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Learning to Live with the Other Germany in the Post-Wall Federal Republic

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LEARNING TO LIVE WITH THE OTHER GERMANY IN THE POST-WALL FEDERAL REPUBLIC



Kathrin Bower

The GDR could not be a foreign country; otherwise we would have run across it at some point. But it was definitely not domestic either. East Germany was so far away that it had disappeared from our map of the world. Not foreign. Not domestic.

—Susanne Leinemann

The ambiguity of the relationship between the two Germanys as neither foreign nor familiar lies at the heart of Susanne Leinemann's 2002 memoir about her experiences coming of age in the Federal Republic during the 1970s and 1980s.¹ Born in 1968 in Hamburg, Leinemann belonged to the generation of Germans for whom the Berlin Wall was at once an unquestioned feature of the German landscape and a barrier that rendered the German Democratic Republic nearly invisible. It was not until Leinemann traveled to East Germany in 1985 to visit her pen pal in Dresden that she began to feel a sense of kinship with the other Germany. She mused over the fact that the encounter with the real people of East Germany, with whom she formed lasting friendships, did not inspire the wish for a unified country, but rather stimulated anger at the injustice of the travel restrictions imposed on East German citizens.² The wall was an impediment to freedom of movement, but the division itself went unquestioned. Although Leinemann's memoir represents only one account from the West German perspective, the general lack of curiosity and indifference she described until her visit to Dresden was characteristic of a majority of West Germans, who had largely made their peace with the division of the country by the

1980s.³ The Federal Republic of the 1980s preferred to characterize itself as a postnational nation, loyal to the principles of the European Economic Community, an alliance that in turn would further help to assuage the nationalist blemishes of the past. East Germany for its part had at last achieved recognition as a sovereign nation on the world stage and continued to emphasize how its founding ideology of antifascist socialism distinguished it in body and spirit from the Federal Republic. While the West German government had modulated earlier rhetoric urging reunification in order to preserve prosperity and peace, the East German government insisted on the division as the basis for its self-definition and *raison d'être*.

Forward into the Past

After forty years of separation, neither the West Germans nor the East Germans were prepared for the impact of reunification. But had the peoples of the two countries developed separate cultural identities to such an extent that the dissolution of the border represented merely the illusion of a return to sociocultural community? Since the collapse of the East German state in 1989 and the subsequent suturing of divided Germany in 1990, scores of books and articles have been published on the economic and political conditions that led inexorably, or less so, to the demise of the GDR, as well as myriad personal accounts by East German citizens describing their ideological and critical distance to the state, their blinkered view of the world, or their cheerful memories of childhood guided by compliant citizenship and populated with the products of *Ostalgie*.⁴ Other accounts by East and West Germans offer perspectives on life after unification and the perceived, real or imagined, differences between *Ossis* and *Wessis* as well as speculation on how long such differences will persist.

It would certainly appear that in the early post-wall years *Ossis* and *Wessis* had become terms of cultural difference designating competing conceptions of "Germanness," ironically undermining the myth of reunification by revealing the otherness within the idealization of *ein Volk*. In the discussion to follow, I will first examine how the two Germanys managed and learned to live with their separation, and will then explore how the lingering effects of those lessons influenced responses to unification. How did the two Germanys define themselves during the years 1949 to 1989? Did the clash of political ideologies and social realities in the FRG and GDR outweigh any shared cultural history? How has the master narrative of the GDR state as an *Unrechtsstaat* (a state *not* based on the rule of law or the constitution) largely dictated by a West German imagination affected relationships between East Germans and West Germans? What steps are necessary

to establish a collective sense of responsibility and engagement with the past in pursuit of a truly unified future in a post-wall, renationalized Federal Republic? To offer some preliminary answers to these questions, I have selected a range of published protocols, memoirs, and essays as a basis for analyzing a variety of perspectives across generational and geographic boundaries in response to unification: Helga Königsdorf's *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* (1995), Daniela Dahn's *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* (1997), Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* (2002), Susanne Leinemann's *Aufgewacht. Mauer weg* (2002), and Claudia Rusch's *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (2003).⁵ Although many more accounts could be considered, works by these five writers already serve to complicate overly simplistic views of East versus West Germans as *Jammeropsis* and *Besserwessis*, while also shedding light on the complexity of the German-German relationship, past and present.

In order to evaluate the impact of 1989 and beyond on the perceptions of *Ossis* and *Wessis*, it is first necessary to look back over the forty years of division and the history of East and West German relations that preceded it. From its very beginnings, the Federal Republic viewed itself as a provisional, partial state that would one day become whole again. When the Soviets issued a note of support for unification in March 1952, however, the conditions were unacceptable to the West German government and its American ally. Without democratic elections in all of Germany, the Americans insisted, there could be no unification or peace agreement.⁶ As the Cold War heated up, it became obvious that the Western Allies and the Soviets would not reconcile their differences on the terms of unification. In the first two decades of its existence, the Federal Republic arrogated to itself the right to speak for Germany as a whole (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*), because it alone had a democratically elected government. In tandem with this assertion of voice, the Federal Republic sought to deter other countries from recognizing the sovereignty of the GDR by refusing to establish diplomatic relations with countries that did so (with the exception of the Soviet Union).⁷ Although West Germany and East Germany signed a basic treaty in 1972 in which each recognized the other country's sovereignty, West Germany tacitly continued to regard itself as the only legitimate German government, evidenced by its policy of automatically granting citizenship to any East German who wished to live in the Federal Republic.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

