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Author(s): Andrews, Molly.
Article Title: Life review in the context of acute social transition: The case of East Germany
Year of publication: 1997
Citation: Andrews, M. (1997) 'Life review in the context of acute social transition: The case of East Germany' British Journal of Social Psychology 36 (3) 273-290.
Link to journal: http://www.bpsjournals.co.uk/journals/bjsp (direct link unavailable)
DOI: (not stated)

Andrews, M. (1997) "Life review in the context of acute social transition: The case of East Germany" *British journal of social psychology* 36: 273-290.

LIFE REIVEW IN THE CONTEXT OF ACUTE SOCIAL TRANSITION: THE CASE OF EAST GERMANY

> I think that the past ... is not as past as we assume. We are the result of the past and the past is in us. What I find alarming in this whole discussion is that vergangenheitsbewaeltigung is normally only discussed after the system has collapsed....I think it would be much more natural if this talking about past events would not feature as something special.
>
> - Ingrid Koppe, (East) German member of the Bundestag

One of the most successful adverstisement campaigns in the five years since the "wende" (or changes) of East Germany has been that of a cigarette company called West; plastered on billboards and psyches throughout the country is etched the slogan "West is best." When the citizens of East Germany decided in their first and only democratic election to dissolve their country, they hoped and believed they were leaving behind them forty years of a failed experiment. Despite Chancellor Kohl's promises that it would not be long before they would join in the prosperity of their Western "family," the reality has proven to be somewhat more complex. East Germans experience far less material security now than they ever did under the old regime; not only do they no longer enjoy the certainty of housing, employment, health care and other benefits which were once provided by the state, but many are economically, as well as otherwise, unprepared to compete in a system which is not only foreign to them, but in many ways antagonistic to the socialization of which they are products. And finally, when the more immediate needs of keeping food on the table and a roof over head have been met, there still remains another challenge, less tangible perhaps but no less important, that of "processing" "coping with" or "working through" the past (a rough translation of the very German German

word, Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung). How are the citizens of what was once East Germany to make sense of their history, as individuals and as a collective, they who are the remnants of a country that is no longer? Under the rallying cry of "West is best" what is the fate of the "them" they once were, prior to 1989?

The past is not only in us, it is us - individuals are not exclusively their past, but they are at least their past - and without a past there is no enduring self. A t[[substantial part of the self concept is derived from the social context in which that self exists - persons create, sustain and change their identities in relation to their environments [author]. Particularly in the case of East Germany, whose citizens experienced in a very personal and direct way the long arms of state power, the dramatic downfall of the country has precipitated a massive and radical reformulation of identity (Borneman 1991; Philipsen 1993; Reich 1990; Schneider 1992; Smith et al. 1992). There is a deep reflection on the meaning of the past, both of the state and of the individual. In this essay, I shall examine the inter-related nature of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung (reassessment of the past primarily at the level of society) and life review (this same process, when focussed on the life of the self.) The form and purpose of life review can vary considerably, depending upon what has prompted it and when it is conducted in the life course. Not surprisingly, one of the key determinants of the way in which East Germans experienced the demise of their country was their age. This paper shall explore the possibilities and the limits associated with this generational effect, focussing on the interface between the history of the self and the history of the society in which that self exists.

Society in Individuals and Individuals in Society

There is a false dichotomy which is often constructed between the individual and society (Broughton 1987; Riegel, Meachan 1976). Indeed in many debates, this contrast is taken merely

as the starting point for argumentation. If individuals are eminently social beings, as indeed they appear to be, then there is no reason to assume that society exists only outside of them. That is to say, individuals live and breath in wider contexts (there are, if only for reasons of logistics, very few hermits), and certain dimensions of those contexts become, over time, integrated into the self. A young infant, for instance, has little cognizance of any being which extends beyond her immediate world, but one standard measure of cognitive development is the ability for perspective role taking, i.e. a growing appreciation of the world which includes but is not limited to the self (Piaget 1932). Here one can see how the "social" context is indeed integrated into the increasingly complex psychology of the individual.

The construct of society as wholly apart from its individuals is equally fallacious. One need not go as far as Mrs. Thatcher did in her now famous proclamation that "There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families in society" to acknowledge that one very important component of society is indeed persons. Society includes, but is not limited to, individual beings. Much recent work in social psychology examines the essentially integrated nature of individuals and society, rejecting the long-established dichotomy between the two as artificial and misconceived. (Bakhurst, Sypnowich 1995; Burkitt 1991; Shotter, Gergen 1989; MORE REFS FROM PH.D. add Harre and Sampson? ref. in Burkitt) "The view of human beings as self-contained unitary individuals who carry their uniqueness deep inside themselves, like pearls hidden in their shells, is one that is ingrained in the Western tradition of thought" (Burkitt 1991:1). However, this view does not correspond with the experiences of real people operating in a real world. "...humans are always in social relations from the moment they are born and they remain part of a network of other people throughout their lives" (ibid.:2) As we shall later see, if one is to take seriously the fundamentally social nature of individuals, an attempt to understand the way in which they make sense of their lives must incorporate the social context in which that

review occurs.

Clearly, then, what happens to the collective psychology of society also happens to, one might say is expressed by its passage through, individuals (Butler 1989; Connerton ;Fentress, WickamHalbwachs 1951/80; Middleton, Edwards 1990; Schudson1992; Schwartz 1991). Conversely, when individuals remember their lives, they do so in categories which are socially available to them. Later we shall explore the very profound effect wielded by a society in determining the contours of the memorable. In the East German discussion of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung, the attempt to "work through" the forty years of socialist dictatorship has been concurrent with, or perhaps has even stimulated, a very rigorous life-review on the part of many citizens of this once-nation. This is not at all surprising when understood in the context of the interrelationship between individuals and society, as here outlined.

Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung and the Stasi Files

It was not by plan but by fortuity that the timing of my arrival in Berlin in February 1992 corresponded nearly exactly with the opening of the files of the Ministry of State Security - or "the Stasi" - one month earlier. My research - a qualitative study of the social psychological dimensions of the transformation of East Germany in which I interviewed forty men and women[1], most of whom had been leaders in the burgerbewegung (citizens' movements) - had been planned nearly a year in advance, i.e. before the November 1991 federal decision to allow

[1]Unless otherwise stated, the quotations used in this article are from my data collected for this project in 1992. As my German is not fluent, the bulk of the interviews were conducted in German with the assistance of a translator. These translations were then double-checked with another translator who was responsible for transcribing the complete interviews (in both German and English). A small portion of the interviewees preferred to be interviewed in English; in these cases, the translator was still present at the interviews, enabling us to make use of her assistance if the need arose.

people the right of access to their Stasi files. Conducting interviews in such a politically charged environment as the rubble of the East German state posed a number of interpretative challenges for me. Although any researcher must always evaluate the reliability of interviewees' self-report, here the difficulty of this process was exacerbated by the political context in which it occurred. Most East Germans find themselves in a new environment which harshly judges their past lives. How could it be that there was so little resistance to such an abhorrent system for so many years? Worse still, what kind of people are these who could spy on one another, spouses, colleagues and friends included? Although it is virtually inevitable that social and individual identity will be recast as a response to acute political change, there are greater motivations for some groups of people to actively change their past than for others. In the case of East Germany, everyone now wants to portray themselves as having been part of the (miniscule) resistance movement under the old system. East German sociologist Marianne Schulz says that of the East German population of 16 million, there are now 16 million resistance fighters, as well as 16 million victims (personal conversation). Everyone now portrays themselves as having been part of the oppostion, and/or a victim of the system. However, the group which is least susceptible to this identity transformation are those people who actually were part of the underground citizens' movement. This very small sector of the population experiences the highest degree of consistency between their past and and present selves, as what they were formerly persecuted for now brings them praise. As this very select group is the focus of the current study, for the purposes of this paper, I regard the data collected from these persons as fundamentally credible, and not as a source to be analyzed in itself - although clearly such analysis is rich with possibilities, even if a diversion from present argument. Moreover, the interviewees of this study are people who have thought deeply about the issues we discussed together. In the course of my data collection, I made every attempt possible to suspend my own construction of events and rather to listen openly to the analysis of events offered by my interviewees. These analyses, in

dialogue with my own, form the core of the present paper.

The opening of the Stasi files, an historically unprecedented phenomenon, has provoked much controversy, in what was East Germany as well as in other former eastern block countries who have opted for quite different strategies to interrogate their own history. One of the very first things that the leaders of the East German citizen's movements did when they gained power in late 1989 was to occupy the offices of the MfS. These activists were successful in their campaign to "open the files", i.e. to set up a commission which would review applications from private individuals wishing to learn if the Stasi had kept a file on them, and if so, to have access to the contents of it.

Wolfgang Ullmann, founding member of the Autumn '89 oppositional group Democracy Now and latterly a representative to the Bundestag for the amalgamation party Alliance '90, describes what he wishes to accomplish through the opening of the files: "... what we are going to do is.. firstly to ask the question... 'what has happened?'... 'Who has done what?' is the second question..." Establishing the facts, constructing what past there is to be worked through, is the first priority. After this follows casting the actors: in this story, who played what role? The files contain masses of information, some of it seemingly quite innocuous; but when viewed in their entirety, they reveal the extent of depravity of state intrusion into the private sphere, really existing socialism's desperate, but fragile hold on "the people." Katja Havemann, long-term East German dissident and widow of Robert Havemann, the symbol of East German opposition, explains that the files stand as a living record of what has been endured: "When history is written... it will come to this. It really did happen." Seeing proof of what one already knows deep in one's skin is somehow reassuring, preserving sanity even if adding to sorrow. Havemann describes this as "the right to look at the still very fresh evidence."

Some persons have showed deep intelligence and compassion in their pursuit of historical truth, suggesting that justice and human understanding need not be incompatible. As more and more Stasi informants were uncovered, "victim-victimizer" talks sprouted throughout Eastern Germany, planned meetings, usually on some "neutral ground", between spies and the spied-upon (who might also have been friends, colleagues, even spouses). The files reveal in many cases answers to the questions posed by Ullmann, what has happened and who has done what? They do not, however, provide insight into the question "why has this happened?". Through these talks, an attempt is made to explore motivation, and ultimately to arrive at some understanding of the past, in order to increase the possibility of moving beyond it. In some cases these meetings have been successful, in others less so.

Werner Fischer, one of the most prominent activists of the East German opposition from the early 1980s onwards, found himself as the person designated with the responsibility of disbanding the Ministry for State Security. In the course of our interview, Fischer captures the irony of this appointment, describing the body guard and secretary assigned to him as "all former MfS people... there I was sitting at this desk and thinking to myself 'where were you two years ago [when] I was in this room being interrogated?' And I visited the cell I was held in... I somehow couldn't comprehend all that had happened - such perverse events." Details such as these bring home how dramatically Fischer's life has changed, and no one is more aware of it than he. There is a sense of near unreality which characterizes our interview, especially at its conclusion when we once again encounter Fischer's secretary, regarding her with a new perspective. For Fischer, the struggle to comprehend the complexity of what he has lived through is an ongoing one. He describes himself as someone who, at the time of his appointment, "appealed for some kind of differentiated inquiry, that is not to reduce every case to a common

denominator, but to look closely at what caused each person to act this way or that." Fischer has a very clear idea about environments which are conducive to bringing about constructive confrontation.

