International Journal of Korean Unification Studies
Vol. 23, No. 1, 2014, 131–150

‘I am wondering that all of us went along’ A Case Study on German Unification

Detlef Garz

The unification of the two German countries in 1989 shattered the politics, the institutions and organizations of both nations, and the entire society in a unique and unprecedented way. This was especially so for the population of the new Eastern federal states — the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). The article presents, on the one hand, results of research carried out in both the western and eastern parts of Germany shortly after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 asking for attitudes in terms of the process of unification. On the other hand, there is a focus on the biographical development of two subjects from the former GDR who were interviewed in the early 1990s and in 2012. In these case studies, (portraits) differences and similarities concerning their life history will be spelled out.

Keywords: West Germany, East Germany, unification, biography, qualitative research, case study

“Until the mid-eighties history had appeared to
have slipped into the crystalline state of ‘posthistoire.’
This was Arnold Gehlen’s term for that curious feeling
that everything is changing, but nothing works anymore.
Rien ne va plus — nothing truly surprising could happen anymore.
Under the dome of systemic constraints,
all possibilities seemed exhausted,
all alternatives frozen,
the available options meaningless.
This mood has since reversed.
History is again in motion, it is accelerating,
it is even overheating.”[1]

1. Jürgen Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe,” *Praxis International* 12, no. 1 (1992): 1.

Introduction

The unification of the two German countries in 1989 shattered the politics, the institutions, the organizations of both nations, and the entire society in a unique and unprecedented way. Shock waves were sent both outwards to the international community, and inwards, influencing the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit* according to Habermas) as well as the everyday life of many people, not only in the East. This powerful course of events also meant major changes for individuals whose life stories were transformed; they had to face new social and political processes and major turning points in their life history. This was especially so for the population of the new Eastern federal states — the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). These trends can still be seen to this day both on the macro scale, in the political and economic field, and on the micro scale, in cultural, social, and psychological arenas. In this year, which marks the 25th anniversary of the year when the wall came down (November 9, 1989), the voices heard in the discussion are even louder.

When we focus on people from the former GDR, there is a very simple, but at the same time profound, question that must be asked in any study which concentrates on biographies in situations of crisis. What do people do whose life has changed in the most dramatic way? How do such people construct and reconstruct their life history when faced with such a dilemma: on the one hand, how to adapt to the new circumstances and, on the other hand, how to remain sincere (truthful) to the history of their life? We will come back to this question in the second part of the paper.

In a very informative and readable article published here in 2010, Hanns Günther Hilpert, a member of the Asia Research Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, attempted not only to compare the German and Korean experiences of a nation divided, but also to highlight analogies and differences between the countries. One of the most striking developments he observed in both Germany and Korea was “the emergence of different identities and mentalities”[2] after 40 and 60 years of division respec-

tively. It is this topic on which I would like to elaborate.

To begin this paper, I present results of research carried out in both the western and eastern parts of Germany shortly after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. This earlier study included 48 subjects who were interviewed for the first time in 1991 / 1992 and for a second time in 1994. 24 interviewees lived in the former GDR, in or near the city of Leipzig, and 24 were living in the former West Germany in or near the city of Oldenburg. We carried out focused and narrative interviews both in 1991 / 1992 and for a second time in 1994.[3] The interviews lasted between forty and sixty minutes; half of the subjects were female and half male.

In 2012, more than 20 years after the initial research, we began an attempt to interview the original 24 subjects from the eastern part of Germany. This task proved and still proves to be rather difficult: some people had died; others have moved to new places where we have not been able to find them; some women subjects have married and changed their names; and so on.

In the first retrospective interview series in 1991 and 1992, the interviewees were asked about those events related to the unification of Germany that were especially significant in their lives. These events

---

2. H. G. Hilpert, "A Comparison of German and Korean Division: Analogies and Differences," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 135.
3. The analysis was carried out, firstly using narrative methods (cf. Fritz Schütze, *Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of the Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews*, INVITE — Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training. Further Educational Curriculum. EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme, 2008, www.biographicalcounselling.com / download / B2.1.pdf. and secondly, with the method of 'objective hermeneutics' following Ulrich Oevermann (cf. Ulrich Oevermann, "Die Methode der Fallrekonstruktion in der Grundlagenforschungsowie der klinischen und pädagogischen Praxis," in Klaus Kraimer (ed.), *Die Fallrekonstruktion* (Frankfurt / M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 58-156; Andreas Wernet, "Hermeneutics and Objective Hermeneutics," in Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), pp. 234-246. The interviews were carried out by Dr. Eveline Luutz (Leipzig) and Dr. Ursula Blömer (Oldenburg), respectively. I would like to thank both of them.

included the so-called Monday demonstrations,[4] the ban on the East German edition of the Russian journal 'Sputnik' that supported the new politics of Mikhail Gorbachev with his policy of Glasnost and Perestroika, and the many charges of vote-rigging that affected the local elections in May 1989.