During four decades of division, each Germany developed images of the other that served as foils. West Germany contrasted its democratic political system and capitalist economy with the socialist dictatorship in East

Germany, while East Germany touted its own antifascist credentials and portrayed the Federal Republic's commitment to capitalist democracy as the continuity of fascism by other means. As a counter to the coupling of West Germany's acceptance into NATO and its rising economy, which could easily absorb reparations payments to the victims of the Holocaust, East Germany's antifascist origin story not only denied shared responsibility for World War II, but also firmly established its moral superiority as the "better" Germany. In this version of history, the line between the two Germanys had miraculously been drawn so as to divide the fascists from the communists, separating them into discrete geographic compartments. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, with its SED label as an antifascist protective bulwark, only reinforced the idea of a demarcation line. The wall itself came to serve as a kind of projection screen for images of the other Germany and as an affirmation of each state's core values. In his 1982 story *Der Mauerspringer*, West German writer Peter Schneider described the wall as a mirror that reflected the Federal Republic's sense of superiority while also obscuring any real interest in what lay beyond it: "the wall became a mirror for the West Germans, telling them day after day who was the fairest in the land. Whether there was life beyond the death strip soon became a matter of interest only to pigeons and cats."⁸ As a mirror for the West's narcissistic satisfaction with its political and economic system, the wall seemed to have only one side, oddly mimicking in reverse the official maps of the GDR capital issued by the East German government, which showed nothing but blank space where the streets of West Berlin should have been.⁹

At once a border and a threshold, the wall symbolized the confrontation between two different ideologies, as well as their mutual mission of repression and denial. In an analysis of the division and subsequent unification of the Federal Republic, political scientist Wolf Wagner noted that the projection of totalitarianism onto the GDR made it easier for the Federal Republic to repress or deny the fascist continuities in its own government, as well as its persecution of communists,¹⁰ while the projection of fascism onto the FRG enabled the Democratic Republic to repress or ignore its own totalitarian tendencies.¹¹ For his part, anthropologist Dominic Boyer portrayed each Germany's projection of negative qualities onto the other as the basis for their symbiotic relationship, noting that for each "the 'truly' forward-looking Germany defined itself in opposition to the backward glance of the other Germany. For each Germany, the other represented the national-cultural past against which its ideal national-futurity could be measured. Neither Germany, in the end, made sense without the other."¹² While consumed with casting aspersions on each other's politics and morality, each Germany studiously disregarded the resistance to fascism in the other, with the exception of the politically

neutral White Rose.¹³ The willful blindness toward morally redemptive activities on both sides of the wall at the state level was offset by an exaggerated indulgence toward the GDR on the part of West German leftists. Whether due to blindness or indulgence, the foundation for such misperceptions resulted from a combination of indifference and ignorance regarding real existing conditions in the GDR.¹⁴

By the mid-1970s, the two Germanys had reached a level of wary coexistence and mutual recognition codified in the basic treaty of 1972, but remained at odds on the issue of unification. For the East German government, the treaty was a vehicle for cementing its identity as a separate state, distinct from the Federal Republic on ideological grounds that precluded any *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* (shared sense of belonging).¹⁵ In a report to the Central Committee of the SED in May 1973, Erich Honecker was adamant that no special relationship existed between the GDR and the FRG, and denied any unity between the two states: "The GDR is not part of the FRG and the FRG is not part of the GDR."¹⁶ The West German government took a more ambivalent course. The Federal Republic continued to see itself as the legitimate representative of the German nation and in a judgment passed by the Federal Constitutional Court in July 1973 affirmed the two-states-one-nation concept, arguing that the "The German Democratic Republic belongs to Germany and cannot be seen as a foreign country in relation to the Federal Republic of Germany."¹⁷

Despite the FRG's official commitment to unification, the two countries increasingly drifted apart, divided by ideological differences, social values, and a deadly border. As time passed, West Germans became less and less interested in unification and had comfortably reconciled themselves to life on the more prosperous side of the wall. In his review of polling data from the mid-1980s, Hans-Georg Betz observed that over half of the West Germans polled between the ages of 14 and 29 regarded East Germans as a separate people and viewed East Germany as a foreign country.¹⁸ Other studies showed that some two-thirds of West German youth had neither interest in nor knowledge of the GDR.¹⁹ It was not until the latter half of the 1980s when reforms swept the eastern bloc countries and Mikhail Gorbachev became a household name that West Germans began to take notice of what was transpiring in the GDR.²⁰

Migration, Revolution, Unification

When Hungary opened its borders to Austria in the summer of 1989, thousands of East Germans took advantage of the opportunity and fled to the West in a wave of mass immigration that would continue unabated

until the GDR officially opened its own borders in November 1989. In a 1997 article published in the now defunct journal *East European Quarterly*, political scientist Peter O'Brien suggested that "migration (or the threat of it) inspired the revolution and determined the collapse of the GDR" and also "set the pace and terms of unification."²¹ While one could argue that the mass defection of East German citizens did not so much inspire the revolution as represent a symptom of the problems with the GDR system, the hemorrhaging of able-bodied and well-trained young citizens was something the state could neither afford nor effectively stop by a show of force. For Daniela Dahn, a GDR writer, intellectual, dissident, and SED party member, the late 1980s represented a moment in GDR history in which the citizens had finally found their voice and the solidarity and strength to express themselves: "Finally it seemed that futility had been vanquished and the age of meaning had dawned."²² The many discussions and forums she attended at that time were inspired by ideas of reform and not by the desire to emulate West Germany. Yet as events unfolded, it became obvious that reform of the derelict East German state was neither politically possible nor economically feasible and unification was seen as the best solution to the crisis.

