ill to carry on as Party secretary has an ironic hint of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* but also evokes memories of the process after Stalin's death that culminated in his condemnation by Khrushchev. (Given that democratic centralism made no allowance for replacing the head of the Party, it can also be seen to prefigure the way Khrushchev himself would be removed – for health reasons – not long after the publication of the novel and, some years later, the replacement of Walter Ulbricht by Erich Honecker.) Ole's reaction to hearing Jan's praise for him, is 'als höre er die Rede zu seinem Begräbnis.' In a comment which, by making clear that the speaker is not being ironic, satirises the Party's refrain that the Party is always right, Jan says that: 'Bienkopp hat sich hinter dem Rücken der Partei etwas ausgedacht, und wo soll das hinführen?'⁷⁴ Although he is impressed by Ole's speech in his own defence, Wunschgetreu follows the line that the Party knows best, and that if the Party had wanted co-operatives they would already have moved in that direction.⁷⁵ In response to Ole's assertion that he wants to

⁷² op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 148-150.

⁷³ Peter Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left. The PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy*, (New York, NY; London: Berghahn, 2005), p. 28.

⁷⁴ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 189.

⁷⁵ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 193.

move forwards, not backwards, Wunschgetreu declares that the Party – by implication, at a level well above that of the ordinary member – is the one to decide such matters: ‘Was vorwärts und was rückwärts ist, bestimmt, dünkt ich, noch immer die Partei. Willst du sie belehren?’⁷⁶ The sympathetic portrait of Ole throughout the novel, even when the presentation of him also gently mocks him, makes it clear to the reader that this insistence on the importance of the hierarchy and the need for everything to be centralised in a Leninist fashion is being criticised here.

Not surprisingly, a sense of vulnerability arising from democratic centralism is shown as ever present among lower Party officials. They fear they will be blamed and humiliated for not doing something they should be doing, but also for doing something they were instructed to do which is suddenly no longer Party policy. Elsewhere in *Ole Bienkopp*, Wunschgetreu himself and the lower Party functionary Kraushaar are frequently depicted as anxious and almost paralysed by the need to satisfy the unpredictable wishes of those above them.⁷⁷ Reviews of *Ole Bienkopp* by Party critics such as Hans-Jürgen Geisthardt come to the defence of the Party and its practices, including democratic centralism. Geisthardt, asserting that between the classes there are antagonistic contradictions whereas within the now dominant working class and its new structures there are only non-antagonistic contradictions, declares that the contradiction between democracy and centralism is non-antagonistic. Using the common Marxist-Leninist terminology that obviates the need for arguing the case, he says that ‘demokratischer Zentralismus ist für die Partei und den sozialistischen Staat objektiv notwendig’ and that it ensures at every level, from the top down to the village level, a keen appreciation of the constant changes taking place.⁷⁸ Where local Party officials are clearly not behaving correctly, he says, as in the case of Frieda Simson and Willi Kraushaar, it is because democratic centralism has been distorted, not because it is likely in itself to lead to the problems he identifies of ‘Sorglosigkeit, dogmatisches Denken, seelenloser Bürokratismus’.⁷⁹ Geisthardt is here attempting to redefine democratic centralism as a process that takes account of constant change. He refuses to face the argument in the text that it might lead to unpredictability and concentrate power so that anyone at any level has the capacity to

⁷⁶ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 194.

⁷⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 320, 330-332, 342-343.

⁷⁸ Hans Jürgen Geisthardt, ‘Entdeckung neuer Konfliktgrundlagen. Zu Erwin Strittmatters Roman “Ole Bienkopp”’, (1964), in op. cit., Jarmatz, *Kritik in der Zeit*, p. 742.

⁷⁹ op. cit., Geisthardt, p. 743.

misuse power against those below them. Geisthardt's argument is based on an ideologically-driven unwillingness or inability to see that there might indeed be antagonistic contradictions between ideals and the structures set up to achieve them.

Democratic centralism is complemented or reinforced by the Party's approach to inner-Party discipline. The Soviet view was that the Party could only fulfil its leadership role if it were organised 'as a single contingent of the working class possessing unity of will, unity of action and unity of discipline', and noted that on many occasions 'Lenin stressed the necessity for iron discipline in the Party that would be equally obligatory for all members.'⁸⁰ The requirement to perform acts of self-criticism is one part of inner-Party discipline. Another is the use of suggestions that a Party member might be infringing some of the basic rules. A principle introduced by Lenin, for instance, was that there were to be no factions organised in the Party. This is explicitly adopted by the SED as one of its Leninist principles and norms of Party life: 'Jegliche fraktionelle Tätigkeit und Gruppenbildungen ist unvereinbar mit den Zielen, dem Charakter und der Rolle der Partei.'⁸¹ Out of this comes the power of Jan Bullert's implicit accusation in *Ole Bienkopp* that Ole is guilty of factionalism: 'Das Schlimmste, Bienkopp will, daß andere Genossen sich seiner Sekte anschließen.'⁸² Hans-Hermann Hertle points out how destructive this was in practice for democracy within the Party, for the healthy renewal of Party policy and even for ensuring an orderly succession from one leader to the next: 'Das seit 1921 gültige normative Verbot der Fraktionsbildung, von den Parteikadern aufgrund einschlägiger Sanktionen als generalisierte 'Fraktionsbildungsangst' internalisiert, verhinderte wirksam Koalitionsbildungen für programmatische wie personelle Veränderungen.'⁸³

The ostentatious use of the black book, learned as a technique by Wunschgetreu from the level above him and by Frieda Simson from Wunschgetreu, represents the process of disciplining Party members by the use of an implied threat of humiliation. It makes the person affected suddenly aware that things are not how he thought they were, that power can be used unpredictably and in a way that can exclude or reject him and that he has no way of preventing this or appealing against it. It mostly has the

⁸⁰ op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, p. 16.

⁸¹ 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland', in op. cit., *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, p. 774.

⁸² op. cit., *Ole Bienkopp*, p. 193.

⁸³ Hans-Hermann Hertle, 'Der Sturz Erich Honeckers. Zur Rekonstruktion eines innerparteilichen Machtkampfes', in Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Peter Steinbach, Johannes Tuchel, eds., *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR*, (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999) p. 327.

desired effect of silencing its targets and reinforcing the power of those above them in the hierarchy. Wunschgetreu and Simson both realise this. For Wunschgetreu, at this point representing the authoritative narrative voice, it is a source of shame and challenges his belief that the Party is always right, for Simson a symbol and a source of her power. Even burning the black book as Wunschgetreu does, however, cannot change the way power is exercised. All the Party functionaries, Wunschgetreu, Kraushaar, Simson, Karl Krüger and even Jan Bullert during his brief time as local Party secretary, are shown as vulnerable to and, except for Krüger, living in fear of the unpredictable actions of those above them.

Conclusion

The Party, committed to the rule of reason over the emotions, depended for the loyalty of its members on a profound emotional commitment. Following psychological methods which it did not acknowledge but which reflected an understanding in conflict with its Marxist-Leninist ideology of why people behave the way they do, the Party actively sought to create a sense of exclusivity for its members and a secure refuge where they could belong. Whoever belonged was offered comradeship, solidarity, certainty in a threatening world and was absolved of the need to think or act independently. In a set of interviews in the late 1980s, Dorothee Wierling asks a fifty-eight-year old ‘Betriebsparteisekretär’ why he keeps talking about the Party when he is asked about his private life. He answers:

Ja, weil das mein Leben ist. [...] Also ich brauchte mir nie die Gedanken machen. Mir hat man immer gesagt, Du gehst dahin, und dann gehst Du dahin (lacht). Du gehst dahin, dann gehst Du dahin. Also dann bin ich, bei mir war’s so, daß doch die Partei mich einmal geformt hat und zum andern auch die Partei mein Leben ein bißchen mitbestimmt hat.⁸⁴

This commitment was created in part by initiation into the Party. The humiliation involved in initiation helped to define a sense of who belonged and who did not. Those who did not, who were outside the Party, were necessarily the ‘other’, who might be able to be recruited but who might also be actual or potential enemies of the Party. The use of power in various forms, including humiliation, might then be necessary to defeat them. The continuing loyalty of members was reinforced by Leninist methods of organisation and disciplinary processes. The accounts considered here suggest, however, that Party members did sometimes see the contradictions

⁸⁴ Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato, Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung. Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR*, (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), p. 585.

between the values they believed that they and the Party espoused and those demonstrated by the Party's way of behaving. The implications of this are considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 Humiliation and the future of the Party

Introduction

This chapter considers the responses of individual Party members to their witnessing of, participation in or being themselves the victims of acts of humiliation. These responses amount to a sustained critique of the Party for failing to abide by its declared principles of dignity and equality, but also for the most part suggest a continuing loyalty to and a belief in the possibility of transforming the Party. Looking at a range of representations, I suggest that this loyalty made members wanting reform unwilling or unable to consider that there might be fundamental ideological or structural shortcomings, not just personal qualities, that prevented significant change taking place, and that the use of humiliation followed directly from such shortcomings and from the Party's determination, and particularly that of its leadership, to hold on to power.

When Party members started to suspect that the Party might not always be right and that humiliation might be lying in wait for them should they make mistakes, what remained was their sense of dread at the prospect of rejection by the Party. At this point, a gap tended to open up between their thinking and their feeling. They tended to idealise aspects of the Party, creating in their minds an ideal Party to which they attached themselves emotionally while still not rejecting the actual version of the Party that they had to deal with on a day to day basis. They saw the imagined ideal Party as the source and protector of the utopian vision formulated by Marx and Engels and brought within reach by the political actions of Lenin. The real Party, however, with its links to Lenin's Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was the gatekeeper to Lenin and to the practical realisation of the Marxist-Leninist vision. While the real Party could exist without the ideal Party, the reverse was not true. This was what made it so hard for believers in the vision to reject the Party and made the fear of exclusion so powerful.

This chapter also considers examples of loyalty tested through the humiliation of true believers in the Party. It discusses the nature of Leninism and the way the narrator in *Ole Bienkopp* constructs a rare critique of it. This is followed by an examination of prophecies for the future that are contained in *Ole Bienkopp* and Günter de Bruyn's much later novel, *Neue Herrlichkeit*.

