

Contested Memories: Divided and United in Berlin

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Social Anthropology**

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I hereby certify that, except when explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the legacy created by the process of unification of the formerly divided city of Berlin. It is a micro study of a local community-based organisation in the East of the city, where primarily local people from East and West Berlin had set up a Neighbourhood Centre, using as their model existing neighbourhood houses in the West of Berlin. This micro-study is located in the context of global and localized processes that contributed decisively to the final collapse of the East German State. The research explores how the often cataclysmic changes and ruptures in their customary life and work affected citizens, especially women, following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent unification with West Germany in 1990. Women played a crucial role in the everyday life and management of the organization in question. Their life stories and experiences inform much of the analysis contained in this thesis. The ethnography consistently involves people's narratives and the transmission of different historical and intergenerational discourses and the comparative views about the previous and the current quality of life under different political and economic systems. The House, in which the Centre is located, reflects the broader history of the region. It was a Jewish Children's Home until 1940 and thus carries the narrative of a past that was both German and Jewish. It continued to serve largely child and adolescent groups in subsequent political systems. Today, that legacy is marked and commemorated and is fundamental to the Centre's aim of contributing to the transmission of memory to younger generations. The research explores how the often cataclysmic changes in customary life styles affected citizens and how they individually and collectively translated their experiences and life stories into 'workable scripts' for the present. The present is frequently framed in relation to the multiple layering of memories and the individual and collective negotiation of disillusionment. Since the Unification has been and is still being acted out in the context of global economic and geopolitical

relationships, the absence of a real consensus about what kind of society people want in the light of their joint and separate experience is an ongoing, interesting and challenging process and again part of a larger discourse.

My own participation in the activities in the House and in the neighbourhood shows how men and women involved in the construction of neighbourhoods and landscapes find themselves far from being victims of history and events beyond their control. Methodologically the participation in a variety of activities was central to the process of research, building relationships, gaining trust and insights into people's different views.

The research demonstrates how personally relevant and engaging relationships built around common goals and needs, can mitigate the frequently traumatising and debilitating effects of rapid transformation. The research also raises questions about the future of such small enterprises in the constantly changing climate of financial constraints.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What we are faced with – what we are living - is the constitution of both ‘group membership’ and individual ‘identity’ out of a dynamically chosen selection of memories, and the constant reshaping, reinvention and reinforcement of those memories as members contest and create the boundaries and the links among themselves (Boyarin 1994:27).

Boyarin’s quote above summarises the relational and political processes I encountered once my ethnographic research in Berlin had begun.

This introduction will first problematize the key theme about the ways in which memories in private, collective and public narratives may be consensual or contested and how the potency of expressed or silent narratives and memories interact with the present and, by implication, the future. I shall outline the reasons for choosing Berlin as a city and then describe the site, its organisational context and location. This will be followed by an outline of the themes addressed in each chapter, followed by a description of the methodology used to gain evidence and a discussion of its limitations as well as the ethical considerations adhered to.

Memory and its vicissitudes

I embarked on my research with the intention of finding out how people in East and West Germany dealt with the transmission of memories through the trajectory of narratives, in public or private commemorations, through silence or oppositional practices, peacefully or violently. In the context of German history and, in particular, the more recent collapse of the entire state system, which resulted in the unification of Germany, this is a broad field to enter in order to understand how the memories of the past forty years might still affect

people's lives. I was aware of divided and contradictory opinions about the process of unification and interpretations about the past. It seemed a natural and 'transitional' consequence of a momentous coming together after forty years of separation and huge costs in both human and financial terms. West German friends and relations assumed that any lingering resentments or 'ostalgia' (see glossary) would melt into the new and now re-united whole of a restored German nationhood. Once I arrived in 2006, however, I soon realised that these widespread assumptions in West Germany as well as the seemingly 'stubborn persistence' (Eigensinn) of East Germans in retaining their separate identity constituted a still shifting and deeply contested background to the research.

More focussed questions clearly needed to be asked of people who were still experiencing changes that had proved far more dramatic and complex than anyone had foreseen. Questions needed to be directed at what these changes had generated for people in terms of their memories of loss as well as gain, of sentiments, energies, hopes and disappointments.

Memories of embodied experiences linked to collective memories of being in a certain state or group and memories connected to historical events are, as is known, frequently interrelated but not necessarily the same (Bloch 1989; Olick 2007). Although memories are generally constructed socially and contextually, the act of remembering is an individual capacity, a practice closely interrelated with external, contextual influences (Lambek 2007:201).

The production of what is referred to as 'collective' memory is a manifestation of personal, social memories connected through signs, symbols, language; semantic codes re-coded within social groups to differentiate them from others. Halbwachs (1950/80) has probably most clearly identified what might be construed as 'collective memory' by locating memories in their social and spatial context, looking not at cause and effect but at what is 'meaningful' in a given context. Connerton, building on Halbwachs' work, has extended the concept to include what he defined as social 'memory-habits', the repeated enactment of myths and symbols, which constitute 'reservoirs of meaning'

(Connerton 1989:56) that are transferred through kinship narratives, rituals, commemorations and other habit enhancing practices. Connerton cites the example of the powerful, repetitive ritual of religious liturgies binding different Jewish tribes, for instance (1989:45); the ritual chanting and repetitive sequence of the Christian Mass is another. ‘Symbolical representations’, such as the Trooping of the Colour in the UK or the journey of the Olympic Flame are performed to touch deeply lodged sentiments in the individual and the collective consciousness (Connerton 1989: 38-40). Such rituals can, however, also instil a sense of clannish belonging, especially if rallied around the fear of putative ‘others’ (Douglas 1999); some scholars have mentioned this factor in the context of unexpected xenophobic hostilities and physical attacks on immigrants in the East of the former GDR (see Chapter 6).

Olick, writing on the politics of regret, examines the ‘history of collective memory’ in the specific context of German transitions after WWII (Olick 2007) and focuses on the taboos and transgressions associated with Nazi Germany (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 6). ‘Realms of memory’, as conceptualised by Nora, (1989) refer to points of reference, often spatial, where memories can be ‘elicited, reinforced or produced’ (Carsten 2007:3). Such sites, especially if they are official and designed to carry a message, create and re-enforce meaning, convey consciousness of identity, of national belonging, of suffering, of liberation. Cities, as we know from the works by Huyssen (2003), Young (1993) and Till (2005), are often the prime sites for such public statements of state ideology, enacting official priorities and national aspirations, but also political statements: the large memorial in Treptow cemetery in the former East of Berlin, for instance, erected ‘to the eternal glory’ of the thousands of Red Army Soldiers who lost their lives in the battle for the liberation of Berlin and ‘for the freedom and independence of the Soviet Union’ in WWII, is a massive, triumphal statement against fascism. It follows in the tradition of commemoration and identification of sacrifice in a national and liberating cause.

The equally monumental though quite differently conceptualised memorial to the European Jews, who died as a result of Hitler's extermination policies, is in the centre of the united Berlin. Designed by the Jewish architect Eisenman, it was opened in 2005 and has become a unique memorial to German nationalist crimes. These two monuments denote quite different, politically inspired approaches to memorialisation: The traditional monument evokes the immense loss of lives in the name of a national cause, depicting not only the statue of a hero but also tanks as instruments of war and superior engineering. The other monument, which, in its abstract form and dedication, was hotly contested for years, proclaims national responsibility for committing genocide. It does not commemorate, as Eisenman stated, something that happened in the past but is a memorial to the continuing memory of what must not be forgotten¹. The monument evokes visceral sensations of spatial disorientation, of isolation and profound unease. But it is also a space in which to be – especially for those who do not know what it signifies.

The 'politics of memory', as expressed in cities through voids (Huysen 2003), buildings and memorials (Young 1993), and the bitter feelings these can generate (Till 2005) emerged as part of the ethnography and were present in the debates about who or what was being monumentalised in every case, as illustrated in Chapter 2. As far as the Holocaust Memorial is concerned, it is a reminder of a 'fractured memory', its siting in the middle of the capital remains problematical, especially for the people of both Germanies who have different memories of their respective histories. According to Habermas, "the break in the continuity of our sustaining traditions is the precondition for recovering our self- respect" (Habermas 2003:40); his is a stark warning against any attempts at trying to re-establish a semblance of continuity in German

¹ 'www.holocaustmemorial.de, 2010:' Auschwitz' as a global symbolic concept has since come to stand for oppression, persecution and ethnic cleansing (Habermas 1996). The Stockholm Holocaust Conference in 2000 is now considered the origin of an official, European memory and the start of a transnational cooperation in Holocaust memory.

history, as has been variously suggested in the wake of unification and the reinstatement of Berlin, as capital of the Federal Republic.

Berlin as modern conundrum

In the context of rebuilding the ‘new’ and united Berlin, the politics of memory about the recent past were competing with visions about the future and the retrieval of a more glorious past. The capital of the United Federal Republic, elected to assume its former function in 1991, also became a city that aspired to act as a ‘bridge’ between East and West in Europe (Binder et al. 2004) rather than compete with other German cities which had occupied the spaces for centres of excellence in finance, industry or international communication (Eckardt 2004)². In its role as capital for the united Germany the city, or rather its administration and citizens, strove to convey a forward-looking image, where the past would nevertheless be remembered and acknowledged. The Wall, which acquired its present iconic status only after its demolition and the sale of small segments as objects of art or memorabilia, is now commemorated in a variety of sites, representing a ‘negative’ and also contested heritage of Berlin’s history by eliciting differing accounts and representations (Binder 2005). At the Mauer Museum, for instance, the predominant view or representation is from West to the East rather than showing perspectives from both sides as discussed in Chapter 2.

Heated debates and a government enquiry also surrounded the rebuilding of the old imperial palace in the space left by the demolished communist ‘Palast der Republik’ or ‘Palace of the Republic’. This symbol to communist culture and society once stood in the prestigious site close to the Berlin cathedral and the ‘Museumsinsel’ or island of museums. Its demolition, ostensibly because of its damaging asbestos content, became the subject of deeply divided public

² Eckardt examined Berlin’s Future for a conference in Chicago in July 2004 and found that its future role was still evolving since most of the important functions amongst competing cities had already been occupied by others (2004, conference paper July 8-10).

opinions across the city between those who were for and against this exchange of symbolic ‘palaces’.

According to Prof. Frierl, a well-known East German architect at the centre of many of these debates, the iconic status of the demolished people’s palace, first as memorial to the cultural politics of the GDR and after 1989, as space for contemporary and ‘avant guard’ art, was compromised in the process of its demolition. The decision to replace it with a replica of the old imperial palace of no particular architectural merit was, in his view, short sighted and wasteful since no firm plans had yet been formulated about the use of this space (Frierl lecture, January 2010).

The renovation and reconstruction of neglected areas of the former GDR city, such as the area of Prenzlauer Berg, (see Chapters 3 & 4), also attracted controversies. Much of the old building stock had been preserved and the ‘cautious urban regeneration politics’, for which Berlin had become famous during the eighties (Till 2004), were to be employed there too. Yet the plans were at least partially usurped by private investors and speculators, who disregarded civil society movements, and excluded local objectors, as discussed by Haeussermann et al., (2002) in their study of Berlin’s housing policy.

More nuanced images had to be extracted from these manifold ‘contests’, not only between East and West, but between contemporary opinions in the public domain. Many voices tried to come to terms with the multi-faceted legacy of unification and the aftermath of bringing two unequal societies under the umbrella of one government. It is not surprising that societies shaped by very different political systems and divided by still chronic imbalances of power and economic efficiency continue to raise questions about the delay of a discernible ‘inner unity’.

In order to understand this prolonged process of transformation, it was important for me to identify the discreet but not static pieces of an overall picture that would convey an impression of a place in time in the centre of the now unified city of Berlin. This image is also intended as a contribution to the

anthropological body of work, which shows how a local ethnographic micro study at a particular time reflects and highlights aspects of much larger contemporary historical and socio-cultural themes, posing questions that cannot necessarily be answered but can highlight areas of further exploration.

A place or space, preferably in the former East, had to be found, where I could gain a better insight into people's views and ideas about unification, about how their pasts interacted with the present and their future. It became increasingly clear that the main research needed to focus on what had happened in the East as it was here that I came across new beginnings and new aspirations as well as a good deal of resentment about the process of unification. The site I found, and which is described below, was located in a district close to the centre of East Berlin. It had its own particular character as a bohemian and quirky district filled with dissident intellectuals and artisans. Before describing the details of this site and its characteristics, however, I need to give some context to the political background and the debates about the GDR as a 'vanished system' that continues to pose riddles and puzzles.

In 2006, most of the transformative structural processes of the 'Wende' or 'turn' from the previous Marxist-Leninist and so-called 'post-totalitarian' German Democratic Republic (GDR) had been concluded but had not resulted in the hoped-for inner unity of the two former states. Why was this so? Sabrow, the editor of an extensive volume on 'sites of memory' in the GDR, departs somewhat from Nora's concept, mentioned above and in Chapter 2, by recognizing the relational and temporal 'figuration' of memories in spatial mnemonic landscapes or fields (Sabrow 2009:18/19). These fields, as Olick also suggests, are extremely complex and multi-layered, they are represented in different activities such as festivals, public anniversaries, in monuments, art or photography, in museums, archives or film, eliciting emotional and cognitive responses, scrutiny of authenticity, of truth and justice. Such divisions are to be considered as 'fluid and provisional' but nevertheless explain how memories can be triggered and how and for what purpose they are employed in the

representational media (Olick 2008: 100)³. Sabrow identifies such major ‘areas of memory’ in the context of unification, which only appeared, it seems, in the wake of unification and the total dismantling of the former system (Sabrow 2009:11-27)⁴. The data and the narratives I gathered in Berlin over time were not categorised in any way initially, but later appeared to merge into patterns or fields of enquiry that loosely correspond to those outlined by Olick and Sabrow. I have considered them in three categories but suggest that they tend to overlap and merge.

Fields of Memory

The first group is the memory of the GDR as a ‘totalitarian dictatorship’. This association is still fiercely contested and analysed: East German dissidents compare the system to Hitler’s Third Reich and defend this on the basis of Hannah Arendt’s work on totalitarianism and its definition⁵. They fear a potential trivialization of the former police state in reports and discussions designed to represent former the GDR to future generations. This will be discussed in Chapter 2. Others favoured the descriptive title of ‘post-totalitarian system’ (Schroeder 2000; Kocka 1998), in order to distinguish the more liberal but still ‘total surveillance’ state in the GDR of the 1970s and 1980s from the Stalinist USSR of the 1950s, which had superimposed its political and economic system onto the occupied territories of East Germany from 1945 onwards. The enforced socialist revolution with its radical structural changes in ownership and land reforms triggered a rebellion by East German workers in the uprising of 1953, which was brutally squashed with the help of Soviet

³ Olick’s typology of social memory fields relates to the representation of the past in the media. He names four associated criteria: Emotionality, Authenticity, Truth, Justice (Political- Moral) which are each mediated through different functions and in different situations.

⁴Sabrow names memories associated with the dictatorship, those that are linked to loss and nostalgia and those he ascribed to memories of daily life in the GDR as broad categories that overlap and are not always easily distinguishable.

troops (Dennis & Kolinski 2004)⁶. Between 1949 and 1961 about 2.7 million people had, apparently, fled to the West through the still open border in Berlin. This drain on a skilled workforce resulted in the final sealing off and the building of the Wall during the night of 12th August 1961, again with the help of the Soviet military. This Wall also 'sealed' the final separation of East Germany from the West. It reduced the numbers of people fleeing to the West to a small trickle, and opened the process of a gradual but inexorable estrangement between the two societies (Moeller 2008:21), despite strenuous efforts to keep contacts and communication open.

The Wall as symbol of repression for the West and of survival for the East German Government, became the focus of opposing interpretations that have survived: for victims the Wall will always be a symbol of total repression and imprisonment. For others, it came to be regarded as symbol of defence against fascist aggression, imperialist propaganda and for inner peace and security (Detjen 2009:389-402). In the course of time the populations (as opposed to the governments) on both sides of the Wall came to accept it as a material reality and enforced separation between two systems that each placed lethal weapons on each side of the Wall designating the border areas as potential battlefields. The division created in time many myths and stories about the other side, and the entangled relationships at different levels.

The second group of memories is associated with the practice of 'accommodation to' or 'arrangement with' the regime. These practices might be seen as belonging to the broad category of 'building social capital' in the literature (Port 2010, Lampland 2007, Putnam 1996); they became quite marked, developing their own rhythms' and time scales; (beautifully captured in the descriptions of shop floor behaviour by the writer Christa Wolf, for instance), that did not necessarily end with the demise of the GDR State. In the case of the Soviet Union the memories of such practices or habits were a

⁶ The East German Uprising was an important landmark in the new communist state – see chronology Appendix

largely a consequence of living under an oppressive and persecutory system: informal links between the functionaries of the communist state and its citizens needed to be forged in order to cope with ordinary life, not least with continuing kinship relations across the sealed border. The practice also included maintaining reciprocal and informal links for the purpose of obtaining goods or services, using limited resources creatively often entailing help from others on the understanding that a return favour could be counted on. According to Port and his study in the town of Saale, such 'niches of solidarity' or practices in what he called the 'second economy' flourished and, in his view, explained the lack of any larger groups of resistance against the state (Port 2010, 353; Lampland 2007).

The third field of memories relate to former achievements: These memories appeared to emerge more clearly as personal and collective insecurities in the new post-socialist, neo-liberal democracy grew and unemployment reached phenomenal proportions⁷. The depressed self-image of many East Germans required restoration, their memories of former successes and of socialist core values seemed to have been challenged by the new rules of individualism and capitalism. Attempts to regain self-confidence and a sense of self-worth were often dampened or destroyed by sharp criticism elicited by the application of western values, with an implied criticism of an assumed superiority. I heard this especially from younger people, who told me about the values and achievements in their parents' lives compared with what they experienced in the present; I listened to similar discussions during a conference which I attended, where participants undertook writing workshops in order to reconnect with their past. Several spoke about their first encounters with western colleagues which had left them feeling devalued and diminished by the lack of interest in their work and their experience. Not included in these

⁷ These sentiments and longings for what had been lost were quickly exploited by the wave of Nostalgia for East German goods and products, beautifully described in the film of 'Goodbye Lenin' and by Berdahl and others in the collection of ethnographies 'on the Social Life of Postsocialism(2010).

subjective memories and comments are the inevitable distortions created by embedded memories, especially those with an emotional content. An East German taxi driver summed up one striking difference between then and the present: “If we mended fences round out houses in GDR times everyone would have asked where we found the material. These days they’d ask why we did not use better material to build a fence. etween two systems that each placed lethal weapons on each side of the Wall, designating the border areas as potential battlefields. The division created in time many myths and stories about the other side, and the entangled relationships at different levels.

We know from research that part of this restorative work is a reflexive, critical stance towards the present and a sifting of memories that are effectively measured by standards of the present. In the long run, wrote Kielmansegg in 1992

it may well be that their unique experience with totalitarian dictatorship will enable the East Germans to make a significant contribution to a democratic political culture in Germany.... but not until they have been able to deal with their perplexity and confusion (Kielmansegg 1992:188).

The perplexity and confusion is not surprising if one remembers that the GDR was once considered by Dahrendorf and others as the ‘first modern society on German soil’ with a modern form of ‘totalitarian’ substance, as stated by Dennis & Kolinsky (2004:28). In contrast to the post-war conservative system in West Germany during the fifties, modelled on western democracies and capitalist market economies, the GDR had achieved dramatic and organisational changes during its transformation into a communist system, as discussed in Chapter 5. Laws on women’s equality, laws on abortion - heavily debated on both sides of the Iron Curtain at the time - gave women greater

control over their bodies⁸. Protection from unemployment, liberal legislation on divorce and good opportunities for vocational education as well as adequate provisions for child care and welfare enabled women to join the workforce, compared with the West during the post-war years, and to become part of the work-based social network which had such a crucial role in socialist societies (Thelen 2009, Pine 2007). Women in the GDR acquired a reputation for being keen on wanting employment, even if they rarely matched the numbers of male positions at the top of organisations or in academia (Kolinsky 2004). The memory of having once been considered superior to the West in morality, equality and justice was badly shaken when the extent of corruption and deceit by SED Party leaders and their supporters was revealed in 1990. The same notions were further damaged in countless ways by the insensitive and often ignorant behaviour in which those who thought they knew better, mostly from the West, railroaded over existing skills and knowledge, ignoring local values and experience (Niethammer 2009).

It would be wrong to paint a picture of a deceived people; several studies have shown how the process of finding ‘accommodation’ within a ruthless system not only restores degrees of self-respect and hope for the future, but can also be understood as a form of tacit resistance (Ash 1997). It can lead to corruption and enterprise amongst the like-minded (Humphry 2002). Paradoxically, as several scholars have shown, such overt or *sub jucice* dealings between the state and its citizens lead to complicity, maintenance of the status quo and stagnation, as Port showed in his study of an industrial town in former East Germany (Port 2010; Fulbrook 2009).

External factors had to intervene in order to topple the dictatorship, factors beyond and exogenous to the control of the SED regime, which was too deeply entrenched in its own complicity. There is an extensive literature which deals

⁸ This law was rescinded after unification. Michael Schwartz details the lively debate between both countries across the Iron Curtain in 1972 (2008:183)

with the various aspects of the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellite states, referred to in Chapter 2. The following chapters will focus on the production of different practices that retrieve and defend this increasingly distant landscape of a vanishing past in the process of going forward. In my view these fields of 'contested memories', this battle of retrieving and valuing what is also described as a 'site of projection' (Sabrow 2009:20), is an important 'work-out', the beginning of planning for the future. Such re-collecting creates images that retain an authentic quality of social life in the GDR for those who still remember, it preserves values and dignity of past lives that can be passed to future generations and on which new frameworks can be built.

'Last Orders'

Prior to the Fall of the Wall, which had occurred almost by accident, there had been moves to liberalise GDR travel conditions for some time. When Hungary opened its border to Austria in May 1989, thousands of East Germans took to the road in order to reach West Germany, causing consternation and emergency measures in both, East and West Germany. Between August 1989 and November 9th 225,233 people left the country. The Central Committee (ZK) found itself forced to issue exit permits under pressure from below which included the permission to return (Horn 1999:56-57). One could see long lines of 'Trabies', the notorious East German car, waiting at crossing points. An exhibition about the unification in the German Historical Museum in Berlin (2010), shows refugees from the GDR being accommodated in make-shift shelters in schools and public baths as far west as the Saarland; locals in West Germany, who could be heard in recorded interviews, feared invasions of these 'others' with their strange clothes, their bad haircuts and willingness to live in makeshift camps⁹. Demonstrations for greater freedom alternated with voices of caution, underscored by fear based on past experiences in Germany, Prague,

⁹ The exhibition at the German Historical Museum in Berlin offers a predominately 'Western' perception of the Wende, drawing on Western news reels, reportage but also a number of contemporary witness reports and recorded speeches.

Hungary and Tiananmen Square in China. Some commentators warned that greater proximity and physical closeness to the sibling state might challenge years of well-oiled political moves on both sides to keep a respectful distance at government level. The architects of the 'Ost-Politik' or politics towards the East, Willie Brandt and Egon Bahr, had designed the scaffolding for a mutual and increasingly respectful co-existence in the seventies; they had attempted to maintain a metaphorical proximity through economic and social deals, such as the buying of political prisoners in the GDR for hard cash, or through heavily subsidised trade agreements, that tended to keep up the veneer of a successful economy in the East (Fulbrook 2009). Yet the political distance between the two states had widened in the wake of the politics of détente, which followed the Helsinki agreements and a change in the politics of national defence¹⁰.

The seventies and eighties also introduced other global changes in new micro and information technologies which forced 'post-fordist' seismic changes in the production and delivery process of traditional heavy industries, which had been so successful in Russia, the cradle of Marxist/Leninist ideology. The GDR leadership had been slow in recognizing and admitting its failure to adapt its economy and its production to globally dictated condition as Leonard described so vividly (2007). The political climate of relinquishing control over the member states of the Soviet Union created by Gorbachov and the pressure applied by the exodus of German people eventually forced the SED government into taking measures to debate a drastic shift in its policies. According to the historian Wirsching one of these debates took place on November 9th 1989, at the same time as it was decided to ease the issue of travel permits to the West (Wirsching 2009:357-374). The rumour that people

¹⁰ The Helsinki Accords were a major attempt to ensure peace and greater cooperation between Northern Alliances from East and West, concluded and signed in 1975 (Helsinki 1975). The Accords, which were mainly known for their agreement on non-proliferation of nuclear arms, became one of the tools in the effective undermining of the infringements of Human Rights and environmental pollution employed by the West against Soviet countries but also by dissents within these countries against the dictatorships within the Soviet Empire (Ash, 1994:216-298).

could now travel freely was leaked and spread like wild fire, before the actual decisions were published. The Wall fell during the night of 9th November.