In August 1990, the GDR and the FRG signed a unification agreement determining that the GDR would be incorporated into the Federal Republic according to article 23 of the Basic Law. On 3 October 1990, the German Democratic Republic together with the majority of its laws and civil institutions ceased to exist. This absorption of the GDR into the Federal Republic gave rise to assertions of colonization and the creation of a subordinate East German class paradoxically transformed into subalterns simultaneous with their recognition as *de jure* citizens of the Federal Republic. Despite their equal citizenship on paper, however, they were not seen as fully committed to the democratic principles of the unified state. In O'Brien's analysis, West Germans viewed both foreigners and East Germans as in need of resocialization "to respect the liberal democratic values of West German political culture."²³ This perception of the East Germans' deficient democratic commitment was contradicted by their actual attitudes, reflected in the results of an Allensbach Institute survey in 1990 that showed East German and West German endorsements of democratic government to be virtually identical.²⁴

The sudden and sweeping erasure of the state that was once their country, combined with widespread prejudices and negative perceptions of life in the GDR held by West Germans, generated a sense of culture shock among East Germans in the expanded Federal Republic. As Wolf Wagner reported in his 2005 *Kulturschock* study, what had previously been normality for East Germans was equated with poverty, while at the same time East

Germans were struggling with pressing, present concerns about their livelihood in a new Germany where they felt humiliated and devalued.²⁵ For some East Germans, it was as if they had become migrants without ever leaving their home. The sense of anomie that followed unification was difficult for many East Germans, while others welcomed the challenges of the transition. Regardless of how successful they were at negotiating life in the unified Federal Republic, almost half of East Germans responding to a 2003 survey reported that they still felt like second-class citizens in the FRG.²⁶

Wende Migrants and German Ausländer

Despite the Federal Republic's implicit recognition of one people, two states, the *Volk* had indeed evolved in different ways as a result of forty years of socialization under oppositional political systems, lending some truth to the popular retort regarding the unification slogan "'We are one people.' 'We are, too.'"²⁷ Building a sense of community to bridge the social and cultural differences that grew out of political division is a slow process and the designations East and West German as well as their more pejorative cousins *Ossi* and *Wessi* persist more than two decades after the so-called *Wende* or unification. As Peter Schneider prophetically predicted in 1982, the wall in people's heads would take much longer to dismantle than the physical wall that had divided the country.²⁸ Public opinion surveys, historical analyses, and sociological studies provide insights into important facets of unification and its effects, but personal accounts offer a more fine-grained and multidimensional perspective that both individualizes and humanizes the lives of respective German others before and after the wall. In the following discussion, I will look at examples of personal accounts by East and West Germans describing their relationships to the GDR state, their sense of identity in postunification Germany, and their perspectives on *Ossis* and *Wessis*: Helga Königsdorf's collection *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* based on interviews with East and West Germans between 1990 and 1995; Daniela Dahn's *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* (1997); Susanne Leinemann's *Aufgewacht. Mauer weg* (2002); Jana Hensel's bestselling *Zonenkinder* of 2002; and Claudia Rusch's alternate version of a GDR childhood in *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* published in 2003.

Helga Königsdorf's collected interviews with East and West Germans provide insights into geographic differences as well as generational ones. As a former citizen of the GDR, Königsdorf enjoyed a successful career as a mathematician and writer. After unification, she made a name for herself as a critical voice on the GDR past and the complexities of the German-German relationship in several collections of stories,

an autobiography, and two volumes of "Protokolle" offering a range of personal impressions on unification: *Adieu DDR* (1990) and *Unterwegs nach Deutschland* (1995). In the foreword to *Adieu DDR*, Königsdorf wrote: "Without changing our location, we enter a foreign land."²⁹ Five years later, she assessed the situation somewhat differently: "Becoming one people was not difficult ... Being one people is more difficult than becoming one. ... Our relationship to history separates us more than it unites us."³⁰ The competing historical narratives constructed to identify and justify the GDR and the FRG continued to exert influence on attitudes and perceptions after unification, complicated by the nearly wholesale rejection of GDR institutions, rituals, and social structure along with its designation as an *Unrechtsstaat*. The undifferentiated dismissal of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* only served to deepen the divide between East and West, described by Konrad Jarausch, Hinrich Seeba, and David Conradt as a binary opposition between the good, liberal, and democratic West Germany and the bad, repressive, and communist former East Germany.³¹ Königsdorf acknowledged that East Germans were tempted to invent new biographies for themselves as an alternative to accepting the negative image of their past that dominated West German perceptions: "And so it happens that everyone has their own truth in the end. The other's truth is painful when it calls one's life into question."³² In that atmosphere of insecurity and rapid change, Königsdorf envisioned her book as an invitation and inspiration to dialogue, especially to those uncomfortable with the pace and dimensions of unification.