Escaping from the contradictions: the ideal versus the real Party

The account of Joachim Goellner provides a striking example of the humiliation of a representative of a typical group in the Party: the post-war ‘convert’ who becomes a minor Party functionary with absolute loyalty to and an unshakeable belief in the ideal Party. It suggests both that the Party sought to strictly impose its Leninist principles on its more active members in both the Ulbricht and the Honecker periods, that it was prepared to humiliate them as a means of discipline and that this led to real frustration and anger at the lower levels but not to a theoretically coherent alternative view of how the Party should act.

Goellner’s autobiography revolves around three acts of humiliation where his sense of injustice at rejection by the Party is clear.¹ Writing in 2003, he displays long and continuing enthusiasm for Marxism-Leninism, hatred for what he sees as Stalinism, and extreme rage at the way he and his family were treated by the Party during the time of the GDR. The account is inevitably highly subjective and applies his later view of Stalin retrospectively to early events. Nevertheless, it provides a powerful case study of the use of humiliation as a weapon and of the consequences of humiliation.

Goellner was born in 1926 into a family which he describes as half-Jewish on his father’s side. Illness kept him out of the Hitler Youth and, linked to his developing hostility to Nazism, enabled him to stay out of the army until late in the war. He twice tried to desert the army, firstly by attempting to reach Sweden, when he was caught and sentenced to nine months in prison, and secondly by making his way through to the Soviet lines, where he was put in a prisoner of war camp until 1948. It was there that his life changed through his encounter with the Party, though even here he idealises the Party:

Indes nahm ich wißbegierig 1945/46 an einem Antifa-Lagerkurs teil und fand in dem uns fragmentarisch offerierten Gedankengut von Marx, Engels, Lenin, und – leider – ja, auch Stalin meine Intentionen, mein Traumbild von einer gerechten Gesellschaft im positiven, dialektischen Sinne aufgehoben. Mein Bedürfnis nach unendlicher Harmonie, nach Friedenssehnsucht wurde gestillt. Wir hatten gute Lehrer, glaubwürdige Antifaschisten, von denen ich keinen nennen könnte, der nach 1945 an großer Stelle gelangte.²

One of the things that strikes him about the Soviet Union is that its people are open, warm, friendly and not interested in revenge or in humiliating their defeated

¹ op. cit., Goellner, *Autobiographie*, Kempowski BIO 6860/1.

² op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 55.

enemies. He acknowledges their terrible suffering: ‘Teilweise war unsere minimale Verpflegung mehr gesichert als unter den vielen dezimierten Sowjetfamilien infolge des über sie mit Elend und Leid hereingebrochenen Raubkrieges.’³ Impressed by this experience as well as by what he has been taught of Marx and Lenin and by his encounters with the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland, he commits himself to Communism. On his return to Germany, he joins the SED and is employed in shipbuilding in Rostock. By 1953 he has become a minor Party functionary, responsible for cultural activities in the shipbuilding works. At this time, he says, he was becoming increasingly anti-Stalinist and was frustrated at the lack of political change in the aftermath of Stalin’s death.⁴ Nevertheless, he pursues his work enthusiastically and willingly does what he can to help construct the new GDR – a photo entitled ‘freiwilligen Arbeitseinsatz, NAW’, shows him building the Rostock Überseehafen in 1959.

His first humiliation is to do not with his political differences but with what the Party sees as morally unacceptable behaviour. In the early 1960s, having been married for twelve years, he divorces his wife and marries a much younger woman (who is pregnant). The Party organisation, keen to demonstrate its commitment to Ulbricht’s ten commandments of socialist morality, takes action against him formally, giving him a ‘strenge Rüge’. At this time, as Harsch points out, the emphasis on morality led to resistance to divorce and judges in divorce cases ‘often incorporated phrases from Ulbricht’s Ten Socialist Commandments.’⁵ Goellner and his new wife are put into poor-quality accommodation. Goellner is stripped of his position and required to carry out hard physical work on the shop floor. This leads to a deformity of his right arm and he is moved to a more manageable machine. All the elements of humiliation are contained in this punishment. Nevertheless, Goellner seeks to believe that he has not been badly treated, since even in his new position he feels solidarity with his colleagues, he says, is respected by them, helps to organise a cultural event and even tries to put them on the right political track. There is a defensive aspect to his assertions, however, and his underlying anger and bitterness are demonstrated in the way he says he has been “‘Hinabgeschleudert” ins Proletariat’, in his description

³ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 56.

⁴ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 76.

⁵ op. cit., Harsch, p. 287.

of his working conditions as ‘eine Sklavenarbeit im “modernen” Sozialismus’ and in his direct criticism of the sexual hypocrisy of those higher in the Party hierarchy.⁶

In 1964, Goellner is once again back in a Party post, this time as ‘Kreissekretär des Kulturbundes für den Stadt- und Landkreis Rostock’. He is enthusiastic about his work while expressing concern about the tendency of cultural policy to swing from one extreme to the other, this being in the run-up to the Party’s 11th Plenum in 1965. By 1972, although this is now in the relatively liberal period inaugurated by Honecker, he finds it ‘psychisch belastend’ to put up with the restrictions and dishonesty involved in having to follow the Party line in the constant committees and meetings he has to attend: ‘Trug man eine reale Einschätzung vor, wurde man des Defätismus bezichtigt, bei Schönfärberei gab’s ~~mit~~ (sic) Pluspunkte’.⁷ Holding on to his belief in the rightness of his cause, he distinguishes between Party members who are Stalinists and those he describes as ‘Ein wahrer Mensch und Kommunist.’⁸ Despite this, he is further promoted.

His second humiliation is more clearly political than the first. By 1976, he is ‘zunehmend in Widerspruch zwischen marxistisch-leninistischer Theorie und DDR-Praxis’.⁹ In 1976 (the year of the Biermann affair, which he does not mention), he is highly critical of the production of a play that someone else with better connections has staged. In his criticism he does not follow the Party line closely enough or the Party’s hierarchical procedures for expressing such criticism. He is dismissed from his job and starts to slip into apathy and depression. He feels that the Party was looking for a pretext to get him out of his job and to punish him for the second time, just when he thought he was reaching his goal of linking the local population into good theatrical productions. He still retains his faith in the ideals of socialism, however: ‘Ich stelle nicht den Sozialismus von Marx und Lenin in Frage, wohl aber die Modalität seiner Durchführung, die sich gegen die großen Lehrmeister nun selbst wandte.’¹⁰

Goellner regains his old job in the shipyards, running cultural events. Here he again appreciates promoting plays that he says are courageous, critical Soviet or GDR works and which are enthusiastically received by the shipyard audiences. By 1979 he

⁶ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, pp. 91-93.

⁷ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 103.

⁸ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 104.

⁹ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

is no longer so resilient, however, becoming ‘unzufriedener und verbitterter’ and drinking heavily. He realises his life is falling apart. Previously he has bounced back from what has been done to him, but this time it has been too difficult: ‘Verlor ich auch nicht mit meiner Funktion mein Selbstwertgefühl, so war es eingeschränkt, dezimiert und die Arbeitsmotivation getötet. Schwierigkeiten in der Familie kamen hinzu.’¹¹ His response to the misery caused to him by his humiliation, and which he has passed on to his family, is to seek a way out by looking for a new woman to become involved with. He falls in love with a woman who is sixteen years younger. Since she is from Thüringen, he moves to Jena to be with her, at which point his wife attempts suicide and is only narrowly saved. Despite life being wonderful in Jena, he realises he only feels really close to his wife and his children. He moves back to Rostock and gets another job there, though with a ‘Stalinist’ boss.¹²

Over the next few years, the cumulative effects of his humiliation and his responses to humiliation (anger, depression, loss of empathy for others, alcohol dependency) result in serious mental problems and lead, unsurprisingly, to another episode of humiliation, but one which he provokes. At a function in Berlin where he has a minor role, he suddenly decides he has to talk to the top people in the Party and tries unsuccessfully to force his way through to them in the Palast der Republik. He is summoned to appear before the Party and excluded from it. Though he realises this is a logical result of his own self-destructive behaviour, he also senses that it follows from his treatment over the years.¹³ He lives for a while on small pieces of theatre work offered by contacts, but suffers badly from depression and apathy, only partially breaking out of this to take a manual job in a sugar beet factory in 1985. Family tragedies ensue. Two of his sons are arrested, one for theft, the other on what Goellner understands are trumped-up charges. His third son tries to cross into Poland to reach the West German Embassy in Warsaw and so go to the West, but is arrested, imprisoned and then expelled to the West.¹⁴ Goellner, sensing that his son is becoming desperate in Hamburg, makes numerous requests to be allowed to visit him there, all of which are refused, despite his age. The son, whom he sees as his love-child from 1969, then kills himself in 1987.

¹¹ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 109.

¹² op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 113.

¹³ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 116.

¹⁴ Entlassungsschein 28.8.1985 W. Joachim Goellner, in *Documents*, Kempowski BIO 6860/2.

The death of his son turns Goellner from being depressed and apathetic to being seriously mentally ill. A number of documents and letters associated with his account give a clear idea of his condition since these are fixed in time, unlike the memories that he is using for the memoir. In a ‘Stellungnahme an Stasi’, he says that he himself twice tried to commit suicide, in December 1987 and July 1988.¹⁵ It is apparent that he is consumed by impotent rage, a predictable consequence of humiliation. Seeking his own version of ‘normalisation’, he is desperate to turn things back to the way they ought to have been, wanting everything to have been different, wanting his son not to have killed himself, wanting the authorities to have allowed him to visit his son while he was alive, wanting the GDR not to have treated people the way it did. Pushing for change in the GDR, he writes letters constantly, to Erich Honecker (22.7.87 and 13.9.87), the editor of *Neues Deutschland* (28.3.88 and 10.07.88), the readers’ letters editor of *Neues Deutschland* (25.5.88), Hans-Joachim Vogel, leader of the SPD Group in the West German Bundestag (20.3.87); the Central Committee of the SED (16.8.89); the editor of Sputnik in Moscow (07.07.88 and 25.11.88).¹⁶ Although there are some replies, nothing significant comes out of them, apart from a requirement to visit the Stasi. Only one receives a personal and saddening reply. Goellner has discovered that his son was on a programme made by Norddeutscher Rundfunk and writes asking to be able to hear his son’s voice, only to be told in an undated letter: ‘Um so mehr tut es uns leid, daß wir Ihnen die Stimme Ihres Sohnes nicht mehr zukommen lassen können. Das Band ist bereits seit längerer Zeit gelöscht.’¹⁷

After the Wende, Goellner, still a believer in Marxism-Leninism, rages against both the new society and the old. He is particularly angry at the thought that those who persecuted him in the past are again in positions of power and still persecuting him.¹⁸ His faith in the ideal Party remains, however, and he declares that only socialism can be the answer to the problems of the world: ‘Der Sozialismus ist der aufregendste Gesellschaftsentwurf, den es im Interesse eines menschenwürdigen Lebens für alle Menschen in allen Teilen der Erde und in Zukunft für kommende Generationen gibt.’¹⁹ The post-war convert remains loyal to the end, though not to the version of the Party that has spent its time humiliating him.