Was this a revolution?

Habermas (2004), the critical philosopher and close observer of Germany's constitutional democracy, is one of several commentators who doubted that what he called the 'exit revolution' was, in fact a genuine mandated revolution since there were no 'counter organisations standing by' or clear visions for the future (1994:43). The jury is still out as to whether what happened in the autumn of 1989 was a revolution or a rebellion, or a defining moment in a series of processual changes, as proposed by Szmere in relation to Hungary (2003). For the historian Peter Bender and others, who witnessed the events in the summer and autumn 1989, there is no doubt, however, that what happened was revolutionary and unique in German history: 'no power in the world could have halted that movement' (Bender 1999:83). The demonstrations by candle light, the dismantling of public icons and their highly ritualistic and symbolic significance in cities, at high spots of increasing and organised protest actions, attracted world-wide media attention and increased the tension surrounding these protests. The 'defining moment', writes Arendt about revolutions, 'is the active involvement of people'. In 1989 crowds of people stood or walked peacefully and repeatedly in streets, holding candles, some in fear, others defiantly, demanding freedom from oppression and corruption, 'acting together for a common aim' (Arendt 1963/65:267). There is little doubt that history was produced during those days and weeks in East Germany and where, as Lass described in relation to events in Prague in 1989, those not present achieved presence through being involved in the narratives of events that acquired historical significance through the telling and the act of remembering (Lass 1994).

The Consequences: winners and losers

During the two years of my research I became aware of fairly persistent, and in some instances, growing resentment about the traumatic ruptures, the individual and collective losses of whole communities, which had followed unification. The wholesale rationalisation of industries, businesses and agricultural enterprises in order to create viable – or sometimes not so viable – new organisations, demanded huge sacrifices, entailed loss of status, self-esteem and identity, similar to the experience in other post socialist states, as will be discussed in the following chapters. This speed of change appeared to be primarily driven by the interest of investors, by those who had been economically more successful. But collectively ‘the revolution’ experienced by every East German was now driven by the ‘other, more successful sibling’, the former rival on the international stage, as Ash has pointed out (1994:372), although few in West Germany would have thought of themselves as either rivals or as equals on the international stage.

By 2006 people had clearer perspectives of what they had gained as well as what they had lost. The advantages of the much heralded ‘democracy’ seemed still elusive to many. There was no doubt, that, with few exceptions, the people I met and those whose opinion I read or heard, did not want the old system back. They had got rid of it after all and had won valuable but often only hypothetical freedoms, as discussed in Chapters 3, 4 & 5. Many people in East as well as in West Germany were by no means happy with the new arrangements that followed unification: in the East they felt uneasy about broken promises by the former conservative government of attaining levels of prosperity akin to those enjoyed in the West. The West of Germany felt frustrated at the continuing cost of unification and the slow progress in the new states. The poorer regions in the whole of Germany wanted additional funding in order to survive the rapidly growing cost of living and

commensurate expectations to meet these¹¹ (Conference in Glauchau, June 2007). According to Thierse, (2000) the federal commitment to support the 'new' states until 2019, is a security but also a red rag to West German bullish competitors and investors, who urgently want the East to become economically more productive.

The past as future: Questions for research

Why did I choose this subject and this particular location for my continuing research in Germany which began with my MA dissertation about the Post-War II study into the silence after the war? I had grown up during the forties and fifties in West Germany, acutely aware that silences surrounded questions about this War and the atrocities that happened. As a child we had lived close to the then East German border, knew of those 'others over there' whom we could not visit and did not know although some, we were told, were relatives. I left Germany as a young adult before the Wall was built to live in England. The East of Germany had always remained unknown territory for me without any of the personal connections that many other Germans had maintained. I had learnt, however, that there were substantial differences in the perceptions of some concepts such as freedom, democracy and above all in the historical understanding of fascism between the two political systems. Once the Wall fell I became very interested in how the people in the once divided country now 'got on'; how would those who had lived under communism manage, what would they bring to our liberal, capitalist system? What were their thoughts and memories about the divided past, how did these thoughts articulate with the present or the future? Did the shadows of the now distant World War II and its consequences experienced by both parts of Germany, carry a similar weight? What were the main differences in their imaginings about the future, what were their expectations and how did these manifest themselves? My professional background in psychotherapy had alerted me to the importance

¹¹ The conference was organised for participating cities to present their intergenerational projects in 2007. Many of the debates focused on the allocation of state funding its apparent unequal distribution.

but also the pitfalls of memories and memorialisation in the present. I knew the consequences of loss from experience and professional practice. The ethnographic material will address and evaluate some of these questions and link the analysis in chapter 5 to the more descriptive chapters 3 and 4.

The literature review in Chapter 2 discusses the current concerns about the future of the contested memories of the past: how can a credible and reasonably truthful picture of the GDR be constructed, how should the state be remembered and how can future generations be taught to remember the GDR, its society and its system? The fascinating finding by the Max Planck Institute's retrospective research studies into the life courses of GDR citizens, mentioned by Dennis in his chapter on East Germany, are part of an increasingly significant body of social studies of life in the GDR. Dennis mentions the plea by civil rights activist in the Bundestag in 1995, that the 'citizens of the GDR were not a 'people of oppositionalists, but even less one of denunciators'. This remark points to our lack of detailed knowledge of ordinary life under the dictatorship and highlights the need for further exploration and research of the many layers of subtle and varied interactions between agents of domination and individuals, families, work colleagues and others (Dennis2004:30-31).

During my research I experienced a distinct lack of understanding of the deeper layers of a society which was superficially like my own yet appeared to have different roots and traditions. Contradictory sentiments about the consequences of the Fall of the Wall and the subsequent unification of the two German States as well as the interplay of recollections and narratives of before and after unification did emerge more clearly; yet their social and political context became more complex the longer I spent in the former East. During several trips back after I had completed my fieldwork, I gathered new information, rather like a 'hunter' (Morris 2004)¹² to compare and contrast earlier impressions and findings. Through an engagement with the literature

¹² Prof. Brian Morris referred to anthropologists being rather like 'hunter gatherers' who do not really begin to sift their bounty until after they have returned from the 'hunt'.

and comparison with other research findings, visits to museums and lectures, a clearer image gradually emerged and is presented in the thesis.

Berlin as context for the research

Berlin was chosen as the site of fieldwork; it is a city where research into how East Germans and West Germans might manage to live with each other offered distinct advantages in the face of continuing reports and opinion polls that both sides were, in fact, becoming more separate as time passed. I had read Borneman's ethnographic analysis of the then almost schizophrenic position in which Berliners found themselves as actors of the same mould but dancing to the tune of their respective masters (Borneman 1992:24). Berlin had been the capital of the GDR and a showcase of success for the Eastern Bloc, while West Berlin, cut off from its national centre and existing almost solely on subsidies, acted primarily as an enticing shop window for the East of western luxuries, of cultural and political freedom for the East. The close contact between the two halves of the city and easy access to their respective Media had created many informal as well as formal channels of communication.

When I visited Berlin in 1993, after unification, I was struck by the huge demolition works in the centre of the east side of town, close to the old Checkpoint Charlie. The walls of whole blocks of buildings were being bludgeoned by giant demolition cranes; Friedrich Strasse was in the process of becoming a high class shopping centre with glass palaces and ultra-modern subterranean 'malls' filled with restaurants, piano bars, more shops, still nowhere near completion but advertised on huge billboards. Potsdamer Platz, the old heart of pre-war Berlin, had been an empty oasis. In 1993 it offered viewing platforms of its future 'Gestalt', a vision of tall glass towers, plazas and streets where the Wall had once divided the City. Berlin had been elected to become the capital of the united Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1991; preparations for this move did not begin until later but ran in tandem with the

enormous economic and cultural shifts and sacrifices demanded by the unification of the two Germanys in October 1990.

I had underestimated the scale of the city, its history and its complexity and therefore decided to focus on an area in the former GDR, close to the centre, where the Wall had once stood. Here I had once stood on a specially erected tower in Bernauer Strasse and looked across two rows of barbed wire fences on top of two walls, which constituted the 'Wall' into what was then a strange and 'other' world. This memory of people living in a virtual prison without reach has direct links with the childhood memory having lived in a camp (albeit for a short time only) of prisoner of war camps and of cities such as Jerusalem or Belfast, separated by barriers and walls: It links too to the memory of a fence that I remembered from childhood, that existed then between us and those 'over there' in the East.

The eastern part of Berlin was uncharted territory for me; it looked very attractive with its mixture of old and new. When, by sheer chance, as described in Chapter 3, I came across the House that had once been a Jewish Children's Home and was now a Neighbourhood Centre, it seemed to fulfil the conditions of a site that might provide sufficient information and links to associated and related institutions, events and people (see below). The House also encapsulated within it and its surroundings the whole of the turbulent 20th century history of Germany, its two world wars, the division of the country into opposing political and ideological governments during the Cold War, forty years of socialist party dictatorship and finally the collapse of this system, unification and new beginnings under a new system, of which this Centre was one. I was familiar with neighbourhood centres set up on the model of the original Settlements in England, as I had worked in one once as a trainee.



Fig. 1 'Neighbours will always exist; places to meet need to be alive'.

This Neighbourhood Centre, as I shall explain further in Chapter 3, had been modelled on the similar institutions in West Berlin which had been set up there shortly after WWI and again after WWII (report in: *Zeitzeugenboerse* 2005/2).

The Chapters

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature I considered relevant to the main themes of this thesis: memories as performative acts in the present, as links in kinship and intergenerational patterns, but also as tools in restoring dignity and hope during the transitions that followed the total transformation of one state system into another. East Germany differed from other post-socialist states through its history and umbilical cord to its sibling state.

Chapter 3 will describe the House, which had become a Neighbourhood Centre (NBC) in 1998. It is a complex network of disparate but also interrelated threads held by a more or less common ethos of social engagement and the determination to build something new out of the ruins of

the old, using what is still valuable and valued with newer materials and innovative ideas.

The House, the three organisations within it and the square to which the House belongs, became the locus of my enquiry and provided a link to all chapters. The extraordinary history, the underlying philosophy of the current teams who use it and their activities are described in Chapter 3 and continued in the Appendix. The Neighbourhood Centre (NBC) is part of another larger network, a local charitable foundation, called the 'Pfefferwerk Verbund' or Association, which was set up in 1990, soon after the dismantling of the socialist state apparatus in the GDR and the closing down of many welfare and community provisions. At the time of its inception, generous funding was still available for replacing the comprehensive former state provisions for care in the community with mainly charity-funded independent projects and initiatives. The founding members, as described in chapter 3, were local activists, some academics, some artists and some local traders, who saw an opportunity for how the different pots of available money could be used to replace what had been closed down; they prepared their funding applications and company structure with the help of advisors from West Berlin, who knew how to set out applications and how to operate in the new system.

Today the Neighbourhood Centre, as well as the whole Pfefferwerk Verbund, is still following the original ideas that inspired the group to create something new, better than what they had and sustainable after the collapse of the society as they had known it. The almost inevitable increase in bureaucratic layers and bottlenecks, which angered people during my stay, has probably continued but has evolved into more structured patterns of separately managed sectors within an overall network that makes up the Association. The management process was still evolving 2006-7; it has since become institutionalised, less informal. There was sadness and regret about the loss of the former intimacy and spontaneity amongst the founding members of this now considerable

enterprise, but it is considered to be in the past and, as they say in Berlin “gelaufen” – “it is over ” and cannot be changed.

Chapter 4: The Square. The identity of the Square and the memories of life around the square during its different time zones are explored here. The changing demography of the area is made apparent by the post-modern multiculturalism of mainly young and affluent but also transient families; the views and aspirations of a shrinking indigenous population are in conflict with those of newcomers, which has an inevitable impact on the activities in the NBC.

The perspective of local residents are discussed, who speak about their square as a space filled with experiences before and during the war, during their youth and later. The chapter focuses on the interrelationship between the NBC and the local residents’ group who use the square and the small house in it as a meeting place for celebrations and events, forging links of relatedness (Carstens 2007). The spatial relationships in the square and the ritualised use of its different parts throughout history are described. A group of pensioners who meet regularly in the square illustrates the typical ‘closing off’ of memories that might be uncomfortable or contentious, connected with life in the GDR that is now over and unavailable to further enquiries.

Chapter 5: One Nation-two People explores the process of unification through the life stories of three people, each core members of the NBC team. Their stories reflect not only their own unique experience but also aspects of events prior to and following the end of the GDR as they had known it. Through their memories life is seen to go on right through the extraordinary ruptures of the revolt, the regime’s collapse, and social upheaval. Their lives stand for new beginnings and plans for the future. The continuity and ‘ordinariness’ of kinship, of work and the willingness to go forward, characterises each of the

stories, echoing the literature about life during cataclysmic changes (Das 1998; Passerini 1983; Berdhal 2003).

Chapter 5 also touches on the gender politics in the GDR which differed from those in the Federal Republic (FRG). 90% of women worked full or part-time and retained responsibility for household duties (Scott 1974). Disappointment that this level of employment could not be maintained has led to further migration by young women. Lack of state funded social care has led to greater involvement of family and kin in social care. Awareness of what might be required by people in the locality and support towards self-help is a strong theme of Neighbourhood Centre work; the life stories of people I interviewed bear witness to how they were able to draw on their life experiences as well as on the new freedom of action available in the new democracy to fulfil their vision of a society that would be different from that under their old system.

The last part of Chapter 5 reviews briefly the 20th anniversary of the Fall of the Wall in 1989 as well as current perceptions in the media of this event in the autumn of 2009. The celebrations highlighted, predictably perhaps, that a Unification had been achieved, but East German voices also questioned whether the transformation into a Western Democracy had been as rewarding and beneficial as promised. Some key studies, but particularly one of young people in the GDR and across the Federal Republic reflect this persistent ambivalence.

Chapter 6: Ghosts of the Past. Old ghosts were resurrected for me during a campaign against racial violence in Berlin, which is one subject of this chapter. I was interested in people's ideas and theories why this violence had erupted so soon after unification; my primary interest, however, lay in how the campaign unfolded and with it the impact on the NCB team: what it generated for them in terms of team dynamic, memories of the past, including past

relationships to authority and questions of being 'socially engaged' in ways that were not necessarily of their choice.

Different projects and events during this campaign brought former victims of persecution during the Third Reich into contact with school children and their families. These were particularly imaginative and enriching examples of reconciliation akin to those practiced in South Africa after the end of Apartheid (Olick 2007:148). Past and current experiences of these terrible events became linked through narratives, connecting the disconnected, creating at least temporal new perspectives.

Conclusion: The last chapter, as indeed all the others, conveys what I experienced in this small area in East Berlin, where people from east and west Germany worked together on a common project, but where those from the West, who were, on the whole, formally better qualified, kept their voices at the same level as those who had grown up locally, and who, at times, spoke with more enthusiasm and emphasis about their visions of the future. Each respected the other despite, or perhaps more correctly, because of their differences.

Throughout the thesis the term 'contested memories' refers, as stated at the beginning, to public discourses and private narratives as represented and experienced in different social systems and transmitted through varying social activities, frameworks and mnemonic devices (Olick 2007:34). The concept of 'fields of memory', as described above creates an artificial categorisation of narratives, myths and stories about the past to ease the understanding of important themes that permeate daily practice. The ethnography has shown that the active recognition of differences in remembering past events and traumas, whether contested or not, creates 'news for the present', that will be relevant and vital for the future.

Outline of a Methodology

Ethnography, as mentioned above, is the main tool used today in socio-cultural anthropology and related disciplines as it encompasses comparison and contextualisation (Brewer, 2000). Since the process has several stages, the initial, introductory phase may well be the most confusing, as here the ground is usually staked out and theories are formulated as well as questioned. ‘Ethnographic gatherings’ are collected and sifted, hypotheses formed, discarded and reviewed as one progresses along the winding paths of what is an increasingly more complicated field.

Urban ethnographic fieldwork differs substantially from that in rural areas as boundaries are less clearly defined and sociality, the way people react and relate to each other as well as to the environment, is more complex and fluid, less proscribed or rule-bound by traditions (Hannerz 1980; Goddard 1996; Linke 2002). Berlin now has the largest non-indigenous population of any city in Germany and more tourists annually than inhabitants. Here as elsewhere in Germany, heated debates about headscarves in schools raises sharp debates in the media, countered by the spectre of ‘multiculturalism’¹³ and its corollary of ‘Abgrenzung’ or distancing from the ‘other’, that has created ghettos and gated communities (Hausschild and Warneken 2002).

My search for a suitable site for research began Berlin, seven years after the unification of Germany and of East and West Berlin. Although there was a superficial unity, the two parts of town were perceptibly different: a certain role reversal had resulted from the renovated and re-built areas of the former centre of the old East, which had been closest to the border; it now looked much smarter than the previous showcase for western affluence at the Kurfuerstendamm in the West. The new Centre of the City and the new government sector of the new capital of Germany had, in fact, become

¹³ The term often attracts criticism as it is seen as the opposite of integration. In fact intolerance to difference is far greater threat in Germany although this is less so amongst the younger generations (Yildiz, 2000).

thoroughly westernised, the void of the former Potsdamer Platz had been filled with tower blocks and glass domes with shops, restaurants and offices. Only a thin line in the pavement indicates now where the wall once stood. I decided to go further East and to look for a flat to rent so that I and my husband could live in the area where I hoped to carry out the research. Here there were still street trams that only operate up to the previous border. The traditional little red/green man at traffic lights has a shape that differs from its western partner. These are now almost the only outer signs of difference between East and West in the centre of the City¹⁴. Other reminders, such as pockmarked, blackened buildings with overgrown entrances, and empty backstreets were temporary witnesses of the unknown past until they too would be restored.

Lampland points to the required perceptual shift from thinking about 'exclusive domains' to 'realms of activity', when she writes that

To recover the particularities of Eastern European history, we must expand our vision of the social world to encompass the cultural beliefs and practices many of us have long taken for granted (2007:39)

I struggled with the deciphering of these differences which were neither obvious nor immediately comprehensible. I encountered prejudices about different life styles and belief systems on both sides of the former divide but found that they seemed to be most audible in the West where the denigrations of most things 'East' were more often relentless and not questioned. I decided to focus on the East as this was new territory and might tell me more about how these entrenched prejudices were maintained.

Testing, checking different sources and comparing data is an integral part of social science research in a process of 'triangulation' (Hannerz 1980:310). This includes the testimonies of people and their narratives within the context of

¹⁴ It had been planned to unify all street signs in Berlin, but the East Berliners, apparently, fought hard for their 'little green man' and won.

the official, state narrative referred to earlier and which is mainly represented in commemorations, monuments, policies on education and culture and in art (Huysen 2003; Moeller 2009). Since unification galleries and museums now show artworks and artefacts from the former GDR. Seeing such work from modern eastern artists hanging next to those I had known from previous visits raised questions about their references and context.

Formal and Informal Interviews: Research Activities

The major part of my research consisted of first getting acquainted with the 'field' once I had identified the area in the East of the city and the House with its special history that will be described in Chapter 3. At my first meeting with Selma, a senior worker at the centre who later became my main informant, I described my research interest and my role as attentive observer, but also as a participant in daily activities. She was interested and promised to discuss my request to spend time at the Centre and with her colleagues and her management. Several months during the autumn of 2006 were spent with occasional meetings and conversations, which included visits to the headquarters of neighbourhood centres in Berlin and an interview with Dr. Scherer, the director, who strongly recommended that I undertake this project in Centre in Prenzlauer Berg¹⁵. I was invited to present my research project and its academic context in the University in London. At an initial meeting with key members of the NBC teams the details and terms of my stay with them were clarified. The teams were used to students and interns and receptive to my quest as an older German person from abroad who wanted to explore the recent process of unification in the context of the house and the current activities of the neighbourhood centre. The idea of the house as a microcosm of history and unification was intriguing to them and they understood why I

¹⁵ Dr. Scherer had a keen interest in history and shared my view that this Centre and its historical connections would provide a suitable setting.

had decided to choose this as a site for research and as exploration for my own interest in post-war history, which had begun in my previous work.

The senior staff members were anxiously protective of the people who came to functions, courses and sessions at the Centre and did not want them to be approached. I therefore negotiated my stay in the Centre on the basis that I would observe and participate in whatever activity they chose as being suitable. They liked the idea of an outsider's perspective on what they were doing and my offer to give them feedback at the end as well as a copy of any report I would write. We found compatibility in our respective concepts and agreed to discuss at each stage what might be interesting and useful.

I obtained permission to talk with the staff and to interview them but not with the users of the services unless this should evolve naturally. In time I made many informal contacts but restricted the more formal interviews and life stories to those people I got to know best and with whom trust had been established.

The people I chose to interview were the staff at the Centre who agreed to this based on our common understanding that their perceptions, knowledge and memories will provide a valid impression of their past and current experiences (Radstone 2000). Our interviews usually started with an open question about how the many changes that had happened might have affected them and what factors, if any, were still relevant in their current lives. For several people losing their former jobs led them to this Centre, because they had been retrained or because of their interest in this work. I made contact with other people whom I met through participation in events or to whom I was introduced. One of them was Inge Franken, from West Berlin, who had researched the history of the house and who played an important role in the Centre's work with schools and the guided tours through the exhibition on the

second floor¹⁶. I also interviewed the head of the agency for Time Witnesses in Berlin who, like myself, had started her university education late and who was passionately interested in keeping the past alive through the reports of living witnesses.

Amongst the interviewees not directly connected with the Centre but linked with the work, were a youth worker who had grown up and trained in the GDR and a young woman who had crossed illegally to the West but then returned to her family after 1990. Two women from the West who both worked for an organisation called 'Seniors in Schools' came to a conference I attended on intergenerational practices and one agreed to be interviewed. I also interviewed three of the managers at the Pfefferwerk Organisation, two of whom came from the West.

By the end of my empirical fieldwork I had undertaken more than 25 confidential interviews in the sense that we had arranged set times and a confidential space for our talk and agreed on an informal, open format. My questions were non-directive and mainly for clarification (Hammersley and Atkinson 1993:113); not all of the interviews proved useful and did not form part of the final evaluation. The interviews with the managers were recorded and transcribed, as were the group sessions with the time-witnesses. For individual interviews I chose to make notes as this was less intrusive. I also made notes based on my observations and reflection at the end of each day (Bourdieu 1985, 1990).

In addition there were also numerous conversations and longer discussions in groups that I noted down in great detail. I set up and participated in discussions with four 'witnesses', three men and one woman in their late sixties or seventies, who had been in youth clubs or after-school-care in the House, during the nineteen forties and early fifties. I attended several

¹⁶ Inge Franken, a retired history teacher, had initially come to the House to join the Group One-by-One, a conversation group dedicated to meetings between holocaust survivors and the descendants of perpetrators. Her father had been a convinced National Socialist and lost his life in the attack on Stalingrad.

conferences on 'Citizens Engagement and Contribution to Society' (Burgerschaftliches Engagement), which had been organised by the Project Bureau, (see Chapter 3). These discussions were fascinating and largely expressed the views and ideas of social engagement by the staff at the Neighbourhood Centre; however, I chose in the end not to focus on 'Civic Engagement', which is part of a government funded policy. It would have taken me into a different though also related area of research, which deserves to be treated in great detail.

My approach to the research, or my positionality in relation to fieldwork, was guided by the belief that it was important 'to study up and outward' following Burawoy et al. (1999), I did not select people in order to seek specific information. Instead I took their work context as defining criteria for my selection. In my role as observer I followed the daily routines at the Centre and what evolved from there in terms of connections to related encounters and subject matters.

My curiosity returned time and again to the centrality of the house and its network of relationships as well as its activities in the context of its history. The consequences of unification and the attempt by the NBC teams to pursue a vision that was based on re-establishing self-worth, sociality and trust in this relatively new state became more prominent in writing up my field notes. I was interested in the review by Carsten and Hugh Jones of Levi Strauss' work on 'the house' as a symbolic representation of significant social, kin and gender relationships (Carsten and Jones 1995:36) and the evolving character that houses develop over time, when they are re-configured, re-created or simply adapted, as this house was, to ever new uses.