Unterwegs nach Deutschland is an apt title for a collection of multiple viewpoints on identity and belonging, concepts of freedom and democracy, future possibilities, and missed opportunities in the transition from divided to united Germany. While Königsdorf's sampling was far from statistically significant, the diversity in responses among older and younger generation East Germans punctured any simplistic arguments about a clear age divide in attitudes toward the GDR and the new, post-wall Germany. One university student interviewed in 1993 claimed that she would always be a product of the GDR and saw no reason to be ashamed of that fact. Yet she also felt abandoned by her parents' generation, who were so absorbed in transforming themselves that they did not take time to address the confusion felt by their children.³³ A young man interviewed in 1990 insisted that the ideals of the revolution had been betrayed and he was concerned about a resurgence of fascism.³⁴ Such concerns are bolstered by views such as those expressed by a nineteen-year-old *Gymnasium* student that right-wing extremism was a strong influence on the young people in his town and that it would have been better to keep Germany divided into two sovereign states.³⁵

Among the older generation of East Germans, there were also a range of views, from those who felt betrayed by the SED government because of the opportunities they missed to those who defended their service and allegiance to the GDR. In some cases, the defense of past actions blended with a supple mindset regarding the conditions for success in united Germany. The experiences of a former Stasi official interviewed for *Adieu DDR* illustrate the opalescence of attitudes not only across and within generations, but also within individuals. Whereas he still felt affinity with the East German state in 1990, by 1993 he claimed to have no identity, except perhaps for a continued sense of being different from West Germans. In a telling statement, he equated his neutral feelings toward West Germans with his attitude toward foreigners in general: "I have never held prejudices towards West Germans. Now I'm going to say something really terrible: just as I've never held prejudices against any other foreigners."³⁶ Despite a common language and a shared cultural heritage in which four decades of separation could be seen as a mere interlude, the sense of estrangement encouraged by division remained.

Hierarchies of Belonging

In contrast to Königsdorf's postunification interviews with a diverse group of informants, Dahn, Leinemann, Hensel, and Rusch focused on their own experiences both before and after unification and used these as bases for more general assertions and assumptions about the state of *Ossi-Wessi* relations. Daniela Dahn's *Westwärts und nicht vergessen: Vom Unbehagen in der Einheit* (1997) combines her reckoning with the process of unification with a critique of the double standard the new Federal Republic applied when reviewing GDR history. Dahn is a journalist, intellectual, writer, and critical voice from the GDR whose discomfort with unification was fueled in part by her resentment towards the devaluation of her past. Spurred by the West German presumption that East Germans are resistant to confronting the effects of a socialist dictatorship on their lives as GDR citizens, Dahn set out to balance the scales by showcasing "the modest advantages of the GDR and the immodest disadvantages of the Federal Republic."³⁷ She rejected the view that critics of the GDR regime could only opt for exile or inner immigration, but acknowledged that dissidence and opposition came with a price:

Not one of us succeeded in being a hero all of the time. We made compromises and paid for our courage to resist with phases of weakness. But the genuine books strengthened the need for civic courage, dignity, and truth. That our

product was a form of sustenance was evidenced by the long lines in front of bookstores and book bazaars. ... Nobody can take that experience of being needed away from me.³⁸

Despite the surveillance, state controls, and socialization practices, Dahn described a vibrant culture of protest and dialogue that nourished the civic courage that enabled the *Wende*.³⁹ Dahn is indignant about the *Doppelmoral* (double standards) she perceives in the Federal Republic's postunification master narrative of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* and the implication that its citizens were complicit in their own oppression. As evidence of the hypocrisy and uncritical self-perception of the West German position, Dahn pointed to the FRG's indulgent treatment of former Nazis who were entitled to state pensions despite their service to a fascist dictatorship.⁴⁰ Dahn did not deny the injustices perpetrated by the GDR regime, but also refused to remain silent about injustices in the Federal Republic's political and social practices, specifically targeting the FRG's persecution of political opponents and dissidents under the auspices of emergency laws and the suppression of critique in the workplace.⁴¹ For Dahn, the nearly exclusive focus on surveillance and the state security apparatus in the GDR actually shored up the status quo in the FRG and represented a kind of colonizing mentality, obstructing progress toward genuine unification.⁴² Most galling for East Germans in this context, Dahn contended, was the West German blindness to the faults and failures of their democratic system, combined with the assumption that East Germans should be grateful for this gift of democracy.⁴³

The West German expectation that East Germans were both unschooled in and uncommitted to democracy is a theme that comes up in other accounts of the *Wende*, and appears to be grounded in preconceptions and ignorance rather than actual experience. In a study on the political culture in united Germany published in 2010, Russell Dalton and Steven Weldon traced the results of surveys from the first two decades following unification and concluded that the majority of East Germans were strong supporters of democratic principles, but with differing expectations for democracy in practice than their West German peers, and on the whole far less satisfied with actually existing democracy in the Federal Republic.⁴⁴ In *Westwärts und nicht vergessen* Daniela Dahn portrayed East Germans as critical, self-aware, and discerning in their engagement with their past as well as the realities of life in the Federal Republic, implying that their views and perceptions were and are both valuable and largely untapped resources for the future of a truly democratic and unified Federal Republic.