> ... in the immediate environment, at work, at home, among friends or within the church, one must discuss the events of the last forty years, what part a person played in it, that somebody says 'well, I did it for state security.' Then one listens to his story, analyses why somebody does it, has done it, has worked as an unofficial collaborator. And only then, when somebody has told his story, one begins to understand. This is the only way it can happen...

Critically, Fischer thinks that the conversations must take place between the concerned individuals, the spies and the spied-upon, but the enterprise is not merely an individual affair. To understand why and how certain events have taken place, and to comprehend the reasons why individuals might have behaved in a particular way, it is important to examine the intersection between that person's story - their biography - and the social, historical and political context in which they lived. People did not, for the most part, collaborate with the secret services because they were by nature deceitful but rather because of beliefs which they held or vulnerabilities of their personalities and/or life circumstances. Katja Havemann, like many, had the experience of learning that a woman who she had thought to be her good friend was in fact informing on her to the MfS. To overcome the paralyzing sense of betrayal, Havemann and another friend, Irene Kukutz, decided to interview "Monika." Havemann describes her as someone who "has been a really hurt person from her childhood on. She is exemplary of the kind of [person the Stasi attached themselves to.] ... they [the Stasi] used their [informal informers'] psychological difficulties and the problems they had in their lives in order to make them useful for this double-

life." When Havemann discusses this situation now, it is still with pain, but also with resolution. Clearly it is not possible to un-do what has been done, but developing an understanding of the situation assists one to move through and beyond it.

But such a process is predicated on dialogue. For progress to be made, both concerned parties must agree upon what has happened, as well as sharing, to some extent at least, their judgment about these events. Konrad Weiss, well-known documentary film maker, one of the founding members of the Autumn '89 oppositional group Democracy Now, and subsequently a member of parliament in Bonn, reflects that "dialogue always presupposes an insight into the guilt, the confession of guilt. It is not possible to have dialogue with people who do not show any insight." One such person might be Jorg Seidel, former employee of the MfS (whose job it was to spy on the Western spies in the East Germany). He says "I do not want to apologize for the activities of the MfS which have taken place in the society.. I don't call into question, I am supporting what I have done."   Seidel is a particularly interesting case. Unlike many other employees of the MfS, he does not deny his former affiliation, nor does he try to explain it away. He is not a political dinasaur, as those who retained their commitment to hardline socialism are portrayed as being. Rather, he is young, quite attractive, and saavy. He proclaims that while he would never work for the West German secret services, he wouldn't mind a job with the C.I.A. (He would have been rather mistaken if he thought that as an American, I could help him procure such a position.) He does not live in the past, but neither will he have anything to do with what he regards as an attempt to rewrite it. He is very critical of this concept of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung: "you can't write history anew, you can neither work it through. You should really stand by history." This phrase "stand by history" reappears several times in our interview, and seems central to his outlook. Seidel believes that those who argue for "processing the past" effectively are trying to "un-do" the past. But Seidel feels that what has happened has happened; the past cannot be

changed. It must, therefore, be acknowledged, and "stood by." Proponents of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung, however, argue that while the past is indeed unalterable, its role in the present (and thus the future) is a dynamic one, and it is for this reason that it must be closely examined and evaluated. For Seidel, such analysis seems to be in tension with his concept of "standing by the past."

Havemann's magnanimity towards Monika contrasts with her feelings for other informants of the Stasi who are not forthcoming about their past activities. She characterizes her feelings in the early days of the changes as "naive" in that she expected that Stasi employees would welcome the opportunity to unburden themselves. "We imagined that they would feel relieved when they finally were able to come out of this role." For the most part, this did not happen. Now, she says "I don't want to have anything to do with them, really!" Werner Fischer has had a similar experience. When we spoke, he had occupied his job for two years, during which time his attitude had become more cynical.

> I was more tolerant then... Unfortunately what I had expected from people did not happen, that they come clean about their actions... I think that this is tragic not only for their personal future development but for the inner peace of the country. In human terms I find this reprehensible.

Again, the point is clear: 'coming clean' is important, not only for an individual's "personal future development" but much more importantly "for the inner peace of the country." One has a responsibility not only to oneself, but to the society of which one is a part, to examine the past critically and one's role within it. If the parts fail to do this, the quality of the whole suffers.

Examining the past does not necessarily mean, however, that one will arrive at a stark analysis of it, involving culprits and heroes. The construction of "victim-victimizer" is itself a controversial one. Konrad Weiss feels that to cast the population of the former GDR into victims and victimizers is to oversimplify the situation. Echoing Havemann's description of Monika, Weiss explains that many victimizers were also victims. "They became involved due their personal circumstances, due to their own weakness." Moreover, the difference is not so stark as one might think: "the transitional boundaries between keeping silent about something to cooperation are very smooth." The analysis must be deep enough that it allows for the complexity of the situation, with all of its shades of grey.[2] Werner Fischer elaborates on how such a construction has been used by some to avoid examining their own lives, at the same time as they forcefully judge others.

> People are only too eager to point a finger at the other person, to the guilty one, 'that was him, the Stasi,' in order to disguise their own shame of not having been able to even only in a very minute way, show resistance. This simply must happen, but at present does not, that people ask themselves 'how far have I contributed to make this system function, if only by my silence?' This is an exceedingly difficult process.