In the second interview series (1994), the subjects were asked about changes both in their everyday lives and in their philosophy of life since the first interview and for an assessment of the unification processes up to that time. For the third series, which we have just begun, we decided to conduct narrative biographical interviews, meaning that the interviewee is asked to tell her or his life story at full length.

In terms of age, we decided to include subjects who were about sixty, forty and twenty years of age when the Wall came down. The reason for this choice was our belief that these cohorts or generations had experienced a very different way of life which should lead to diversity in terms of biographical development.[5]

What were the results of this first phase of research? The following presentation summarizes the findings. It is arranged in order of West and East German subjects and within this, by age group. We asked respondents to describe their attitudes regarding unification.[6]

---

4. The Monday demonstrations began in Leipzig in September 1989; from there they spread to other cities such as Dresden, Halle and Karl Marx-Stadt among others; they formed an important part of the so-called 'peaceful revolution.'
5. A cohort describes a group of persons within the same age range; in contrast to this definition, a generation means not only a group of persons within the same age range but it implies over and above that these persons share some common experience — such as the European generation of 1914 (i.e. those young men who had to fight in the First World War) or, in North America and Western Europe, the hippie or protest generation of 1968.
6. Dr. Ursula Blömer was a coworker in the early stages of the project. I owe her much.

West German Subjects

Those Born Before 1935: The Older Generation

The generation born around 1935 expressed strong sympathy with the process of unification. This was because most had had a closer connection with the former GDR in their life histories than younger generations. Some of them had even been born in the eastern part of Germany; they might have spent part of their life there, or remained closely connected through friends or relatives with people living there at the time when Germany was divided. Reunification gave them the opportunity to revisit this chapter of their lives and to do so with intensity as they could now, for example, visit their birthplace or their old home. Importantly, this was now 'without problems.' They could also revive or rebuild contacts with friends or relatives.

In thinking about the unification process, parallels were drawn between the past and the present. Comparisons were made between the rebuilding in West Germany after the Second World War and the reconstruction in the new Eastern states, between how West Germany had faced up to the Nazi era and how to deal with the Stasi in the Federal Republic of Germany after 1989. Experiences from the past are linked again and again to problems in the present. One could see that some people kept asking themselves if they had failed or could have done more in the past. However, in general, unification was judged positively and found approval from almost everyone.

30 to 40 Year-olds: The Middle Generation

The most severe polarization was found in the 30 to 40 year age group. On the one hand, this group included strict advocates of unification, who felt that their belief in the free market economy and capitalism as the only system that could have a future had been confirmed. On the other hand, there were the critics, people who did not accept this kind of unification but understood it as a form of annexation of East Germany by the West; some feared a lowering of their living standards

and a general decline of the welfare state following the breakdown of socialism.

In our investigation, the so-called reconstruction helpers (i.e. persons from the West going to the East in order to 'help' — often as civil servants) were drawn, in large part, from this age group. We noted, therefore, that their life stories or biographies were the most affected by the changes. Members of this group benefited from unification on the whole. They not only earned more money (the so-called 'bush-bonus'[7]), but new opportunities and career chances were made available to them to an extent that would not have been possible without the political turnabout. Those subjects whose course in life was not directly affected by the transition also showed a strong interest in the various processes and implications of this historical event — even though this was clearly from the perspective of the observer.