¹⁵ Stellungnahme an Stasi, 29.8.88, op. cit., *Documents*, 6860/2.

¹⁶ op. cit., *Documents*, 6860/2.

¹⁷ op. cit., *Documents*, 6860/2.

¹⁸ Letter 08.07.2003, to Amtsgericht Rostock, Herrn Langer, Richter, op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1.

¹⁹ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, p. 165.

The root of the problem: not Stalin but Lenin?

Goellner, like fictional supporters of the ideal as opposed to the real Party such as Josefa Nadler in *Flugasche*, Horrath and Klee in *Spur der Steine*, the persecuted Havelka in *Collin*, and Rita in *Der geteilte Himmel*, blames the Stalinisation of the Party for its failure to live up to its ideals. A rare alternative critique comes from *Ole Bienkopp*. Here the way examples of humiliation by the Party of its own members are presented, with comments by the narrator, amounts to an attack on key structures and core beliefs of the Party that go back to Lenin.

Central to Leninism was the requirement to build a new type of working-class party, one that would by its nature be revolutionary, prepared and able to seize power and therefore not committed to a parliamentary route to power or to ‘bourgeois’ concepts of justice. The party would be strictly disciplined and highly centralised, able to change its strategy and tactics rapidly in accordance with the circumstances and the most advanced theory and to have its strategy and tactics carried out unquestioningly by its members. In order to ensure the sustainability of the socialist revolution, the destruction of the bourgeoisie and the development of the economic and social capacity to move to Marx’s ideal of communism, power would be exercised by the party for an indefinite period in the name of the working class, a concept known as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Much of Lenin’s thinking that gave rise to the new type of party and the strategy for seizing power is contained in his ‘What Is To Be Done?’, ‘One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)’ and ‘Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Socialist Revolution’.²⁰ The Leninist principles were adopted formally by the SED as the Communist leadership out-manoeuvred the Socialists during the late 1940s and over the next few years turned the SED into a ‘party of the new type’. Hermann Weber treats this period from 1949 to 1953 as the period of the ‘Stalinisierung der DDR’, based on the Soviet model, and says that this Stalinism ‘beruhte auf einer verstaatlichten und zentralistisch geplanten und geleiteten Wirtschaft mit materieller Privilegierung der bürokratischen Oberschicht und dem Fehlen jeder ernsthaften Mitbestimmung der Arbeiter.’ It also involved the SED formally taking over the leading role in accordance with the principle of democratic centralism of the State, the economy, the

²⁰ V. I. Lenin, ‘What Is To Be Done?’, ‘One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)’, ‘Two Tactics for Social-Democracy in the Socialist Revolution’, in op. cit., *Selected Works*, Volume 1.

justice system, cultural production and mass organisations.²¹ The whole of this transformation can be seen, however, to be based on the principles of Leninism as they were put into effect even by the early 1920s. The additional element for the SED that transformed the Party into a ‘Stalinist’ party was the cult of the personality surrounding Stalin, with its religious overtones and its extremes of purges and fear.

When the SED accepted de-Stalinisation after the ‘secret speech’ in 1956, it was the cult of the personality and associated ‘dogmatism’ that were attacked, along with limited acceptance that injustices had taken place because of the role of Stalin. There was no suggestion that the Leninist principles and practices were in any way at fault or that they might have led logically to ‘Stalinist’ practices. Ulbricht, responding to Khrushchev’s speech, declared that Party based itself on Leninist norms and that the problem with Stalin was not that he had necessarily and successfully attacked the Trotskyists, Bukharinites and bourgeois nationalists, but that he had set himself above the Party.²² Even the modifications to the Constitution in October 1974, by which time Honecker was pursuing his version of consumer socialism, confirmed in Article 1 the entrenched position of the Party with its Leninist principles: ‘Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist ein sozialistischer Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern. Sie ist die politische Organisation der Werktätigen in Stadt und Land, unter Führung der Arbeiterklasse und ihrer marxistisch-leninistischen Partei.’²³ The various episodes of clamping down on internal opposition in the late 1950s, the mid and late 1960s and in the 1970s in cultural terms around the Biermann affair, along with the increasingly intensive use of the Stasi up to the end of the 1980s, were all based on maintaining the Leninist principles and practices of the Party in order to hold on to power.

The narrator’s critique in *Ole Bienkopp* suggests not that there are faults in the Party that can be corrected but that the very conception of the Leninist Party might be fatally flawed since it contains elements which are irremediably destructive and self-destructive. At a time when it was still problematic to attack Stalin in the GDR as openly as in the USSR, it was certainly not possible to criticise Leninism explicitly. One critic came close to identifying the underlying conflict, implying a contradiction between the original Marxist ideals and the actions of the Party in practice:

²¹ op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, pp. 151-152, 174.

²² Walter Ulbricht, ‘Stalin ist kein Klassiker des Marxismus’, 04.03.1956, in op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, pp. 225-226.

²³ op. cit., Weber, *Dokumente*, p. 345.

Das Schicksal des untergehenden Siegers von Blumenau läßt keinen anderen Schluß zu als diesen: Zum Sozialismus auf dem Lande mit Bienkopp oder überhaupt nicht! Der Held [...] ist maßstabsetzend. Entweder gelingt es uns allen gemeinsam, eine Republik zu schaffen, in der die Schöpferkraft dieses Menschentyps in Ganzheit freigesetzt ist, oder aber wir werden keinen richtigen Sozialismus haben – keine richtige Gerechtigkeit. So steht die Frage.²⁴

The problematic Leninist elements identified in *Ole Bienkopp* include the inevitable misuse of power arising from democratic centralism, the humiliating demand for self-criticism and the wider use of humiliation as a central feature of Party discipline. However, the narrator also implies that the only morally decent way forward for the society is towards socialism and that only through the Party can socialism be achieved. Here too the contradiction is apparently resolved by the belief in the ideal Party which pursues Lenin's vision while rejecting some of the methods Lenin introduced. Several characters convey this. Most notable is Anton Dürr, tireless, incorruptible, utopian and passionately committed to achieving the ends he supports without using means that make their achievement impossible; that is, without imposing decisions or resorting to humiliating attacks. For the Party in the village, Anton is a substitute Lenin figure, able to do no wrong and always a point of reference for what is right, even after his death. Ole Bienkopp becomes his equally idealistic but more fallible successor. Significantly, however, the representatives of the ideal Party both die. Anton is killed by an external enemy; Ole, the utopian twice defined as an internal enemy, dies through the actions of Frieda Simson, the representative of the real Party.

The voice of the narrator is significant here, commenting ironically, sometimes intrusively, sometimes portentously, but also positively about the chaotic and mismanaged efforts to build socialism. The narrative is framed by lofty statements about the earth travelling through space and the insignificance or perhaps grandeur of one small village.²⁵ The narrator adopts the same amused, haughty tone in relation to his characters and their sufferings. When Ole, having been injured by Ramsch, finds that his wife Anngret has started an affair with Ramsch, the narrator comments:

Was ist geschehen, Genossen? Ein Mann war wochenlang krank. Seine Frau bestellte sich einen anderen. Der Mann überraschte die Frau mit dem anderen. Er raste.

²⁴ Inge v. Wangeheim, *Die Geschichte und unsere Geschichten*, (Halle: 1966), p. 77, quoted in Reinhard Hillich, 'Aufforderung zum Mitdenken. Erwin Strittmatters Roman "Ole Bienkopp"', in op. cit., Münz-Koenen, p. 100.

²⁵ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 7, 428.

Was weiter? Nichts. Das Paar wird sich trennen oder versöhnen. Die Erde reist durch den Weltenraum.²⁶

The narrator also uses an authoritative voice to show approval of particular characters. In discussing Karl Krüger, he speculates that it might have been wrong for him to be pushed out of his Party position during Stalin's time, then addresses the readers again as 'Genossen', linking them to the positive, forward-looking features of Krüger and Ole Bienkopp. The narrator can similarly use the term 'Genossen' to appeal to the readers to join him in condemning the greedy landowner, Serno.²⁷ In recounting the downfall of Simson after she has effectively driven Ole Bienkopp to his death, the narrator changes the nature of the conversation by directly appealing to the readers as 'Genossen' and to the Party as such to decide where responsibility lies: 'Ist sie schuldig, Genossen, oder sind's wir? Wie sagte man doch von Anton Dürr? Er hatte etwas gegen dressierte Menschen. Sie waren ihm eine traurige Unzierde des Höchsten, was die Erde bis nun hervorbrachte.'²⁸ The reference back to Dürr is significant, enabling the narrator to identify with him against the destructiveness of the representative of the real Party in the village.