Fischer, too, questions the rigidity of the "victim <u>or</u> victimizer" construction: "I am not able to draw a clear line. I am very cautious with this categorization." Notably, if the categories of victim and victimizer are appropriate, he would be by most people's criterion a "victim" - a key

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There are others who do find the victim-victimizer polarity appropriate. For instance, Wolfgang Ullmann speaks of "an inclination with people to mix up between victims and victimizers, but if you look into the Stasi files, you see there are spies and there are people who are spied on... there is a very clear borderline between those... I am very sharply in opposition against any attempt to mingle up those groups."

person in the opposition who went to prison many times and was ultimately forcibly exiled from his country. Fischer, however, rejects this rendition as simplistic and unsatisfactory.

> Do I know in how far I, as a so-called victim who was in prison and so on, contributed in a certain way to a stabilization of the system.
> Because the Stasi strengthened this apparatus, could only strengthen it by constant referral to the opposition, that is how the system legitimized itself. In that respect I belong to the criminals, who ensured that the Stasi found more and more reasons to expand. Who can judge this?

It is important to Fischer to ask these hard, and ultimately unanswerable, questions of himself, for in so doing he must personally confront the moral complexity of the society in which he and all other citizens of the GDR lived. Did his voice of opposition to the corrupt regime in fact lend it legitimacy that it would otherwise be lacking? This quality of self-scrutiny is not unique to Fischer. Lotte Templin, long-term oppositional activist and wife of Wolfgang Templin - once labelled by Honnecker "the number one enemy of the state" - expresses a similar reasoning behind her decision to review her Stasi files. She says that it would be quite easy for someone in her situation to blame categorically all things which went wrong in her life on "the state." (In the case of the Templins, it is indeed true that the state identified them and their family as targets for severe and sustained harassment.) She rejects this blanket amnesty for herself, however, and insists on examining her past in a differentiated manner, so that she can, in her words "take responsibility" for those decisions which were genuinely hers. In so doing, she reclaims her own life. Jens Reich, scientist and one of the co-founders of Neues Forum - the largest of the opposition groups which mushroomed in September 1989 - acknowledges that there are some "real" victims, but while their suffering has been great, their numbers are few.

> There is a part of the society who are in a deep sense really victims. I know people who have been crushed, destroyed, physically or psychologically. ... They haven't had a voice and they still have no sufficient voice. They are simply destroyed to an extent that they are not able to speak without hysteria about these things... but 99% of the population are neither [sic] real victims. They are perpetrators of misdeeds in the sense that they waited too long, and I think everybody has this guilt, including myself.

Invariably, a key component of "coming to terms with the past" is examining and evaluating one's own role in contributing to, if not the creation then at least the maintenance of, certain adverse situations. Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung does not entail the examination, from a safe distance, of some amorphous "society" while never querying the behavior of individual actors, but neither can an assessment of the past be reduced to particular lives, while ignoring the context in which those lives operated. It is, then, not at all surprising that people, like Fischer, Templin, and Reich, who take the process of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung most seriously, do not exempt themselves from their own scrutiny.

Ruth Reinecke does not share the same history of participation in underground oppositional politics which characterizes most of the respondents mentioned thus far; nonetheless, her concept of coming to terms with the past is similar to theirs. Her membership in the East German Communist Party - the Socialist Unity Party, or the S.E.D.- can only be understood in the context of her family's background. Reinecke, a Jew, lost much of her family in the Holocaust. Her mother returned to Germany after the war to help build an anti-fascist state. When Reinecke grew up, she shared this commitment, and describes being a member of

Communist Party as "an expression of my very own life." Like many others, she left the Party in the summer of 1989. An actress at the Maxim Gorki Theater, she became closely involved with the Berlin artists who were responsible for organizing the massive demonstration in Alexander Platz on November 4, 1989, the critical event which precipitated the opening of the Wall five days later. These days she spends much time reflecting on the past, not in nostalgia but as a means through which to understand the present and her own role in it. She has a young daughter, and it is important to her that she should be able to pass on to her an explanation of why things have happened the way in which they have.

> In my every day life and also at work, I still feel that I am looking into the past of the GDR. I want... to be able to tell my daughter why things have happened exactly in this way. I also want to understand because I have not yet understood everything which has taken place... [Why is it important to understand it?] You have to, you have to understand it. It is your obligation to search into these things which have happened.

The interview with Reinecke is very long and emotionally taxing. It is evident that she takes very seriously this "obligation to search into these things which have happened" and at one point she begins to cry. She struggles to understand a world that no longer exists and her role within it, examining the actions of her past from the perspective of a new and different self. Reinecke expresses a heightened sensitivity to issues of generational influence. She says she would like to be able to tell her daughter "why things have happened in this way" - the very same question she might have liked to ask her own mother and those of her mother's generation. "Coming to terms with the past" is not something which one can sit down and 'do', and then be done with. It is, rather, Reinecke explains, "a constant thing. You can't say, well on Sunday I will deal with the

past. It's going on and on. And it's also a good thing that it functions this way." Finally, Reinecke asserts that "We are obliged to understand those forty years [of the GDR] in such a way that certain things will not be repeated. I must be very vigilant in regards to my own past so that I will be able to understand the present, the past and the future." For Reinecke, and others, there is a very direct and clear relationship between "understanding the forty years of the GDR" and "being vigilant in regards to [her] own past." Moreover, the commitment to "work through the past" is not rooted in an unwillingness to look forward, but rather in the knowledge that one can only move forward if one is resolved about the past. As Koppe asserts "The past is not as past as we assume." This sentiment is also echoed by Wolfgang Ullmann who, when asked how he would answer the charge that those who concentrate on Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung put obstacles in the way of the future, responds "... this argument is, so far, an illusory one because [one cannot form a position which is] open for future and revival... without coming to terms with your past. The challenges of this past are present challenges..."