My questions grew initially out of my own previous MA research into the silence about the atrocities and crimes committed by the Nazi regime during WWII which, as mentioned before, I had completed in 2004. I was curious, as I stated above, as to how people in the former East had experienced the post-WWII period, whether similar sentiments of guilt still affected their lives as

they had affected the immediate post-war generation in the West. What had the division by a wall done to them? These questions, however, were soon subsumed into others, which related much more to the stark contrast of opinions and prejudices I detected, first in West Germany about the East and then in East Germany about the West. Sentiments in the East were not voiced as openly, silenced, perhaps by the knowledge that the great majority of East Germans had voted for a speedy economic and political union with West Germany in 1990, as mentioned before. Their growing resentment was often compared to the effects of colonization. More specifically, it was also related to feelings of deep disappointment as East Germans had lost trust in their state. It appeared as if East Germans were unaware of how deeply their sense of identity and ways of thinking had been shaped by the ideologies of their regime. West Germans, on the other hand, had remained almost unaffected by the momentous events in the East – apart from the initial euphoria the narrow assumption that ‘east had to change to west because this was best’ prevailed unchallenged for longer than was serviceable. I shall describe in greater detail how these processes had affected the people I met and how my small ethnographic research reflected much larger consequences of unification.

I agree with Hammersley and Atkinson that research design should be a reflexive process, which operates throughout every state of the project (1993), and I agree with Brewer’s definition of an ‘ethnographic imagination’ which takes a reflexive and open approach as principle for its belief of what can be achieved. Although ‘reflexivity’ has become a post-modern buzzword, according to Shore (1999:28) that can easily become an excuse for unnecessary autobiographical disclosures, it is also a useful and by now almost automatic response to forms of social enquiry. It challenges the illusion of ‘impartiality’ or ‘objectivity’ that distorted so many of the earlier anthropological research writings (Said 1993; Asad 1973).

The research began with few pre-conceived ideas but clearly a lot of social theory derived from the post Marxian and Durkheimian schools as well as post-colonial writings by Wolf (1997), Said (1993), Anderson (1991), Douglas

(1966), Bateson (1984) and many others, about what I would find and how this might be processed. My most informative source material came from the post-socialist writers, several associated with the Max Planck Institute in Halle. The political philosopher Jurgen Habermas provided valuable perspectives as did Hannah Arendt's texts about totalitarianism and her ideas about 'Action' as a civic pursuit were inspiring, either in the original or in the writings of others. To me, this gathering and sifting, the comparing and searching for meaning seemed more like a weaving together of images, endlessly back and forth, until a pattern emerged that held its shape. These patterns became important stepping stones on the journey towards forming ideas and theories that needed constant reappraisal. Were their memories in fact contested?

There were contested ideas about memories and confusing ideas about what was memory or rather resentment in the disguise of memory (Sabrow 2009; Lambek 1996); contested ideas about the past emerged and affected current perceptions and attitudes, certainly, but not necessarily where I assumed they would play a part or in what way. I shall return to the above questions in the conclusion but wanted to state here that as in most interesting and worthwhile research the outcome usually presents more questions than answers.

Throughout the ethnographic part of the research I was mindful of my own, ethical stance as observer, participant and recorder, ensuring that people gave their permission to be interviewed, that they could see the transcripts if they wished to see them (which most of them did not) and that there were repeated discussions about the use of the material for an academic study. The writing up of my notes and recollections was extended over several years with three visits to Berlin in the intervening period: I could observe changes but also constancy in the determination of the people at the NBC not to let go of their original concept.

The final evaluation of the research presents a combination of ethnographic data and extensive bibliographical research. I chose three life histories as being representative of my main findings in interviews, conversations, lectures and conferences. These histories are presented and discussed in chapter 5. The

three life stories are those of older people between the ages of 53 and 61 who were part of the core team at the Centre, a team that mainly consisted of mature people, due to the nature of the work but perhaps also due to their experience and inclination to work with people. Each had experienced in their lives aspects of what were key events in the German past, especially since the collapse of the old system and unification with West Germany. Although I did not set out to concentrate on older people, this group proved particularly informative in the end about temporal and spatial dimensions of change, the depth of their experience and the commitment to new beginnings.

It was an immensely enriching experience for me; I formed new friendships and gained knowledge about a society that is still dealing not only with the experience of the state it helped to deconstruct but also with the reconstruction of memories about lives in the past that will be important in future. The engagement of local people in the task of shaping their own lives with the support of the neighbourhood team is part of the 'middle ground' in society, (Eidson 2004:61), a small example of what might be possible in the wider world.



Fig 2. The Neighbourhood Team 2007-9

Chapter 2

The challenge of uniting what was divided: A Review of the Literature

*'In Berlin the Past is really a foreign country'*¹⁷

New Statesman, 24/8/2009:34

'This is my life, I lived this, I cannot be put into a museum'

East German Citizen, May 2007

Both quotes refer to history and memory; both evoke the contested meanings inherent in the representation of historical events in time and between two polarized positions. There is on the one side the 'historicised' past, based on careful research and expert advice, packaged and presented in a museum to be appraised by visitors, including the journalist from the UK who saw here a past that 'really' belonged to another spatial as well as temporal zone; on the other is the expression of a person who lived through this expanse of time and place, who embodies the experiences of this past; she experienced it with her family, her friends, her work, she rebelled against certain aspects of the regime but there are many other areas of life that are important to her and cannot be catalogued and bracketed into display objects, she feels that they should not form part of reports about life under communism. She is affronted by the idea of being 'museumnised', it reminded her of the expectation of the former SED¹⁸ party regime to conform to certain ideas or behaviours. Her memories were, as Nora once wrote, 'sacred' to her and not to be tampered with by external 'prosaic' interferences (Nora 1998). Her outburst of indignation that her life should become the 'object of museum displays', curated moreover - by western

¹⁷ The citation is based on L.B. Hartley who, in referring to historians, states that the 'past is another country where things are done differently...quoted in 'Ethnography and the Historical Imagination' by Commaroff and Commaroff 1992:14.

¹⁸ Socialist Unity Party (see glossary)

experts, whilst her past was still so present, alerted me to the gulf that existed between us in relation to how she and I perceived what was indeed her and not my life.

Between these two positions, the personal and the public, lies the contested field of the politics of memories, a 'battleground', of strongly held opinions that seem to be fought over 'kinds of memory' and 'kinds of history' (Sabrow 2009: 16) which will be discussed in this chapter.

The first quotation above is by a British journalist, who in 2009 wrote about the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was then in full swing in the city and elsewhere in the united Germany. He saw a highly acclaimed exhibition with the evocative title 'East Time: Stories from a Vanished Country'¹⁹. The black and white photos of life in the GDR triggered layers of meaning in popular, political and world perception of a lived presence that is far from past but relegated to a past which is perceived as 'foreign' in the present. Celebrations in Berlin focussed on the disappearance of the Wall as a symbol of liberation and on the new united capital city as showcase for the united Germany twenty years on. Yet, as Pine has pointed out, it was also still felt viscerally in its absence (Sept. 2011). The images of a past that has passed but is still present, of a demolished wall that is in the process of being symbolically re-erected²⁰, and the image of a future that wants to monumentalise the past, create confusing parameters and discourses about how to gain an understanding of all these temporal processes. How can the countless memories, collective and individual, that were associated with life in a legitimate system, be connected to a system that had also sanctioned

¹⁹'Ostzeit: Geschichten aus einem Vergangenen Land'. The exhibition was shown at the House of Cultures, Berlin. See www.hkw.de/en/

²⁰ The existing traces of the old wall are easily overlooked. There is a museum of the Wall in the East of Berlin and a number of sites of memory as well as a gallery with sections of the wall painted by famous artists (Eastside Gallery). The location of the Wall is being marked in pavements and streets.

criminal and illegal acts? How can each be remembered? How can lives, that were ordinary and valuable in themselves during these times, be shown to have enduring validity despite acts of betrayal by many citizens, secret torture and total surveillance, as researched in Funder's harrowing report on the Stasiland (2002) and now open to archival research in thousands of volumes?

For Habermas, referred to in the introduction, the past no longer provides nationally affirming continuities but rather a 'contrastive foil' for understanding the present. Public memory of the national past, he writes, 'is now assigned the task of breaking the mythic repetition-compulsion of a history burdened with guilt and injustice' (1999:47). The historian Bender, on the other hand, questions a nation's ability to achieve such an aim unless a commonly accepted narrative of the past can be achieved as a baseline on which to build a joint future. In his view the interpretations about the fundamental political division between East and West have their roots in the revolutionary beginnings of the 20th century and in political divisions whose ideological foundations have not yet been sufficiently addressed (Bender 1996).

Tensions exist, as Lass has shown (1994), between personal, embodied memories rooted in individual and collective experiences connected to historical events, which are often held in silence, or amongst trusted kin rather than openly communicated, and those memories that originate in the public sphere, at seminal, historical moments, or that appear in memorials and form collective reference points for public use (see also Watson 2007:26, note 3; Halbwachs 1992). The East Germans' rallying cry that could be heard in demonstrations before and after November 8th, 1989, for instance: "We are the people" is one such sound and action memory, which at the time, held collective but also individual significance²¹ and reverberated round the Eastern

²¹ The slogan "we are the people" was first heard during the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig in October 1989 and caught on like lightning. Later the slogan changed to "we are one people" (Links, Nitsche, and Taffelt 2009).

Bloc countries. Since then however, its use in advertisements, in speeches, in popular songs, football, art and politics, has turned it into almost empty rhetoric, appropriated by mass culture. Michael Lambek made the point that memory is a moral act, yet he also stated that memories in the plural can be used as:

objects, not acts, they are re-usable, recyclable, they define personal and collective relationships, set the imagination to work but when they are contested they appear more like unshreddable bureaucratic files (Lambek 1996:238).

A generalisation of what is perceived as public memory confronted with a differently perceived memory of individuals can elicit antagonistic reactions, as it did for my friend. It also highlighted my position as 'outsider'. Here, perhaps, lies the problem of writing about contested memories and fractured lives: in trying to understand the complex process in which memories are embedded, triggered or evoked, publicly appropriated or transmitted relationally, one is caught up in a slippery stream of temporalities. This thesis is essentially trying to address how these memories in narratives, monuments, in local politics and groups are consensual or contested, buried or taken out of their hiding places and put to work.

Aims of the chapter

The fields of literature touched on by this thesis are numerous and cannot possibly be reviewed within the space of this chapter. I have therefore limited myself to a few themes, interrelated with history and memory, that run through all the chapters: they are firstly concerned with the consequences of the transformative processes in the former GDR and in particular with an analysis of how these processes interacted with people's lives, their perceptions of ruptures, losses and gains. The literature from other post-

socialist countries is used as comparison of similarities and differences. The concept of transitional process is employed with caution as is available data on current attempts to construct a memory of the vanished state for the future. Secondly, the review deals with particular examples from the German literature, examined and chosen for their relevance to this ethnographic study which was carried out in Berlin between 2006 and 2007 with subsequent follow-up visits in 2009 and 2010.

History, Narratives, Memory

Richardson defines three types of history in her ethnography of *Memory and History in Schools and Families in the Ukraine* (2004:113). She distinguishes between the authoritative and formalised, public accounts of the past, based largely on retrospective professional and media analysis of events which can be subject to political control and assume hegemonic properties 'in the Foucauldian sense', especially in dictatorships.

History as a 'social process', that is symbolically represented in memories or in forgetting, is more ambiguous, subject to individual or collective interpretation as Lambek has pointed out; it can be ambiguous, it can be mobilised for various purposes, acting as resistance to or subversion of remembered events, or be socially embedded, an intrinsic part of identity.

Lastly there is the 'common sense' approach to history, which is probably closer to Haukanes' view that private histories are often in the thread of an authoritative account but with local or personal variations that can change over time (2004:93). Olick (2007:4) stresses the social and collective properties in memories, recollected in a multitude of 'stories' or narratives that give ontological credence to many modern institutions, including politics. He cites the German Historian's Dispute in the eighties and the differing narratives that opposed each other (Maier 1988) as an example of how dominant discourses

can develop and be challenged. The historian Morris Suzuki writes about the subjective 'truthfulness of the processes by which people create meaning about the past' (Suzuki 2005:27). It seems that these interpretations or meanings are taken from media representation rather than linear historiography and create a constructed authenticity of narratives which inform identity at particular points in history (see also Skultans 1998:12). Such narratives as externalised constructions of memories can serve as anchors to retrieve a disappearing past, or to make it disappear, as illustrated by Ten Dyke in Dresden in 1992:

practical and ideological voids appeared in history: history books were dumped into bins, schools quickly adopted West German curricula. The GDR's Academy of Science was disbanded, and the local Museum for History was closed...(Ten Dyke 2003: 150).

The almost total disbanding of the GDR's higher educational institutions and academic personnel was particularly traumatic for those concerned. One former historian from Humboldt University told me that they had much regretted being incorporated into the West German system which many of them had regarded as more cumbersome and less flexible than their own (Dr. A. July 2007)) .

The importance of re-inscription in the context of traumatic memories is discussed by Bloch amongst others who wrote about giving troubling or toxic memories a voice in the present through a retelling of past events (Bloch, 1989). Jelin, in the context of Guatemala, describes the effectiveness of re-enacting past trauma through drama (Jelin, 2003). At times of turbulent changes and uncertainties special memories and narratives are particularly implicated in affirming self-hood and identity, as Comaroff and Comaroff state when they speak of the need for a historicized Anthropology (1992:6-7).

The events unleashed by world-wide economic changes towards the end of the 20th century (Hobsbawm 1995) had particularly drastic effects on the narrative

of remembered experiences and their relational contexts (Carsten 2000; Pine 2007), depending on how and where people found themselves at particular points in their story. Stewart discusses narratives as a 'social form mediating between individual experience (mental process) and public representation' (Stewart 2004:562). He found that Roma need no material reminders of their traumatic experiences because they are being reminded daily and repeatedly of their status through others. Their experience is similar to that of the Jewish bourgeoisie, as described in the 'Life of Rahel Varnhagen', for instance, who carried the stigma of her identity constantly (Arendt 1980, 2010).

Revolutionary changes during the seventies and eighties were driven by different time scales in each of the then socialist countries. By the nineteen eighties, however, the government in the USSR under the leadership of Gorbachov finally decided that maintaining the Soviet Union in its traditional form, was untenable, as was the war in Afghanistan²². This decision and the gradual relinquishing of power and control over satellite states, accelerated the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union rather than individual factors in the different countries (Bender 1999; Howbsbawm 1995; Fulbrook 2009). It was the Fall of the Wall in Berlin, however, which became symbolically the watershed, the signal that World War II, with all its consequences, had finally ended.

²² See Judt, T. (2005) for a more detailed discussion of the different factors which influenced Gorbachov to change course, introducing glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring), which eventually led to the collapse of the structure of the empire (Judt,2005:559-633), Leonhard (2007) gives an insider's account of the GDR under Soviet tutelage.

Transitional processes following transformation

I have described actual events, which pushed towards the opening of the Wall in the Introduction and referred to them throughout the chapters. The literature pertaining to what has become labelled as the 'Uebergangszeit' or time of transition that follows a cataclysmic event, is particularly relevant to my understanding of process because of its evolutionary concept. In Germany the complete transformation from one political and economic system to another within the space of one year required a series of radical measures that should, and sometimes did allow for diversity in time and diversity in action to 'adapt' to the new, as Burawoy and Verdery amongst others have pointed out in their discussion of theories of transition (1999:4). In many cases, however, the speed which drove the process tended to generate hope followed by frequent failure, as Flockton and others found in their analysis of small businesses during the transitional period in the former GDR. They found that resources were 'insufficient to foster an effective transformation from below', meaning not only capital but also resources to cope with competition from abroad and in a climate of fast changing global economics (Flockton 2004:93-109).

The transformation of economic, social and political systems are linked to a complex set of interrelated features, including local constructions of the past, established group affiliations and changing national ideologies and do not, according to Hann (2007:7), lead to predicted outcomes. In the view of several scholars, this is one of the reasons why the two former German States are not as closely linked as had been hoped or as had been foretold and why the expected 'economic miracle' did not follow automatically with the injection of huge funds into the economy of the GDR (Dennis & Kolinsky 2004; Wirsching 2008).

In Anthropology the spatial and temporal concepts of transition and liminality are linked to Van Gennep's theory of initiation rites, usually during adolescence and times of developmental changes. These can involve tribulations and trials, a sense of temporal suspension and regression; they contain fear and uncertainty of the future as well as hope and anticipation (Van Gennep 1960). The term 'transition' has been sharply criticised in the way it was applied to post socialist countries after the collapse of communism, because of the wholesale assumptions made by many experts and entrepreneurs, mainly from the West, that the only logical arrival point after communism was capitalism (Verdery 1996). 'Transitology' became an overused concept in post-socialist literature and indicated, according to Hann, that:

The Cold War is not over. Its influence is felt even now. How else to understand the importance accorded by both scholars and policy-makers alike to 'privatisation, 'marketisation' and 'democratisation' – that troika of Western self-identity so insistently being imposed on the ex-socialist 'other' as a sign that the Cold War *is* over? (Hann, Humphrey and Verdery 2007:20).

It is well known that since the fall of the Soviet Union the contest between economies, run along capitalist principles has continued with a vengeance on a global and ever shifting scale (Gledhill 1994). Cold war politics between the superpowers have given way to an emphasis in high-powered discussions on world peace, on preserving economic stability and viability in the most as well as the least powerful countries of the world. Those who used to live on the margins of socialist societies lost their protective social security on which they had depended, however meagre this was. Verdery observed an emerging 'feudalism', especially in Russia and Eastern states of the Soviet Empire, (Verdery 1996: 204-228) as did Humphrey (2002: 21-40), who described the utter destitution of the 'dispossessed, former members of collectives who could no longer depend on free subsistence to survive'. This degree of poverty was less of an issue in the former GDR, where the worst material effects of

redundancy could be cushioned by benefits or early pension payments. Here the psychological effects of long-term unemployment and intermittent short-term work were the most devastating consequences (see Chapter 3 & 5); the roller-coaster effect of hope and despair affected the older population most, and older women most of all. (Lutz & Gruenert 1995:19-21).

Verdery is critical of the term 'transition' but uses it nevertheless in order to illustrate the inherent vulnerability during a state that is ambiguous, temporal and uncertain as to outcome (Verdery 1996). She as well as Hann and others draw interesting comparisons between the end of colonialism and socialist colonisation of client states in Europe and the Third World. Hann asks:

Have Western elites, supported by the dominant disciplines of transitology, systematically promoted models for the post-socialist countries that bear little connection to the realities of their own country?
(Hann 2007:10)

The term 'transition' is also used by Habermas in the context of spatial dimensions that challenge, threaten or even consolidate existing orders. He fears that a failure to grasp the global aspects of the political challenges facing Germany will lead to illusory measures being taken to reduce the massive unemployment in the East (Cronin & Pensky 2003:ix). Garton Ash, coming from the social historian's perspective, foresees, rather like Verdery (2007), that new historical insights will emerge from post-socialist writers, which will challenge the still primarily western, hegemonic perceptions of history, throwing new light on the developments and the interrelationships in socialist countries prior to their final decline (Garton Ash 2009:8). An important consideration in these processes of carving out new states and geopolitical boundaries in the East since the early 1990s is the deliberation about what kind of societies are to emerge and how the western concept of 'civil society' in a democracy will fit with the legacies of the old regimes, where civil groups and initiatives also existed but under the close scrutiny of the ruling parties

(Hann and Dunn 1996; Hann 2007; but also see Schroeder (2000) and Habermas (2003), who each take a more nuanced view of the German question.

The value of ethnographic exploration lies in the potential to attend to the minutiae of custom and practice, of beliefs and external expression of doubt and uncertainty (Passerini 1992). Berdahl focuses on the observed details in a small East German border town where, for instance, locals stage a formal funeral for the 'death of the GDR', complete with a draped coffin and funeral bearers in mourning; such ritualised practices provide interesting clues to the larger picture just after the Wende (Berdahl 1999:213). There is now a considerable post-socialist literature available in the social sciences revealing varied and densely patterned descriptions of people struggling in many different ways to accommodate to what was then a radically new situation in all post-socialist countries. The often creative or destructive pathways people found into the future were very different and were, in most areas, contingent on the common pressures exerted by the economic dictates of incoming capitalist democracies and their 'missionary zeal' to effect quick and, as is now evident, often illusory transformations. The response to this transformation in different societies demands, in most cases a 're-articulation of collective and individual identities', writes Szemere (2003:158) from Hungary, but also a recognition by the 'incomers' of existing resources, traditions and practices, as well as deficiencies. The informative collections of ethnographies edited by the Halle group (Hann 2007; Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004; but also Carsten 2007, and others) provide a rich pool of studies about local responses to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the search for post-communist structures and systems which, as mentioned above, did not always follow the anticipated outcome.

Uncertainties and Consequences in East Germany

An important debate soon after the collapse of the Wall, or the 'Wende' as it is called in Germany, concerned fears about the unexpected rising incidence of vicious racial attacks such as described in Chapter 6 of this thesis, combined with racist discrimination against ethnic minorities, especially in the rural areas of the North East. Old fears of escalation and confrontation created initial confusion, not least triggered by the arrival of imported immigrants from the West (Jarausch 1997; Habermas 2006). Eastern and Western taboos about racism ran parallel with debates about unemployment, insecurity and fear. These debates followed in the wake of the euphoria raised through hopes for new dreamt of freedoms, of travel and shopping; weeks and months of an almost anarchic sense of liberation after the opening of the Wall soon gave way to the realisation that 16 million East Germans had to change their lives radically, many fundamentally. What had been taken for granted no longer existed. Ideas about what might be gained gave way to what had been lost (Mieselwitz 1999:30). Recent polls in 2010 indicated that people still locate a 'truly united country' somewhere in the future²³. Memories linked to age, gender, situational or circumstantial factors would continue to influence such practices based, as they most likely are on what Lambek has called 'remembering as moral practice' (1996:248); I suggest, he is referring to the relational aspects of remembering, the attachment built on human relationships to the past, the trust in what is remembered rather than the official rendering of the past. Olick's distinction between 'mythical memories' of the past that still have power over the present versus 'instrumental memories' that are governed by the present are interesting in the context of collective memories and their potential manipulation by school, in families and by the media (Olick 2007:38).

²³ An East German longitudinal study of 17 year olds which had been commenced in 1987, reported in 2004 that a comparison between East and West Germans revealed that unification was positively rated. However, progressively lower ratings were given by the East German participants in areas of security, child care and sociality (Arnsward 2004).

Time and timing are crucial considerations in the narratives about the unification of the two Germanies, particularly in the context of Europe and post socialism. The way in which the 'take-over' or unification was managed, rather than the fact that it happened, still agitates numerous debates amongst people and experts. The frequently debilitating effects of the rapid dissolution and privatisation of virtually all state owned enterprises – some 8000 – including the sale of East German banks through the offices of the 'Treuhand' agency, created armies of unemployed. The GDR had 9.6 Million employed people at the end of 1989; by 1993 the figure had shrunk to 6.1 Million, whereby this latter figure excluded those who were funded by 'public job creation programmes' (see Appendix) or short-term contracts (Lutz & Gruenert 1994:2-3). According to these authors' differentiated breakdowns in the different employment sectors, agriculture and heavy industries lost more workers than all other sectors. The extent of the state's bankruptcy was, according to all accounts, as much a surprise to the East Germans as it was to the West. Today this ignorance is explained with the secrecy of the state system in the GDR and the concern of Western governments to keep the status quo at all cost in order to prevent a second Prague Spring or even Tianaman Square reaction (Bender 1999).

The preservation of stability in relationships had become the cornerstone of policies between East and West Germany, as mentioned before, and was carefully observed by each government during the years of 'détente' between the super powers, although relationships oscillated continually between tolerance and increased surveillance, especially during the seventies and after the Helsinki accords in 1981/2 when America stepped up its electronic defence (or Starwar) programme (Fulbrook 2009; Judt 2005). Both independent post-war states had never really been able to stop gazing at the other contemplating the 'mirror image', as described by Borneman (1992), weighing up constant value judgements that kept each glued to the fault line of two world systems and hidden military nuclear weapons. Yet for each state this tension- laden border represented a line of security held by the status quo that could not be

jeopardized. This changed irrevocably with the peaceful breach of the Wall on November 9th 1989.

In retrospect the unique and ‘critical’ event of the Fall of the Wall, if one adopts Veena Das’s term in this context (Das 1998), was only one of several incisive markers in a long chain of events that led to the final collapse of the Soviet Union, as discussed by Judt in his chapter on the end of the Old Order (Judt 2005:585-633). It was, however an irrevocable marker in German history as shown in the course of this ethnography, an irreplaceable affirmation of the will of the people to surge forward at a particular time and demand peacefully the freedom they not had since the end of the Weimar Republic in 1933.