Consistently throughout the novel, whether adopting a superior, a mocking or a satirical tone, the narrator reaches out to embrace the readers with a comforting voice that retains a clear sense of a grander vision and expresses sorrow at the way the Party's representatives disconnect themselves and the Party from the full, generous, pleasurable life that the Party should be promoting. As 'Genossen', the readers will, the narrator suggests, share his position of superiority over the characters. They will also share the narrator's commitment to the ideals that guide the best of his characters, Bienkopp, Dürr and Krüger. Like them and like the narrator himself, the readers are assumed to be believers in the ideal Party. The narrator declares that this imposes a responsibility to ensure that the rigid functionaries are not the ones who control the Party. However, since he has not resolved the contradiction between the ideal vision and the current strategy for achieving it, he gives no hint of how this might be done. In looking for a way to bring about socialism without adopting the power structures and practices of the Leninist party, the narrator offers nothing to the reader but hope for an eventual utopia.

²⁶ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 83.

²⁷ op. cit., Strittmatter, pp. 253, 358.

²⁸ op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 424.

Unsatisfied longings: the ideal Party survives the real Party

It can be inferred from *Ole Bienkopp* that the Party's need to humiliate its perceived internal enemies arises from its sense that what is being argued by even the most benign and utterly loyal critics represents a challenge to the existence of the Leninist Party. Believers in the ideal Party want socialisation of the means of production, without the dictatorship of the proletariat, and co-operation instead of compulsion in collective efforts to build socialism. They prefer discussion about disagreements over the best way to build socialism, not administrative measures to prevent or punish the expression of alternative views. They seek to build democracy within the Party, guaranteeing the rights of all members, with loyalty a two-way process. For the leaders of the real Party building real existing socialism, adopting such an approach would be impossible, not just because it conflicts with Leninist principles of strict centralisation and party discipline but also because adhering to these principles is the Party's only guarantee that it can hold on to power, and without power there can be no socialism. For them, this was the whole point of painstakingly and where necessary humiliatingly building loyalty to the Party, a loyalty that was stronger than any personal loyalty to friends, family or colleagues.

It is here that the two aspects of the Party's Marxist-Leninist ideology as both 'Herrschaftsinstrument' and 'Heilslehre', are significant, since it is the interplay between them that gives the leadership their power over Party members lower in the hierarchy.²⁹ Ideology as 'Heilslehre' helps to develop loyalty. Loyalty in turn requires acceptance of the Marxist-Leninist vision of an eventual better life, obedience to the wishes of Lenin and acceptance of the rules and practices instituted by him. Acceptance of the Leninist rules and practices ensures acceptance of the ideology as 'Herrschaftsinstrument', to be applied internally and externally. Such acceptance implies a willingness to use power whenever necessary in order to retain the power needed to realise the Leninist vision. The leaders and most committed members of the real Party sensed that it was impossible to abandon any element of this without the whole closed system collapsing.

The relationship between the proponents of the ideal Party and the representatives of the real Party is analogous to the failing relationship between Rita and Manfred in

²⁹ The terms appear in Beate Ihme-Tuchel, *Marxistische Ideologie – Herrschaftsinstrument und politische Heilslehre*, in op. cit., Eppelmann, p. 107, attributed to Peter C. Ludz, Ursula Ludz, 'Marxismus-Leninismus', in *DDR Handbuch*. 3., (Köln: 1985).

Der geteilte Himmel. Manfred, talking of the Party official who will not countermand the order to exclude Manfred's friend Martin from the university for his criticism of an apparently irrational Party decision, says: "Er hört ja gar nicht auf das, was man ihm sagt! Ich rede und rede, bis mir selber ganz elend ist. Aber er darf ja nicht hören." Echoing this, Rita realises that she and Manfred have drifted apart and are similar in the way they fail to communicate: 'Ich weiß nicht, wann wir anfangen, aneinander vorbeizureden.'³⁰ In the same way, the leaders of the real Party refuse to hear what believers in the ideal Party are saying, but the believers in the ideal Party, not seeing this and convinced that their helpful, positive arguments should be listened to, do not realise that all they have started to do is 'aneinander vorbeizureden.'

A further problem for the real Party was the difference between the way its leaders tried to believe that people's behaviour was shaped and the way people themselves felt about influences on their lives, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. The Party sensed that too much remained outside its control, too much that was spontaneous or driven by desire, envy, hatred, anger and a wish to assert power over others, and that was not simply to do with the class struggle. In its attempt to force a better world into being, it had to make people be different; encouraging or cajoling them was never going to be enough. Its own members were no different from ordinary people. They too were driven, independently of the class struggle, by the same desire, envy, hatred, anger and wish to assert power over others. Ironically, this was a point that largely seemed to escape the believers in the ideal Party as well. In their wish to see the building of socialism in the GDR, they too overlooked the way people were and did not ask themselves how socialism could be built if people had other concerns and lacked the necessary enthusiasm for it.

Ole Bienkopp's prophecy of doom

The prophecy implied in *Ole Bienkopp* is a pessimistic one: the real Party cannot achieve what it is in principle aiming to achieve and cannot by its nature be reformed, and members who retain their utopian socialist vision and believe there is no one but the Party to realise it will be dispensed with by the Party or made irrelevant when the Leninist principles are discarded. The prophecy is shown to be realistic at the end of the GDR. Prominent GDR intellectuals in 1989 called for continuing efforts to build the utopian version of socialism at the same time as the political structures and

³⁰ op. cit., Christa Wolf, pp. 134-136 (highlighted in original).

support necessary for this disappeared.³¹ While Christa Wolf could ask people on television on 8th November 1989 to help ‘us’ build a truly democratic society, promising ‘Kein leichtes, aber ein nützliches Leben. Keinen schnellen Wohlstand, aber Mitwirkung and großen Veränderungen’, Stefan Heym would soon be regretting the passing of the ‘heartlifting’ moments when ‘the people, one million of them, realized that they had, overnight, learned how to walk upright’.³² Suggesting that while the people wanted quick, practical improvements in their lives, the intellectuals were fighting to preserve their utopia, the response of Monika Maron is forthright:

the intellectuals’ utopia, simply in order to survive, means the intentional sacrifice of a better life for the others, degrading sixteen million people into nothing more than the object of an idea in the future as well as in the past. [...] What is it that drives people whose profession is thinking to declare that a state with this kind of history, plus a ruined economy and a demoralized population, is the bulwark of their own utopia?³³

The belief that the Leninist vision could have been realised through an imagined ideal Party continued to run deep, however. Goellner, looking back from 2003, says many highly complimentary things about the GDR and makes clear his belief in the better Communists (such as himself): ‘Nicht alle Parteifunktionäre verkörperten den Typ des stupiden, dogmatischen, vom stalinistischen Geist durchdrungenen Apparatschik.’³⁴ Among the letters accompanying Goellner’s manuscript is one from an old friend and colleague, Walter Neumann, written on 25th April, 2002. Neumann adopts as an underlying motif a quote from Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster*, which he remembers as ‘Die Betroffenen und die Nichtbetroffenen leben in unterschiedlichen Welten’.³⁵ Written with care out of apparent concern for the physical and mental health of Goellner, his letter is a measured, lucidly pessimistic assessment of their life and work during the GDR, the impact they have had and what can be done now. He appears to be firmly but carefully telling Goellner to resign himself to the fact that it is too late for him, personally, to make any difference and that he needs to adopt a more stoical approach. The political work they committed themselves to, on the basis that they ‘finden es nötig, die bestehende Welt zu verändern’, has left them isolated

³¹ I consider that the political critique in *Ole Bienkopp* is not undermined, as such, by the revelation that Strittmatter during the War was a member of the SS-Polizei-Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 18, that he was trained in Norway and active in Greece, something he did not admit during his lifetime. See, e.g., *Welt Online*, 9.06.2008.

³² Jörg Magenau, *Christa Wolf, Eine Biographie*, (Berlin: Kindler, 2002), p. 385; Stefan Heym, ‘Ash Wednesday in the GDR’, in *New German Critique, Special Issue on German Unification, Germany 1989-90: A Dossier*, No. 52, Winter 1991, p. 31.

³³ Monika Maron, ‘Writers and the People’, in op. cit., *New German Critique*, No. 52, pp. 38-39.

³⁴ op. cit., Goellner, 6860/1, pp. 97-99.

³⁵ Letter Walter Neumann to Goellner, dated 25th April, 2002, in op. cit., Documents, Kempowski BIO 6860/2.

and powerless: ‘Insoweit sind wir Bestandteil einer Etappe der menschlichen Entwicklung, die im Nachhinein als Irrtum einer Ideologie, als Fehlleistung einer Partei bezeichnet wird.’ Though this is not how he feels their work and its impact should be viewed, he sees that the ideals they both still hold to will not, for the moment at least, be realised: ‘Die Zeit des gesellschaftlichen Rückschritts, die wir nun erleben, läßt keine Wirkung in Richtung unserer Ideenwelt zu’, a sentence in the letter which Goellner himself has highlighted. It is now time, Neumann suggests, to accept that even ‘als “Rädchen im Getriebe” ist eben nicht mehr zu bewirken – nicht in unserer (real vergangenen) und nicht in der anderen (alten, aber existierenden) Gesellschaft’. Attempting to reassure Goellner, he urges: ‘Seien wir froh, daß wir zu den Menschen gehören, die anderes wollten und dafür tätig sein durften’, and insists that they are both to be seen as ‘gleichermaßen Betroffenen’.

It is here, however, that Neumann, while confirming the continuing faith both of them have in the vision they were struggling to achieve, misunderstands the differences between them. His own position is that of the Stoic. Margalit says that Stoicism ‘claims that no society can be humiliating, because no society can provide a thinking person with good reasons for feeling humiliated. The reasoning behind this view is that humiliation is an injury to a person’s self-respect, and self-respect is tautologically the respect persons accord themselves without needing the opinion of others.’³⁶ Neumann repeatedly urges Goellner to adopt this position, even when apparently commending him for his continuing resistance: ‘Es ist Deine Stärke, daß Du keinen inneren Frieden gemacht hast, auch wenn Du nun überhaupt nichts bewirken konntest’, another sentence that Goellner has highlighted. Goellner’s lived experience, however, is of active commitment to a cause being repaid by repeated acts of humiliation and of the impotent rage and depression that are the consequences of humiliation. Both Neumann and Goellner will continue to believe in the vision and not question the inbuilt reasons for the impossibility of achieving it through the Party they were both committed to, but they will now have very different ways of trying to come to terms with the fact, as Neumann says, ‘daß wir diese menschliche Welt nicht als Sieger verlassen’.³⁷

³⁶ op. cit., Margalit, p. 11.