In a few people of this age group, there was a movement towards a transformation in ideological concepts and an existential crisis could be detected. Their views of the world had come under pressure because they were adherents and sometimes advocates of socialist ideas, at least in theory, and had hoped that a better society might develop in the East. This group observed the unification process critically and distanced itself from the "western tendencies of absorption unification."[8]

Those Born After 1968: The Young Generation

In the group born after 1968 we found greater distance from the events, due to a lack of interest in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent transformation processes. This group offered a sober to emotionless evaluation of the results of this historical event. Members

7. In talking about a bush-bonus, there was the implication that the East was some kind of a jungle or wilderness. Sometimes people referring to the East were speaking about the 'Wild East' as an analogy with the 'Wild West' suggesting a state of comparative lawlessness in the years immediately after 1989.
8 One famous exponent of this approach is Günter Grass who voted for a confederation of both states and against unification.

of this age group felt little connection with the former GDR; the GDR was seen by some as a foreign country and their connections with it were for the most part less strong than their connections with neighboring western countries. The first set of interviews revealed that hardly any of them had ambitions to exploit unification as an opportunity for career or politics, for example. Few saw unification as a catalyst for change in their own lives. In the second set of interviews, a slightly greater tendency to show interest in the "other part of Germany" appeared.

Interestingly, it was this group that faced the most major consequences in their life histories from the radical societal change that took place, both in the medium and longer term. Through increased contact between populations in the east and west of Germany, they were confronted with the actual problems of people who had grown up in East Germany as well as their ideological concepts of the world.

East-German Subjects

Those Born Before 1935: The Older Generation

Those people who were 60 years and older had grown up during Fascism; they would have been about twenty years old when the GDR was founded in 1949. In 1989 they were almost at the end of their working lives and probably felt betrayed both by fascism and the politics of so-called 'real socialism.'

The central question for this generation was whether and how they would make use of experiences from earlier events in their life histories to cope with the changes in the present. This group was especially interesting for the study because they had experienced Germany before 1949 as a unified country that was then divided (presumably) against their will. It could therefore be assumed that a strong traditional bond with West Germany as a valuable object had been kept and continually reproduced (for example, in their continuing

experience of separation from friends and relatives, always painful and full of negative emotions).

We can identify this group as the 'generation of reconstruction' that is, the generation who had the task of rebuilding the country after the Second World War; connected with this was the hope for a better 'antifascist and peaceful' Germany. The generation born before 1935 was shaped in its early childhood socialization by the war. From the necessity of building a new country, many in the proletariat or in the petty bourgeoisie were given new opportunities to make better careers. The significance of work or occupation in shaping identity was abetted by the ideological exaggeration of the importance of work in GDR society.

However, not all subjects in this age cohort identified themselves with socialism and tried to do so unconditionally and uncritically; some accepted it as a given fact and lived an apolitical life. The GDR was their homeland, but their real life took place in the private sphere. There was a focus on daily life. For these subjects, radical transition in the GDR provided the opportunity to end the division of Germany that they had endured so painfully. They were pleased about reunification and composed in dealing with the problems resulting from the political transition.

30 to 40 Year-olds: The Middle Generation

This generation was born after the division of Germany and experienced Germany solely as a divided country. The GDR was the *Heimat* or homeland of these East German subjects. One could therefore expect from them a strong emotional and moral rootedness in the GDR and its ideals which would have great potential in forming identify; if this supposition is true, it would be of great importance to understand whether, and in which ways, these identities forged in the GDR were to be transformed by the changes taking place.

This potential for identification was also fed by political developments during this time. The events that were consciously reflected

upon by this generation and which were felt to be significant, included the political unrest in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the end of the Cold War, and the reduction in tensions and widespread diplomatic recognition of the GDR in the mid-1970s. These events and identifications following from them formed this generation through the GDR's life and beyond its fall.

It is also obvious that for this group, their youth had been affected by increasing problems in terms of the political legitimacy of the GDR. The increasing problems of the country were discussed critically, even if cautiously and mainly in opposition circles. Geulen diagnosed this generation as deliberately distancing themselves from the system, but he denied them a radical role with the corresponding individual consequences. He formed the opinion that this generation mourned the loss of the GDR the least.[9]

In our study we found two characteristic (or ideal) types. The first type included subjects who identified themselves very strongly with the GDR and mourned its passing. The setback to their life stories was enormous as their future employment was not secure and they also felt negatively about the general prospects. The second type included subjects who had distanced themselves from the GDR or were in opposition groups and who welcomed reunification and involved themselves in building the new country.

Those Born After 1968: The Young Generation

This generation was born after the building of the Berlin wall in 1961, after the so-called 'Prague Spring' in 1968, and after the West European and North-American student movement and related turmoil. By the same token, most of the economic and cultural indicators within the GDR pointed to a process of societal stagnation and decay, followed

9. D. Geulen, "Typische Sozialisationsverläufe in der DDR. Einige qualitative Befunde über vier Generationen," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 43, B26-27 (1993): 37-44.

by economic decline. For these subjects, we did expected a much weaker identification both with the state and with their parents' views.