The specific literature on the German ‘Wende’ and its consequences for East and West has since become huge. It includes unification and subsequent developments, which focus on how the former German Democratic Republic’s formal integration into the western system of its sibling state raised ghosts from the more distant past. It also raises questions about how the differences of historiography between the two states could or should be reconciled. The rapid dismantling of the former SED State and its incorporation into the Federal Republic was, according to the theologian in East Berlin, Richard Schroeder, the ‘only way’ but ‘extremely costly in human and economic terms’ (Schroeder 2000:130); according to others, it was, despite the free elections in 1990, a brutal disenfranchisement of a people who lost their identity as ‘East Germans’ with the loss of their state . There was no real time to choose because the citizens of the GDR, with the encouragement of the West German Government, allowed themselves no choice (Jarausch 1997; Bunzel 2010; Gruenbaum 2004); they urged the FRG towards unity of currency and unification²⁴. The GDR ceased to exist on 3rd October 1990. The lived and embodied memories of greater sociality and security under socialism, despite

²⁴ One of the slogans in the early nineties was: ‘Wenn die DM nicht zu uns kommt gehen wir zu ihr’ (‘if the DM does not come to us we go to it’)

glaring disadvantages, began to assert themselves in individual and collective consciousness as the demands and challenges of the new system began to be felt (De Soto 2003).

Questions about the joint responsibility for the Holocaust were raised as soon as the disappearance of the Wall 'opened the view' into this controversial and contested past; was there the same sense of guilt in the East where no reparations had been paid to victims of the Holocaust as there has been in the West? Why are there certain 'moral superiorities' on each side, asks Sabrow (2005:132). Who remembered whom during the Cold War? Do the different memorials in each country bear witness to highly politicised and appropriated public memories of favourite 'blocs of victim groups' that reflect the intention of strengthening the image of the ideological enemy? Michaela Haenke Portscheller illustrates this question in her contribution to contested sites of memories of two concentration camps for prisoners of war, one in the East and one in the West. Each reflects, 'like mirror images', she writes, the opposing hegemonic ideology (2005:167)²⁵ Such sites have also been problematized by Young (1993), Till (2004) and Huyssen (2003).

In order to avoid the mistakes after the Second World War, when silence 'silenced' any attempt at comprehending the incomprehensible (Giordano 1998; Haidu 1992) of not allowing a 'normalisation' of national consciousness by bracketing what had happened (Habermas 2006), the hugely elaborate process of 'working through' the phenomenon of the GDR, the second dictatorship in twentieth century Germany, began to be set in motion. The last section of this review will briefly touch on the Federal Government's endeavour to establish topography of the old GDR, its citizens, their hopes,

²⁵In the West the image of the enemy of the Soviet Union was strengthened whilst the recognition of Russian soldiers as victims of the Nazis might have disrupted this image. In the East by contrast, antifascist fighters against western capitalism were promoted and portrayed as heroes.

views, experiences for the future by appointing two special commissions under the chairmanship of Professor Sabrow of the Historical Institute in Potsdam.

Whilst the report and aims of these two Commissions (Enquete Kommissionen) were published and remain contested by different parties, the attempt of coming to terms with two historical manifestations of totalitarianism (Arendt 1951) in one century was, in a much less ambitious or grandiose way, enacted in the House, in which the Neighbourhood Centre was located. Here the national question of how and when 'inner unity' between East and West might be achieved was not posed. Questions about the past dictatorships were either asked or avoided but the events that took place in the House throughout its history were researched, recorded and debated. People got on with their daily tasks and reflected on highlighting and honouring differences, as they came up. Acknowledging the relative merits of difference was considered to be important and therefore not couched in silence²⁶.

Processes of Transition and Transformation in Post-socialist States

A careless application of the term 'transition' or 'transitology' can easily lead to an institutionalisation of the term itself, as mentioned above, particularly if applied to the introduction of privatised market economies in Eastern Europe or to attempts by well-meaning NGO's to help people 'through their transition'. Lampland's study of the agrarian elite in Hungary in the early 1990s is but one telling example of the confusing difficulties that aid agencies and other experts encountered which were manifestly not due to 'intransigence, ignorance or incompetence,' as some would have it, 'but to the very simple problem that learning new ways of doing business takes time' (Lampland

²⁶ The NHC team consisted of a mixture of East and West Germans who provided factual information as well as their views on topics such as unification, prejudices and the significance of the history of the house in which they worked on their lives.

2007:36). Yet the term continues to be applied widely, particularly in relation to post-socialist economies. Szmeré, who researched the underground rock music scene in Hungary, prefers to describe the process involved in such enforced changes as 'processual' in the sense that in Hungary, more perhaps than in other countries, the collapse of the regime had been preceded by what she sees as a 'transitional period' of slow decline of the whole system (Szmeré 2003:161). The connection between change and experience of loss is well identified by Pine who makes the important point that the fetishisation of the concept of 'transitology', obscures important common factors that could be discerned in most of these post-socialist communities: the effects of the disappearance of inclusive welfare services, the effects of large-scale unemployment, and the unexpected burden this placed on citizens, especially women (Pine 2007:111-123; see also Bridger and Pine 1998). Very similar effects occurred in the former GDR where, as a consequence of the transformation of the former GDR's institutional structures and their integration into the Western FRG system, 'after the first flush of system change, Eastern needs and misgivings about the validity of the Western model proliferate' (Dennis and Kolinsky 2004:1-16).

The term 'transition' is used nevertheless because of the implied interrelationship between time, space and movement driven by the individual and collective desire to find some new sense of identity and security. People's reactions to sudden cataclysmic changes and losses that affect the quality of life as those outlined by Pine above vary, often building on past experience, using known resources rather than trusting the new. In other cases, and this particularly applies to the East Germans, the prospective availability of long coveted luxury items and other goods, known through the media, overrode considerations of careful reflection. Thousands fled the country during 1989 and 1990, leaving deskilled voids, particularly in rural areas. The performative aspects of unforeseen change and loss in daily practice, in the sense used by Bourdieu (1990), is a useful tool to think about the repeated turmoil of 'compressed time' during the loss of securities and banal normalities. I agree

with Das that 'every day is an achievement' under such circumstances and that 'the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary are braided together....are theoretically much more difficult to understand (Das 2010:137).

In East Germany the complete and sudden transformation of the entire structure of the country necessitated a long period of differing 'transitional' processes which did not always, as Szmere rightly observed, account for 'the continuities, the subtleties, the why and how of transitions that follow social transformation' (Szmere 2003:160). Transition in its broader meaning admits to a past and a future as well as an uncertain almost 'liminal' and temporal present. In the case East Germany such a period, which is often referred to as 'anarchic', preceded and followed the Fall of the Wall; during this brief in-between time there was hope and anticipation of what might be achieved in terms of a new socialism, of a more liberal GDR (Links and Taffel 2009). It was a vulnerable and emotional time experienced by dissidents in the GDR as well as by critics of the system in the West who had always cherished some hopes that the ideas of socialism might still, one day, prevail (Wirsching 2008). After unification in 1990, however, long as well as short-term transitional processes involved the East German society in reorganising their lives, to question their belief system on several levels, question their damaged identity and confidence, because they began to perceive themselves not as the victors over an oppressive regime but also as losers to a superior and more successful 'other'.

The cost

Within the continuities of daily life there were also unexpected ruptures in routines, in relationship patterns that had to shift from those that existed in the work place to other realms including kinship, entailing often new risks in altered kin and family relationships (Pine 2007, Thelen 2005). There was the loss of accumulated 'social' rather than fiscal capital, in the socio-cultural

sense developed by Bourdieu (1993) and Lampland, above, who both stress the importance of 'habitus' over time which includes the 'reciprocity of social relations, that are far more difficult to change than institutions' (Lampland 2007:32). Graeber, who discusses the habit and value of 'productive action' (2001, 49-98) compares this to the Maussian theory of the 'gift' and as a commodity in social relationships. One may agree with this analysis or not but undoubtedly these special relationships confer social status and forge trust in all societies but acquired a particular meaning and also expertise in socialist economies, where people used to devise their own ways of making life tolerable as Port found in his fascinating study of an East German industrial town (Port 2010). 'Social capital' was tied to work places and to resources as well as to 'connections' to people of use or with influence of kind

The value of ethnographic accounts lie in their ability to recognize the emotional and psychological tension inherent in most struggles between what is familiar and what is new and threatening, because they focus on the minutiae of custom and practice of beliefs and external expressions of doubt and uncertainty (Passerini 1992; Berdahl 1999 and others). The most apposite literature comes from studies that engage with memories that inform the present as well as the future in critical ways and do not conflate memories with history (Antze and Lambek 1996; Collard, 1989; Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004; Watson 1994). Of similar importance are studies that illustrate how the past continues to haunt us, how it might become a rallying point as many of the outbreaks of extreme human violence have become, or serve as symbolic example for a 'break' in what we understand under humanity. (Hinton 2002, but also Kwon 2008 and Malkki 1995).

Pine, for instance, compares with great insight the reactions of people in post-socialist Poland to sudden ruptures in their lives in the country side and in an urban environment (Pine 2007: 93-113). They experienced a sharp economic decline after socialism and Pine found that in rural Poland, especially, women emerged as the most resourceful in filling the 'void' left by the loss of

industrialised employment, with a return to 'household production'. This was accompanied by 'highly individualistic entrepreneurial activities, movement and mobility' which often resulted in an uneasy ambivalence about how to combine modernity with a return to more traditional practices, especially in a climate that devalued past achievements (Pine 2007:99). Men could move more easily into new work places or return to the land, whilst women, whose public image and identity had mostly been defined in their public work place, had to return home to take up the unpaid social caring of former state services. She writes:

'Outside' turned to 'Inside' through this process, 'the domestic domain, kinship and family came to carry an enormous and expanded load in social economic and kinship terms' (Pine 2007:104).

People's 'cultural world.... has been profoundly altered by socialism' writes Lampland in relation to Hungary (2007:39) and people's approach to radically altered circumstances does not necessarily alter with the speed of change but on the contrary retracts, deviates, counteracts, denies the existence of new possibilities, clinging instead to the well tried 'images of the past', (Boyarin 1994 and Carsten2007:25). Creed's work in Bulgaria shows similar examples of social disruption and what he calls 'decimation' of public rituals that undermined the ritualistic and collective affirmations of sociality, which had been promoted during socialism through folklore and national symbolic identity (Creed 2007:70). Rituals certainly played an important part in post-socialist East Berlin, where traditional festivals were actively and often humorously re-invented and revived, including those belonging to incoming ethnic minorities (see Chapters 3 and 4) in order to promote not only the novel multi-ethnic integration of younger inhabitants but also to revive people's memories of the past and of significant events.

Zonabend's work presents a useful counterpoint here, not only because she is not concerned with post-socialism, but as an example of how in a rural French

town in the post-war fifties, new technologies and powerful external pressures for change in social priorities challenged traditional and draconian village rules. 'Marrying for the land', for example, which had been an important social custom, could now be gradually subverted, particularly by younger women, who were nevertheless the carriers of traditions in a carefully balanced co-existence of the old and the new. Zonabend shows how these changes were gradually fused with the traditions of exchange and barter. The sense of retaining a perspective on change over time and adapting to it was preserved here, continuity and cultural identity, despite considerable pressures for relational as well as technical modernisation were preserved: change had been given time to change; because time, in this village, was (still) available (Zonabend 1984). For Walter Benjamin, who, according to Boyarin, daringly invoked the importance of ancestral continuities despite being a Marxist, 'life is maintained through a constant effort to retain the image of the past' (1994:27). Kwon evokes a similar image in his study of post-war Vietnam where the ghosts of ancestors, who had been 'banned' by the Vietcong, are re-integrated into daily life as signifier of 'the immediate historical background to the social vitality of ghosts in contemporary Vietnam (Kwon 2008:3).

Inevitable tensions arise between the old and something new, especially if the new is accompanied by injunctions set by external powers. Yet there is no universality in how these tensions are negotiated. While defending the need for micro studies in a period of rapid social and economic changes, Verdery and Hann (2007) as well as others warn that changes from one system to something less certain than a definable goal, might lead to hasty conclusions about cultural diversity and specificity. They make a geopolitical as well as an ecological point, which also emerged in the different regions of East Germany, complementing rather than negating the consideration of common factors, outlined by Pine above. Generally it is time and experience which allow people to assess the realities of new systems and judge their usefulness to them. Some institutions and organisations that had worked well under socialism were, it seems, all too often dismissed prematurely, leaving a sense of devaluation and

humiliation, denying people a sense of agency that might have been provided by the honouring something of what had been worth preserving.

I conclude this section with a quote by Don Kalb from Hann's collection cited above. It summarizes neatly, I think, the costs of these processes, which did not all lead to failure, but have left a growing number of people on the margins of post-socialist countries:

The global upsurge of nationalism and religion and the return of authoritarianism...must be seen not as the re-enactment of local cultural tradition against cosmopolitanism, but as intense efforts to stall the tide of demoralization and corruption after the long epoch of market-driven transformation²⁷ (Kalb, 2007:329).

Time and Spatial Markers: The East German Experience

Nora's work on memory and history is highly relevant in the context of post-socialism with its often rapid re-inscriptions of the new order and new nation building, complete with newly erected 'sites of memory' to erase previous manifestations of power, mentioned briefly in the introduction and discussed at length in the literature by Binder (2005), Huyssen, (2003) and Dr. Friel, in his lecture on the planned replacement of the 'People's Palace of Culture' in Berlin (2009). Kuechler's discussion of 'memoria', that is the space created by the absence of remembered objects (Kuechler 1999:54) is apposite here as the debates created through absence ensure a continuing presence not of the object as of its meaning. Although the speed of change may wipe over the past, it cannot deal with the persistence of memories which are triggered by events, mnemonics or some revival in the media, where memory production is at its height (see Conclusion).

²⁷ An epoch implies 'significant time from a certain beginning (Oxf.Dict.)

In the context of the unification process of the two politically independent states the manifest reality of inequality and inferiority after unification usurped all ideas of 'equal status'. The realisation of how the government of the GDR had neglected its environment, the large-scale pollution in industrial areas, the outmoded and inefficient state of the industrial equipment, the fabric of buildings – despite some stunning restorations in Dresden, for instance attracted loud criticism in the West and spread like some cancer through the country, leaving the 'new Laender' open to critical advisors from the West with their often unsuitable ideas about local modernisation (De Sohto 2003:96)²⁸. Bender draws attention to the curious inability to give voice (Sprachlosigkeit) to the most important subjects that would have needed urgent debate in each country and that still separate East and West today: Although occasionally mentioned they were rarely, if ever, discussed together, publicly, in the media, for instance, or by politicians. He refers to what each society would defined as 'equality and liberty'. Each concept, he states, has different meanings and moral implications in East and West Germany. In the West the thought that economic liberties should be curtailed for the sake of equality seemed unsupportable, whilst the people in the East find the growing difference between rich and poor indefensible. Both sides are separately not only debating economics here, but also moral questions about social priorities and values. West Germans, he continues, 'think primarily economically and the East Germans socially' (Bender 2003:19). Yet in each country are also those, who would think like those in the other.

'Disagreements are better than silence', he writes, 'we need to learn to recognize each other in our respective histories which can only be achieved through dialogue' (Bender, 1996:19-20). Since then this dialogue has begun, though not very convincingly or audibly through the 'Aufarbeitung' or working through of the GDR, as discussed below.

²⁸ Why these should be 'new' countries, when in fact some are far older than countries in the West, is a good question, an example of the linguistic carelessness of the 'take-over'.

Critical Events in History

By finding itself in the Russian zone of occupation in 1945 East Germany had become the inevitable heir to socialism in Europe after 1945. Although many on either side of the then fence shared in the fervent post-war antifascism, the determination of each occupying power to initiate its own ideologically driven programmes of re-education and reparation of war damages, resulted in an early division between the western Allies and the Soviet military Administration (SMAD). German communists, who had survived the Third Reich or gone into exile in Moscow, were promoted and encouraged to lead the new party system predicated on a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of 'democratic centralism' (Fulbrook 2009:120). German Socialists, who had formed the SPD during the Weimar Republic, now found themselves defeated in the West by the Conservatives, and in the East in an enforced merger with the KPD in 1946. These early divisions set the points for the short journey into a divided country and into opposing political camps that were soon trapped in a Cold War. Antifascism became, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, a symbol for East German identity and pride.

In the post-war years, which had brought radical changes in industrial production, the management of economies and new technologies, socialist countries too had modernised their production methods in selected industries and East Germany soon took a lead in productivity and export amongst Soviet Bloc countries during the first twenty years of its existence (Leonard 2007).

East Germany, when revealed after 1989, appeared backward and industrially polluted to the western visitor. Yet it had achieved a similar position in the East in comparison with other COMECON countries, as had West Germany in the E.E.C. (Fulbrook 2008, Grosser, 1992). East Germans were proud of their achievements, there had been many creative and positive cultural exchanges between countries, East German writers, artists and dissident song-writers like

Wolf Biermann, had achieved a high status in the West until he was expelled. As mentioned before, during the latter years the political climate had become rigid to the point of increasing and mounting desperation by the people and party politicians who wanted to introduce changes. This memory of frustration and waiting may have been at work powerfully and ‘mythically’ according to Olick, (2007:38)) when monetary union with the West became a real prospect. Although there were warnings in the 1990 about the financial and social costs that a capitalist state would introduce, Chancellor Kohl’s by now proverbial promise of ‘flowering landscapes’ painted an effective image for neglected landscapes and industrially polluted waters. The prospect of unrestricted travel and shopping were, according to most observers, key attractions, an exemplary case of ‘self -determination by a people, ‘that had nothing to do with democracy’ (Bender: 1994:81) By March 1990 a majority of East Germans voted overwhelmingly for the German Alliance, in their first free election. It was a vote for unification by accession rather than through a new constitution, despite considerable opposition from within and from the more cautious voices in the West. Habermas was foremost in his critique of the manner in which unification occurred because he foresaw the consequences that by 2010 have become uncomfortable memories:

What we are objecting to is the reckless treatment of incalculable and exhaustible moral and cultural resources ...the self-understanding, the political self-consciousness of a nation of citizens forms itself only in the medium of public communication. And this communication depends on a cultural infrastructure that is at this moment being allowed to fall into ruins in the new states (Habermas 2003: 47).

Habermas refers in this passage to the ‘liquidation’ of universities, colleges and museums, which he believes to be even worse than the destruction of other industries in the production sector. After twenty years of neoliberal democratic capitalism in the united country, opinion polls amongst former East Germans still result in the view that it will take much longer than

anticipated before a parliamentary democracy will be completely acceptable to the majority. According to Klaus Schroeder, who wrote about the 'Price of Unity' (2000), this is not surprising, but it is curious that even amongst the young East Germans agreement with the political system was low then and lowest amongst young women (12% in the East compared with 21% in the West)²⁹.

These statistics underscore and possibly explain the sense of betrayal, which I heard from younger East Germans, especially at the point where the global banking crisis hit the markets hard. Lutz Niethammer, historian for contemporary history and ethnographer, referred to the humour of the nineties where slogans such as 'advance through failure' (Vorsprung durch Scheitern) was meant to give courage to those who had lost so much; he states that those in the East, with their experience of defeat, denigration and hopelessness, might be better equipped to deal with global financial crisis than those in the West. He suggests that the democratic collectivism and 'communitarianism' of the East might now begin to be more appreciated in the West, particularly amongst the younger generation, and in the context of environmentalism and alternative patterns of social organisation (Niethammer 2009:280).

The organisations of the Pfefferwerk Network (see Appendix) and the Neighbourhood Centre, where I spent so much time during 2006 and 2007, are success stories as are many other enterprises, proving that the strength of human determination and creativity have a lot to offer at the right time and in the right place. It is however, also valuable to chart the processes that hinder such success stories, which I have attempted to do here.

²⁹ These statistics are taken from Schroeder (2000:187-189) and are produced by the Allensbach Institute for Statistical Information, Germany.

On the eve of unification in October 1990 a teacher in a high school in the former GDR asked her class of 16 year olds to write about the end of 'their' world, as they had known it. Twenty years later one of them told the interviewer of the Spiegel newspaper that this 'liberated' GDR had only existed for a few months, 'a phantasy land, filled with autumn leaves, burning candles...an adventure playground. 'I did not feel the socialist regime anymore and not yet capitalism'. Another, more realistic classmate wrote at the time: 'I am angry that the GDR is gobbled up by the BRD, we enter the united Germany with bent backs, that is bad... but I also see a lot of advantages and look forward to the future' (Hollerson 2009; Der Spiegel, 41, 66-77). This spirit still lingered in 2007, characteristic of what became later more clearly perceived as a temporal loss of identity, pride and achievement. Amongst the many interviews of youngsters born in November 1989 in East and West Germany, remarkably similar views appear about what they consider important and worth striving for in the future. They recognised how loss of dignity on a personal as well as on a collective level can lead to a psychological withdrawal, to entrenched attitudes and eventually to a re-evaluation of what had been lost. East German youngsters regretted having lost an 'authentic sense of history' and knowledge of what it had 'really been like' to live in the GDR.

Inner Exile – pathway to Identity?

The development of an inner unity and the formation of a collective identity is variously described as a 'slow and painful process taking much longer than anticipated' (Gruenbaum 1999:162); The constant presence of the media tends to blur or 'wipe over memories', writes the historian Jarausch (2009:527) and, as mentioned above, distorts personal and collective narratives that percolate through families and local communities. Huyssen, who wrote cogently about the 'Voids of Berlin', found these voids 'saturated' with memories and 'wilful forgetting' (Huyssen 2003:53). Twenty years after the disappearance of the

border, the Wall and its former spatial dimensions are still present in people's minds, geographically unclear perhaps, and without their political significance but with a persistent mental representation of its dividing and defining function. A team from the ethnological department of Humboldt University in Berlin explored formerly divided neighbourhoods in the nineties. They interviewed citizens of two districts in Berlin on each side of the former border about the actual location of the border and about what their idea of 'neighbourhood' had been in comparison to now. Whilst people were hazy about the actual geographic location of the Wall today, due to altered landscaping or re-building, they held firm images about what is – rather than was – different 'over there' from 'here'. One of the persons interviewed by the team of students who worked on the project, told them how the physical presence of the wall had created its own small community within its confines that was open, trusting, and self-perpetuating since no-one could escape: 'When the Wall was still there, she said, 'then we even got on well with our Turkish neighbours, despite differences, today everyone is out for himself, differences of opinions turn violent, that was impossible then' (Klemmt und Kubbernuss 1999:55) People on each side of the former divide thought their social surrounding had changed for the worse, there had been a loss of sociality. Whilst holding very similar values about what a good neighbourhood should convey, for example 'open contact, friendliness and knowing about each other, consideration and respect for each other, keeping an eye out for others', they clung to memories of better times linked to spatially defined identities of difference. Berdhal discusses ambivalence and distortions in commemoration rituals in the former border village, soon after the Wende in Germany (1999) and I observed quite varied manifestations of where people positioned themselves in relation to the 'other' Germany. Most of the older interviewees tended to emphasise their East Germaness in contrast to their membership of a united Germany or Europe. There was little overt joy about being part of a United Germany, tangible proof of the pervading sense of disillusion which had long overtaken the euphoria of 1989. For many the feeling of being rubbish reached deep into their consciousness since the

quality of their whole lives as lived during the SED dictatorship had been questioned, although no questions about their expectations and values had ever been asked, as Bender, referred to above, noted in 1996, in his article 'Welcome to Germany'.

Many West Germans would not agree with this statement having little empathy with what is variously regarded as retrenchment, a refusal to accept what is for those in the West so blatantly 'reality'. I met several West Germans, who were angered by East Germans defining themselves as Ost-Deutsche (East Germans) rather than simply German. Interestingly Herzfeld mentions the 'over-inclusive, kinship language' in national discourses about post-socialism (2001) in his work, that negates essential differences in socialisation, in relational traditions, practices and memories and gives little credit to past achievements, not least a peaceful revolution against the yoke of an inefficient and brutal regime. It was inevitable that the initial joy and closeness between siblings, East and West Germans would need to be re-assessed, not only in the light of the overpowering force of the more successful and richer brother but also because of their respective social and cultural differences which had left their mark during the forty years of separation.

The celebrations of twenty years after the Fall of the Wall indicated that there was a stronger Eastern voice and more awareness in the West of how their fellow citizens in the East think and feel which had still been absent ten years earlier (Mieselwitz 1999:29); there were signs that the East Germans also acknowledged their past and their part in maintaining the system in the GDR, despite its repression, that they hoped their endeavours to reform the system, would bring results. The memories of these endeavours are now given a more distinctive voice in the reconstruction of lives under communism, which, it is hoped, will in time also provide a clearer picture of the history of the GDR, which, as stated before, is far from coherent or clear.