As if in response to Dahn's depiction of the possibility and reality of political critique in the GDR and her call for a balanced confrontation

with the past in united Germany, Susanne Leinemann in *Aufgewacht. Mauer weg* painted a negative picture of the official West German publications used for the political education of youth in the mid-1980s, because of their dismissal of any oppositional movements in the GDR and their failure to acknowledge the impact of reforms in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev.⁴⁵ As a result of this one-sided portrayal of the GDR, Leinemann claimed that she and her peers expected GDR citizens to be brainwashed zombies, an expectation that could only be dispelled by actually traveling to East Germany.⁴⁶ When Leinemann spent time with her pen pal's family and friends in Dresden in 1985, she came to understand and appreciate the East Germans as people. Although she initially romanticized the GDR social fabric as more textured, authentic, and direct than that of the FRG,⁴⁷ she also came to recognize its roughness, deficiencies, and inhumanity, particularly evident in accounts of systemic abuse in the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA, National People's Army) training she heard about from her friend Andreas.⁴⁸

In contrast to Leinemann's personal experience of kinship and affinity with her friends in Dresden, the FRG's official attempts to cultivate cross-cultural understanding and a sense of shared national history through youth group safaris into the wild East foundered on preconceptions and stereotypes held by both sides that prevented genuine connections with the realities of life in either Germany.⁴⁹ Leinemann, whose generation of West Germans was considered apolitical, hedonistic, and consumer-oriented, argued that the youth trips organized by the West German government in the late 1980s were not so much attempts at cultural outreach as they were lessons in appreciation for the wealth and opportunities offered by the Federal Republic.⁵⁰ In Leinemann's account, the biggest obstacle for West German youth was not the perceived differences, but rather the striking similarities they observed in their East German peers' desires and attitudes, including a focus on consumption as an element of the good life and disaffection with politics.⁵¹ The similarities were powerful enough for Leinemann to refer to her generation and its counterpart in East Germany as twins,⁵² a familial comparison that ironically vanished once the division was lifted and the two groups had unimpeded views of each other. The relationship with her East German boyfriend Andreas, which Leinemann had cultivated and cherished despite or because of their forced separation, could not survive unification because of mutually disappointed expectations. Reminiscent of Dahn's critique of West German democracy, Andreas channeled his dismay at the rift between his vision of life in the FRG and the reality into relentless criticisms of West German society, which Leinemann countered with petty attacks on his limited cultural experience.⁵³

Looking back at the events of 1989, Leinemann questioned the lack of solidarity and support in West Germany for the East German reform movement and its quest for democratic government. Recalling the human chain East German citizens formed spanning the north-south and east-west axis of the GDR, Leinemann asked herself and her readers why West Germans did not follow suit, not only to show their support with the reformers but also to demonstrate that they understood change was coming to both sides of Germany.⁵⁴ In retrospect, the absence of an echo in the West could be read as political apathy or complacency fed by the sense that the FRG had already achieved the favored state of democracy that East Germans could only aspire to. Leinemann noted that after unification West German politicians assumed the role of victors who looked down upon the East Germans as naïve or as incorrigible socialists.⁵⁵ In addition, East Germans were stigmatized because of their origins according to West German stereotypes: "For us West Germans there was no such thing as a half-GDR citizen. Whoever had been part of it, now had to answer for everything—false antifascism, surveillance state, deformation by socialist education, moral cowardice, bad fashion sense, absent food culture ..."⁵⁶ While readers may take issue with Leinemann's appropriation of a collective voice for West Germans in general and for her generation in particular, her criticisms of official policies and individual practice in the interactions between West Germans and East Germans shed light on political and personal elements of unification affecting both sides.

Like Leinemann, Jana Hensel has a propensity to generalize from her individual experience to that of an entire generation. In her bestselling memoir *Zonenkinder*, published in 2002, Hensel's childhood became "*unsere Kindheit*" (our childhood) and her account is peppered with pronouncements of "*wir haben*" (we have), "*wir wollten*" (we wanted), and "*unsere Eltern*" (our parents) in an uncritical blend of first person singular and plural. Although Hensel has justly been criticized for fabricating a homogeneous generational collective of East German youth,⁵⁷ *Zonenkinder* in its own way attempts to counter the equally homogenized portrayal of life in the GDR as steeped in repression and misery. By recalling the moments of transition, as well as the before and after of unification, Hensel reconstructed a version of the GDR where ideology was subordinate to lived experience. The erasure of *Heimat* (represented by street names, school traditions and curricula, consumer products, and rites of passage) that accompanied unification impacted the lives of East German children and adults. Much of Hensel's book is about the difficulty of reconstructing memories in a landscape where everything that was once familiar has disappeared, causing her to compare her childhood to a museum without a name or address.⁵⁸ Yet, when the wall fell, Hensel

insisted that she and members of her generation quickly adapted to the new conditions and were eager to forget their past.⁵⁹ From Hensel's perspective, the eagerness to adapt was a generational characteristic borne of the desire to be accepted and not be perceived as inferior: "We were the sons and daughters of the losers, made fun of by the victors as proletarians tainted by the odor of totalitarianism and reluctance to work. We did not intend to remain that way."⁶⁰ As a result, Hensel claimed that she and her East German peers became hybrid East-West children,⁶¹ having more in common with their generational cohort in the West than with the generation that preceded them in the East.⁶² Nevertheless, as the first generation whose childhood experiences straddled division and unification, "the first *Wessis* from East Germany,"⁶³ their acceptance as bona fide *Wessis* could only be partial because they did not share the same memories.⁶⁴ The children of the *Zone* referred to in Hensel's title are thus at once hybrids of East and West and products of a space in a state of becoming where they could take charge of their relationship to the past.⁶⁵