This generation had also only experienced Germany as a divided country. Their political experience, however, differed greatly from that of the 30 to 40 year-olds. Other ideological standards than those propagated by the government took hold and spread. There was already a trend towards more individualization in this generation of the GDR. This was accompanied by a retreat from societal affairs, since one no longer saw any chances for personal development in the encrusted social conditions and, consequently, 'identification with the conditions beyond doubt' was barely possible anymore. The fact that a general orientation towards Western values already existed before the political changes made it easier for this generation to adapt to the processes of radical change. Furthermore, individual biographical development, the development of moral character and ego, was not yet complete. Options for completing education and gaining work were open and diverse.

This generation judged the process of the political changes as positive in many respects and saw it as a chance for individual opportunities and as way of opening up future perspectives.

In general it can be said that the autobiographies of citizens of the former GDR showed a high degree of similarity in lifestyle; they were accompanied both in daily life and in the construction of their life stories by a careful and overprotective nanny state. The predictability of the development of one's life and of the future provided these subjects with a feeling of security. But with the radical social changes that came with unification, people in the former GDR could no longer lead their lives in the way they had done in the past; the basis for their way of life had in many cases been removed, either long-term or at least temporarily. They had to correct and alter their individual life plans to take into account new structures and societal conditions. The construction of their biographies had to take into account fresh dimensions such as the fact that with freedom came uncertainty. But the time, lived before the political turning point (the so-called *Wende*),

still had and still has an influence. Traces of the past are found over and over again in the present. The patterns which people had followed became brittle; social networks were torn apart; individual values and ideals were shattered, along with accustomed views of the world. Now, accustomed patterns of thought and action, and the norms and values they were based on, had to be legitimized by reason; what was once taken for granted was now being questioned. Over and above this, individuals had to integrate into their autobiographical concept, new social structures, and political conditions. These conditions were felt at both the micro and the macro level.

Individual life stories changed dramatically and were undermined by collective, historical events. For some people, this included new opportunities, challenges and a positive influence on their lives. Some remained almost totally unaffected, at least at the surface, while others experienced the changes as a fracture of their life story, a negative development.

Two Comparative Case Studies

To explore these different outcomes in some detail, the second part of this article focuses on two selected cases based on interviews which were carried out in 1991 and 1992, in 1994, and, some twenty years later, in 2012. Both interviewees were and are still living in East Germany. The interviewees are, however, differentiated in terms of gender and age. In looking at these two cases, I was especially interested in how their life stories were embedded into societal developments and other collective events.

A Portrait[10] of Frank — "Maybe I have Left There, and Back Then, a Part of My Soul"[11]

Frank was born in 1974 in a period that was marked not only by the 25th anniversary of the GDR but also a supposed stabilization of the system and more or less hidden decay. In 1989, when 'the Wall came down,' he was in his early adolescence. At fifteen, his was an open, undetermined future. At the time of the third interview, he was a department head in a large German company.

Frank's father was a self-employed craftsman and as such, belonged to a very small minority in the former GDR, the self-proclaimed 'first socialist workers' and farmers' state on German soil,' with the explicit aim of fostering workers and peasants in all aspects of life. This also held true for progress in school. Students such as Frank, with a different background, faced many difficulties. His progress through school was not smooth and he was not selected for the '*Erweiterte Oberschule*' (extended secondary school) that was a precondition for admission to continued study. But by the time he reached 14 years in age, Frank had nevertheless simultaneously succeeded in accomplishing three remarkable and contradictory goals. First, he had managed not only

---

10. The concept of portraiture was introduced into biographical research by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann-Davis of *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). "The portraitist is very interested in the single case because she believes that embedded in it the reader will discover resonant universal themes" (p. 14). Later on she says that she "hopes to generate theory, not prove prior theoretical propositions" (p. 186). As a framework for interpretation the paper uses Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985), 297ff; J. S. Bruner, "Life as narrative," *Social Research*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1987), pp. 1-17; J. S. Bruner, "The autobiographical process," *Current Sociology*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1995), pp. 161-177; J. S. Bruner, "A narrative model of self-construction," *Psyke & Logos*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1996), pp. 154-170; Oevermann, "Die Methode…"; Schütze, *Biography*; Anselm Strauss, *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959); Wernet, "Hermeneutics."
11. The quotations are taken from the interview with Frank carried out by Ursula Blömer in 2012, p. 27.

to join the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend), the official socialist youth movement of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of East Germany, but also to become an active member, engaged as an agitator.[12] He also participated in the state sponsored ritual called *Jugendweihe*; a 'youth dedication' or 'youth initiation' ceremony. It was meant to represent an obligatory pledge to socialism and was supposed to replace the Christian rite of confirmation.