Contested Memories and 'Aufarbeitung der DDR'

The German State is known for its strenuous and continuing efforts to come to terms with its past in the wake of the Holocaust and the acceptance of responsibility for the break with civilization under Hitler during World War II. (See Fulbrook 2009: 349-352, for a carefully selected bibliography). According to Sabrow, however, there is still an on-going contest in defining the historicity and character of the eastern part of a now united State (Sabrow 2009:16). The crimes committed by the Secret Police (STASI) are methodically documented and accessible to the public now. They provide ample evidence of appalling human rights infringements in the name of security which are being compared to the Nazi crimes of the Third Reich. Although the former GDR had signed the UN Convention on Human Rights when it acceded to the United Nations and the Helsinki Accords, which outlawed the use of torture, torture had been practised in special centres, especially in the notorious jail at Hohenschoenhausen³⁰.

This dilemma will remain a continuing debate, not unlike the debate about the need for a re-evaluation of the Nazi past in the light of the different ways in which this past was or still is being perceived by citizens of the German Republic (Merkel 1995; Habermas 1991). The literature and the discourses concerned with the themes of state violence and transgression is too large for this brief review although they flow, like some subterranean stream, as mentioned in Chapter 6, through many discourses concerned with the evaluation of German historiography be it East or West, or even European.

A Commission of Experts (Expertenkommission) was appointed in 2005 by the BKM³¹ with the mandate to develop a concept for a decentralized network of 'Historical Approaches' (Geschichtsverbund) that could research representations of the former GDR for future generations. The Commission

³⁰ See E. Jaeckel (1992) *The double Past – A comparison of political Systems*.

³¹ The Federal Ministry for Culture and Media

reported to the Federal Government in 2006; the recommendations and transcripts of discussions have since been published by the Federal Centre for Political Education (bpb) in Bonn (2007) which continue to be debated heatedly because the process of how and what to commemorate 'is only just beginning' (Sabrow 2009). It is the stated aim and concern of the Federal Government to involve as broad and as representative a group of citizens and experts in the implementation of these recommendations as possible. The Commission paid particular attention to the fact that a public re-appraisal of the GDR, no less than with the previous National Socialist State, required acceptance that there will be continuing re-workings of new and old material and that the participation of witnesses as well as oral and written narratives constituted an invaluable part of this process. It was also accepted that the current 'battlefield of contested views and memories' should not deter attempts at achieving a more coherent but also highly differentiated image of the GDR. It seems pertinent to mention these committees and working parties here, as they had formed all over the GDR in order to identify how citizens wanted their past to be represented. There are no conclusions although there are signs of a certain fatigue setting in as world events and continuing economic crisis in Europe occupy thinking spaces. According to Jarausch the controversy in the media about memories of the 'everyday' (Alltag) as opposed to memories of a criminal regime (Unrechtsstaat) has created confusing and antagonistic positions (see Sabrow 2005).

According to him a European approach to the division of Europe may free up this rather tense impasse (Jarausch 2007:534).

One might ask to what extent these reports and deliberations might affect the lives of ordinary people, people who work in the NBC, for instance. Again there is no definitive answer but the ethnography has shown, that the impact of the history of the house and its continuing relevance to the present, which emerged particularly poignantly during the Campaign against racial discrimination, is a reflection of tensions and dynamics that adhere to a doubly troubled past.

Conclusion

Many unanswered questions about the vanished republic remain and will continue to surface, probably bringing the two parts of the one nation closer in their attempt to uncover their common past under separate political systems and within Europe. The enduring values include an acceptance of differences as well as the ability to discuss these rather than bully them into political consent. Opinions will have to be continually revised in the light of new research or new insights as to how to remember both separate states. For the GDR it will matter to encapsulate what remains as an enduring memory of a very different way of life style from the present and the future. In this review I have presented the main themes that occur repeatedly in this theses and concern memory and history as well as human endeavour to deal with social as well as political rupture. The critical event for East Germans was the Fall of the Wall and their revolt against a corrupt system. For East and West Germans this event led to the unification which had not really been part of the agenda but became the overriding objective for both countries in November 1989 and during the following year. The Fall of the Wall and unification attained a symbolic and global significance as both coincided with other global shifts in economies and financial markets. The capitalist crisis in global markets had devastating effects but particularly affected post socialist countries where investments from outside were withdrawn and many newly set up enterprises collapsed.

Chapter 3

The House for Others: Glimpses through a Fractured Lens

The story of the House is inextricably linked with five different political systems, most of which left their indelible impact on the population in Germany and the users of this house.

I am interested in its history, how the remembering of spaces and events are reflected in the narratives of its users and form part of identities. Its patrimony is also that of an institutional setting, which, as Eidson has pointed out, ‘sprawls the middle ground between ‘society’ and ‘the individual’, revealing ‘collective memory’ that is neither part of the larger state promoted discourse nor that of society as a whole (Eidson 2004: 59-92). This ‘middleground’, as I stated in the introduction, also reveals how people might or do negotiate larger social conflicts locally, how they interpret for themselves what anthropologists often call sociality³², the ability to form and maintain social relationships in specific contexts. It was reminiscent of Strathern’s (1988) observation of gender and role allocation in Melanesia or the very different and more conventional ethnography of an East German Border town (Berdhal 1999). Each describes the difference between the specific in contrast to the general, which is my focus here too. The narratives in this and later chapters form part of a varied and rich but specific tapestry that emerged in the course of time.

³² Strathern, in writing about the ‘Gender of the Gift’ in Melanesia (1988) states that an understanding of Melanesian society and gender relations is contingent on their ‘sociality’ rather than on general social, and primarily western, notions about gender roles.

I cannot remember how I came across this house, was I drawn to it by accident or a quirk of fate? I certainly had no idea of its existence or where it might be. I cannot remember why I walked down this particular road in East Berlin in March 2006. Viewed from a distance now, the House stands almost alone, yet in reality it is firmly rooted in a slightly rising street, opposite a landscaped square between two tall elegant 19th century houses. It is very familiar and I seem to have lived with it for a long time –strong images are evoked through the narratives of others who did live in the house, who once played there and ate and slept there, and through those who have since worked there or who now come to learn, play, create, reflect, heal. Although I was only there for a fraction of its long history and talked with people who know the house well or perhaps not so well, this experience has elicited strong feelings of warmth, of friendship, but also a slight apprehension of the future. Will this house and its institutions survive, is it sustainable in the current climate of change? How close are the endeavours of the people who work here to the reality of financial cuts? It is a strong house despite its leaking roof and ugly exterior. All its rooms and the garden are filled with projects and activities, some better than others but all somehow related to people; the house tells a story that offers glimpses into a terrible past which reverberates into the present; it played its institutional part in local and even national history, not necessarily consecutively. The visitor is at liberty to fill in the missing pieces - the bits that are there cannot be imagined yet the imagination they trigger is left to roam freely.

The house was built in the late nineteenth century for private use by a merchant who had stables for horses in the yard, a vegetable patch and outhouses. The house design conformed to the architectural classicism of the late imperial age, with large windows on the first two floors of the front façade and smaller windows for servants or nurseries at the top. It was bought by a Jewish organisation in 1910 and converted into a day care home for 50-60 children of the poorer Jewish immigrants who worked in the area. At the height of the persecutions the numbers rose to 180 children in day care; by

1939 the numbers had shrunk to 20 inhabitants.³³ A side wing and roof terraces were added as well as a large kitchen on the ground floor. The steep staircase that connects the three floors, invites curiosity about its history. On one side is a normal hand rail, on the other is a much lower wooden rail fixed to the wall which brings to mind the fact that this rail had been designed for children in accordance with progressive, child focussed theories of the early twentieth century for which the institution became known.

Most of these Jewish children and their carers perished during the Holocaust, their memory is contained in the book, which Inge Franken researched and wrote with the help of many friends at the NBC and in the area as described later in this Chapter. The institution ceased to exist in 1940 when the house officially closed and its inhabitants had to move to a nearby Home for Old People. The house itself had to be sold to the National Socialist Party in 1942 for the 'Volk' or the people at a much reduced price and without its existing mortgage.

Between then and 1945 children and young people tramped up and down the steep stairs; according to reports they sheltered here after school or during air raids. Soon after the end of the war in May 1945 a local major and some returned soldiers gathered young people to come to meetings, to help with clearing the rubble and to join emerging communist youth groups. From 1947 until the end of the communist era young people of varying ages used day care facilities and youth organisations that belonged to the socialist FDJ or 'Free German Youth' organisation³⁴. The staircase remained unaltered. After unification in 1990 and the process of restitution which returned the house to

³³ See Franken, (2005) for conditions in the Children's Home and Roder &Tacke, eds. (2004) who describe the destitution of living conditions at the start of the century in this area.

³⁴ The 'Free German Youth' Organisation was the national body for the socialisation of young people into the ideology of the socialist state in the GDR; it was supervised and regulated by the Socialist Unity party or SED.

its rightful owners, the Jewish Charity in New York sold the house to the Pfeifferwerk A.G. in 1994. The Neighbourhood Centre (NBC) moved in in stages as various structural renovations were completed. It consists of four voluntary organisations with different objectives who all offer different interest groups, courses and self-help groups for adults, a skills exchange and events for children and families (see Appendix). The staircase is still a central link, although most visitors now prefer the newly installed lift in the court yard.

The accidental discovery of the house and its surrounding remind me of Walter Benjamin's 'deliberate' meanderings in the nineteen twenties and early thirties through cities with whom or with which he seemed to have formed relationships, depending on how he responded to their 'character', their power to elicit sentiments and the unexpected that can reveal new aspects about the self, one's position or about identity and memory that is tied to locality (Benjamin 1950). Berlin, where Benjamin grew up in a protected bourgeois household, became for him more like a surrealist painting. According to Hannah Arendt he developed a 'distinctive' view by perceiving cities not unlike works of art, full of surprises and contradictions, in which one found oneself 'between past and present' musing, thinking and never really arriving (Arendt 1968). He challenged a city's official, linear narrative as well as historical time which he saw represented in monuments and buildings. Cities, and maybe also institutions like this house, 'tell of decisions about what or who should be visible and what should not' observed Zukin in her study of cities, thus revealing concepts of order and disorder and uses of aesthetic power (Zukin, 1995:33-35). The house in its current state reveals traces of what its former exterior might have been like. Old plans and photos show elegant Oriel windows on the courtyard side, where a new wing had been added in 1915, and an elegant lower ground floor entrance porch below a small terrace, where now an ugly steel door leads to former workrooms with a terrace above with utilitarian railings. Sadly not a single photo has so far been found that would reveal the front of the house as it used to be, before it was partially damaged by a bomb. The large entrance hall leading through to the garden still conveys

some former grandeur and elegance in its vaulted ceiling and detailed stucco on the upper walls, but the actual entrance door, renewed in 1998, had to be a compromise, I was told, between elegance and functionality.

I happened to come upon the house by sheer chance. It stood there and invited me in through its two announcements; one was written in large lettering across the front stating that this was a Neighbourhood Centre; in smaller letters across the windows of the lower floor one could read: Nachbarschaftshaus - Neighbourhood House - and Selbsthilfekontaktstelle - Contact Point for Self Help. A framed text and photo on the left hand side of the large double entrance door stated that here had once been a Jewish Children's Home and that most of the children and adults who once lived here, had been sent to concentration camps and died. The photo shows two children aged about five or six sitting on a step, laughing. The text refers to an exhibition inside the house of other photos taken before the war, inviting the visitor to enter.



Fig. 3. The Neighbourhood Centre, Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg in 2007

I entered and encountered an organisation and a history which will link the following chapters, adding new dimensions to my questions, outlined in the introduction. The house and its history illustrate different legacies left by Germany's past including the recent unification and illustrate how memory,

place and time interact, shaping the present. Through the Neighbourhood Centre (NBC) I encountered many people and organisations that were either closely or loosely connected with it, I participated in events, celebrations, many meals round tables, where people met regularly sharing food, either home made, or hastily bought at the corner supermarket. I later found links to other, similar Centres in Berlin and more tenuous links to the 'Houses of Culture' that used to exist in the Soviet Union and were inspired by social Reformist and Settlement movements of 19th century philanthropy (Habeck 2010).³⁵ The first Settlement House in Berlin was introduced into one of the poor areas of the city before the First World War by a theologian from Potsdam who had been inspired by Toynbee Hall in London. Lindner (1997), who published its history, referred to the fact that the area was then known as 'a dark and unknown place in the East'.

Before describing the house and its various activities, I shall present a 'Zeitreise' or 'journey through time' as an example of engaged history telling for a class of nine to ten year old children from a local school. Organised in the context of a campaign against racism during 2007 (see Chapter 6) this form of bringing history alive in a setting that 'still bears witness' to its events is a form of re-inscription, a re-signifier' (Bhaba 2004: 59), that proved evocative and popular. First, however, a note about how the details of this past became known:

A hidden past

In 1998, when the NBC had become established in the house, a Canadian appeared with a friend saying he wanted to revisit where he had once lived in a Jewish Children's Home. David, as he was called, told one of the workers at the Centre that he had stayed there as a child together with many other Jewish

³⁵ Toynbee Hall in East London was the first Settlement of this kind, founded in 1884

children, until he was selected to leave with a Kindertransport³⁶ in 1939 ending up in Canada where he had been adopted. According to Selma, who had met him, he had been highly reluctant to become further involved, not wanting to expand on his experiences; His friend had urged him to accept the invitation of the Berlin Senate, which extends regular offers to former persecuted citizens as part of its restitution efforts³⁷. Having changed his name and his family, David told Selma he wanted no further contact since “the past was no longer part of his identity” (S., 03/07). Little did he know how much his chance visit and his revelations were to affect the future of the NBC. Selma publicised the story hoping to research it further with colleagues and members of the youth club, who then still met in the house. But researches proved difficult and the youth club left the premises. For Selma, who had grown up in East Berlin, this information became the source of further enquiries into a past, which had never been particularly relevant to her until now and until her daughter brought home a book, called ‘When neighbours become Jews’ (Wenn aus Nachbarn Juden werden), about the persecution of Jews³⁸.

It was Inge Franken, from West Berlin, a retired history teacher, who eventually took up the search. For her the story of these children became a challenge and, eventually, her most important life project. I mentioned her book earlier. It was published in 2005 under the title ‘Gegen das Vergessen’ or ‘Against Forgetting’; it led to many conversations in the house and with people who became involved and contributed their memories and recollections to the book. Inge managed to establish links with former, now adult, children in

³⁶ Kindertransporte were organised by the Jewish Diaspora abroad with the support and financial help of the British Government in 1938-39.

³⁷ West German towns regularly send out invitations to former citizens who were persecuted or their dependants, organise restitution meetings and discussions with young or interested people.

³⁸ The history of how the Jews and other minorities were treated under Hitler was well known in the GDR but had not been given anything like the same prominence as it had in the West. After the fall of the Wall archival research and oral histories uncovered a lot of material that had previously not been publicly available. Most of the histories I read had been written by Western authors.

Israel, New York, England and elsewhere, who were contacted and visited. It led to contacts with Tosca, a woman who now lives in New York with her son; Inge had invited him to visit Berlin and the NBC in January 2007, as described later in Chapter 6. Tosca followed in September 2007, her first visit since 1939, when she had left with the last Kindertransport. Almost her first sentence after arrival was:

I came reluctantly but being here now I first sat in the square opposite, in the Teutoburger Platz, because I wasn't allowed to sit there when I lived here; dogs and Jews were forbidden to enter – I sat on the bench and stretched out my arms to reach the end of the bench on each side.... (T., 10.9.2007).

Tosca demonstrated how her arms embraced the space in the square. Small and wiry, with sparkling eyes, the eighty-two year old held us in her spell as she talked about her life as we sat around the table. She, like David, the Canadian, had been selected to leave with one of the last 'Kindertransporte' in 1939. Her and her family's story had been researched the previous year by a group of 6th formers from the local High School which they presented at a public meeting in February 2007, (see chapter 6).

Tosca discovered her life as a child in the archive of photographs by Abraham Pisarek, now exhibited upstairs in the long hall. His practice as theatre photographer had been severely restricted by the Nazi regime in the thirties. Inge had heard of him by chance as part of her search for survivors in Israel and met his daughter, a local doctor in Berlin who showed her his photographs of Jewish children in homes and in schools. Some of his work can now be seen in a number of local documentations in former Jewish institutions³⁹. The small

³⁹ There is a large photo documentation in the Archive of one of the former local Jewish Schools, although not all the photos are his. In the late thirties children were taken out of 'Arian' schools and relocated to Jewish institutions prior to and following an official decree in 1938 (see 'Jewish Life in Pankow' a historical documentation 1993).

exhibition on the second floor of the NBC, mentioned in the text I had seen outside the main door, shows children and their carers engaged in various typical activities of a home for children of varying ages. Tosca could point to some of the scenes and name its children. She confirmed the description in a contemporary Jewish Family Journal in 1935 which mentions the enlightened humanist philosophy of childcare in this home where “laughter must not cease” and where children are treated with dignity (Franken, 2005:25). The Home had initially been run according to progressive, non-religious child care principles of the time, providing activities for learning and for play as well as a training school for adolescent girls to learn home economics and cooking. Bringing sunlight into the rooms, as well as art, music and opportunities to explore and learn, is still reflected in the architecture of the house, in tall windows, terraces and in generous proportions. Later, as more children came whose parents were forced to work or had been deported, the Jewish heritage of the children, their festivals, stories and songs became an increasingly important part of their daily routine, planting enduring memories. The photos on the walls speak of care and dedication despite a certain austerity in the furnishings.

Selma spotted on one of the photographs that children were making sailing boats from cotton reels, bits of cotton cloth and string in one of the workshops. As she is a keen sailor herself she devised the following project in June 2007, which, as mentioned, fitted into the context of the Berlin-wide ‘Campaign against Racism’ in local districts.

A Voyage into the Past and back into the Future

Selma built a model boat just like the one in the photograph and fixed it symbolically over the inner entrance door to the Centre. On the sail in black are some letters in Hebrew that spell out the word ‘shalom’ which means peace in

Hebrew or, colloquially, 'hello', 'see you', – a greeting that reaches out across years of indescribable silences.

In May 2007 Selma decided to invite a class of children between 9 and 11 on an imaginary 'Zeitreise' or journey through time by guiding the boat she had built along an imaginary time line, drawn in chalk on the paved area of the courtyard. 24 children and some parents arrived. 'Here we are now', she said, placing the boat at the beginning of the line, 'and now we sail into the past, past the time you were born and beyond the time you remember'. She first paused in 1989, the year when the 'Wende' happened and the Wall, that had divided Berlin and the whole country, was pulled down and Germany was re-united. Most children knew about this event but seemed more interested in the fact that the glass elevator on the outside of the house had not yet existed then, or that they would not have existed either. The boat stopped again in 1945, when the war ended and a bomb had torn out a bit from the front of the house. Selma told them the story of Klara, who had often come here before the end of the war in order to get her food rations, as the schools were frequently closed or inaccessible because of air raids. One day she arrived and a Russian Soldier stood in the room, straight in front of the cupboard where her ration was kept. She still remembered the fear and anxiety at that point. How could she get to her food ration? Klara, who is now seventy years old, had forgotten what happened then. Would she get her food, which consisted of a bag of dried sliced potatoes?

The boat sailed further in time to the year 1910, when the house was bought by a Jewish Foundation and turned into a Home for local Jewish Children, whose parents needed to work during the day in factories or home-based workshops. Some of these parents were poor or had died. The boat sailed a little further back to 1864 when Otto Pein, a merchant, had first built the three-story house. It had a side wing and stables for horses and cows in the yard, as was usual at that time. Here the boat turned round to sail slowly back to the year 1937 with many careful stories on the way about the First World War, the years that followed and the depression of the twenties. Selma spoke about the different teachers and young people in the home; of the boy, for instance, who jumped out of the first

floor window into the sand pit below in order to impress the girls, about the cheeky brother and sister, whom everyone adored. Her stories triggered responses about how children lived today, their school experience, their family histories. The boat stopped and the group left the river of time in the year 1937 in order to go upstairs to look at the exhibition of framed photographs on the second floor, which showed children of various ages at work and at play in different rooms of the house, in the sand pit and on the swings in garden; some sat on the lap of carers, others listened to stories, during the day or at bed time. One could see them sleeping in rows of beds, no longer in the residential section but in the large room, as many had by then lost parents and relatives. There are also photos of a group of children by the sea, laughing.

Selma, helped by parents, spoke about the deportations and killings sensitively but without sentimentality. Many questions were asked about what happened at the time and why Jews were persecuted. Some children had heard about these crimes in school. They calculated how many years had passed and how old parents or grandparents might have been then. They were encouraged to ask questions at home and at school. Back at the workshop members of the workshop team and an Israeli artist Anat, helped them construct their own boat out of cotton reels and string and bits of cloth. Anat wrote each child's name in Hebrew on each sail creating a link between now and the past. The boats were taken to the courtyard and everyone was encouraged to use chalk to colour in the time line and to sail off. Soon the courtyard was covered in little boats that sailed further up and down the time line, into the future and well into the early evening, when the workshop ended.

It was a successful event; all participants felt they had been on a special voyage and taken part in an experience that left them thoughtful but also curious to find out more. According to feedback children continued to ask questions of their parents – a request for further journeys into the past, maybe also for different age groups, was discussed and implemented



Fig 4. A copy of the original boat in the photo by A. Pisarek (1937?)

The new Past is hidden- we only remember the Old

The experience of this journey raised many questions for me, not least the question about time: until 1998 no-one seemed to know about what had happened here, or if they knew, they did not pay much attention. Yet the house had been bought in 1996 from the Jewish Restitution Committee and the real estate buyers, Pfefferwerk GBR, a subsidiary company of the main Charity, Pfefferwerk gGmbH,⁴⁰ must have been aware of the titles and deeds. The records I was allowed to copy in the offices of the property company, which had bought the house, stated clearly that in 1942 the Society of Jews in Germany were required to sell the property, a 'Jewish Children's Home', to the National Socialist Peoples' Welfare Organisation at a hugely deflated price and without the existing mortgages. After the war, but not until 1952, the house was appropriated into the ownership of the 'Berlin KWV' or Community Housing Association, where it remained until it was 'restituted' or returned to Jewish ownership under the agreement with the Jewish Claims Conference in

⁴⁰ See Appendix on the organisational aspects of this business which had been set up in 1990/91 as part of the 'Pepperwork' group of local traders and/or professional offices.

New York in 1992⁴¹. The Jewish patrimony had been known all along, but unlike in the West, where the history would have been uncovered and commemorated long ago, this history was never regarded as sufficiently important during the time of the German Democratic Republic. More curious, however, is the seemingly 'invisible' history of the house and its functions during the time of the GDR. Although we heard individual accounts from passers-by and interested seniors who visited places of their childhood, no official records have so far been found about the activities in the house, about any inspections of the kindergarten, which was there, or of the youth clubs which, according to witness accounts, held their meetings and dances there in 1945 and later.

It is a puzzling and unexplained finding, as the building and its facilities had always been used by children, young people and their families, albeit under different political systems. A neighbour told me later that she had visited the children's Day Centre or 'Hort' as part of her role as further education consultant. She remembered 'soulless rooms, peeling paint, loads of children, and carers in overalls' (E.N., Sept. 2007). She had clearly not been impressed although the child care policy of the GDR was highly regarded in affording full-time care for children of working parents⁴².

The kindergarten and the youth clubs, each public institutions that used the house, would have been subject to inspections, health checks, maintenance and council decisions as to financial outlay. My enquiries at the local council offices and the library, which included local archives, drew a blank; I was

⁴¹ The restitution politics in the former GDR were determined by the view that the GDR would not restore individual property or property that had already changed into the hands of the 'People', or the state. 'Restitution follows the laws of property' is the conclusion by Riedling who also deals with the GDR (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/>, accessed 02. 2010).

⁴² The childcare arrangements in socialist countries differed substantially from those in the West and will be discussed in Chapter 5. Also see Fulbrook, M. (2009). Lane, C. (1983) Women in Socialist Society, with particular reference to the GDR in 'Sociology', 17:4 pg 489-505 for a contemporary account.

directed to the Landesarchiv (State Archive of Berlin) where I found two entries: In 1949, a council meeting debated whether an advice centre for sexually transmitted diseases could be located in the house.⁴³ A further entry, in 1954 declared that damage caused by damp needed to be removed⁴⁴. People in the neighbourhood would, I thought, surely, remember the crèche, the Kindergarten, the youth groups? I asked some elderly citizen who had grown up locally and who sat regularly in the square. They remembered nothing. The Berlin Agency for Time witnesses (Zeitzeugen) advertised for information, without success. A group of women and one man, regular visitors to the house, and all local, had many memories about the adjoining square, but knew nothing of the Children's Home. (see chapter 4).

Herr Strehlke, now 79, also in search of his youth, came to talk to a group of us about time just after the war, when he, then 14, was invited to come to a youth club organised by a former major in the army. 'We had to be 'self-sufficient, organise everything ourselves, we cleared ammunition from the gardens and parks after school for which we could earn extra rations', he told us. He brought his ration card as evidence and a small photo of himself and his friends at camp. He spoke about how he was politically 'educated' by the major and other local men, who gathered them into groups to keep them off the street.