³⁷ op. cit., Neumann.

The Party consumes its children: *Neue Herrlichkeit*

The narrator of *Ole Bienkopp* engages the reader, often satirically, in a discussion about the nature of the Leninist party in the 1950s while continuing to support a utopian approach to the development of socialism. The narrator in Günter de Bruyn's satirical *Neue Herrlichkeit* from 1984 has a more pessimistic but equally prophetic view of the future of socialism in the GDR.³⁸ This is a view that, as Detlef Gwosc says, can at last be expressed, despite the continuing difficulties of having critical works accepted: 'Rückblickend kann formuliert werden, daß insbesondere die DDR-Literatur der achtziger Jahre DDR-Wirklichkeit zur Sprache hat – auch und zuweilen gerade jene Seiten des Landes, die von Partei und Staat mit einem Tabu bedacht wurden.'³⁹

In this novel, the humiliation of Viktor Kösling, the son of a top Party leader, by his parents is shown to permanently undermine his capacity not just to love but even to empathise with other people. This, in turn, causes terrible damage to the lives of those unfortunate enough to come across him. The satire is more subtle than in *Ole Bienkopp*, contributing to more-rounded characters whose exposure as cruel, hypocritical, calculating or treacherous is all the more effective, and to a sense of a society that is warped by the brutality of the Party and its willingness to use humiliation to achieve its ends. The satire also has literary targets. Most obviously, it draws on the setting and social context of Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, transposed to a lowland area of the GDR.⁴⁰ Here the concern is how the accidental community of workers and residents in one of the Ministry's holiday homes, 'Neue Herrlichkeit', copes with the isolation and enforced closeness caused by huge snowfalls. The self-conscious, all-knowing narrator is thus deferring to but also extending a literary tradition, acknowledging the myth of the GDR as the inheritor of the best of German literature, and satirising both romanticism and social realism. The closed society of 'Neue Herrlichkeit' can also be seen to represent the GDR itself, as Gwosc suggests: 'eine Welt im Kleinen, deren Mitglieder sich im Minimalkonsens

³⁸ Günter de Bruyn, *Neue Herrlichkeit*, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1984; first published Halle, Saale, 1984).

³⁹ Detlef Gwosc, 'Das raunende Unperfekt der Gesellschaft zur Sprache bringen: Günter de Bruyns Roman *Neue Herrlichkeit*', in Dennis Tate, ed., *Günter de Bruyn in Perspective*, German Monitor 44, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 101. On the difficulties of getting the novel published and the organised critical hostility to it, see Gwosc, pp. 102-106.

⁴⁰ Valerie Greenberg, 'Den Zauberberg auf Normalhöhe bringen. Günter de Bruyn's *Neue Herrlichkeit*', in Uwe Wittstock, ed., *Günter de Bruyn. Materialien zu Leben und Werk*, (Fischer: Frankfurt am Main, 1991), pp. 187-206.

vereint sehen, eine Zwangsgemeinschaft, die dem einzelnen die Rücknahme individueller Ansprüche auferlegt und zur Solidarität verpflichtet.’⁴¹

The narrator, speaking directly to the reader with a consciously ironic tone, introduces the home’s permanent inhabitants, a clearly dysfunctional and yet stable ‘große Familie’.⁴² The home, known by its nineteenth-century name, ‘Neue Herrlichkeit’, is formally called the Friedrich-Schulze-Dekker-Heim after one of the GDR’s anti-fascist heroes whose widow, Frau Erika, lives there permanently. Frau Erika creates for herself a fantasy world of fairy stories and imagined romantic love. When a group of young people come for a training session at the home, Frau Erika sits by the fire (an electric heater) and tells the story of her husband’s exploits. The narrator’s description of her posture, her voice, ‘leise erst und gefaßt, später [...] laut und schrill’, her inability to confine herself to a modest version of events as she promised and the ambivalent and somewhat mocking response of her young audience, suggest that this, as part of the continuing attempt to reinforce the GDR’s founding myths, is an extension of her fantasy world, with as little connection with reality.⁴³ The apparently light-hearted approach of the narrator here makes it shocking later when more and more hints lead to an inevitable conclusion that Frau Erika is acting as a spy for the Party. At a less serious level, the portrayal of the other permanent guest, Herr Köpke, is used to satirise the Party’s emphasis on the importance of the collective: ‘Herr Köpke ist Jäger, seit Jahren Mitglied des Görtzer Jagdkollektivs, an dessen Treibjagden und Festlichkeiten er aber niemals teilnimmt, da Jagen für ihn nur Reiz hat, wenn er allein ist dabei.’⁴⁴

Life in ‘Neue Herrlichkeit’ is gradually changed by the arrival of Viktor Kösling. Viktor lives a life of self-delusion, in which he sees himself as competent, considerate and well-liked for himself, not just for his connection to his father. He quickly develops a romantic fantasy about the half-glimpsed chambermaid, Thilde. The narrator establishes the romantic setting for the story as Viktor is being driven towards ‘Neue Herrlichkeit’ where he is to work on his long-delayed doctoral dissertation. There are pine forests, a lake set between ridges, and signs to places such as ‘Schwedenow’, a playful reference to a romantic poet created by de Bruyn in his

⁴¹ op. cit., Gwosc, p. 107.

⁴² op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 5-9.

⁴³ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 106-107.

⁴⁴ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 19.

Märkische Forschungen.⁴⁵ In a way which will be a consistent feature of the novel, however, the narrator also includes details designed to mock the developing romantic fantasy but also to satirise the conventions of socialist realism. As the car approaches the house, the narrator notes that there is a cemetery and that ‘Der Weg zum Friedhof scheint auch der zum Müllplatz zu sein’, a recurring image in the novel which Gosc sees as pointing towards the downfall of the GDR.⁴⁶

Viktor is in fact weak, indecisive and constantly searching for ways to live that require the least effort or imagination and are most beneficial to him. The satirical portrait of Viktor failing to get down to work on his dissertation, helping unskilfully to clear the snow, talking arrogantly and naively to Sebastian the gardener, and being drawn into the fantasies of Frau Erika, could add up to a sense of him as a foolish innocent, easily taken advantage of by others. However, Viktor has a cruel, calculating nature which is depicted in relation to both Thilde and Tita, Thilde’s grandmother who is suffering from dementia. As Viktor eventually convinces Thilde that he loves her and that she loves him and needs to be with him, he destroys the relationship between Thilde and Sebastian. He cannot understand either that this might have been a better relationship for Thilde or that Sebastian feels enraged by what Viktor is doing.⁴⁷

Tita, the original owner of ‘Neue Herrlichkeit’, tries in her increasingly demented state to leave and return ‘home’ to her village in the lost territories in the east, across a border which she, unlike the regime, it is implied, does not recognise. Claiming to be very attached to her, Viktor consciously uses Tita as a way to become close to Thilde. He willingly but incompetently acts as a supplementary carer for her. Though this helps in his quest to get Thilde to love him, he becomes frustrated by the time and attention Thilde gives to Tita rather than to him. His scheming is eventually successful: with the help of his contacts at home and after persuading a reluctant Thilde, he takes Tita to a Catholic old-people’s home and leaves her there. The Catholic home is shown to be comfortable and relatively well-equipped, with the inhabitants looked after kindly. Nevertheless, the nun in charge is highly critical of Viktor and Thilde for abandoning Tita, accusing them of ‘Liebesentzug’ which, she says, ‘kann tödlich sein.’⁴⁸ When Tita simply leaves and returns home, Viktor is filled

⁴⁵ Günter de Bruyn, *Märkische Forschungen*, (Halle, Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1978), p. 13.

⁴⁶ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 14; op. cit., Gwosc, p. 107.

⁴⁷ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 141-145.

⁴⁸ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 157.

with murderous rage and fantasises about poisoning her.⁴⁹ The State-run home that Viktor subsequently takes Tita to and where she is forced to stay is much worse. These are shocking moments of humiliation for Tita where Viktor, far from being naively foolish and self-centred is shown to be cold, brutally heartless, self-obsessed and determined to do whatever he needs to do to be alone with Thilde, even though he does not see that Thilde is suffering from guilt and shame at what she has colluded in.

When Viktor and Thilde visit the home again, Tita is drugged and unresponsive, sitting unmoving in a stinking room that is shared with other similar women. When they complain, the overworked young doctor is utterly damning, of them for abandoning Tita and of the GDR's failure, after so many years, to provide a decent life for all its citizens. The terms she uses are a clear challenge to the Party's terminology, ideology and practices: 'Unfähigkeit zur Arbeit heißt die Schuld; die Strafe dafür ist Verbannung und Enteignung.'⁵⁰ Thilde is distraught at what she sees and hears. Viktor, on the other hand, has consciously closed himself off and refuses to be affected by it, even though he realises it gives the lie to his world view. Like Claudia in *Der fremde Freund*, he builds a wall around himself: 'Viktors Panzerung ist so gehärtet, daß nicht einmal die Qual, die Thilde fühlt, ihn rühren kann.'⁵¹ At the end of this section where the narrator has put satire aside and given the floor to the clear-sighted doctor to speak directly to Viktor and Thilde but also to the imagined readers, the earlier tone is resumed as a way of revealing Viktor's shallowness and lack of humanity. As soon as the huts of the old people's home are out of sight, Viktor's mood is transformed:

Die Schrecken hinter sich zu spüren und das Mädchen, das er liebt, an seiner Hand zu haben, macht ihn froh. Daß er noch nie im Leben so genau gewußt hat, wie lebenswert doch Leben sein kann, möchte er gern sagen, sagt es aber nicht, da Thilde schweigt und er es sich nicht zutraut, sie aus ihrer Traurigkeit zu reißen.⁵²

Viktor's relationship with Thilde is destroyed by Viktor's parents and by his weakness in relation to them. Early in the novel, his parents are subject to apparently gentle satirising, but it is soon made clear that they dominate him and determine the direction of his life. He is raised in line with the requirements of the Party so that he, as a member of the Party, can follow these requirements himself. So successful is this

⁴⁹ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 167.

⁵⁰ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 198.