Secondly, and in strong contrast, he also was an active member of the Protestant Church working in its youth organization called *Junge Gemeinde* (Young Community) and at the age of 14 he was confirmed.

Thirdly, and in spite of being a member of the FDJ, he also kept in close contact with the opposition movement in East Germany (and especially in his hometown) that was developing in the period before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

What is exceptional about this participation in such very different groups is that it was possible only at that point in time, on the eve of the 1989 revolution. Frank himself comments, "I really enjoyed the time before the wall came down; it was a phase of '*Sturm und Drang*' … when I was fourteen or fifteen, and the world laid down at our feet; we had every freedom; and nobody dared … to intervene."[13]

It is obvious that Frank encountered very special basic societal conditions. He was in the right spot at the right time. If he had been born, let's say, approximately five years earlier, there would have been no options and choices available for him; the GDR with its political regime would have rigorously determined his biographical development. And if he had been born some five years later, unified Germany would have been fully in place and new norms and regulations established. Only the generation born between 1972 and 1977 had this window of opportunity and could really benefit from these specific conditions. Frank grew to adolescence in a kind of moratorium, a

12. Agitator was an official political office for students in schools in the GDR. The person was in charge of communicating the state's point of view; e.g. via wall newspapers.
13. Interview, ibid., p. 12.

period of time in which it was possible to live in both an unordered and a 'protected space.'

In his book 'Outliers,' Malcolm Gladwell provides some striking examples of these turning points in history showing "that it really matters how old you were when that transformation happened."[14] If you were too young, you could not take advantage of that moment; if you were too old, your mind-set was shaped not only by the old paradigm but you were mired in many facets of everyday live such as being already married, having kids, having started a career and so on.[15]

Accordingly, we can state for the record that besides individual disposition and family structure, certain generations are given the opportunity to make a difference. This difference might lead in turn to a biographical path dependency in which every decision taken will be pre-determined by this one major societal incident experienced at a critical age.[16] Given this, what were the implications for Frank in his transition to adulthood?

Generally speaking, in order to live an autonomous life, he had to answer for himself the three basic questions, either explicitly or implicitly, that constitute every human being. These questions are, in the words of Immanuel Kant: "Where do I come from, where am I going, and who am I?"

And Frank, in a contemplative style of thinking, comes close to stating these considerations. In his interview he declares, "I have to ask these questions: Where are you standing now? Who are you? What are the tasks that lie ahead of you? And how do you want to

---

14. Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers*, p. 62.
15. Ibid., p. 62ff. A very impressive discussion provided by Gladwell is that of young Bill Gates and his options in comparison with some older and more settled managers working at IBM at that time.
16. cf. J. Mahoney, "Path dependence in historical sociology," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (2000): 507-548 in general; for biographical research in particular Detlef Garz, "Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Entwicklung aus pfadtheoretischer Perspektive," in Heide von Felden (ed.), *Aktuelle Perspektiven der erziehungswissenschaftlichen Biographieforschung. Theoretische Überlegungen und methodische Differenzierungen* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2008), pp. 47-68.

live your life?"[17] A few sentences later he adds in a pragmatically 'down-to-earth-manner,' "I have to find answers for myself, and I must find them today…. This is a historical fact."[18]

As a result of this particular set of circumstances, Frank was in a position to choose what he wanted to do. As with most people in modern society, he was able but, at the same time, had — in his words: 'today' — to make very concrete and long-lasting decisions in at least three different walks of life.[19] These decisions are: what kind of relationships (e.g. starting a family) I want to have, what kind of occupation I want to take up and, finally, (if and) how I want to serve the common good. In the paragraphs that follow, I will focus primarily on how he dealt with the last issue, and the question of how citizenship is approached.