I learnt about the relationship between poverty and capital and the power of governments to do something about this, but we also danced, and the girls sewed clothes and swimsuits for themselves out of old flags – he laughed at the memory – 'those were funny' (H.S., 04. 07).

He remembered making toys for poor children at Christmas and how in 1946 he went to work with his father at the main railway station in Berlin, getting

⁴³ Was this connected to the horrendous sexual violations of women by soldiers in post-war Berlin?

⁴⁴ (<http://www.berlin.de/verwaltungsfuehrer/bauen-wohnen/>)

there on roller skates. The streets were ripped up, there were bomb craters everywhere, a bus had plunged into an underground shaft:

We had a large slice of bread between us to eat all day; the work was very hard, but my father said, boy, if we don't get these trains running now, nothing will get going for the future (HS, 04. 07).

Herr Strehlke later returned to education, studied mathematics and became a high school teacher. His memories of the immediate post war chaos and the spirit of 'Aufbau' or renewal mirrored in some way the stories about anarchy and excitement preceding and following the fall of the Wall in 1989-90 researched by Links & Taffet (2009) without the drama of death, destitution and absolute horror of the post war era. Memories of the square's beauty persisted in the stories of the now almost mythical pre-war era in the twenties. The image below speaks of a distant time of order and apparent civility, where women sit in neat rows on benches, while older children hold the hands of younger ones walking along raked paths. As in so many photos, it only tells a partial story as an increasing number of people, mostly immigrants from the East, lived nearby in overcrowded tenement blocks at that time, often under appalling conditions; in fact the Day Care Centre for Jewish children had been created because of perceived needs of many of the poorer immigrant Jewish families who had come from Poland and further East to find work in the expanding Prussian capital (Franken 2005).



Fig 5 Teutoburger Platz, Berlin, 1928

A Neighbourhood enterprise “from the bottom up”

‘We started with a small table, a coffee pot and some home-made cakes in the square’ said Selma, one of the initiators of the idea of gathering people who were traumatised by the ruptures of the aftermath of unification. She told me that women had been hardest hit because of the closures of factories that coincided with the closure of institutional day care for children and dependents. A whole way of life, however frustrating it may have been, had at least been dependable, but was now lost. The older members of the population, and again older women more than men, had been most affected, as they found out through their statistics. Many observers and analysts have confirmed her information when they researched the emotional and material effects ‘unleashed’ in the nineties, following unification (Kolinsky 2007; Gruenert and Burkart 1994).

What seemed like a massive betrayal to some seemed to others, like Selma and her colleagues, who had also lost their jobs, also a call for new initiatives: filled with energies to create something new in order to counteract the air of

desolation and despair they saw around them, they explored the opportunities that were offered through grants and funding from the West. They engaged in 'action' in the sense of engagement with society as result of creative, political thinking, reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's ideas about new beginnings and 'action enabled through the freedom of thinking' as Arendt wrote in 1968 (quoted in Bernstein 2000:291). The women approached people in the square, listened to their stories and encouraged them to participate in building something new. Selma told me that civic engagement as an idea had acquired a double meaning in the GDR, where the implicit expectation to engage in civic action had been heavily promoted and awarded with bonus points, but such activities were also tightly controlled by the party.

Selma became my main source of information and guide around the house. She showed me the large, friendly entrance space on the first floor, where people meet and where a café is planned as soon as volunteers can be found to run it; the art gallery, also a large room with a view into the street and across to the square, 'der Platz', where they had first tried to create a kind of space for self-directed activities and sociality:

Our idea was to attract people, there were so many broken existences, so much disorientation and confusion after the Wende, when the old system disappeared and new rules had not yet been established....we could dream of changing everything (S., 05. 2007).

The idea of setting up a neighbourhood house evolved in the course of searching for funds. 'We asked all sorts of institutions', said Selma, 'our idea of combining a work space (Werkstatt) with an art space and with a lot of self-directed activities was hard to fit into the existing criteria. Eventually we were directed to the umbrella organisation of Neighbourhood Houses in West Berlin'. Had the idea been taken from the tradition of Houses of Culture in East Germany and other Soviet Union countries? She said no, not at all, although the original ideas of 'Kulturpalaeste' and neighbourhood houses

might have been related. She and her colleagues had been directed to visit and learn from the established Neighbourhood Houses in West Berlin. Based on the Settlement Movement, as mentioned before, the idea had come to Berlin after World War II from the USA as a Quaker initiative to introduce 'democratisation' into the cities. Local neighbourhood-based facilities were to provide citizens with the opportunity to pursue their interests while also having the opportunity to be exposed to new skills, ideas and cultural events (see Lindner, 1994).

It seemed to me that there was some continuity with the cultural institutions set up under communism that Habeck (2010) describes in his fieldwork research in Russia; the idea of cultural activity used for social development, as a 'base and guide for change' is an old pedagogical device paradoxically used by radical reformers like Paulo Freire (1970) by authoritarian dictatorships, as well as liberal democracies. Hannerz (1992) rightly defined culture as the 'meaning people create and which creates people as members of society'. The idea of creating cultural centres can be seen as double sided, although I was sure that Selma's idea was authentically based on her belief in the power of creative activity. She and her colleagues wanted to provide a space for people who would be able to use the house free from interference by those in power and with the support of the NBC team.

The Prenzlauer Berg district east of the new centre of Berlin had recently been integrated with the larger borough of Pankow (see map). Here new 'communities'⁴⁵ were constantly being created by the influx of younger, often more affluent families, many only in temporary residence, belonging to the international population of corporate employees. They used the facilities of the NBC well, set up their own groups, often around child care and toddler

⁴⁵ 'Community' here denotes groups of people in a neighbourhood with shared interests and needs.

activities⁴⁶. Older people and the middle-aged, on the other hand, featured less in the statistics of the NBC, which was explained by the need for these age groups to be available for duties of care (NHC statistics 2005, also Thelen 2004); there were, however, also demographic reasons, as many of the older people had moved away, not being able to afford the rising rents or wanting to move to newer homes further East (Pankow Statistics 2007; Roder and Tacke 2004).

Urgently needed social institutions, like a neighbourhood centre, childcare facilities, special centres for the disabled or hard to manage, had to be created under the umbrella of charities, who received state funding, but retained considerable independence in how they ran their facilities soon after the *Wende*. Funding, as already mentioned, had been more easily available after unification than it is today, resources could be traded or begged from richer friends, eager to help. People were prepared to help, I was told, more than today (KA, 06. 07). In consultation with other groups and tenants' associations – which had formed relatively quickly to protect property rights and tenancy agreements – activities were organised to meet the requirements of younger and often immigrant families, who also moved into the area because of work opportunities and still relatively cheap rents. The NBC team had to learn how to write applications to charities, negotiate contracts with lawyers, willing to help. They learnt from the Western experience without, necessarily, wanting to adopt the same ethos or structure. According to Selma they did not want to repeat what they knew to be 'pitfalls' of the capitalist system⁴⁷, but did not want to reproduce the 'top-down' constraints inherent in the Houses of Culture they had known. It is endemic to these centres to 'grow' out of the locality and to follow locally devised visions of what an urban neighbourhood centre might achieve (Scherer 2005). There is a danger, however, warned Dr.

⁴⁶ Prenzlauer Berg became famous for its abundance of children at a time of falling birth rates .

⁴⁷ West German television had been beamed into East German homes for years, anti-capitalist propaganda had been taught in schools. People were aware of what was happening in the West and knew the attractions as well as the pitfalls of life in the West, especially in Berlin (see Borneman, 1992)

Scherer, director of the NBC's umbrella organisation in Berlin, that they also foster 'dependencies' and certain inertia that may be difficult to change (Dr. S.,06. 2006).

One of several published versions of the ethos that informs the work of the Centre states:

Neighbourhood Centres in cities provide a number of different facilities, which are informed by and geared to the needs and requirements of self-help groups, families, children, young and older people in the neighbourhood. They work in conjunction with voluntary agencies and are committed to 'civic engagement' as well as to collaboration with local agencies, engaged in the re-generation of the area. It is believed that a framework which facilitates social and neighbourly relationships also promotes a natural climate of (social) engagement and belonging, which will in turn promote the growth of stable and sustainable neighbourhoods (NBC Concept 2004, Berlin).

Selma's vision of a 'Werkstatt', literally workstation or more familiarly workshop, fits into this concept but is less ambitious, more individually tailored. 'I wanted people to be really engaged in and responsible for what was going on here. They could create and make things, but they also needed to 'clear up', to take an active part in what they and we try to create together' (S.,03. 2006). 'What do you think about all that now?' I asked Selma, when we talked about these beginnings at one of our initial meetings.

Of course it's not ever how you think it will be, but it has been very interesting how people responded and came up with ideas. Look at Anna, she is now running the skill's exchange mart. She is in a wheelchair and had little prospect of ever working again. She was helped through the work incentive scheme which is complicated but at least gives her a chance to work in an interesting job (S., 07. 2007).

‘and you yourself?’

I initially started with grand ideas but had to modify these over time. The work creation scheme is very tricky, as it always changes. I act as mentor for several of them. Some learn through it, others lose. Ask them! (S., 07. 2007)⁴⁸

I did ask in the course of the field work and realised through the variety of the responses that people resented this thinly disguised welfare ‘hand-out’ that subjected them to ignominious procedures and much red tape; some had also accepted it as an inevitable consequence of the Wende and made it work for them, as I learnt from Wienke, a young mother of two, whose time-limited contract needed to be renewed every three months. She appreciated the flexibility of the scheme and did not mind its rigorous scrutiny of her and her children’s financial position.

Selma and I met in October 2006 and again in January 2007 in order to discuss details of my ‘placement’. She had negotiated my stay with members of the other three teams and I was introduced to them in January, when I outlined the purpose of my research and asked what their expectation was of me. I explained that their organisation and the House in which they worked were special. The building reflected in its history some of the important and most traumatic events of the past century. It told a story of political and social changes whose enduring influences on present times, including the silence and denial, which cover uncomfortable memories, could be clearly read. I did not mention at that meeting that it was this initial encounter with the House rather than any of the occupants, that led me to explore it further and planted the thought of looking here rather than elsewhere as a base for my research.

⁴⁸ See Appendix. The Hartz IV scheme enables people out of work to earn certain amounts in addition to their benefits and offers contracts that are individually tailored. When this State Benefit scheme was first introduced in 2003/4 it attracted wide-spread criticism and protest, not least for ‘hiding’ the true extent of unemployment.

The Tour of the House

The offers of activities, displayed in the entrance hall, are directed at every age group, every facet of interest or need. There were a number of Yoga and other body movement classes, 'Theatre of Experience' for seniors, drama for youngsters; dance, pottery, hobby activities, singing classes in different languages for children and parents, clearly directed at the international population in the area. The offer of self-help groups was even larger. I counted more than a dozen activities each day of the week, amongst them stopping-smoking groups, compulsive disorder groups, workaholic anonymous, gay groups, chess groups, parenting groups, jumble sales and exchange marts, including the exchange of skills. The eclectic mix for people from all over Berlin was unusual. There was the announcement of an exhibition by a local artist and her pupils in the Gallery F92, on the first floor. A separate poster described a group called One-by-One. Here the descendants of Nazi perpetrators and victims of Nazi persecution could meet confidentially every last Sunday in the month⁴⁹.

Opposite the broad flight of stairs that led up to the entrance to the first floor on the right hand side I noticed a large photomontage. It showed the 'mirror image' of the stairs with the names, dates of birth and dates of deportation of former occupants on each tread. I stood still, overwhelmed by this powerful, simple device of documenting something so far reaching and still incomprehensible. The sun filtered through the windows of the glass doors into the garden, it all looked domestic and peaceful; bicycles, which stand, lean or are chained to every available rail speak of people who are local, and who pass by this image every day, maybe now without noticing it even.

⁴⁹ The organisation of One-by-One was set up in America and is now present in many cities in Germany. It is a non-profit organization founded by those whose lives have been deeply affected by the Holocaust. The membership is multi-generational and welcomes descendants of survivors, perpetrators and bystanders as well as concerned individuals.

The Self-Help Contact Centre

Located on the top floor of the house and most often reached by the external lift, it follows to some extent Selma's vision of a 'Werkstatt' since the groups work autonomously and are responsible for the organisation of their group sessions. The Centre is financed by the German Humanist Association, through the Pfefferwerk organisation. The two full time workers here are involved in an advisory and organisational capacity and Ruth, the social worker from West Germany, liked her job 'in the East' as she felt more appreciated here and also free to work in the way she liked, as an equal with people who, she said, were going through difficult and traumatic times. It is interesting to compare this view with that mentioned by Verdery of the 'shock therapy' approach to citizens of former Soviet countries by western 'healers' who treat them as if they suffered a mental illness and need to be 'rescued'...from their socialist experience (1996:229). For Ruth the differences between East and West were no longer important or indeed relevant although she, like Selma, referred to the numerous existential break-downs she had come across in the lives of people, often highly qualified and skilled, who battled on, with obstinacy and determination to survive on meagre pensions or subsidised incomes.

The other full-time worker, Hilde, who used to live in the square opposite, is a single parent with two teen age boys. She once worked as a fabric designer, lost her job and joined the Self-Help team in 1992. Smaller offices on this floor are for volunteers, who man or rather 'woman' the 'Helpline for Seniors' for the whole of Berlin under the efficient administration of Angela, a former buyer for a flagship store on Alexander Platz. The Telephone Helpline was developing a 'Find a Grand-parent scheme' for young families along the lines of similar schemes in other cities in Europe. Advice and Training would be

made available through the 'Projekte Bureau' for intergenerational initiatives, on the floor below.

The Intergenerational Project Bureau and Photo Archive



The second floor with its long, often silent corridor seemed more institutionalised than the other two more open spaces above and below. Large white doors that need unlocking, or where one needs to knock before one can enter, are forbidding. Studious work appears to and does go on here, interrupted occasionally by mysterious movements or music. Two rooms seem life-less, are mere offices, with the euphemistic title: 'Hier turnt das Volk', which means that the administration for the local sports club, which includes sport for the disabled, is located here, but hardly ever appears.

Fig. 6. Gallery: Jewish Children's Home

Abraham Pisarek's photographs are displayed along the rather narrow dark corridor which is badly lit⁵⁰. Here one often finds parked prams and heaps of shoes outside the room that is aptly labelled the 'room without shoes' for bodywork of all kinds. Three offices of the 'Project for Intergenerational Dialogue', are on this floor. This national information and training network extends across Germany and has links with other European countries⁵¹. I was told by one of the staff members that they liked working in this house because 'of its integrated sense of commitment to neighbourhood work and the ethos of voluntary engagement' (I. S. June 2007). The Ministry for Women, Seniors

⁵⁰ At my last visit in 2010 the lighting had been much improved as had the displays.

⁵¹ The Intergenerational Project collects information on all German and some international projects and on training and conferences. www.intergenerationendialog.de/

and Youth, which knew the director's work, had asked him to develop this Project in order to make it a 'National Centre of Reference and Training'. The director, Walter, and Iris, the anthropologist who had worked in Africa, are committed to promoting 'civic engagement' and its place in public policy as well as its application in the community. Here also resides Anna, secretary and administrator of the Project, who used to work for big commercial firms in Hamburg. In her spacious and tidy room I would often find people from all three floors sipping herb tea from her thermos flask, eating cakes from the café opposite and exchanging the latest gossip or scandal of what 'they' had done. 'They', I was to learn after some time, were the hierarchically elevated layer of the Pfefferwerk administration, who had, it seemed, become increasingly obscure in the way they communicated. Anna's room often served as testing station for new ideas. Although Anna had been appalled by the haphazard way in which this 'typical Eastern' organisation managed its financial affairs, when she first arrived, she now values the social purpose and interest of intergenerational project work, the collaborative ethos of the house and its mostly friendly atmosphere.

The Neighbourhood House and 'moskito'

The first floor is the seat of the actual 'Neighbourhood House', as opposed to the Centre, which refers to the whole building. Here I met Cornelia, one of the three permanent staff members, but only on a part-time contract. She also lives nearby; she is a small and immensely energetic woman. Cornelia also lost her job as a textile designer after the Wende, just after she had become a mother. Helped by her family and partner she was able to retrain as specialist in work with the disabled and their families. She now runs the family advice service, the exchange market, including a skills exchange and week-end family events. Juggling several part-time jobs to remain financially independent, she never complains, is always cheerful but reluctant to 'chat'. Life had been extremely difficult initially, she told me, and would not have been possible

without help from family and friends. She has created a large network base for local contacts and introduced me to several organisations. Because of her liaison with Social Services and local institutions, more families are now referred to the Centre and offered informal advice on money management, childcare and other matters. She and others have their ear to the ground and learn what is required or respond to requests for new groups and perceived lack of facilities; she knows what goes on in the neighbourhood. Parents, she told me, are increasingly willing to pay small contributions and there are bursaries for hardship cases. Many of the family groups, however, tend to be middle class, often from other ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the changes in the local population.

Ka, the third team member, lives opposite the NBC. She introduced herself as neighbourhood co-ordinator and is the designated link with local pressure group organisations; she runs the volunteer bureau in the Square that engages with ecologically orientated renovation and conservation projects. Ka used to work in the local theatre before the Wende. She was a founder member of the now much larger charitable organisation, the Pfefferwerk gGmbH, of which the NBC is a part, as outlined in the introduction. It seemed that Selma's idea of a workshop and place for creative expression combined with Ka's ideas of neighbourhood self-help and the support from western experts in setting up a project, gradually resulted in this lively and versatile organisation. The NBC was one of the first projects of the Pfefferwerk group of companies which, as stated above, fulfilled the increased need for professionally run centres and institutions soon after unification. The management increasingly and skilfully attracted available funding for other educational and social projects, such as training for the disabled, a hostel for homeless youngsters, the development of skills training for the unemployed, a shop and a school for international students.

All projects are part of a close network of organisations and projects although the rapid growth has necessitated the introduction of new layers of

management. This has caused considerable resentment in the atmosphere amongst the staff at the NBC, where it used to be possible to talk directly with the 'bosses' whereas now communication lines are diffuse, unclear and, according to Selma, in an unhelpful muddle.

Ka's total and 'embodied' commitment to the neighbourhood enterprise seemed to consume her. She told me that she had to be often absent with stress and 'burn out'. She had a tendency to take decisive initiatives, at times without consultation, and used the collective 'We' which caused resentment and problems. She seemed caught between the former ways of managing, using her social connections but without the transparency the consultation that was now expected. In time she unfortunately lost the support of some former colleagues who could not agree with her management style or her strategies. I and others, who were new at the Centre, were initially ignorant of underlying tensions. We found her helpful and very informative; she took us on walks round the 'Kiez', as the neighbourhood is called in Berlin, and pointed out still remaining projects that needed renovation, but also a high degree of vigilance by local pressure groups. Shortly before I left the Centre major shifts erupted in the organisation. The deputy director suddenly resigned. There were unclear rumours and I became aware of factions and subgroups forming in different corners of the House and in the square. No one was prepared to talk; a big meeting, which was called during my last week in July 2007, took place behind closed doors.

Later it transpired that the conflicts, which had been considerable, were gradually being resolved. New people were appointed who apparently understood management methods better than the 'old guard' and creators of the organisation. The majority of the managers had been trained in the West. I was told that the new director of the NBC, was 'fearless and stands up to authority' (S.B. 2008). This comment speaks to the still often tense relationship triggered by conflicts embedded in radical change, of a process where unequal powers are pitted against each other and where no time is

available to negotiate colliding perceptions, as Habermas predicted when he wrote about the impending chaos following rapid changes (1995) On my last visit in November 2010 I met the new director with Selma. They both told me that the organisational climate had much improved because the team felt able to withstand the pressures and cuts of the now distant management. Although the NBC had lost some of its former status in the overall network of organisations, it had regained a more independent sense of its purpose. New funding had been released by two of the large charities that supported the work at the Centre and the building had been renovated in accordance with old plans and the photos from Pisarek's archive.



Fig 6a Pisarek's Photos from the thirties showing the court yard

The Art Gallery, F 92.

The gallery takes up a large room at the front of the house, overlooking the square. It is organised by Letti, a lively, energetic grandmother who had just celebrated her sixtieth birthday and had been to Israel for the first time in her life. She too had lost her job in 1992. Letti's professional commitment to the gallery and the exhibitions was total, especially as she had to manage on a

small budget. The gallery has about ten exhibitions a year and has built up a considerable local reputation especially for its mainly East German artists. Each exhibition is supported by events connected in some thematic way. During the Campaign against Racism the mixed media exhibitions were accompanied by leaflets about social injustice, anti-fascist rallies, events and discussions. Some of the leaflets were overtly political, contrasting the conditions of the jobless with the Human Rights Convention; others addressed the extent of racism locally with detailed examples of infringements. Art often spills over into the reception area and along the corridor; events stretch the resources of the minute kitchen on this floor. As these are 'private functions'; alcohol can be sold and is consumed in small plastic cups. Parties can stretch far into the night, forge and affirm local links as well as new channels of information and exchange. I noticed certain degrees of frustration about parties that were attended by 'yet again the same crowd'. It raised questions as to how publicity could be improved without available funding. Letti was often frustrated but battled on regardless.

Past the small and totally inadequate office where the three main workers, their helpers and the two gallerists share desk spaces, computers, telephones and a central diary into which all messages are written, the corridor ends in another open seating area leading on one side to a small balcony – a thinking and talking space as well as refuge for smokers. At the end of the corridor is a beautifully proportioned room, often used for events, for drama groups and for conferences. Stacks of chairs are hidden behind a large yellow curtain and can be wheeled out if needed. The spectacle of chairs and tables being moved along corridors on this floor is a frequent and puzzling occurrence, until it becomes clear that the fee income from letting rooms forms an important part of the revenue for the Centre which needs to find 28 % of its total funding.

I attended many functions and festivals in this room and participated in workshops for the Theatre of Experience, which, crudely translated, is theatre by the elderly! Their sense of humour and courage in portraying very intimate

feelings and failures was admirable. The assistance of a theatre pedagogue helped prevent too many lapses into deep embarrassment. Here, like elsewhere in the Centre, women predominated. In terms of gender, the Centre and its spaces were definitely managed by females, predominately from the former GDR, although the users came from all over Berlin. This is not surprising given the nature of the work, which attracts, it seems, more women than men; not because the work is underpaid, but because it can be flexible, creative and because it is concerned with 'care for others' in the sense used by Olick who sees in memory, not unlike Lambek (2007) a capacity for 'holding in mind', a responsibility for caring about the present through what is valuable in the past (Olick, 2007).



Fig 7 A 'Family Event' with story tellers and puppets 2007

Still left to mention is the small, time-limited project 'mosquito' run by two female political scientists from the West. This is an important project that is attached to each neighbourhood centre in Berlin, with the specific brief to target racism and racial attacks in the area. Information, advocacy and mediation are offered as well as a register of incidents recording local racial attacks or conflicts; this register is anonymous but the number and nature of the incidents are published regularly. 'mosquito' participated in the Campaign

against Racism and has close links with local schools and youth organisations (see Chapter 6).

The Workshop, hive of creativity

Directly below the room for events and performances is the 'Werkstatt' with its entrance from the courtyard. It is well equipped for wood-work, pottery and other hobby activities. Wolfgang, who is on a Hartz IV contract. He runs this space under close supervision from Selma who is the inspiration behind its creative functions. He is a former welder from one of the large smelting plants south of Berlin, which were all dismantled in 1991, when he lost his job. The other assistant is Wienke, 36, a young, single mother of two girls, also on Hartz IV, but time-limited, because of her age and the expectation that she will return to full employment. Yet for Wienke the scheme works well as it fits in with her childcare duties. Wienke and her children were closely involved with the research into the history of the house and travelled to Amsterdam, in order to see the Anne Frank museum. Wienke, who is very interested in her family history, as her father had been an 'old Nazi', she told me, first came to the house as a single mother in search of 'something to do that seemed relevant'. She stayed and now helps where she can. The workshop also offers modelling classes for adults in the evening, run by Selma and Anat. 'It's a place to relax in', said Selma, Wolfgang is the calmest and most centred person; without him I would often lose my temper. I come down here to unwind'.