⁵¹ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 196.

⁵² op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 199.

initiation by his parents that he has no ambition except to be what others want him to be. He will finish his doctorate without interest or enthusiasm and will join the diplomatic service, for which he has been groomed.⁵³ This point is repeated much later when he patronisingly assesses Thilde's life and considers that she will find in him what she needs, 'denn seine Fähigkeit, zu werden, der verlangt wird, ist groß.'⁵⁴ Even in the early satirising of Viktor's parents, however, there is a sinister edge. It is evident that Viktor has been made compliant in a way that is inappropriately intrusive. The level of infantilisation, and the overt cruelty associated with it, are clearly abusive. When trying to write to his father, he has to follow a required pattern, firstly describing the contribution to Marxist-Leninist theory that he is making through his dissertation, then moving to the personal. At this point his father insists on discussing 'Mädchen': 'Die müssen, weiß Viktor, für einen jungen Mann wie ihn zwar wichtig sein, doch nicht zu sehr: verschönernd, aber nichts bestimmend, nicht unbedingt problem- und schmerzlos, aber im wesentlichen doch angenehm.'⁵⁵ It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Viktor's mother, behind a pretence of kindness, is deeply unkind and menacing to Thilde or that his father arrives at 'Neue Herrlichkeit' to forbid the marriage, threatening Viktor and refusing even to acknowledge Thilde.⁵⁶

While the focus here and elsewhere in the novel is apparently on Viktor and his failings, the narrator ensures a gradual change in the reader's perception of the capacities of other characters. Viktor has consistently seen himself as superior to Thilde and certainly more worldly and articulate. However, it is Thilde who finally draws out of Viktor what has made him both arrogant and weak. He tells her that when he was an eleven-year-old child, he was sent for boxing lessons. He could not face going to these but did not tell his parents he spent the afternoons cold and wet, wandering through the gardens of Sanssouci instead. When they discovered the truth, they punished him for this. The understanding of the seriousness of Viktor's story comes entirely from Thilde. She is outraged, firstly that his father could be so unkind but also that his mother went along with his father's actions. Here Thilde is shown to be articulate, perceptive and determined as she points out to Viktor his parents' cold, calculating behaviour and the absence of love that it indicates. She is shocked by their

⁵³ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 10-12.

⁵⁴ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 164.

⁵⁵ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 67.

⁵⁶ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 178-179, 191-193.

decision to expose him as a liar on his birthday, cruelly and inexcusably deceiving him when he was expecting to receive presents from them. She uses for their behaviour the word that the Catholic nun used, 'Lieblosigkeit', and expresses her horror at what is effectively cruel and unusual punishment that ensures their actions are felt as humiliation:

Und grausam nennt sie die Strafzumessung: vier Wochen Kontaktlosigkeit, kein Wort, keine Geste, kein Blick für den kleinen Verbrecher, völliger Liebesentzug. Wie das Kind, nach einer Phase des Trotzes, in Verzweiflung gerät, wie es weint und um Zuwendung bittet, wie es nachts, nach Vergebung schreiend, vor dem Elternschlafzimmer steht, die Tür aber verschlossen findet, und wie es schließlich in eine Krankheit mit hohem Fieber sich rettet – das erfüllt Thilde nach so langer Zeit noch mit Zorn.⁵⁷

As a revelation of humiliation and its consequences, this scene is as shocking as those where Tita is dumped in the old-people's homes like rubbish on the way to the cemetery. Committed to a life of denial, however, Viktor continues to defend his parents. Thilde, in distinct contrast to Viktor's behaviour throughout, remains implacable: "Wenn wir einmal Kinder haben", sagt sie, "werden die anders erzogen, ob du willst oder nicht."⁵⁸

Again the Party triumphs in the end, however. Viktor's father arranges for Viktor to be transferred to the diplomatic service abroad without finishing his doctorate so that he will be separated from Thilde and slowly forget about her, which Viktor does in the chapter ironically headed 'Genesung'. Thilde is left abandoned, even as she and the others from 'Neue Herrlichkeit' take Tita after her inevitably early death to be buried in the cemetery, where much of the service is drowned out by the noise of lorries dumping rubbish.⁵⁹ Viktor cannot be excused for his treatment of either Tita or Thilde, regardless of the cruelty he has suffered and despite having to live, as Owen Evans points out, as his parents 'perennial pawn'. It is not the narrator's intention, Evans says, to 'generate sympathy for Viktor amongst the readers' or excuse his behaviour: 'guilt is levelled at a socio-political system which has created and perpetuated such a destructive, and sometimes brutal, atmosphere and supports an exploitative and ruthless political élite in the process.'⁶⁰

⁵⁷ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 169-170.

⁵⁸ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, pp. 170-171.

⁵⁹ op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 213.

⁶⁰ Owen Evans, 'Hope for the Future? Günter de Bruyn's *Neue Herrlichkeit* and Christoph Hein's *Der Tangospieler*', in op. cit., Jackman, ed., *Christoph Hein in Perspective*, p. 83.

While Evans calls *Neue Herrlichkeit* ‘a bleak novel’, Gwosc suggests that there is a hint at the end of the funeral scene that hope can still be retained.⁶¹ Frau Bahr, a distant neighbour, says: ‘Ja, das sei genau das, was sie immer sage; man dürfe die Hoffnung nicht aufgeben, man müsse sie immer bewahren: denn sei es mit der Hoffnung erst aus, sei alles schon aus.’ Her comment, however, cannot be taken at face value, since it is addressed to Thilde’s long-absent mother who has suddenly reappeared but can offer no hope to the despairing Thilde.⁶² The following chapter, showing Viktor already recovering on his plane journey out of the GDR and exchanging a knowing smile with the stewardess, suggests that there is no reason left to retain hope. Viktor has been reclaimed by the Party, the time at ‘Neue Herrlichkeit’ can be seen as little more than an interesting aberration and the human cost of the Party’s practices will never need to be counted.

Conclusion

The texts considered here suggest that the Party consciously used humiliation during both the Ulbricht and the Honecker periods as a weapon against its own members to secure their loyalty and to ensure Party loyalty took precedence over other values in their lives. This process was often highly successful in transmitting the capacity and willingness to humiliate. It ensured that members carried out their leaders’ instructions and that the actual or virtual children of the Party were initiated to carry on the process of humiliating those below them or outside the Party, with damaging effects for themselves and for the wider society.

The response to this – the belief in an ideal Party existing somewhere beyond the real Party – did not help Party members to look closely at their beliefs or at the basis of the Party’s actions, the Leninist principles and practices which were designed to ensure the Party could seize and hold power but which did not set out a practical route to achieving the ideals of Marx and Engels. The supporters of the ideal Party, for whom the Party as it existed was the only means to achieve their ideals, had no strategy to fill this gap. Even attempting to devise one would have required serious questions about whether the Party’s use of power had become an end in itself by the 1970s and 1980s when the vast ambitions of the earlier decades had been abandoned. Quite apart from any painful personal and social consequences, this left potential

⁶¹ op. cit., Evans, p. 85; Gwosc, p. 114.

⁶² op. cit., *Neue Herrlichkeit*, p. 214.

internal opponents of the leadership intellectually and politically incapacitated. Humiliation was, therefore, an effective weapon, but one that ruled out both the option of internal renewal of the Party and the possibility of State power being used to find a different path to socialism.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis considers the nature of humiliation, arguing that defining humiliation as an exercise of power offers a fruitful way of understanding the consequences of humiliation for ordinary people, their rulers, and the society they live in. The thesis then applies this definition to the German Democratic Republic, which serves as a case study in humiliation. I do not argue that the humiliation in the GDR was comparable to that of the preceding Nazi period, which was far more consistent, wide-ranging and brutal in its use of humiliation as a weapon against those it perceived or defined as its enemies. However, the examples of representations of the GDR analysed in accordance with this definition do suggest that humiliation of the GDR's citizens by or at the behest of its ruling party was a consistent and damaging feature of life in the GDR, and that this was true of both major political periods, under Ulbricht and under Honecker.

In the sections below, I summarise, in the light of the findings of the different chapters, some of the apparent reasons for the use of humiliation in the GDR, stressing continuity with the immediate past, as well as some of the specific forms of humiliation that emerged and how these changed over time. Additionally, I review the impact of humiliation on its victims, on the humiliators themselves and on the society. Seeking to generalise from this case study, I then consider whether a reduction in the incidence of humiliation might be possible, relating this to the period of the transfer of power at the end of the GDR.

Causes and continuities

Both the theory and the practice of humiliation as demonstrated in the GDR suggest that one of its most dangerous consequences is the setting in motion of a cycle of humiliation, based on a sense of helplessness that leads to rage and a desire for revenge. The representations considered in Chapter 3 on the myths highlight the Party's awareness of this cycle and both the need and the failure to break it. Some of the representations in Chapter 3 as well as examples in later chapters, such as the fictional *Horns Ende*, suggest that humiliation by representatives of the Party and the State as well as by ordinary people arises out of familiarity with humiliation as an exercise of power during the Nazi period and the failure to draw on the lessons of that period and end the cycle of humiliation. It is not surprising, then, when ordinary

people are shown to resort to humiliation in their daily lives or to fail to react strongly when witnessing its use by the Party and the State.

Of significance here is the position of the Party leaders who took power with the support of the Soviet Union. Many of them had suffered humiliation at the hands of the Nazis but also of the leaders of the Soviet Party. A number of the novels, such as Heym's *Die Architekten*, portray the damaged nature of these leaders that Antonia Grunenberg refers to and the likelihood (discussed in Chapters 3 and 7) that they will resort to humiliation in turn to establish and retain their power. As the founding leaders died or were replaced, it might have been expected that the propensity to humiliate would ebb away over time. However, for the whole of the period of SED control, the key leaders in both the Ulbricht period and the relatively more liberal or at least more loosely controlled Honecker period were all from the generation who had suffered under the Nazis or Stalin or both. They had seen the different ways power could be gained and used. They had seen and directly experienced how people with power treated their enemies. They were prepared, if they felt it necessary in order to hold on to power, to repeat what they had experienced. Suffering from the paranoia of the humiliator described in Chapter 2, they continued to see enemies everywhere and to pursue them, with brutal vigour in the 1950s and with more refined but often still cruel methods even in the late 1980s, though often with less success.