Five years older than Jana Hensel, Claudia Rusch completed her secondary schooling in the GDR and characterized her peer group as the last genuine *Ossis*, as well as the first new *Wessis* in the ironically titled collection of tales from her childhood in the GDR, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*.⁶⁶ Unlike Hensel, Rusch grew up in a household opposed to the SED regime and committed to reform (her mother was a close friend of dissident Robert Havemann), guided and guarded by parents who sought to inoculate her against the influence of the state. Although as a child she often wished that she could have fit in better with her peers, in retrospect, Rusch felt she had a privileged childhood because she was aware of the GDR's deficiencies from a young age.⁶⁷ While Hensel's *Zonenkinder* portrayed GDR childhood as one dominated by rituals and consumer products that generated a sense of belonging that went largely unquestioned, Rusch had no interest in contemplating a GDR revival of any kind and rejected the nostalgia for East German products as uncritical sentimentality.⁶⁸ For Rusch, the deprivations she was aware of as a child were countered by the desire to one day become French and live in France.⁶⁹ It was not until the collapse of the GDR that Rusch discovered her loyalty to what one could call the "other" GDR, the human potential to resist the repressive tendencies of the socialist dictatorship and thereby give lie to the stereotype that all East German citizens were conformists and fellow travelers: "We were also the GDR. Not only spies and careerists, but also our families and friends lived here. Not only were those who wanted to press us into their preconceived molds part of this country, but also those who woke us up."⁷⁰

As the daughter of dissident parents who recognized that their child did not have a future in the country they were committed to reforming,

Rusch was torn by conflicting emotions when she learned after the *Wende* that her parents were determined to help her realize her dream of moving to France, even if it meant never seeing her again. Her anger at the state's power over human relationships prevented her from feeling any inclination to either forgive or downplay the crimes committed by the GDR regime, most insidiously its capacity to destroy family life.⁷¹ Reflecting on how her East German biography continued to affect her, despite her sense of liberation after 1989, Rusch admitted that the GDR had not vanished from her consciousness just because the country had ceased to exist, but instead continued to exert its influence over her through what she called "the absence of self-evidence."⁷² This reference to a lack of naturalness or self-evidence even after the fall of the wall represented a condition of alterity that was at once more subtle and more complex than the terms *Ossi* and *Wessi* imply. A sense of self-consciousness inexplicable to West Germans and western Europeans about her freedom of movement and international friendships imbued her psyche, setting her apart from those who had grown up taking mobility and a cosmopolitan worldview for granted.⁷³

Embracing the Inner *Ampelmännchen*?

Taken together, the selections from Helga Königsdorf, Daniela Dahn, Susanne Leinemann, Jana Hensel, and Claudia Rusch offer a far more differentiated picture of East Germany and *Ossi-Wessi* relations than what is conveyed in the equation GDR = *Unrechtsstaat* and the nearly myopic focus on the state security apparatus that predominates in the official stock-taking of the East German past. Although Dahn and Hensel's reminiscences are almost at opposite ends of the spectrum, a divergence that can only in part be explained by their difference in generation (Dahn was born in 1949 and Hensel in 1976), both resented the imbalance in expectations regarding the history of the GDR versus the FRG. For Dahn, it was the FRG's foregrounding of the GDR's injustices without accompanying attention to the flaws in its democratic system both past and present. For Hensel, it was the assumption that the memories and personal biographies of East German citizens were of no interest, and consequently that there was nothing more worth saying about the GDR past.⁷⁴ In both cases, the dominant discourse and perceptions discouraged accounts of normal life in East Germany, which in all of its complexity and banality also included moments of happiness and triumph. In her demand that "We must be allowed to remember the normal, pleasant, and upstanding moments of our earlier life,"⁷⁵ Daniela Dahn expressed the need and desire to balance criticism and self-affirmation, a balance that was

perhaps most closely achieved by Claudia Rusch, whose indefatigable joie de vivre infused the pages of *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*.

Despite the diversity of voices represented in memoirs and essays about life in the GDR, more than two decades after unification the fascination with the East German state security apparatus shows little sign of abating. Films such as *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) have fanned public interest, and the award-winning TV series *Weißensee* broadcast on ARD brought the experiences of a fictional Stasi family in episodes festooned with GDR clichés into German living rooms. The Stasi prisons and archive are tourist attractions and books such as Ruth Hoffmann's *Stasikinder. Aufwachsen im Überwachungsstaat* (2012) serve as companion pieces to stories about the lives of ordinary East German citizens. Historian Mary Fulbrook was an early voice among scholars to criticize the wholesale condemnation of the GDR state and has enjoined Germans of all stripes to embrace a more differentiated and pluralistic view of the divided past that unites them. For Fulbrook, it is "the plurality of debate on values and virtues—without necessarily a scapegoated other as the essential counterpoint" that will allow East and West Germans to establish a shared sense of identity.⁷⁶ The ubiquity of the *Ampelmännchen* at crosswalks or the cultivation of *Ostalgie* through niche markets and the tourist magnet DDR Museum in Berlin do little to offset the prevailing view that equates East Germany with the Stasi. Both representations of the GDR, as a surveillance state and a place of homey nostalgia, deny the multidimensionality of a past that is an integral part of the legacy and national identity of all citizens in today's Federal Republic.