Anat arrived in 1997 from Israel in order to work in the pottery room as an apprentice. She grew up in Israel but joined her brother, who was already in Berlin. She told me:

I like it here, it is not always easy, but I like the town and the opportunities and I like particularly this place; this house has a soul, it has something very special for me – it has helped me a

lot with finding my feet here and feeling comfortable (A. o6. 2007).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to introduce a particular house and an institution, which grew out of the chaos of the Wende and symbolises in its inception and current state of flux something of the liminality, mentioned by Verdery and others in the context of post-socialism (Verdery 1996:229). I wanted to convey the special atmosphere in a place which may be partially due to the history but is also created by the people who work here from the former East and West at a particular juncture in time and place; symbolically this institution represents the spirit of renewal but also the difficulties of working with a not yet united whole, an 'unfinished piece of welding', as Wolfgang would probably say, with edges that are still jagged.

The next chapter will introduce the Square opposite the Centre and continue many of the themes touched on here in a wider context.

Chapter 4

The Square: an ethnographic exploration of a place in time

But places are never merely backdrops for actions or containers for the past. They are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities (Till 2005:8).

Memory becomes a 'site', a monument visited rather than a context, a landscape inhabited (Antze & Lambek 1996:xiii).



*Fig 8 Aerial view of the area east of the Teutoburger Platz ,
S.T.E.R.N. Archive 2005*

The Teutoburger Platz is a nineteenth century garden square created as part of a far-sighted building programme for the outlying districts of Berlin by the

town planner Hobrecht in 1862 to accommodate a burgeoning population of incoming settlers. Since 1989 and the downfall of the German Democratic Republic the area around the square, like the whole of the east of the city, has experienced drastic demographic and social changes in rapid succession, producing the need not only for adjustment to change but also to retrieve memories as anchors and markers of a fast disappearing past. A specific place in time evokes a memory or recollection that may be related to the present or give relevance to the future. It creates what is conceptualised as an ‘embodied’ space as part of a cultural experience (Richardson 2007:74). Yet the wider context also played its part in this square in time, producing shapes and irregularities within the square, with changing purposes.

The present layout of the square, as well as the Neighbourhood Centre (NBC), which overlooks it, reflect both how living in the area and being aware of historical events in the course of years have created a neighbourhood, a so-called ‘Kiez’⁵², to which people are almost expected to develop a sense of belonging and for which they are also expected to ‘care’, meaning that they take an interest in its affairs. In this chapter I intend to explore such memories, contrary at times, in the context of the spatial dimension of this square which is not necessarily typical of Berlin, but more, perhaps, of any ordinary urban square around which people live, interacting with it over time. It is a space that is ‘socially constructed by the people who live in them and know them’ (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2007:15); a site where memories are created to be forgotten or later retrieved, in which habits and relationships are formed and abandoned, in which play as well as work occur on a regular basis creating participants and onlookers in a continual exchange of roles (Connerton 2009; Rodman 2007).

⁵² The term refers traditionally to ‘red-light’ districts. It also stands for a nostalgic neo-traditional city design, ‘compact urban neighbourhoods that have a European vitality and are defined by Berlin architecture, density and street design’ (Till 2005:44-45). The term was not used during the GDR era but became fashionable again in Berlin after 1989.

The square and its surrounding streets do not form a homogeneous whole, although materially they present a picture of mostly restored, elegant nineteenth century architecture almost intact, whilst the personal memories and narratives as recounted by local people evoke highly differentiated and richly coloured images of past social events that assume a presence in old films, photos or accounts, bearing witness to the ever changing social and material environment. The relational threads that bind people to places embody, in the words of Karen Till, 'presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering' (Till 2005: 8). Here, I think, the historiographies of the place, the telling of what is remembered, also act as important counterfoils to the present, inviting comparison and a sense of loss with nostalgic statements of something that is definitely no longer in the present (Berdahl 1997). Andreas Huyssen (2003), who focuses particularly on the 'eloquent voids of places in Berlin' (where the Wall once stood, for instance, empty sites, whose ownership is still disputed), would, I think, relate to this square and its many secluded places as a space where the culture of memory 'which is as wide as memory's political uses are varied' would play its part now and well into the future (Huyssen 2003:13).

This chapter is divided into three main sections to provide some structure to what I remember as a fluid, continuous and dynamic local production of cultural manifestations in the context of its urban and commercial evolution.

The first section on the Square will outline the historiography of the area and through the narratives of some of its citizens, former and current, illustrate its changing spatial and temporal functions which were determined by the needs and wants of the local population as well as by historical events, and last but not least by the habits and fashions of any given time .

The following section on renewal and regeneration describes the rapid developments following the Wende and the pressures it generated not only for

the defence of existing housing stock against developers but also the dreams and hopes for renewal from within rather than from elsewhere, although the injection of much needed capital dictated its own terms.

‘Continuities and Changes: Past and Present’ finally traces enduring as well as passing phases in the history of ‘place making’ (Till 2005) of this square and its surroundings, the silences as well the outspoken voices of citizens who continue to engage with the space that is subjected to different experiments in civic politics in an attempt to counteract larger commercial forces that threaten the locality.

The Square

Coming from any of the six streets that lead into the square one would see an open, landscaped space in the centre, surrounded by rows of mostly lime trees, many of which had been planted since the terrible winter in 1944/5, when Berliners had no access to fuel and had to cut down most of their trees for firewood. In spring the scent of the lime trees is always surprising and almost intoxicating, filtering out all other city smells for moments only, but strongly enough to evoke impending changes in the air. Cars are parked on all sides, various street signs either invite entry into the central park-like area or prohibit entrance to dogs or vehicles of any kind. It’s a green, leafy space, informally divided into different areas where one can rest or play, be public or hidden, where people can meet socially, or remain separate. Some people traverse the space to save time, others linger, or come to stay for some purpose. The large play area by the small house or ‘Platzhaus’, for instance, is mostly a hub of activity and noise as parents and their children meet at the large sand pit, surrounded by wide wooden seats. Several older people, grandparents or pensioners, sit a little further away and watch. On a grassy pitch in the centre of the square the older children from a nearby school come

regularly to play football. The German word 'platz' means 'place', from the Greek *plateia*, and is an open space but can also mean a personal seat. 'This is my place' or 'Platz' is therefore synonymous with this is 'my space', I belong to it and it to me. A public square can convey the double meaning of belonging, especially if associated with personal or communal memories. The Teutoburger Platz, or 'Teute' as it is referred to locally, functions as such an open public and also communal space used primarily as an area for recreation by different groups. The 'Leute am Teute' or (People of the Teute square) is an association of users of the square, who have made it their business to belong but who also care for the maintenance and upkeep as part of a formal agreement with the local council.

The daily rhythm of movement across the square is determined by its users. From one or two of the benches men, who spent the night here, move slowly towards the Supermarket where, after eight in the morning, they usually find others with whom to pass the day and get the odd 'Schrippe' or bun for breakfast. Throughout the day different groups can be identified: school children who hurry across or dawdle in small clusters, groups of youths arrive to play games or lounge under trees, pensioners appear regularly, greet each other, looking for their customary space to sit down while others hurry along the paths not noticing those around them. Parents, mostly mothers, arrive later and throughout the day until afternoon, when school leavers re-appear with those from offices or shops. Towards evening it is mainly young people, increasingly couples on fine evenings who sit in the secluded spaces hidden from public view until well into dusk. I noticed a group of men, pensioners perhaps, who regularly sat by the Platzhouse playing cards in the early evening but never knew where they went in winter or when it rained. Maybe they retreated to one of the small pubs which are at the corners of two cross roads? The Square, as we saw in the previous chapter, was once laid out much more formally, with flowerbeds and neat box hedges, formal benches and at least two regular gardeners who kept it clean and tidy. It was fenced in and locked at night. The playing, running, resting, chatting and networking of today seem

more akin to what Richardson, in her comparative ethnography of the recreational *plaza* in Argentina associates with the market place, where people are ‘off-stage’, not on show, where they can be themselves and informal rather than on parade as they might be in the in the *Plaza* (Richardson 2007:74-91). Each image of the square memorialised in photos, recordings or now on the web, will evoke its own temporal and mythical memories: amongst the older residents, the Teute was often referred to as a lost paradise, as discussed earlier.

The illustration below from the fifties, by contrast, speaks of entirely different times. The square had been concreted over after the war to hide trenches and shelters, and needed to be covered in earth. It is not clear in this photo whether the working group consisted of residents or whether it was a working party recruited to spread the earth over the area. Volunteering certainly existed and was encouraged under communism, but voluntary organisations, like the residents’ ‘Leute am Teute’, who even have their own website now, would have been highly suspect under the previous regime.⁵³

But there were opportunities and encouragements for voluntary, civil engagements in the form of the so-called ‘Subbotniks’ or work programmes at week-ends, participation in solidarity-bazaars or markets, competitions concerned with the improvement of villages or towns. They were directed by the State, often quite imaginative, but never free from control and rarely totally voluntary (NBC, 2010:4).

⁵³ Civil activities were permitted, as Selma had explained. They had to be open to state scrutiny and were potentially threatening to the SED party-controlled State. In most cases, where such activities took place, they were infiltrated by spies of the secret police and either tacitly tolerated or disbanded as so brilliantly described by Funder in her book on the Stasi (2002)



Fig 9 Work groups (Arbeitseinsatz) in the Teutoburger Platz in 1950

In another, very similar urban square in West Berlin the researcher Karen Till conjured up for me the stark, cold reality of the laws of the Third Reich between 1935 and 1940 (Till 2005). It is in a prosperous and leafy area where an established middle class, including many Jews, used to live in the 1930s. Here one becomes suddenly aware of street signs, rather like those that artisans used to hang outside their workshops to attract customers in pictograms of a loaf of bread, for instance, or a hat, or a dentist's instruments. These pictograms are suspended on high poles at certain places in the quarter where Jews once lived. The reverse sides of the signs reproduce in print the laws that were passed between 1935 and 1939, explicitly forbidding Jews to enter the square, to buy bread from the baker, to practice dentistry or to enter local shops at certain times⁵⁴. The realisation that the same laws would have ruled in the Teutoburger Platz - my square - as everywhere in Germany at the time, had a forceful impact on me because the details of those facts and atrocities hardly surfaced in the stories I heard. They appeared to have been erased or forgotten, as they had in my conscious mind in 2007, until I saw these signs,

⁵⁴ Karen E. Till (2005). Till interviewed the artists, R.Stih and F. Schnock who explained that for them the signs acted as 'pictograms' with many different meanings, which will reach people reflexively 'in many different ways' (recorded in 2003, p. 159)

which for me are one the most poignant memorials to the perfidity of a regime out to defile and destroy a section of its population.

Later that year, on September 9th 2007, the memory of these signs was poignantly revived for me by the Jewish visitor, Tosca, who had come to the commemoration ceremony at the NBC, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 6. Her triumph at having survived the law that forbade her and her fellow Jews to enter the square in 1935 became a lasting memory for those of us who witnessed it. Added to this particular memory are countless other images collected during hours spent sitting or walking in the square, observing, chatting, playing with families and children in the sandpit or round the small house at one end, where sometimes drinks and small snacks can be obtained. Richardson had presented an analysis of 'being-in-the Plaza' (2007: 74-92); my aim was to be in the square but also to participate in its life on a day-to-day basis.



Fig 10 Part of the play area and the 'Platzhaus', 2006/7

The Kiez and its history.

The Teutoburger Platz is one of five squares in the Prenzlauer Berg district, which escaped the worst of the building boom that invaded East Berlin in the

nineteenth century. This area then consisted largely of fields and small villages and a few windmills. It was developed between 1862 and 1895 as part of a ring of new housing projects for the floods of new inhabitants who arrived in the wake of the industrial revolution, included many Jews. Following the foundation of the new German 'Reich' or empire in 1871, Berlin, as its capital, used the reparation payments imposed on France after the Franco-Prussian war to enlarge and beautify the town. This large-scale development, which some have compared to the generous building plans of Hausmann in Paris, ensured a fairly homogeneous city-scape comprising purpose-built apartment blocks on the periphery, along wide, tree-lined streets, some of them old country roads to distant towns. The hill to the north east of the city centre, called Prenzlauer Berg, because its main road led to the distant town of Prenzlau, formed part of this rapid expansion. The area, known for its fresh air and clean water, attracted developers who built windmills but also breweries with garden restaurants and entertainment spaces, the famous Pfeffer Brewery being one of these. Many of the tenements were also built by speculators who, ignoring existing building regulations, erected the infamous 'Mietskasernen' or housing barracks on the periphery of the old city of Berlin with little access to light and air, sanitation or even basic living spaces which became breeding grounds of diseases. During the economic crisis in 1928 the Prenzlauer Berg area belonged to the most densely populated in Europe, with 325,000 people living in about 100,000 flats. This overcrowding has not continued, but the district is still one of the most populated in the borough of Pankow today with 23,677 inhabitants in an area of 136.8 hectares ⁵⁵.

The Pfefferberg Brewery, by contrast is a handsome collection of spacious buildings and courtyards with a large garden restaurant and many rooms for

⁵⁵ See 'Sensing the Street', an ethnographic project about Ackerstrasse, in the centre of Berlin, which became notorious for its appalling housing conditions during the thirties when most of the old tenements were demolished. The street was then divided by the Wall and reflects today a sensory mixture of years of sanitation, old housing stock and rebuilding. The Exhibition of this project was at Mitte Museum, Berlin www.mitemuseum.de. The ethnographic work was carried out by students of the Humboldt University, Berlin 2005-2007.

entertainment. Their history is fascinating, bearing witness to social and political changes during the 19th and 20th centuries. After the brewery closed in the 1940s a bakery took over. During the war Hitler's army used the extensive cellars as ammunition depots and stables and the cellars served as bomb shelters. In GDR times the spacious vaulted cellars became venues for pop concerts during the eighties that attracted people from far and wide, including West Berliners. After the fall of the Wall, several locals quickly obtained preservation orders on this complex of buildings. Most of the spaces are now successfully converted for social, artistic, office or other useful purposes but remain in the ownership of the company which was formed in 1991 (History of the Pfefferwerk gGmbH, 2007).

I mentioned that Ka offered to take me and others on a walk round the neighbourhood to get to know the locality, its issues and problems as well as the success of recent years. We heard about local plans and local people's participation in what she called "building an inclusive community".⁵⁶ The leaflet printed by the International Federation of Settlements she gave us stated:

Social Inclusion is representation, ensuring diverse communities are brought together, providing tools for people and the opportunity to understand the system. It is about empowering people to make connections so that their voices are heard (<http://inclusion.ifsnetwork.org/practices>).

Ka is the representative of the local residents association (Betroffenenagentur), which, she explained, included tenants, squatters, and owners as well as multiple owners; most were actively involved in planning projects, design for public spaces, rent control and other housing concerns specific to this area, although the number of engaged people was diminishing.

⁵⁶ 'Inclusive communities' are the concept of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, (IFS) to which the NBC belonged.

The Teutoburger Platz, a rectangular area of about 6000 square metres, had initially been planned as a market garden, surrounded by birches, robinias and ash; in 1910 it was planted as a formal garden park with a playground in its centre as shown in the photo in Chapter 3. Today the play area covers approximately a third of the green space of the square. 'We had to fight for that', said Ka, because the local parks department, looking at old plans, wanted to re-instate the formal gardens and fences that had existed before the war. 'We told them we wanted no fences, we had enough of walls and fences'. In 1992 the Berlin Town Planning Department designated the square and surrounding area as fit for 'regeneration' and the creation of 596 social housing units and 188 private or 'collective self-help units'⁵⁷ for the sum of 160 Million DM of which 98.4 Million were subsidised. The regeneration plan implied that 'large amounts of national and possibly European funding' would become available to repair and rebuild the old housing stock, after years of neglect, wherever possible, and to bring flats and apartments up to current standards of hygiene and modernisation. Ka was keen that we should appreciate how difficult it had been to carry out this regeneration by the letter of the law as local residents had to be involved; yet consultations, to which people were not used, were difficult and frightening; in many cases people preferred to move out of town further east, into newly built estates, rather than to stay in temporary accommodation until their apartment was habitable. Commercial building firms moved in soon after unification in 1990 and were:

like vultures hungry for prey.....spotting every loop hole and pressurising citizens with doubtful promises and open threats. We had help from the West to get preservation orders slapped onto our buildings to stop them from being developed... most of the meetings took place over there in my kitchen' (Ka, 03. 2007).

⁵⁷ Self-help units were usually flats that had been occupied by squatters who arranged a deal with the housing department to carry out necessary repairs in return for basic subsidies and legalisation of the tenancy.

She pointed to a corner house at the south west side of the square where she had lived since 1987.

Some Buildings had been replaced. In the corner where a large apothecary once stood, a modern flat-roofed concrete supermarket was covered with pseudo graffiti. 'This used to be called a 'Kaufhalle' in GDR language', we learnt. One large block still displayed the pockmarks of bullet holes on the blackened sandstone façade. The typical large entrance gate in the centre, leading to the courtyards behind, had been a passage for coaches and horses and the ubiquitous coal merchants' deliveries. It was shabby, overgrown with ivy and looked unused. This building was locally known as the 'beautiful Christine' (die schoene Christine) because of the location in Christinen Strasse, but also, ironically, because the house had resisted re-development in the early nineties, after unification. She said:

The squatters have long since legalised their tenancies and got their subsidies to upgrade the flats at the back, but the front house was bought by a 'nice guy' from Hamburg who never bothered to do anything with it. The people who lived in it could have resisted the sale but did not get their act together. We (the tenants association) tried to help but got nowhere. So here we are: a beautiful classical building falling into rack and ruin (Ka, 03.2007).

I asked her why the people had not been able to get their act together. She looked stern. 'It takes practice to stand up and fight for your rights as a collective, they were not a collective but too concerned with their own interests' she said.

The more prosperous inhabitants used to live in the large apartments at the front of a block, where rooms were high-ceilinged, light and airy, the poorer tenants, often trades and service people, lived at the back in smaller side wings that also had stables and workshops. Some of these blocks were almost like

small self-sufficient villages with their own artisans and shops. Now restored, the more desirable apartments are located inside the quiet inner courtyards rather than facing the streets. Pointing to the rather ugly, grey-rendered façade of the Neighbourhood Centre at the west side of the square, Ka said that this was a ‘typical GDR renovation’ though it had been modified and patchily modernised again in 1995. The elegant building next to it had been the site of a memorable event, as I heard from a local resident later who told me dispassionately, as if recollecting an old image, that here in the frame of the first floor window had once stood a British soldier on fire:

It was during the war, and suddenly he appeared with his parachute round his ankles, he seemed to be burning. We all stood in the square and stared. It was very still, no-one moved. They (the German military) came and took him away (H, 05. 2007).

Our walk continued out of the square past a local primary school, built in the same flat roofed concrete style as the supermarket. Ka pointed to the playground and explained how she and local parents had formed an action group to redesign the layout, to break it up into smaller spaces marked with tree trunks and arbours. ‘We got the wood from a place outside town where we have a house’, said Ka; ‘we’ referred to the Pfefferwerk Organisation. They bartered for the wood in return for some clearing work in the woods. ‘We had great fun and the kids enjoyed it. They can now relate to their playground... be proud of it’. I asked if it had been difficult to get parents involved. She said not initially, but now these week-ends were much more complicated to organise, particularly as far as the people living near the Square were concerned. The residents’ association (Leute am Teute) is obliged by contract with the local authority to contribute ten working days to the maintenance of the green spaces and the play area. I wondered if people might be less interested in ‘collective’ problem solving now and that new residents might not know about collective contracts such as these. Would more recently arrived residents offer their participation in the maintenance of local squares, schools or other public

places if they thought it should be the responsibility of the local authority? Our guide was not really interested in such speculations:

If they want to live here they should participate in their environment, we all work together... it makes more sense, this is our place, we all contribute to it so that we can enjoy it too, said Ka (03.2007).

Our walk continued but had left the immediate area of the 'Kiez' moving to other contested sites where development threatened and residents tried to resist. We had been given a good introduction to how 'social engagement' in the neighbourhood was interpreted and what the expectations of local residents were – it remained less clear how they in turn regarded what was expected of them. It also emerged, however, that the area has become one of the rare places in the Republic where citizens from East and West Germany share their social spaces, together with a high proportion of other ethnic minorities, who have arrived here since 1990.

Multicultural and class divisions

In 2009 the official council statistics registered that 21.8% of the population of in the Prenzlauer Berg district were immigrants compared with 6.9% in the whole borough of Pankow⁵⁸. The majority were Poles, Italians, French, Russians and Vietnamese. The average age (53 %) was between 30 and 40 years old. An unspecified number apparently belonged to the new global class of young and internationally mobile professionals who had begun to move into this area which was child friendly, spacious and less hectic compared to other districts⁵⁹. Asians and Vietnamese seemed to work in corner shops, small bars or stalls, often run by Turkish families. I knew the Vietnamese flower seller

⁵⁸ District here refers to an administrative area within a Borough.

⁵⁹ The statistics had been collected by the Council of Pankow census and were included in a neighbourhood publication by the Nachbarschaftshaus, Teutoburger Platz, in 2009 (published by Pfefferwerk Stadtkultur gGmbH).

outside the supermarket, bantering with the 'alkis' (alcoholics), who sat on the steps every morning waiting for their free buns. Afro Caribbean and Ethiopian families sometimes came to the Centre and mixed with others in the square. The area, which had begun to attract the more bohemian or intellectual types after the war during GDR times, amongst them the rebels, but also those who wanted to be left in peace, was in danger of changing its local character. It had become 'essentialised' in publications and guide books as 'Durchgangszimmer' or passage rather than as a settled place. An article in a local Sunday paper referred to:

The left-wingers and arm-chair socialists who here feel 'free' from politics, enjoying with their children the almost artificially constructed world of the newly arrived though not necessarily rich, the eco-brigade, the health freaks, those whose children attend Yoga sessions and singing classes in English, or Vietnamese, (Scheinschlag 2007:45-51).

This somewhat disparaging picture did not match my observations of people in the square. But statistics at the NBC from 2005 indicated that the Centre had adapted its activities to reflect local requests for more specialist activities and did include classes for English nursery rhymes, for Origami and Yoga for the family. In the 2009 report a much more varied list of offers reflected the increase in specialised requests for local issues, for political and historical work groups as well as offers of recreational activities for all ages in addition to the existing events.

A local doctor (GP), whom I met at an art exhibitions at the NBC in 2007, told me that she was aware of quite a lot of unhappiness that was hidden amongst the local population. She saw more illnesses here related to problems of 'life stress' due to over-work, loneliness or not coping, than elsewhere in the city. She knew that many flats were occupied by single people who were mostly newcomers to the area.

Was the area getting too expensive? The teams at the NBC were concerned, as are many other locals who spoke despairingly about ‘gentrification’ and modernisation of a seemingly much loved neighbourhood. The informality and sense of improvisation, which is still characteristic of this locality and very noticeable in the Square, is in danger of being eroded. Ten years ago everyone had been poorer and ‘more equal’ said Cornelia, when we discussed issues of equality and parity in relation to the families who visited the Centre. None of the local people I met were rich, few owned cars, and none of those who worked at the NBC and who lived nearby, owned their own apartment⁶⁰.

Demographically, however, the area was divided, the poorer members of society were invisible, hidden away and did not seem to participate in life in the Square or at the NBC. There is no doubt that the hectic renovation boom of the nineties had here as elsewhere in the eastern part of the town, generated an exodus of the previous population and given way to different patterns of living. The recent local enquiry undertaken by the NBC in 2009 found that the trend towards gentrification is causing anxiety locally as prices rise and diversity is ‘polished away’. ‘Balconies appear where before people sat together on benches’, stated a blog on the website published by ‘Leute am Teute’ in 2009.

The Pfefferwerk Empire and Neighbourhood-building

I have mentioned Herr Pfeffer’s brewery and his massive collection of buildings, which are all subject to preservation orders, including a very tall chimney, which had been threatened to be demolished in 1990. The founders of this now considerable enterprise re-structured and re-thought the concept of ‘Sozialkulturelle Einrichtung’ or socio-cultural institution, which had been an important component of socialist cultural politics. ‘Social and cultural’ had

⁶⁰ Rented accommodation is much more common in German cities than in the UK.

also become important attributes in the concept of regenerating social spaces in western cities during the eighties and nineties, as industries closed and large areas became available for development as discussed by Till in the context of Berlin (2005). The use of cultural channels to infiltrate and influence public consciousness in civic spaces and in public life is widely adopted by advertisers of commercial systems as well as by governments, because it is an effective route to communicate with the people in the street, gauge their interests and concerns, as Bourdieu outlined in his *Critical Perspectives* (1993). A belief in the function of 'culture' - in its broadest sense - in the promotion of democracy in post-socialist states, coincided, it seems, with other, global movements to regenerate post-industrial inner city spaces, using 'social culture' as a concept for creating diversity and ability for expression. The re-generation of post-industrialist areas aims at involving people in creating their environment or their communities (Zukin 1995; Bell & Jayne 2004). It is a belief in the power of social culture (Sozialkultur) that informs the International Federation of Settlements (IFS), who acted as advisors for setting up the NBC, presumably in the hope of generating a sense of neighbourhood and belonging in the rather ruptured former working class and post-communist district of Berlin just after the Wende.