The GDR did not last long enough for it to be seen if generational changes would have led eventually to a reduction in the use of humiliation by the Party. The nature of the Party with its Leninist structures and practices, described in Chapters 7 and 8, suggests this would not have been the case. Initiation is relevant here, as a practice that can transmit both the capacity and the willingness to humiliate from one generation to the next and that confirms a rigid hierarchy. Its application and specific relevance to the GDR are discussed in Chapter 7. Despite the weakening of centralised mechanisms of discipline and control during the late 1970s and 1980s, many of the representations discussed indicate that at the upper levels of the Party at least, the determination to adhere to Leninist practices in order to control and motivate members persisted throughout the Honecker period.

Specific forms of humiliation in the GDR

Humiliation through infantilisation emerges from the examples as a persistent feature of life in the GDR. Infantilisation goes well beyond the supposedly generous

paternalism discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the myth of heroic love and in other chapters in relation to the image the Party's top leaders sought to present of themselves. It was rather a specific use of power that took away from people the status promised to them as equal participants in the building of the new society and left them inhibited in their behaviour, disabled and frustrated, underlyingly anxious, lied to, constantly being checked up on, and forever being admonished and corrected, with varying degrees of severity, while at the same time having to admire and be grateful to the parental figures responsible for this humiliating process.

One of the causes of this resort to infantilisation but also to other forms of humiliation was the Party's ideological opposition to Freudian ideas and psychoanalysis more generally, as described in Chapters 4 and 5. Far from being sober citizens guided by reason and historically necessary developments, ordinary people in the GDR often appeared in practice to be driven by desire and other unpredictable emotions. If people did not behave the way the ideology suggested they would, then a framework which limited and controlled their behaviour would have to be established. With infantilisation on its own not enough to prevent the 'children' rebelling, harsher methods were also adopted. The examples of representation indicate that exclusion or the threat of exclusion, an element of humiliation, was widespread. This could relate to education, housing, healthcare or jobs, for instance. The victims of exclusion could be ordinary people or even Party members. Resorting to exclusion often involved the Party and the State breaking a commitment to abide by the rule of law, an action that by its nature would be humiliating.

Ensuring that the Party and the State and its various institutions were well enough informed to be able to act in this way, but also behaving as an instrument of severe humiliation in its own right, the Stasi became a central feature of the GDR. Significantly, as Glaeser points out, 'emotive understandings' in the context of the institutional arrangements of the Stasi contributed to a shared ethos and set of ethics which in turn ensured that discipline and commitment to the organisation's aims were passed on from one generation of Stasi officers to the next.¹ This can be seen as a specific and important example of the way the Party itself built loyalty, disciplined its members and equipped them to carry out the orders of the Party without question as

¹ op. cit., Glaeser, pp. 472/473.

if, even in the 1980s, they were still fighting the revolutionary battles dating back to the Weimar years.

One of the many ironies of the Party's position is that emotions, rather than reason, are constantly shown to be central to members' commitment and loyalty. Their belief in the Party was often unswerving, involving a kind of religious faith that was not open to being challenged by the voice of reason. As a consequence, they often lived in fear of humiliation, and particularly in fear of unpredictable punishment and exclusion, since they could not afford psychologically to lose their connection to the Party. The leaders themselves, with their own experience of humiliation, were also the victims of emotions: suppressed bitterness and rage which called forth a paranoid emotional response to their perceived enemies, even though reason told them this would be damaging in the longer term. This tended to confirm precisely what they argued against in relation to Freud, that the aggressive drive both creates and leads to the willingness to humiliate the 'other'.

Humiliation: an incapacitating exercise of power

In the 1990s, a British Home Secretary adopted as his mantra: 'prison works!' What proved it to be true, he liked to say, was that when people were in prison they were not outside committing crimes. In the same way, it is possible to declare: 'humiliation works'. As an exercise of power, humiliation succeeds in eliminating or neutralising those who are seen to be a society's enemies. The society is cleansed, made safe, freed of the alien 'other'. The example of the GDR, however, as seen through its representations in literary fiction, films and personal accounts, suggests that while this may appear to be successful from the point of view of the humiliator, its long-term effect is to undermine both the humiliator and the society where the humiliation takes place. The problem with the use of humiliation is that the fate of the victim is inextricably tied up with that of the humiliator and that both the victim and the humiliator are in different ways incapacitated by humiliation.

Being thrown down a mountainside is more distressing than falling down a mountainside, even if the physical injury is the same. The difference resides in what the Ehlers study referred to in Chapter 2 calls 'interpersonal traumatization'. Humiliation, often experienced as trauma intentionally inflicted by other people, is a shattering event for the victim, made worse by the way it combines the apparently random with the deliberate. The victim cannot know in advance that he has been

marked out by his attacker. Only the attacker, the humiliator, has the power to decide in accordance with his own logic that the rules of the game, implicitly or explicitly agreed to by both sides, have changed. The texts considered in this thesis show the victim responding with bewilderment and incredulity: how can my neighbour, my friend, my Party, my government, be doing this to me? What have I done to deserve being scorned, rejected, cast out? What should I have done to avoid such a fate? Wolfgang Leonhard asks such questions when he is drawn into his first criticism and self-criticism session. Joachim Goellner becomes increasingly distraught as the Party to which he has so profoundly committed himself repeatedly humiliates him over several decades. Friedrich Kabelitz is enraged at the seizure of his memoir and his subsequent trial and imprisonment which conflict with everything he understood to be possible. Christine Afifi spends decades trying impossibly to undo what was done to her father, her sense of injustice apparently dominating her life.

This problematic mix of the apparently random and the deliberate is extensively explored in the fiction, where what is highlighted is the incapacitating nature of humiliation. Wunschgetreu's comment in Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp*: 'Die Welt entwickelt sich. Was gestern falsch war, kann morgen richtig sein', is echoed in different ways across the novels discussed in this thesis.² Fear of humiliation is shown to be paralysing in the present, while humiliation itself robs the victim of a sense that he can determine his own future. The particular form of humiliation that is infantilisation has a controlling, demeaning effect that prevents people reaching their full potential.

Both the theory of humiliation and the examples analysed suggest that the fact of humiliation stays with the victim, at least as an irritant and often as a damaging wound. A recurring image is that the victim is marked in some way. For those who have been initiated through physical cutting, the marking is literal. For others, there is a sense of something visible that shows they are of lower status or lower value, features identified by the humiliator as the sign or cause of their inferiority. Sometimes it is imagined by the victim of humiliation. Klaus Renft discovers there is something about him that makes it no longer possible for his friends and acquaintances to look at him. Peter Erdmann is refused a job though there is no

² op. cit., Strittmatter, p. 231.

shortage of jobs available. Dallow, the fictional humiliated protagonist in Hein's *Der Tangospieler*, feels he has acquired a harelip.

It is the humiliator who has chosen and marked his victims but the humiliator too is marked in a number of ways by the choice of humiliation as a weapon. As is argued in Chapter 2, the humiliator often becomes paranoid, knowing he may become subject to the same combination of apparent randomness and deliberate action by those above him. The paranoia of the humiliator was reflected in the Stasi's constant extension of its range of activities, even in the relatively liberal decades under Honecker. If, like Ulbricht and the other Moscow exiles, the humiliator has been humiliated himself and forced into a craven, defensive position as discussed in Chapter 3, or initiated through humiliation into the ranks of professional revolutionaries in the Party, as Leonhard describes from his experience in the Comintern school (see Chapter 7), he is likely to understand the effectiveness of humiliation and be willing to use it whenever he deems it necessary. Though Honecker was not directly affected by the Moscow purges and show trials the way the Moscow exiles were, it is significant, as noted earlier, that he too had been through the Comintern School.

The impact of humiliation on the society

The SED sought to make the GDR a stable, normal society, one that broke with German history while taking some of the best from it, such as the ideal of anti-fascism from the immediate past, working-class traditions from the earlier periods of struggle, and the German classical cultural heritage from earlier centuries. However, the SED was involved throughout its life in a struggle for power which it ultimately lost. Representations from the Ulbricht period convey a sense of humiliation being used in the interests of the grand vision of socialism. Representations from the Honecker period suggest that the grand vision had given way to the pursuit of consumer socialism but that humiliation was still used as a weapon in order to hold on to power. What is common to both periods is that humiliation is shown to undermine the process of normalisation, as discussed in Chapter 6 on everyday life and in Chapters 7 and 8 in relation to the Party.

The development and promotion of a set of myths for the GDR implied a commitment from both the Party and ordinary people to an underlying set of values and ideals which would allow a normal society to emerge in a way which satisfied all sides. The SED's use of humiliation, however, was fundamentally destabilising. It

demonstrated that there was less common ground than people had hoped. It made clear that proclaimed values and norms and the commitment to justice and dignity would be overridden by the Party whenever it felt this was in its own interest. Humiliation built in a sense of precariousness in everyday life that could at times be ignored but was never entirely forgotten. It ensured that the immediate future was never predictable and that the authorities, not the ordinary people, would define what was normal. Even in the later decades of relative liberalisation and individualism, a sense of agency and autonomy was still limited.

The Party's willingness to resort to humiliation arose out of its Marxist-Leninist ideology. As discussed in Chapter 4, such an ideology involves an exclusion of other ways of thinking and a refusal by the authorities to consider in an open, sceptical manner what makes people behave the way they do. Where the conscious shaping of a population within a closed ideological framework is attempted, humiliation is a likely consequence as the authorities struggle to deal with people's desire not to be treated as children but to think and feel for themselves, to open themselves up to other influences, to indulge in playful and creative fantasies, to discard their inhibitions and to participate fully as adults in social and governmental institutions. The representations analysed in the thesis point to the Party's tendency to humiliate its own members and the consequences of this for the Party's failure to reform as the GDR society changed. The representations also show humiliating behaviour within the Party spilling out into the wider society, carelessly disrupting and damaging lives. The writers of many of the later texts depict normal life as chaotic, anti-social, exploitative and driven by personal passions, with the Party mercilessly if incompetently trying to maintain its control.