In telling his story, he frequently refers back to the political dimensions of his biography and it becomes obvious that he knows about the imponderability of life. In talking about the GDR first and unified Germany later, he acknowledges that "I think that I am absolutely a lucky dog that I could experience both" systems.[20]

At present, his general attitude to the former GDR is a relaxed one. "I do not wish to get the GDR back; but neither am I someone who condemns the GDR."[21]

Even if he concedes that living in the GDR was like 'living in two worlds' — "at home, within the family, one could talk openly, but apart from that in school there was something like an official

17. Interview, ibid., p. 22. Another interviewee wraps up his uneasiness with the GDR as follows: "There are three things that bother me: I cannot read what I want, I cannot go where I want, and I cannot say what I want — and related with the last point comes the schizophrenia of what to say in school and what to say at home" (Interview Schimanski 1992, p. 1).
18. Interview, ibid., p. 22.
19. cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Norton & Company 1980); Ulrich Oevermann, "Sozialisation als Prozess der Krisenbewältigung," in Dieter Geulen, Hermann Veith (eds.), *Sozialisationstheorie interdisziplinär. Aktuelle Perspektiven* (Stuttgart: Lucius und Lucius, 2004), pp. 155-183.
20. Interview, p. 18.
21. Ibid., p. 22.

language"[22] — he also points to his upbringing: I have "experienced the pulse of the GDR"[23] and there were some important advantages related to it. In the former GDR, "people were more relaxed, without fear, you went to bed relatively relaxed and next morning it was the same going to work. Today, this is an exception; the rule is to stress yourself … can I do this, can I do that? If you keep that in mind, then you can say that the quality of life was not so bad, leading a happy life was also possible in the GDR — notwithstanding all the disruptions."[24]

Frank sums up his assessment of the former GDR with an example. "You had better remember that. This state resigned without firing one shot at its own people."[25]

So it is no wonder that his summary is balanced: "Not everything was bad; I need not start a new life saying everything before has nothing to do with me. I cannot do this, I do not have to do it, and I need not to do it. Many things I am able to do today I once learned in the GDR."[26]

A Portrait of Renate — "I Merely Wonder that All of us Joined In"[27]

Renate, the female interviewee, was born in 1935. She was ten years old when the Nazi regime collapsed, 14 when the GDR was created; she studied Oriental Archaeology and worked as a reader in a prestigious publishing house. When the Wall came down in 1989, she was 54 and had lived in the GDR through all 40 years of its existence. In 1991, at the age of 56, she was given early retirement.

Renate's father was an engineer; later, he became a university

22. Ibid., p. 2.
23. Ibid., p. 23.
24. Ibid., p. 17.
25. Ibid., p. 19.
26. Ibid., p. 29f.
27. The quotations are taken from the interview with Renate carried out by Ursula Blömer in 2012, p. 49.

professor. As with Frank, Renate had trouble at school. Because her father belonged to the so-called 'intelligentsia,' she was part of a minority which was not favored by the state. In 1949, when the GDR was established, she was fourteen. But in contrast to Frank for whom at this age, many new chances were unfolding, Renate's adolescence coincided with the creation of the GDR. Instead of new avenues opening up, options were being closed. First, she had to fight to be allowed to study at all. Her choice fell on an "orchid subject" as exotic courses are called in Germany; she studied Oriental Archaeology, knowing that under the given circumstances, she would never be able to travel and see the places she was studying. Nevertheless, she was awarded a Ph.D. in 1966 for a thesis on modern Indian painting. But it was hard to get work afterwards. Because of this, she was glad to find a position as a reader in 1969 in one of her minor subjects, the history of art. For the next 21 years she stayed in the publishing company working for a lexicon on the history of arts. In March 1991, after the company was 'reconstructed,' she was fired or, to put it more elegantly, she was given early retirement.

In the following paragraphs, as in the case of Frank, I would like to concentrate on Renate's life story especially in terms of citizenship.

Throughout her years in the GDR (from 1949 to 1989), Renate was never involved in any formal opposition to the state but neither was she easy for the GDR to categorize. By reason of her occupation, she had to meet many foreigners but her more or less private travels also brought her into contact with many non-GDR citizens, something that was perceived by the state with growing uneasiness and distrust.[28]

With all this, it comes as no surprise that the time shortly before and after the Wall came down was something very special in Renate's life. "1989, when we went on the streets, this was for me the most fantastic time of my life."[29] She elaborates on this in her narrative in

28. In a file compiled by the Ministry of State Security (Stasi), the following was put on record. "It is known that the X (sic) is associated with foreign citizens also in her flat. We know about Polish citizens, citizens from the Arab region, and contact persons from the Federal Republic of Germany" [i.e. West Germany].
29. Interview, Ibid., p. 160.