Life Review in Eastern Germany

Just as Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung tends to occur only in societies which have already collapsed, individual life review is most likely to happen at the end of the life course. The concept of life review, as it was originally postulated by Robert Butler in 1963, is premissed on the hypothesis that there is a correlation between the biological fact of approaching death and the life review process. Butler describes the life review as

> a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these revived experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and reintegrated. Presumably this process is prompted

by the realization of approaching dissolution and death... (1963:66).

Subsequent research on life review has examined Butler's claim of its universality (ref.), confirmed its long-term effects (Haight 1992), and reconsidered it from a social constructionist perspective (Wallace 1992). All of this work takes as its starting point that if this process does occur, it is at the end of life (thus leaving in tact Butler's original proposition). As such, life review is usually associated with old age, although there has been some work examining more unusual circumstances in which death is encountered at a younger age, such as in the case of persons with A.I.D.s (ref.). No research to date explores the possibility of fostering the life review process in situations other than when death is seen as being impending.

It is not surprising that knowledge that one's life is drawing to a close would serve as an impetus to reflect upon the meaning of the years that have been lived. Sudden death denies its victim the opportunity for this reflection, although it also true that survivors of nearly-fatal accidents sometimes report their experiences in words such as "I saw my life pass before my eyes." Although the term "life review" in its formal sense does not refer to such situations, it is nonetheless evident that crises, at any stage of life, can cause individuals to reflect on the meaning of their lives, a sort of life review. Thus the loss of loved ones, unemployment, or any other dramatic (and usually unfavorable) alteration in life circumstances can and often does motivate people to reexamine their lives; one possible result of such intro- and retrospection is the creation of a new blueprint for living.

These are exceptional cases, however. Generally life review, like Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung, happens when the object of evaluation - in this case, the individual life - is approaching or has reached the end of its existence. In these cases, the benefits of reviewing the past are derived only in the present, as there is no longer any future. Thus, the individual who sees "the dying of

the light" and embarks upon a life review, strives for resolution about those things which have and haven't happened in the past, but has no time left for redressing. But Butler's description of life review entails more than mere reminiscence, although both processes are characterized by a "progressive return to consciousness of past experiences." Life review is qualitatively distinct from reminiscence because it involes a rexamination of past conflicts, which are ultimately "surveyed and reintegrated." However, it seems logical that the potential for such reintegration would be significantly enhanced if the process were to occur when there was still sufficient remaining life ahead. Butler cites Aristotle in Rhetoric: "They live by memory rather than by hope, for what is left to them of life is but little compared to the long past" (quoted in Butler 1963:65). If life review is limited to the last stage of life, it is too late for hope, as there is little future which remains. Memory is all there is and all there can be. This would not be the case if life review, in Koppe's words, would not "feature as something special" but rather would function as part of the texture of everyday living.

Not surprisingly, a cataclysm such as the loss of one's country is enough to stimulate life review for many. Citizenship is, after all, a primary source of identity, regardless of the particular feelings one might have for one's country. The GDR was no exception to this. Even members of the opposition, with their antagonistic relationship to the state, had strong affective ties to their country. Werner Fischer explains that he "did not want to see the GDR disappear. This is how many opposition members express it today, 'better to have a stormy relationship than none at all.'" The description Fischer offers here is, quite consciously, one which mimics a lover lamenting the demise of a relationship, regardless of the pain that love may have brought him. The vacuum left by the absence of the loved-one is great. Similarly, Fischer now finds himself without a country, and he experiences this as a real loss.

There is, of course, a wide spectrum of feeling about the changes which have taken place. Ursula Herzberg is in her early seventies. She was born in Berlin, escaped the Nazis (not all of her family did), and returned in the late 1940s to rebuild an anti-fascist, democratic, socialist Germany. As an aside in our conversation, she comments "this country, Germany, I can't even say 'my country' anymore." Time and again she expresses that she has lost her country, and with it all that she has dedicated her life to. Wolfgang Ullmann stands on the other end of the continuum. He says quite plainly "it's not the end of my country. It's the end of this state of despotism... it was an awakening and revival of my country." When asked if he feels that he has lost his country, he replies "No, absolutely not, I got it back." Themes of exile, occupation and alienation run throughout many of the interviews. Barbel Bohley, who was forcibly exiled from the GDR after the Rosa Luxembourg demonstration of January, 1988, draws an analogy to that time and her more current experiences. "The GDR as a whole put in an application to emigrate to the Federal Republic... Whether I wanted to or not, I emigrated. It happened to me before, in '88 that I suddenly found myself in the west against my will. ... [This time] the west came to me." Ingrid Koppe makes a similar comment "I often say we have gone into exile without leaving the country" and Werner Fischer, again, "I have the feeling that the country has been occupied... I feel an alien in my own country." Andre Brie, political theoretician, long-time internal critic of the Communist Party, and at the time of our interviews, the Deputy Chairperson in Berlin of the Democratic Socialist Party, comments "this was my country...not Germany. Up to now, I have no feeling for Germany. I am at home in the East of Germany. There are my landscapes, the people..."

The voices of these men and women are situated in a particular time and place, and must be understood as such. At the time of the interviews, there had been little more than two years since the opening of the Berlin Wall. Reminiscent of Pirandello, these were citizens in search of a

country. The theme which emerges time again is one of being forced into exile without ever having left one's country. As more time passes, and people begin to explore this new world and find a niche for themselves within it, the experience of alienation may very well decrease. The sentiments which they report to me in our interviews are not definitive in any sense - that is to say they cannot be generalized across the population nor across time even for the speakers themselves. However, this fact does not negate the existence of very strong and powerful themes which do emerge across many of the interviews, themes which we shall explore at further length in this essay.