As discussed in Chapters 5 to 8 in particular, some representations from after the Wende convey anger at humiliation during the GDR, others complain of the continuing influence of the humiliators despite their earlier activities and a number suggest that the actions of the politicians and businesses from the former West Germany amount to humiliation of people from the former GDR. Looking at the period of transition to a united Germany, Wolle notes the increasing disenchantment among former GDR citizens between 1992 and 1996 as well as something deeply

ironical, the complaint of the SED's successor party, the PDS, that what was taking place involved the humiliation of millions of people from the former GDR.³

Can the cycle of humiliation be broken?

The stereotypically humane, far-sighted Soviet general in Konrad Wolf's film, *Ich war Neunzehn* (discussed in Chapter 3), advises the Communists he has liberated from a Nazi prison that 'Rache ist ein schlechter Ratgeber, besonders für die Zukunft'. The desire for revenge is one of the consequences of humiliation which helps to perpetuate the cycle of humiliation. For the victim of humiliation, this usually results not in action but in a sense of impotence which eats away at his ability to function in the society. However, at a time of rupture or transition, the victim may become the new ruler and the prospect of revenge is opened up to him. It is difficult for the victim to make a rational choice not to humiliate since, whatever he does, he is forever burdened by the humiliation he himself has suffered. A constant theme in the representations of humiliation in the GDR is the desire for the act of humiliation never to have happened, for a return to a lost time before the humiliation took place. This is matched by an awareness that what has been done can never be undone, that the victim of humiliation is permanently marked by it.

If the victim is an adherent of an exclusive ideology, such as Marxism-Leninism or a fundamentalist version of any religion, it is doubly difficult to resist the desire to exact revenge. When such a victim takes power, his previous tormentors are not just his defeated enemies, they are also his future enemies, implacably opposed to the vision of the new rulers and therefore needing to be treated with the utmost severity. Internal opponents who subsequently emerge, or members of the new community who are defined as hostile to the new rulers, are identified with the earlier regime or described as the unacceptable other and subjected to humiliation, which then becomes a 'normal' exercise of power in the new society. This is the pattern of behaviour that applied to the rulers of the GDR. It can also be applied more widely, however, to many a revolution or transfer of power where the new rulers follow an ideology that contains a fixed, unchallengeable view of what shapes human behaviour. Freud's view, discussed in Chapter 4, that communism conceals rather than dispenses with humanity's underlying drives, 'ihren Selbsterhaltungstrieb, ihre Aggressionslust, ihr

³ op. cit., Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur*, p. 16.

Liebesbedürfnis, ihren Drang nach Lusterwerb und Unlustvermeidung’, could be a description of any such ideology.

The consequences of humiliation, therefore, are so serious, long-lasting and self-perpetuating that, as a concept, it needs to be at the heart of discussions about conflict and conflict resolution and the use of power, particularly at periods of transition when there is the opportunity for the humiliation cycle to be broken. A number of practical and conceptual difficulties stand in the way of this happening. One is that breaking the cycle of humiliation might imply condoning the humiliation of individual victims. The clearest example of this comes from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which ensured a manageable transfer of power but did not deal with the rage and misery of the victims or their sense of further humiliation engendered by the refusal to punish the humiliators. There is a sense in some of the representations of a similar bitterness among former GDR citizens as they see prominent former SED members flourishing in the new society.

Still more problematic for the attempt to break cycles of humiliation is that ideologies with a single, exclusive world view can make humiliation more likely and a willingness to avoid its use less likely. Where argument is not tolerated, belief in a being, a power or a historical process outside and above human beings can be seen to make cruelty to individual people not just excusable but also necessary. In the face of such attitudes, the view of Rorty and Shklar discussed in Chapter 2, that no social goal is more important than avoiding cruelty, looks somewhat forlorn. The same applies when Margalit refers to ‘the respect a human being deserves for the very fact of being human’: his premises are simply not shared.⁴ Similarly, when therapists considering the impact of humiliation on their patients speak of the importance of empathy, or when Rorty talks of the need for ‘imaginative identification’, they are talking at a human level with people who share their values and assumptions and are concerned that human suffering should be reduced immediately and not just in some distant future.

The SED rejected religious belief but asserted the validity of historical materialism. Arguing in a circular fashion, it could then declare that historical materialism validated the Party’s view of the causes of human behaviour. The Party adopted an approach comparable to that of religious fundamentalists, stressing the

⁴ op. cit., Margalit, p. 19.

inevitability of an eventual ideal future, the importance of sacrifice on the way and the unfortunate need to be cruel to those who opposed the vision or the means used to achieve it. It is not surprising, therefore, that representations of the GDR, as noted in Chapters 3 and 7 in particular, contain religious imagery and references to the Inquisition or to heresy, or that committed Communists who were victims of the show trials displayed the same belief as many committed Christians who were victims of the Inquisition, that the Party or the Church respectively was always ultimately in the right.⁵

How, then, in the face of such difficulties, can the incidence of humiliation be reduced? Clarifying the meaning of humiliation and building a better understanding across disciplines of its consequences is a necessary first step and one attempted in this thesis. A better understanding will not in itself overcome the resistance of people who believe in a controlling power outside humanity. Nevertheless, for those less absolute, a commitment to asking in advance whether proposed actions involve humiliation, matched by a commitment not to humiliate, whatever the circumstances, would be a start. Such commitments should apply not only at the individual level of the adult abusing a child, the teacher victimising a student, the chief executive ridiculing his subordinates, but also at the level of the state and its institutions in its dealings with its citizens, outsiders and other states. If such commitments were agreed, everyone in such a position would need to ask: how do I exercise power without resorting to humiliation? Without the option of humiliation, the person with power has to seek agreement to a set of rules and a system of justice based on a common set of values and norms. He has to ensure, with the use of force where necessary, that the rules are not breached and that the system of justice is not undermined. To the extent that it is possible to do so, he needs to keep the emotions out of questions of power, so eliminating the demonstrative aspect of humiliation and the desire for revenge that flows from it. One result of such an approach would be to prevent some conflicts altogether, another to ensure that the ending of a conflict did not make it more likely that another conflict would follow.

These suggestions are modest but important. They also have a utopian aspect. They are based on a view that people are able to live more harmoniously in families and social groups if they do not feel threatened. There is an implied assumption here

⁵ See, for instance, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Inquisition*, (Viking, London, 1999); and on the show trials, Artur London, *L'Aveu*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

that if people are not threatened, they are able to see the value of the ‘other’ and to incorporate a sense of responsibility for the other into their own ethical approach.⁶ Utopian aspirations, however, will not satisfy those who accept Freud’s views about the underlying drives. Nor will they convince those whose world view attributes human action ultimately to factors ‘beyond the reach of time and chance’.⁷ One way forward might be to build on a key theme from Freud’s *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, discussed in Chapter 4, that people display a high degree of self-interest when they come together in organised societies. Such societies offer them security and the opportunity to develop in ways that are impossible on their own. It can be argued in the same way to dictators and ideologues that, out of self-interest, they should renounce the use of humiliation. Such a renunciation might increase the commitment of a regime’s citizens to the regime and its vision, make ‘normalisation’ of the society possible from the point of the view of both the regime and its citizens and avoid the development of an opposition movement strong enough to overthrow the regime.

The SED was unable, after forty years of using humiliation as one of its weapons, to understand the force of an argument such as this, which was in any case not explicitly made. The habit of being in power was too entrenched and the Party’s commitment to its ideology too strong. As opposition increased in 1989 and became more public, the Party leadership through its security services sought to provoke its opponents into acts of violence which could be met with greater violence. Some of this provocation involved acts of humiliation, selectively applied with a deliberately demonstrative intent.⁸ The determinedly non-violent response of these opponents can be interpreted as a unilateral renunciation of the use of humiliation by people who hoped that they, in some general and unspecified sense, would soon have power. This response was in distinct contrast to the events of 1953, when there could well have been a large-scale resort to vengeful violence if the Soviet Union had not intervened to protect the Party and the State. In the very specific circumstances of the GDR in late 1989 and for a limited period only, with the Soviet Union no longer willing to intervene, the non-violent response contributed to disabling the regime, splitting the leadership and enabling a relatively peaceful transfer of power that reduced the likelihood of humiliation of the sort that would take place shortly after in Romania. In

⁶ Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other. Emmanuel Levinas between Revelation and Ethics*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁷ op. cit., Rorty, *Contingency*, p. xv.

⁸ op. cit., Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur*, p. 322.

the period that followed, it became clear that those who had led the renunciation of violence and humiliation would be marginalised by a combination of ‘traditional’ politics, rejection of the continuation of a socialist GDR, and the power of the West. Humiliation did in fact subsequently take place, in the form of a range of actions felt to be unjust, such as the stripping down and selling off of economic assets, the exclusion of people from their jobs for ‘political’ reasons, the reduction of pensions for many former GDR officials and the various trials of former politicians and officials. The case of Peter Erdmann, discussed in Chapter 6, points to a consciously planned attempt to gain revenge by humiliating through the courts those who had humiliated him in 1976 and 1977. Nevertheless, and perhaps also in part because of an underlying sense of moral superiority and the development of elements of a ‘socialist personality’, as discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the myths, what was clear was the relative absence of attempts at retribution or revenge, whether violent or not. This did not fully break the cycle of humiliation, but it certainly reduced its momentum and its capacity for self-perpetuation.

The example provided by this transfer of power at the end of the GDR is an encouraging one but it is unlikely to be a model for the reduction of humiliation elsewhere. The appeal to dictators to abandon humiliation and save themselves is always likely to come too late. By the time such an appeal is needed, they are likely to have established a regime in which humiliation is a normal way of exercising power and where its renunciation is likely to lead to them losing power. The renunciation of humiliation always needs to precede the use of force, whether against abusive parents or entrenched dictators, if the dangerous cycle of humiliation is to be broken. Though there is no template that guarantees the establishment of a ‘normal’ society, using the GDR as a case study of humiliation, its causes, consequences and self-perpetuating nature, suggests that the process of normalisation will never be satisfactorily carried through in a society where humiliation is an accepted way of exercising power.

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