To return to one of the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, what steps are necessary to establish a collective sense of responsibility and engagement with the past in pursuit of a truly unified future? In other words, how can the "Germans" in all of their multiplicity come to recognize and accept their diversity as a core value, and in the particular case of East Germans and West Germans, learn to live with the complex and contradictory experiences and memories of the other Germany? One hopeful example is the initiative *Dritte Generation Ostdeutschland* and its network component *3te Generation Ostdeutschland*, which seeks to harness the experiences and insights of those whose biographies bridge East and West to shape a future that is more attentive to the relationship between personal and political history and more attuned to the responsibilities of the present. The emphasis on *Ostdeutschland* in the title is an intentional effort to recover and unpack the GDR legacy from multiple perspectives in dialogues spanning generations across the new and old *Bundesländer* (German federal states, the "Länder").⁷⁷ In many ways, *3te Generation Ostdeutschland* is a continuation and an expansion of the project that

Helga Königsdorf launched with *Adieu DDR* in 1990, motivated by the belief in the importance of individual stories. The book *Dritte Generation Ost*, published in 2012 with contributions from thirty-three individuals, demonstrated that there are still many stories left to tell, while the *3te Generation* network has created a forum for communication and dialogue. Although the *Dritte Generation Ostdeutschland* initiative is to be applauded for its efforts to celebrate the value of East German experiences and their potential for invigorating the Germany of today and tomorrow, with its backward glance at only one side of a divided country it neglects the work of memory that West Germans must engage in as well regarding the pre-unification FRG. It is the shared commitment to recognize and interrogate the merits, deficiencies, ideals, and hypocrisies of both Germanys that is needed to break through the lingering metaphorical wall between *Ossis* and *Wessis* and thereby bring Germans in all regions of the postunification Federal Republic closer to parity in citizenship even as economic disparities persist.

Notes

1. This note refers to the epigraph that opens the essay. "Die DDR konnte kein Ausland sein, sonst hätten wir sie ja unterwegs mal getroffen. Inland war sie erst recht nicht. Sie lag so fern, daß sie von unserer Weltkarte verschwunden war. Kein Ausland. Kein Inland." All translations from German to English are mine (KB). Susanne Leinemann, *Aufgewacht. Mauer weg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche-Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), 23–4.
2. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 35.
3. In fact, Leinemann's memoir is both unique and unusual as an account by a West German whose friendships with GDR citizens caused her to reflect on her own prejudices and preconceptions, as well as those of her West German cohort, the so-called Generation Golf, known for its political apathy and consumerist orientation.
4. Daniela Dahn and Claudia Rusch are two writers whose works reveal their critical distance to the GDR state, whereas Jana Hensel's bestseller *Zonenkinder* seeks to rehabilitate the mundane pleasures of GDR rituals and consumer products and offset the bleak image of the GDR as an unmitigated surveillance state.
5. The dominance of texts produced by East Germans in this list is at once an attempt to offset the West German master narrative on unification and the GDR state, and evidence of the paucity of memoirs by West Germans about their experiences and relationships in East Germany in the two decades preceding the fall of the wall.
6. Peter Longerich, ed., "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" *Dokumente zur Frage der deutschen Einheit 1800–1990* (Munich: Piper, 1995), 193.
7. From 1955 to 1972, the Federal Republic refused to establish diplomatic relations with any country that recognized the sovereignty of the GDR, with the exception of the Soviet Union. Known as the Hallstein doctrine, this policy created political and economic difficulties for the FRG and was repudiated by the basic treaty between the two

- Germanys in 1972. See also Konrad Jarausch, ed., *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, (Providence/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 45.
8. "Die Mauer wurde den Deutschen im Westen zum Spiegel, der ihnen Tag für Tag sagt, wer der Schönste im Lande ist. Ob es ein Leben gab jenseits des Todesstreifens, interessierte bald nur noch Tauben und Katzen." Peter Schneider, *Der Mauerspringer* (1982; Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 12.
 9. Political science professor Wolf Wagner also characterized the wall as a projection screen for each country's perceived superiority in his 2005 study of unification and its aftermath, *Kulturschock Deutschland – revisited*, where West Germany emphasized its wealth and freedom and East Germany its moral and cultural supremacy. See Wolf Wagner, *Kulturschock Deutschland – revisited 2005*, online version made accessible by author, 2009, 18. <http://www.erato.fh-erfurt.de/so/homepages/wagner/Zuindex/Kulturschock%20Deutschland%202005.pdf>. Accessed 10 March 2014.
 10. Cf. Daniela Dahn, *Westwärts und nicht vergessen. Vom Unbehagen in der Einheit* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997).
 11. Wagner, *Kulturschock*, 50.
 12. Dominic Boyer, "Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 369–70.
 13. See Jarausch, *After Unity*, 125.
 14. Wagner, *Kulturschock*, 52–3.
 15. Cf. Jarausch, *After Unity*, 43.
 16. "Die DDR ist kein Inland der BRD und die BRD kein Inland der DDR." Longerich, "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" 258.
 17. "Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik gehört zu Deutschland und kann im Verhältnis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland nicht als Ausland angesehen werden." Longerich, "Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?" 255.
 18. Hans-Georg Betz, "Perplexed Normalcy: German Identity after Unification" in *Rewriting the German Past*, eds. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1997), 49.
 19. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 22.
 20. Joyce Mushaben, *From Postwar to Post-Wall Generations: Changing Attitudes toward the National Question and NATO in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 100.
 21. Peter O'Brien, "Germany's Newest Aliens: The East Germans," *East European Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1997): 449.
 22. "Endlich schien die Vergeblichkeit besiegt, das Zeitalter der Sinngebung angebrochen." Dahn, *Westwärts*, 11.
 23. O'Brien, "Germany's Newest Aliens," 460.
 24. See Russell Dalton and Steven Weldon, "Germans Divided? Political Culture in a United Germany," *German Politics* 19, no. 1 (2010): 13.
 25. Wagner, *Kulturschock*, 31.
 26. Wagner, *Kulturschock*, 8.
 27. "'Wir sind ein Volk.' 'Wir auch.'" Quoted in Steve Crawshaw, *Easier Fatherland. Germany and the Twenty-First Century* (London: Continuum, 2004), 91.
 28. Schneider, *Mauerspringer*, 110.
 29. "Ohne den Ort zu verändern, gehen wir in die Fremde." Helga Königsdorf, *Adieu DDR. Protokolle eines Abschieds* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 9.
 30. "Ein Volk zu werden war nicht schwer. ... Ein Volk zu sein ist schwieriger, als eins zu werden. ... Unser Umgang mit Geschichte teilt uns mehr, als daß er uns eint." Helga