Throughout our conversations together, many respondents expressed acute feelings of displacement, as they tried to rethink, redefine, and reevaluate their society, and indeed their own lives. Whether they experienced the recent changes as gaining or losing their country - and it should be said that in the present research, Ullmann is unique in his feeling that he has regained his homeland - the upheaval has been dramatic. As discussed earlier, tumultuous changes in living conditions can, and often do, instigate life reviews for persons of any age (providing, of course, that they have the ability for abstract thought). The demise of the East German state has served as such a catalyst for many.

The precise timing of the intersection between biography and society is critical; broadly, different generations experience the same historical changes in different ways. "Naturally, I am a child of my own times" Konrad Weiss explains. Born in 1942, his generation grew up in the aftermath of the Second World War, and spent their youth in the early, comparatively "open" years of East Germany. Wolfgang Ullmann was born only thirteen years earlier, but into a very different society. He describes the Germany of his youth: "I belonged to the Weimar era... I can remember the taking over of political power by Hitler. The whole society of Germany saw this as a real

happy event... the happiness of my childhood in the early thirties came from this event. It's terrible, but I must confess it was so." And Barbel Bohley, in the very first sentence of our interview together, says "most formative for me was the fact that I am a post-war child." The timing of one's birth is, if not deterministic then at least influential in creating the content of experiences which will comprise that person's life. An individual's age at the time of a particular event helps to determine the significance and meaning of the event in that person's life. And while any chronicler of a human life must closely examine the intersection between her subject's biography and history, this is particularly true of the life historian who practices her trade in the former GDR.

The German Democratic Republic barely survived its own fortieth birthday before it expired. Indeed, the weekend in October 1989, scheduled for the grand celebrations, proved to be a pivotal turning point in the series of events which resulted in the country's collapse. "History does not wait for those who stall" Gorbachev had told Honnecker; how fateful his words would prove to be, no one could then know. Three dates are outstanding for their importance to the history of the GDR: October 7, 1949, the founding of the country; August 13, 1961, the day the building of the Berlin Wall began (from August 16 the border to West Germany was closed to all inhabitants of the GDR); and November 9, 1989, the opening of the Berlin Wall, commonly considered the death knell of the country.

How old a respondent was at the time of each of these events contributes to their meaning and importance in that person's life. Generations stood in different relationships to the existence of the country, and as such tend to experience its demise in varying ways. Although the collapse of the GDR stimulated life review for many of different ages, the experience of this process was itself influenced by the age of the respondent at the time of the life-altering events of 1989. The

transition was perhaps easiest for those who were youngest. Their identity of themselves as citizens of the GDR was not as embedded in history as that of their elders. Most, though not by any means all, of the people who fled East Germany in the summer of 1989 - the mass exodus through the Hungarian border - were young people. Of the 343,854 people who left the GDR in 1989 (as compared to 40,000 the previous year) 41.1% were between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-nine (Naimark 1992:86). This was by far the largest age-group represented in the mass exodus. Anyone born after 1961 had never experienced life in the west, but they had seen glances of it through the western television which they often watched. The lure of that which is denied one is always strong. "We want out" they cried, as they closed the door on their life in East Germany. But dramatic movements in pursuit of identity formation is not unusual for this stage of life. These young people were opting for change in their lives. Thus when change did come, it was welcomed, even if at times it was, and is, unsettling. It is said that even those young people who stayed behind have learned the new rules, the ways of the west, far more quickly than the rest of the population. The bulk of their lives still lie in front of them, and this is critical to their forward-looking mind-set. For instance, all three of Jens Reich's children now live in the west "without looking any longer at that inner wall. But for me, the inner wall is still present" he explains, highlighting the generational divide. Youth can adjust more easily because they have lived less time with the old regime.

The parents of this generation occupy a different position. Most of the leading members of the opposition were in their forties in 1989 - they were "GDR babies," born at virtually the same time as the country. This generation was not responsible for establishing the country, but they generally called themselves socialists, and one motivating force behind their actions was that of making a better socialism. Konrad Weiss (born 1942) says "These forty years have been the decisive years of my life. In the act of controversy with this country, I also got my strength."

Werner Fischer (born 1950) expresses a similar feeling. He explains that during the time when he was forced to leave the GDR, "I realized... that my roots were here, that I had become firmly rooted to this soil, here was the friction that sparked controversy." For Wolfgang Templin (born 1948) the opening of the Berlin Wall meant that he was free to travel home into East Germany, from where he had been forcibly exiled nearly two years before. Wolfgang Herzberg (born 1944), the first oral historian in the GDR, and son of Ursula Herzberg, mentioned earlier, describes the plight of his generation by saying that they had "too much respect for anti-fascism." This comment summarizes precisely the complexity of the situation. Herzberg himself was born in England, to German Jewish parents who had escaped the Nazis, and who would return to Germany to build an anti-fascist state. The children of the founders of the country regarded their parents' commitment as laudable, and this deep respect blinded them in later years to the reality that the socialist experiment had lost its course.

This generation which was born in the decade which spanned five years either side of the formation of the country is more identified with the GDR than are their offspring (who, statistically, were those who tended to leave the country) but they are more critical of socialism as it was actually practiced than are their parents, who comprise the younger echelon of the generation which founded the country. This is the youngest generation which is likely to have memories of the west before the wall was erected in 1961. As a child, Ulrike Poppe used to live on the border with West Germany, and this would feature in the games she would play. Her memory of the erection of the wall was in terms of its alteration of her play. Jens Reich (who, born in 1939, is slightly older than these "GDR babies") says of himself "I hadn't that exaggerated hopes" of what would happen following the opening of the wall, because he had experienced the west in his younger years. "People had exaggerated hopes of the west because they hadn't seen it" he explains, offering an explanation for the lure of the west to the younger

generations.