a short emotional outbreak. "After the Wall came down everything changed for me. Everything, everything, everything, everything, everything. For the first time I could say that I had hated the GDR."[30] But then she interrupts herself saying "I don't say this anymore because these days some of my younger friends are living on social welfare."[31]

Nevertheless, there are more advantages that accrued. Let me summarize these points:[32]

- "The second topic is that my outer circumstances have changed in a remarkable way — now I have direct heating in my entire flat."
- "But most of all, I am glad about the intellectual freedom — I can listen to the radio, the radio in the West, without being scared of somebody blowing the whistle."
- "And I traveled like crazy; I traveled even to Hong Kong" — and then she refers to many other places she has visited on vacations in the years since 1989, including cities such as Paris, Amsterdam and Istanbul, and countries such as Portugal, Italy and Morocco.

Notwithstanding the reference to all these positive aspects, in the end, she gives a bitter but more balanced narrative which includes the pros and cons of her life: "That what I had longed for did come: freedom. And then this freedom had spit me out, didn't want me because I was too old. I had lost my job."[33]

Conclusion

There are two points I would like to highlight at the end of this article. First, as a result of the qualitative interviews and the interpretation we have carried out, I have been able to show in a kind of ideal-type manner the differences between age groups as well as the differences with regard to the mindset on the process of unification between East

30. Ibid., p. 103.
31. Ibid.
32. All topics are mentioned, p. 103.
33. Interview, Ibid., p. 110.

and West Germany. The older a person was, the closer the mental bonding with the other country. The biggest differences we encountered were with the younger generation. Whereas many young persons in the West were not interested in politics and events in the East, the opposite was true for many young people in the East. In this group, we found openness and curiosity, amounting to almost uncritical assimilation. Secondly, with the two case studies or portraits, I have tried to give more detailed biographical impressions, in particular to make clear that the specific lifetime in which one lives and the specific events that happen in any lifetime have profound bearings for the individual life. For Frank, almost anything was possible after 1989, for Renate, most life chances were now over. However, one must add that Renate makes the most of the limited chances life has assigned to her.

■ **Article Received: 5/16** ■ **Reviewed: 5/19** ■ **Revised: 6/13** ■ **Accepted: 6/17**

Bibliography

Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Bruner, J. S. "Life as narrative." *Social Research* 54, no. 1 (1987): 11-32.

Bruner, J. S. "The autobiographical process." *Current Sociology* 43, no. 2 (1995): 161-177.

Bruner, J. S. "A narrative model of self-construction." *Psyke & Logos* 17, no. 1 (1996): 154-170.

Erikson, Erik H. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: Norton & Company 1980.

Garz, Detlef. "Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Entwicklung aus pfadtheoretischer Perspektive." in *Aktuelle Perspektiven der erziehungswissenschaftlichen Biographieforschung. Theoretische Überlegungen und methodische Differenzierungen*, edited by Heide von Felden, 47-68. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2008.

Geulen, Dieter. "Typische Sozialisationsverläufe in der DDR. Einige qualitative

Befunde über vier Generationen." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. Vol. 43, B26-27, 1993.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers: The Story of Success*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe." *Praxis International* 12, no. 1 (1992).

Hilpert, H. G. "A Comparison of German and Korean Division: Analogies and Differences." *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 126-156.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

Mahoney, J. "Path dependence in historical sociology." *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4 (2000): 507-548.

Oevermann, Ulrich. "Die Methode der Fallrekonstruktion in der Grundlagenforschung sowie der klinischen und pädagogischen Praxis." in *Die Fallrekonstruktion*, edited by Klaus Kraimer, 58-156. Frankfurt / M.: Suhrkamp, 2000.

Oevermann, Ulrich. "Sozialisation als Prozess der Krisenbewältigung." in *Sozialisationstheorie interdisziplinär. Aktuelle Perspektiven*, edited by Dieter Geulen and Hermann Veith, 155-183. Stuttgart: Lucius und Lucius, 2004.

Schütze, Fritz. "Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of the Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews." INVITE — *Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training*. Further Educational Curriculum.EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme, 2008, www.biographicalcounselling.com / download / B2.1.pdf.

Strauss, Anselm. *Mirrors and Masks: The Search for Identity*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959.

Wernet, Andreas. "Hermeneutics and Objective Hermeneutics." in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, edited by Uwe Flick, 234-246. Los Angeles: Sage, 2014.