- Königsdorf, *Unterwegs nach Deutschland. Über die Schwierigkeit, ein Volk zu sein: Protokolle eines Aufbruchs* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 7.
31. Jarausch, *After Unity*, 54.
 32. "So kommt es, daß jeder am Ende seine eigene Wahrheit hat. Die Wahrheit des anderen bereitet ihm Schmerzen, wenn sie sein Leben in Frage stellt." Königsdorf, *Unterwegs*, 8.
 33. Königsdorf, *Unterwegs*, 29.
 34. Königsdorf, *Unterwegs*, 45.
 35. Königsdorf, *Unterwegs*, 52.
 36. "Ich habe gegenüber Westdeutschen noch nie Vorbehalte gehabt. Jetzt sage ich mal was ganz Schlimmes: genauso, wie ich gegenüber anderen Ausländern noch nie Vorbehalte hatte." Königsdorf, *Unterwegs*, 162.
 37. "Die bescheidenen Vorteile der DDR und die unbescheidenen Nachteile der Bundesrepublik." Dahn, *Westwärts*, 10.
 38. "Niemandem von uns ist es gelungen, die ganze Zeit ein Held zu sein. Wir haben Kompromisse gemacht und für den Mut zur Auflehnung mit Phasen der Schwäche bezahlt. Aber die wahrhaftigen Bücher haben das Bedürfnis nach Zivilcourage, Würde und Wahrheit bestärkt. Daß unser Produkt ein *Lebensmittel* war, bezeugten die Schlangen vor den Buchhandlungen und bei Buchbasaren. ... Die Erfahrung, gebraucht worden zu sein, kann mir niemand nehmen." Dahn, *Westwärts*, 23.
 39. Dahn, *Westwärts*, 68. In an essay published in 1997, historian Mary Fulbrook confirmed that subversive activities and civil unrest were more pervasive than had been assumed, but noted that fascist symbols also persisted despite the GDR's official antifascist policy. See Mary Fulbrook, "Reckoning with the Past: Heroes, Victims, and Villains in the History of the German Democratic Republic," in *Rewriting the German Past* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1997), 187.
 40. Dahn, *Westwärts*, 40–1.
 41. Dahn, *Westwärts*, 196.
 42. Dahn, *Westwärts*, 148.
 43. Dahn, *Westwärts*, 191–2.
 44. Dalton and Weldon, "Germans Divided," 15.
 45. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 78.
 46. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 81.
 47. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 27.
 48. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 115–6.
 49. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 86–7.
 50. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 55.
 51. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 93.
 52. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 119.
 53. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 213–4.
 54. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 202.
 55. Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 226.
 56. "Für uns Westdeutsche gab es keine halben DDR-Bürger, wer einmal dabei war, mußte jetzt auch für alles Rede und Antwort stehen – falscher Antifaschismus, Stasi-Staat, Deformation durch sozialistische Erziehung, Duckmäsertum, schlechter Modesgeschmack, fehlende Eßkultur ..." Leinemann, *Aufgewacht*, 238.
 57. In *Geteilte Träume*, Robert Ide objects to Hensel's tendency to collectivize and generalize, arguing that there were significant differences in how individuals responded to life in the GDR depending on their social position, family background, religious and political

- beliefs, and contacts with the West. See Robert Ide, *Geteilte Träume. Meine Eltern, die Wende und ich* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2007), 104–5.
58. Jana Hensel, *Zonenkinder* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002), 25.
 59. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 14.
 60. "Wir waren die Söhne und Töchter der Verlierer, von den Gewinnern als Proletarier bespöttelt, mit dem Geruch von Totalitarismus und Arbeitsscheu behaftet. Wir hatten nicht vor, das länger zu bleiben." Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 73.
 61. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 74.
 62. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 158.
 63. "Die ersten Wessis aus Ostdeutschland." Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 166.
 64. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 26.
 65. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 159.
 66. Claudia Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2003), 101.
 67. Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 35.
 68. Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 88.
 69. Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 68.
 70. "Wir waren auch DDR. Nicht nur Spitzel und Karrieristen, auch unsere Familien und Freunde lebten hier. Nicht nur diejenigen, die uns in ihr Schema pressen wollten, waren ein Teil dieses Landes, sondern auch die, die aus uns wache Köpfe gemacht hatten." Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 100.
 71. Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 134.
 72. "Die Abwesenheit von Selbstverständlichkeit." Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 135.
 73. Rusch, *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, 135.
 74. Hensel, *Zonenkinder*, 133–4.
 75. "Es muß einfach erlaubt sein, sich an die normalen, angenehmen und aufrechten Momente des früheren Lebens zu erinnern," Dahn, *Westwärts*, 26.
 76. Fulbrook, "Reckoning with the Past," 194.
 77. See network website: http://www.dritte-generation-ost.de/3te_generation/faq.html. Accessed 17 June 2014.

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