It is also this generation for whom the question of life-review is perhaps most interesting. Andre Brie (born 1950) reflects that his generation "is effected by the unification of Germany most, especially because we have forty years of history in the GDR and we have now forty years in front of us, history with a new country... I am not sure how my generation will handle the problem." Ruth Reinecke (born 1954) feels that "the GDR has left behind a very decisive influence on my life which cannot be extinguished. On the other hand, I believe that I am still at an age in which I can actively cope with the new things which have come." She is both firmly planted in her roots as a citizen of the GDR, as well as being willing and able to make the adjustments necessary for living in the new system. She describes her reaction to the opening of the wall:

> When the wall was opened, suddenly another world existed which I did not know, which I would have to live in, whether I wanted it or not. There was of course a great curiosity to explore the world, this still exists. On the other hand I had the fear somehow whether I would be capable of making this new world which had just opened to me my own... Maybe there was also some fear that I could not stay any more the same person I had been so far.

Reinecke speaks of curiosity combined with fear; she knows she can no longer remain the same person she has been. The world about her is changing "whether I wanted it or not" and, in turn, so is she. She is interested to learn about this new world, in which she will also become a new self. One has a sense that the transition is not easy for her, but it is not without its attractions. It has forced her to examine her life closely, to pose herself difficult questions, but it has also provided her with the possibility of embarking on a fresh path. This generation has the

opportunity to benefit in the years ahead from the life review which the traumatic change in their society has spurred.

The same cannot be said for their parents' generation. Ruth Reinecke's mother escaped the Nazis, emigrated to France and England, and at the war's end returned to the country where her family had been virtually extinguished. Reinecke describes her mother as "belong[ing] to that generation that only had the consciousness of building up a new and better society." In order to understand the plight of this generation, one must try to go back in time, imagining the horror they had been through and the strength and courage it took to build anew. The East German state always identified itself as the prototypic anti-fascist state (and contrasted itself with West Germany which was, according to this view, the home of fascism.) That its epitaph should draw parallels between really-existing socialism and fascism, both totalitarian states, is one of history's cruel ironies. Throughout the interview, Reinecke returns to reflections on her mother's generation.

> I believe that this older generation is the one which was punished most... To see now that these forty years were 'in vain' that they haven't brought anything ... and the idea of socialist equality could not be applied in practice, this is a bitter experience. ... [They] are very bitter now, and they will be silent for the rest of their years. Their youth, their thoughts, their creativity has been invested in a life which is now nothing... [You say that they were the most punished. Some other people say they were the most responsible. Is it both?] I believe both are right. One thing doesn't exclude the other. I don't mean they are victims, they are of course responsible. [But] it is much better and much nicer if in the end you can say you have worked for something which has brought happiness to people. And now nothing, absolutely nothing has remained.

This most punished and most responsible generation does not have the benefit of the years to come to lessen the severity of the current evaluation of their life's work; in Aristotle's words, they have only memory, and no hope. The effect of life review for many of this generation is paralytic. Ruth continues to describe her mother, who "shares part of the responsibility, myself as well, she helped to construct this country, she worked for this country. And now when she realizes what the country was really like, she became ill to see these developments. [Physically?] Yes. She is unable to say anything at all." She is just another of this generation who "will be silent for the rest of her years." Perhaps unconsciously, Reinecke says "it is so difficult to express this in words." Speechless, this generation is rendered silent - the effect of which others find difficult to verbally articulate.

Ursula Herzberg, who was born in 1912, is not silent, but she is very bitter. She describes her decision to return to Germany at the end of the Second World War.

> It was not easy to take this step for me because I knew what had happened in Germany... I was Jewish and I knew my mother would probably be missing and not be there any more. I had had some experience with the Nazis until I was seventeen... I found it very very difficult emotionally to return to that country voluntarily. But on the other hand we were told by our comrades "who else would be there to reshape Germany and rebuild Germany if it's not these few anti-fascists who survived or came out of concentration camps?" because a majority of the Germans had been with Hitler and supported him... and for that reason I thought it was my duty to return to this country. So I returned...

The theme of bitterness, of a life wasted, of wrong decisions made, runs throughout the conversations with Ursula. "I spent fifty years of my life on the wrong horse... [socialism] doesn't

work the way I thought it would work, you see, it doesn't work, that's why I say I put myself on the wrong horse." Her language here is very interesting, as it weaves together personal responsibility ("I put myself") and chance (the metaphor of horse racing). She continues:

> Bitterness was for a long time my feeling. I was absolutely bitter after these changes. Usually, I thought to myself, my God, you have wasted, absolutely wasted your whole life, fifty years of your life you could have done all sorts of things ...

It is difficult to listen to someone who, nearing the end of their life, comes to the considered conclusion that her years have been wasted, and to resist the temptation to reassure her that all has not been for naught. Yet, is it appropriate, in such a situation, to suggest to the speaker who has the courage to look at her life realistically, that she must accept her life as, to quote Erikson, "something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions" (REF)? Ursula's life did permit substitutions, and no one knows it better than she. She can even picture the road not taken.

> I would never have returned to Germany from England if I had known what was going to happen forty or fifty years later. I certainly would not have returned. I think I could have been a progressive person and worked for progress, wherever, in England or wherever... I certainly wouldn't have gone back to Germany.

Ursula engages in constant life review, which, as the literature predicts, not unusal for someone of her age. However, the results are not particularly satisfying for her; the process seems to bring her more heartache than sense of resolution. Butler argues that

> The most tragic situation is that of the person whose increasing - but only

> partial - insight leads to a sense of total waste: the horrible insight just as one is about to die of feeling that one has never lived, or of seeing oneself realistically as in some sense inadequate (Butler 1963:69).

Indeed, Ursula's situation is tragic, for precisely the reason described here. She realistically evaluates her life as one whose considerable sacrifice and outpouring of effort yielded little positive result. Unlike her son who can use the time ahead to "reintegrate" the past into the future, her world is dominated by memories, not hope.

Even though Ursula asserts that "now, now I have some ideas" and she is "trying to look forward," her stage of life invariably reduces her propensity to plan for the future: "...at my age and ... being retired, I can't do much I don't suppose, but now it's younger people. ... but I am gradually overcoming this feeling of bitterness of having wasted a whole life for nothing. " Ursula refers to generational differences throughout her interview. "People have to learn again, even if they are a little more advanced age, that's not so easy. It's easier for the young ones..." and then again "I can't see a role for myself much really... I am seventy years old now." But she does not lament her age "I'm glad I'm old now, I wouldn't like to be young again... Enough is enough." Although Ursula says she tries to look forward, she does not feel that there is much in front for her, and neither does she wish there were more.

When Ursula says "now, now I have some ideas" her repetition of the word now emphasizes the centrality of time to her thoughts. It is as if the unsaid part of that sentence is the qualifier "but it is too late." This impression is then confirmed when she proceeds to talk about the responsibility of the younger generation. It is now their turn; moreover, she seems almost relieved to pass over the torch. She is tired. It would be

very different if, as Ruth Reinecke points out, this generation felt that their very hard work had resulted in happiness for many people. This, of course, is not how they feel.

Stimulated by the collapse of the society which they have dedicated the bulk of their years to building, life review for many of this generation yields a depressing scorecard. Here the integrated nature of the relationship between individuals and their society is painfully evident; they are not and cannot be distant from the resounding failure which is the appraisal of their lives' creation, their country. They are "most punished" because that is the final analysis of their lives. Younger generations still have a future, they have time to amend those aspects of their lives which they wish were somehow different.

Conclusion

Since the collapse of the East German state nearly five years ago, citizens of that former country explore the meaning of the past, trying to make sense of the forty years of totalitarianism of that which called itself socialism. One of the most dramatic forums for this search has revolved around discussions of the Stasi files. Terms like victims, victimizers, forgiveness and blame are part of daily conversation. Although many people are quite content to point the accusatory finger at others, questioning their involvements, their motivations, their deceits, there are still others who are willing to ask these questions of themselves. For these people, the rigorous processing of the past of their country also entails a personal life review.

Although life review has generally been regarded as an activity not exclusively but primarily associated with the end of the life cycle, such a process can also be stimulated by dramatic change at virtually any time of the life cycle. In the case of East Germans, it

seems that for those persons who have engaged in life review, it is a somewhat more rewarding activity for those who still have a significant portion of their lives in front of them, for they have the gift of time in which they can benefit from, as they apply the lessons of, their self-evaluation.

The oldest generation, they who founded East Germany, are not so fortunate. Life review for many of them yields a very different picture. Ursula's story, full of bitterness directed at both her society and herself, is sadly not an uncommon one. They know that time is not theirs; rather, the dissolution of the country is the last chapter in a life of hard work. That they are "the most responsible" for what has happened does not make their burden any easier.

If processing of the past were to occur as a regular feature of functional societies, not only those which have collapsed, perhaps the perpetuation of tragedy could be avoided. Similarly, though life review tends to occur only in old age, as a summary-exercise of a story which has already been written, if it were to happen with more regularity throughout the life course, there is a greater possibility that the conclusion would be a more satisfying one. The example of East Germany shows that life review for those in their middle years ("forty years behind them and forty years ahead") has had a very different psychological impact than it has for their elders. For them life review does not function as a final verdict but as a tool with which to measure and reevaluate an ongoing process.

If it is desirable that life review - at both the level of the individual and of the society - be a normative (i.e. not crisis-driven) process, is it also possible that it be so? This is much more complicated question, and one which lies beyond the scope of the present inquiry.

Clearly there is a profound relationship between life review and social structure; while it is individuals who do remembering and forgetting, society deeply effects what is memorable and what is not. Many of the respondents in the present study experienced a crisis of identity precisely because the stories they had come to tell about themselves to themselves and to others, were no longer viable. The goal posts had changed, and they were left with broken identities needing to be pieced back together again, not as they once were but rather capable of functioning in the new world in which they now found themselves.

That social control was a most prominent feature of East European societies is well-known. One critical social psychological function of this control was that it prevented reflection on unique attributes of the self, seriously impairing the possibility of life review, at any level. But are we in the west significantly better in this regard? The case for smug triumphalism seems scant. The concept of a systematic national review is completely alien to our culture, and indeed historic museums who attempt to critically evaluate the past have their national funding threatened. There is no word in the English language to identify the process of Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung (and thus one is left with the rather clumsy and inexact "coping with the past"). Individual life review, when it does occur, ushers in "the dying of the light" - true to Butler's original construction of this process as an integral part of the aging, and dying, process. This is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The next step is for us to explore how the critical self-evalutation integral to examination of our personal and national pasts can assist in augmenting our sense of hope for the future. Life review, in both the private and public domain, has the potential to be more than a mere means to generate and store memories of bygone days.

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