The Neighbourhood Centre team and their project was one of the first initiatives in this area, but, as stated before, now finds itself almost at the margin of the wider organisation, separated from its former management core by two layers of administration. After fifteen years a re-think seemed appropriate, but the pains associated with this re-organisation appeared for some almost like the final call in their particular post-unification chapter, which had been filled with so many hopes and expectations; it had inspired them in the early nineties and provided such energy to develop a vision of building new and important local resources. Their hopes and creativity had produced some new ways of relating and social living in public areas. It had involved the NBC teams in local politics and developments. Their aim in 2007

was to continue their work through local civic engagement in order to attract a wider cross section of the population (S, 09. 2007).

Urban regeneration – A better future?

I wanted to understand the policies of ‘careful urban regeneration’ which underpinned much of the post-socialist developments around the square and interviewed Herr Speck, one of the architects from S.T.E.R.N, a local firm who had won the contract for this work. ‘Critical reconstruction’ is, according to Karen Till, the modern interpretation of the model of a European city, a fusion of traditions and the latest technologies, a re-visioning of the urban house, epitomised by the classical apartment blocks with their inner court yards which had once been designed for high density but ‘humane’ living during the 19th century (Till 2005:45-51). Till writes that ‘neotraditionalists believe that modern interpretations of model historic cities offer a solution to contemporary ills but 19th century urban forms also ‘displace’ contemporary ways of knowing about and living in cities’ (Till, 2005:49). Herr Speck was aware of this dilemma, especially as money had run out and private investors were now needed with different approaches. The former energy and zest which had spurred on much of the re-generation had gone as had the public funding. ‘Berlin ist pleite’, he said, in other words the town is broke and Federal funding has also dried up. Professor Andrej Holm, from Humboldt University, is more critical: He lives in the area and participated in the re-planning of many projects: According to him Berlin’s privatisation policy of its public housing stock in both East and West Berlin after unification resulted in considerable financial losses for the city because of corruption and overzealous privatization. (Albers and Holm 2007). Herr Speck, correct and sad, did not refer to this, although he must have known. ‘We still build a lot in the area, playgrounds, kindergarten and community centres, we recently completed a house adapted for the use of several generations’, he told me in May 2008, and

showed me examples of regeneration projects involving tenants and owners, who all helped in the renovation process.

A year earlier I had spoken with a woman who lived near the square and who now runs a restaurant in her front room. She had told me how she and a group of other women had renovated a whole block of flats in the early nineties:

We received funds from the Senate of Berlin and help from some local building firms. But basically we did most of it ourselves; some of us were or became plumbers and carpenters and bricklayers, it was difficult but good stuff, most of us still live here (Frau T, 05. 2007)

Her homely restaurant offers local food and exotic music on Fridays. It is a regular meeting point and store of ever more stories about the crazy (verrueckt) but also rather exciting times just after the Wende when so much seemed possible.

Urban regeneration can mean many different things. In this district it seems to be a mixture of initial local enterprise, enthusiastic local participation as well as the use of social networks to renovate an existing neighbourhood with the support of public funding; the area appears to have reached the stage of slow or no development now and dependence on private funders and private competition which raise fears in the locality that its specific identity might be lost.

Continuities and Change: Local Voices

I met Herr West in the spring of 2007 in the square along with other elderly men who passed their afternoons watching the life around the play area, reminiscing about old times. He told me of the gangs of boys in his youth who fought battles in the square and in the surrounding streets. Each street had its

own gang. He remembered, how these gangs used the square at the start of the War and its then still densely planted areas as battlefields, how the surrounding streets became almost death traps for the unwary, including adults, because, he said, by the forties adults had no time to supervise us we were free in the streets though still strictly punished for misbehaviour at home'. He related a story about when they sprayed the steeper streets with water in winter to make them freeze, so that the enemy gang could not reach them. Like Herr Strehlke, he told us about the times when the square was dug up later in the war and deep, zig-zag trenches ran diagonally across it, so that local people could find shelter from low flying enemy planes during air raids. 'We mostly made it to the deep cellars under the brewery over there (pointing to the old Pfefferwerk Brewery behind one corner of the Square), but we liked to play in the trenches when it was quiet up there (pointing to the sky)'. He added that 'they' meaning himself and his friends, had been lucky in surviving the war. 'Apart from those who came later, having been evacuated into the country, we all survived and after the war, in '46 and '47' we all met up again. He told us that he and his friends attended the youth groups that met in the house where the NBC now is. He remembered clearly how some older people made them help clear away the ammunition debris in the ruins and in the streets. They worked in the mornings and were allowed to play in the afternoon, until school started again in 1948 and life returned to degrees of normality.

Herr West, now 78, had come from another part of Berlin, where he and his wife lived. He returned on another day bringing photos and memorabilia, like an old ration card and his membership pass of the local youth group, to which he had belonged after the war. In 1935 he and his parents had lived in the 'schoene Christine', in stairway 3 at the back, he said and then proceeded to name every family who had lived on his and the next stairway. He had visited the flat where he, his parents, his three brothers, and later, for a time, his grandparents once lived in three rooms, with a kitchen on the landing that was shared by other families and a toilet, also on the landing further down. 'No-

one can imagine what it was like', he told us. His story and his style of telling it were not unusual. Others of his generation, whom I interviewed, seemed to have a similar interest, either in their childhood memories or in the immediate post-war period, the time when they, as youngsters, were helping to rebuild the country, when they remembered their eagerness to get away from the horror of War, Hitler and Fascist rhetoric, very similar to their contemporaries in the West of Germany. The difference here was that the then new communist regime did not engage in collective guilt or in collective attribution of blame with the exception of Fascism. Prominent Nazis were convicted and punished with speed. Former resistance fighters were publicly commended and rewarded, especially if they had been communists. Capitalism was equated with Fascism and blamed for war crimes as well as other evils, either in the past or in the present. According to the historian Fulbrook (2009:293-309) the publicity surrounding the trials of perpetrators and the public celebration of victim heroes aided the new ideology. Young people were politically re-educated in schools and clubs, where the blame for the War, the deprivation and the many losses were also blamed on the Western capitalist system. Herr West told us that since his father had been an 'old Nazi', these revelations about the evils of capitalism were news to him. Whilst he eagerly absorbed the message, he, like Herr Strehlke, also followed his father to work in 1945 until they had to complete their school years; the political beliefs between sons and fathers remained disconnected across an ideological divide that had opened up, but the necessity to rebuild the country and to create new life chances was common to each generation.

Another witness of the past, Irma Braun, younger than Herr West, told me how the gardener's cottage in the centre of the Square had become a station for the distribution of milk during the War. Her parents had run a small corner shop in one of the adjoining streets and their cow was tied up just inside their side of the square to graze. She spoke about how she, as a young girl of ten or twelve, had to take the cow to be 'gedeckt' or sired, a task she hated as the local boys teased her mercilessly. She was glad when the cow,

along with the horses, was 'requisitioned' by the army for 'war services'. Horses were then part of most trading households in the area. In 1942 or '43, she could not quite remember when, Army officers arrived to muster or inspect these horses for fitness to serve on the Russian Front.

Frau Braun and her friends, all pensioners now, met every Tuesday in the square, and when it rained they moved to a room in the NBC. Listening to her stories the whole group exclaimed that they too remembered that time and stories flew from one to the other. I could hardly follow. The only man of the group, Franz, had been chauffeur to high party officials during the communist era; he had been able to cross the border into the West on many occasions. When he lost his job in 1990, he fell on very hard times and would have remained there, had he not been rescued by one of the women of this group who took him on, like a child, nurtured and comforted him. All four women belonged to a group of friends who have met weekly since they were made to take early retirement in 1991. They were amongst the first who had been 'recruited' by Selma and her colleagues when, as described in Chapter 3, they started to befriend locals in the square with their coffee stall in 1992. The women had worked in the former communal housing department (the KWV or Kommunale Wohnungsverwaltung) of East Berlin and had known each other as members of a 'cadre' or work team, who were responsible not only for allocation of household goods but also the daily administration of the apartments. It would have been their task to know who lived where in each block, to supervise or hold to account each warden in the apartment blocks and to make sure that rents were collected on time. They loved talking about their childhoods and the distant events during the War, tales into which I could join, as I too was a survivor of those times, albeit in a different part of Germany. They brought photos of their outings and birthday parties and we laughed at joint memories of post-war Germany in the fifties. Yet my attempts to elicit more about their work and activities as housing officers, or how the collapse of the former system had affected their lives, met with silence and shrugs of shoulders, gestures which relegated me to the role of a reluctant

interrogator. Those times were past; there had been good and difficult times; on the whole, one knew where one stood in respect of work and one had social support where one needed it.

‘Did you lose your jobs immediately after the Wende?’ I had asked during one of our encounters. They shrugged and one of them said yes, sooner or later. ‘What help or support did you get when this happened?’ They looked at each other. ‘We got our pension, but it was nothing to what you got in the West’ ‘How have things changed since? How are they better or worse?’ More shrugs and more glances amongst each other before one of them said:

‘They are better in some respects, we can travel now, but we are old and have no money, not even our friend, who used to live here and has moved away, can come now, it’s too expensive in a taxi and she cannot use the tram or the bus with her leg’.

I thought of asking if there were services that would help, but realised that even if there had been a service this would not have improved the situation. The loss, not only of the jobs and the security of their work environment, which, in retrospect, seemed to have been satisfactory, was permanent and irreplaceable. Their outlook was similar to that of other people in this age group when we discussed life after the Wende, although not many presented such a determinedly closed front towards me.

I understood that their distant childhood would be a safer topic, the years during and after the war represented collective hardship and external dangers of quite extraordinary proportions, which had been largely shared in East and West. But their early adult and working lives during the period of communism and the SED dictatorship had been completely devalued since 1990. Although they retained their memories and recollections of what they had cherished as well as disliked, these too had been collectively ‘devalued’ by the liquidation of the system and their dismissal into early retirement. Why should their

sentiments or indeed their thoughts about this experience be shared with a stranger from the West? The by now proverbial ‘Mauer in den Koepfen’ or the Wall in people’s minds serves a metaphor for the loss and the erasure of the East German’s past, their culture and identity after forty years of working and living in a now discredited and failed regime. Is it surprising that counter memories should be formed? Berdahl describes such practices in her book on ‘The Social Life of Post-Socialism’ from which Westerners are excluded because of their lack of insider knowledge, ‘creating a strong sense of solidarity among those who are in the know’ (2010:121).

The Wall in people’s minds, however, is also a metaphor for West Germans who could not understand these processes of transformation in the East and who, according to Dennis ‘demonised’ the GDR as a once ‘lawless’ (Unrechts) State (2004:21) which still rejected Western values and ways of practice. For younger people, especially many who found work in the West, the experience of being tainted with prejudices against their ‘difference’ became demeaning. For others the ‘erasures of the past’ create ambivalence and uncertainty about their roots – ‘we do not know what is real and what is fiction’, stated one young woman who is studying in West Berlin but grew up in the post-socialist East. For her and many others, local initiatives to portray the past through exhibitions, events and enactments have become popular and important, but also problematical because they have no real memories of this way of life. (It is interesting that one of the new ventures at the NBC in 2010 programme is a monthly history workshop to which everyone is invited).

‘Leute am Teute’

When I arrived in the Square in 2006 the revival of an almost defunct residents’ association was hotly debated in the Neighbourhood House. ‘Why not let them sort it, it will be a good learning experience’, was as one view. Others wanted to be helpful and eventually, almost by chance, a solution

presented itself: A Czech woman from Prague, called Dagmar, an energetic grandmother of one of the local families, had been referred by the job centre on an ABM (Hartz IV) scheme and offered to take on the running of the small coffee stall and the amenities in the Platzhaus, in 2007. She would develop contact with local families and people who used the square daily. She could monitor what might be needed or required in terms of projects and let the team at the NHC know. Dagmar's interventions and initiatives quickly became quite controversial in local politics, not least because she rightly challenged the maintenance of the two lavatories in the small building which were frequently used by children and rarely cleaned. She drafted rules and levied a small charge for the use of the amenities. The first residents' meeting for many years was called two months later by Paul, the chair of the association who had held the post for the last few years and wanted to hand it on. Dagmar's son, born in Prague but raised in West Berlin, lived round the corner with his wife and two small children. He described himself and his wife as 'meddlers' (Einmischer) in local affairs. Both worked flexible hours in 'Intermediate Technology' from home. He too believes in local participation, in civic engagement and inclusion. He and his wife use rituals, festivals, music and street events to draw people out of their apartments, an old tradition in these parts, I learnt; a church parade was re-enacted to the amazement of local residents who had never witnessed anything like it, as were mock Trade union parades, which had often used the square for public celebrations according to the report of a local history event in 2008.



*Fig 11 The Inauguration of the Residents Association: Leute am Teute' May
2007*

The day of the inauguration of the new association called 'Leute am Teute' and of the opening of the 'Platzhaus' as a meeting place was not only under a blue sky, but also very well organised. Some fifty people came, milled round the little house and then crammed into the small space where tables had been set out with the ubiquitous cakes and drinks. Children ran between adults and some older people quickly claimed the few chairs. I tried to record the occasion but later could decipher little as the noise was pervasive. Paul opened proceedings by outlining the history and the aim of the association, its contract with the council and the responsibility for the square, which needed to be taken seriously if democratic involvement with the maintenance of the square and its design was to be preserved. This was followed by the election of officers, and the proposal to meet monthly as well as a string of other proposals. Tom was elected chair, his wife told everyone about the website that they had designed and which was open for news and views. Selma, from the Neighbourhood Centre, offered to be 'godmother' to the new organisation and the Platzhaus, since she is, technically, Dagmar's mentor and manager. After much talking and shouting out of ideas, Paul finally suggested a baptism with 'bubbly' (German Sekt) or fruit juice, and we moved round the four corners of the Platzhaus, solemnly acknowledging the new name and the new association.

A quick glance at the city blog on their web site (10. 10. 2010) offered a fascinating insight into recent developments: A new exhibition at the NBC, a theatre group for the whole family with the offer of free iced tea, the news that several 'expensive' cars had been torched early in January during the night, causing considerable damage⁶¹. The local supermarket, Kaisers, had stopped stocking cheap beer and cheap rolls, the 'Alkis' or alcoholics, who regularly congregated outside its main entrance, had been moved. 'What a mean exclusion of the excluded', is the writer's comment. A local resident and author, who had recently returned from living in the Balkans, was interviewed and bemoaned the absence of the old, grimy facades, the people she knew, like the woman who used to feed the pigeons and the rocker, who used to stride across the square. She disliked the new pastel-coloured exteriors and the polished cars as much as the new population. Where is our old mixture of all sorts, she asked rhetorically, presumably referring to the less affluent but more eccentric population of old? Finally I read that the apartment block of the 'Schoene Christine' is further deteriorating, soaked through to its lower floors. A scandal! The items are posted with links to newspaper articles or original announcements. There are photos of newly planned developments and jokes. The blog is lively, as expected, it also raises questions about how long these bloggers are able to hold on to their time, their social space, and their collective identity as locals of a certain quarter, which, it seems, is continuing to change fairly fast.

Time is passing inexorably, faster for some than others. The 'local, state-moderated gentrification process' which I have referred to and which probably cannot be halted, will gradually exclude those who have lived in this area for years and cannot afford the rising rents, of which only a few are protected. At the same time there still seems to exist a fairly strong and persistent local

⁶¹ The torching of cars has been reported repeatedly in this and other areas of Berlin in protest at the imposition of more car parking spaces and gentrification of the area.

movement or lobby for the representation of local interests, which includes diversity of residents, life styles and tolerance of a certain, unspecified difference. Local people repeatedly expressed their hope in various discussions that the energy required to resist further 'gentrification' was not expended in torching cars or writing on the internet but in the persistence of raising common, local issues amongst the people who are concerned, who are 'betroffen' or shocked by what is happening but who also, as the double meaning of the German word implies, are themselves participants in the process (Albers and Holm 2007). This spirit of joint action, which does exclude those who do not take part, which pushed through the Wall in 1989 and resisted, as far as possible, the lure of Western property speculators, is this spirit now in danger of being stifled in the comforts of the new 'urban village' of the Prenzlauer Berg? Dr. Holm, who spoke at a local meeting in 2007, was in sympathy with the aims of the NBC and the Pfefferwerk Network of Organisations that the work by residents and other locals remains vital to ensure continuing active social cohesion and a clear focus on local issues.⁶²

Conclusion

The Council of Europe's study of inner city neighbourhoods by Bianchini and Ghildardi Santacaterina reported in 1997 and cited examples from 27 successful local social-cultural practices, defining a number of attributes necessary for successful policies in integrating culture and neighbourhood promotion. This interesting and illuminating report was unknown to my colleagues at the NBC; it seemed, however that the team there and people in the neighbourhood tended to follow the spirit of its conclusions by displaying the attributes of what is called 'the process of creative production' faithfully (2007:246). Every day new 'productions' of activities targeted one or the other section of the locality without marked loss of receptivity or response to

⁶² A study of a house in the locality where residents who fought the council's eviction successfully is instructive in showing how an individual court action can bear fruit and that it is worth persisting (Horn 2002)

constantly new and different demands. In the Square and in the neighbourhood different things happened that one might hear about, adding a thread to the social weave. 'Culture' as such was ill defined, social engagement and awareness are better descriptions that include attention to cultural diversity and specifics; the spirit of being thus involved and active seemed to be pervasive in 2007, certainly amongst the people I met and who seemed to want to counteract the spirit of rampant commercialism which had invaded the area increasingly. The NBC's relationship with the residents' association and with the large organisation of the Pfefferwerk gGmbH will continue to be conflictual but may also be productive of new innovative changes.

In this chapter I have attempted to describe an inner city square, its layout, characteristics and the history which have deeply affected life in the square and its neighbourhood for over a century at least. It is but a sketch of a complex period in a much longer national history. I wanted to describe not only life in and around the square but also the performative functions involved in taming the housing market, which, although still slow compared with other cities, will have a defining effect on the future of this area and this square. The competing interests between the spirits of greed and communal concerns are actively engaged locally. At this point it is not clear to what extent the local pressure groups who work on behalf of tenants and owners will be able to engage with local conservation politics in future and how effective they might be.



Fig 12 Locals in the Square May 2007

The next chapter will take a wider view of the process of unification and its consequences.

Chapter 5

One Nation – two People: An incomplete Revolution

The way we think about memory is increasingly memory without borders – in Berlin, however, and on either side of the old border, memory is still tied to and defined by this border (Huysen 2003:4).



Fig 13 'Divided Opinions' by H.Sandberg 1948

New Starts – Old Skills

This chapter will explore critically and ethnographically some of the consequences which followed the actual 'Wende' or the 'Fall of the Wall' in Berlin on November 9th 1989. I will refer particularly to the impact of change

on the women and men I met during my fieldwork in the Neighbourhood Centre in East Berlin. The chapter is in two parts and will begin with one life story that spans three generations and touches on many of the main issues under discussion in this thesis. I look especially at the question of identification and belonging as discussed by (Feuchtwang 2007:150) as well as the ‘politics of loss and restoration’ as outlined by Carsten (2007: 24/25). Each of these categories, identification and belonging as well as loss and restoration are particularly sensitive to change or rupture. The views and experiences expressed in the interviews reflect only a small part of the larger ‘pattern’ that emerges from reports in the media, historical reconstructions, serious analysis and debate; they represent, however, fairly characteristic markers that re-occur repeatedly in the literature of changes following complete rupture⁶³ as outlined in the Chapter 2. These markers might be summarized as disorientation, fear, confusing expectations, diverging interests and human determination in the search for re-orientation. The threat to personal and collective integrity and identity, so often associated with sudden and unexpected change, is managed in many different and often creative ways as discussed by a number of scholars (Das 1994; Verdery 1996; Hann 2000; Watson 1994; Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004:1-29).

The chapter will use the life stories, the information gained through the questionnaire, the conferences I attended and countless other meetings and conversations to link the key themes in this thesis to the original research question which considered the legacies of the rapid take-over of the former communist state by its western sibling state. How has this transformation of whole life trajectories affected people in the former East Berlin and how do people of the two once separated nations now relate to each other?

⁶³ Rupture here is understood to be the collapse of or break with the known order of the State, its structure, economy, its policy making and will to survive a deep crisis.

The chapter will conclude with a brief observation of the twentieth anniversary celebration in Berlin which I followed through here in Britain on the media. Some significant changes in the way in which unification was presented revealed changes in perception and attitude that had not been as noticeable before.

Stories of the past for the future

Most of the people I interviewed formally, meaning at an arranged time and in a confidential setting, were between thirty and sixty years old, a few were in their early twenties. Most were women, as stated before (see list of interviews in the Appendix). Three of the original founder members still ran the Neighbourhood House team, which is the largest of the four teams at the Centre (see NBC illustration in the Appendix). The interviews were open-ended but usually started with an introduction of my interest in how the changes surrounding unification had affected them. The perceptions and outlooks of the older generation, who had lived during the times of the Cold War or even the real War, as few of them had, were clearly differently patterned to those of the generation who had barely reached puberty when the Wall between the two Germanies disappeared in 1989.

Despite these differences, however, there are sentiments and feelings that are transmitted from one generation to the next, which shape and colour current perceptions, not always in expected or predictable ways. The intergenerational transmission of narratives, as the researchers Welzer and his group found, had been ‘corrected’ by media representations of the past, particularly where the past was tinged with uncomfortable or ambiguous sentiments. When Welzer interviewed three generational families in Germany in the early nineties about their memories, he found that war heroes created by the media had simply replaced or ‘overplayed’ ancestors who had been known to have been Nazis. Such membership had been ‘edited out’ in favour of images of heroes

transposed onto family members: 'Opa was not a Nazi' is Welzer's title of one of the books (2002) which became a much discussed bestseller, highlighting the role of popular media influences in the distortion or erasure of a past that wants to be forgotten but needs to be remembered so that it does not re-occur (Forty, 1999:1-18). Marianne Hirsch's (1997) discussion of 'post-memories' in the context of family photographs also addresses the power of such second-hand memories and the surprising strength of attachment to their real or fictional truth. The contribution of relational ties to memory is also evident in the much publicised study of young students by Deutz & Schroeder (2009). The authors found that the students had very little real knowledge about the GDR but that young people who had grown up in the new Federal States associated primarily the positive things with the socialist state, or plainly wrong facts that were favourable, such as a clean environment, democratic elections or that the Wall had been built by the former FRG. Students in the region of Brandenburg and Berlin appeared to know least, whilst pupils in Bavaria knew at least some facts. The researchers conclude that the level of ignorance or distortion is primarily due to the teaching in schools but also to the intergenerational information flow in families. Other studies that related to the content of teaching in 6th forms came to similar conclusions (Arnsward 2004). It is an interesting phenomenon that with the disappearance of the physical manifestations of the former GDR's rather run-down towns and villages their memory has also been wiped out leaving only that which is important to take into the future (see Kuechler 1999:59 and Forty 1999).⁶⁴

Locating the past in the present through personal narratives was, as I began to find out, more complex than it had seemed at the outset. Memories and narratives are, as discussed in Chapter 2, dependent on circumstances of time or place and a myriad of emotions. Nora speaks of memory 'being torn out of its embodied environment' at times of change so fast that memory has to

⁶⁴ Kuechler cites Certeau who wrote 'that memory always comes from somewhere else', which seems appropriate for both of the research examples I used here.

attach itself to sites or 'lieux' rather than to remain embedded in its 'milieux' (1989:7-24). I was thankful that those with whom I had the closest encounters knew from experience with Westerners or 'Wessis', that their roots and socialisation under communism would create differences between our respective perceptions. They were curious about what I made of them knowing that they had lived in a failed and now defunct state but that their lives had therefore not necessarily been without value. We were each a little wary, at least initially, of each other as 'others' in a collaborative exploration, where I was the stranger in their environment. Carsten draws attention to the interweaving of memory and identity in her introduction to the edited collection of 'Ghosts of Memory' and to the powerful interrelationship between personal and familial memory, that might 'maintain or negate difference locally and nationally'. She writes that:

Conversely, through large-scale political events as well as the institutional structures of the state that impinge on the personal and familial life, kinship emerges as a particular kind of sociality in which certain forms of temporality and memory making and certain dispositions towards the past, present and future are made possible while others are excluded (Carsten 2007:5).

Kinship in its wider, temporal and relational sense emerged as an important factor in many of the East German narratives as did space. The 'placing or locating of memory', the 'lieu' as defined by Nora (1989) can evoke lasting associations, as in the following example: One woman in East Berlin, who had feared the disappearance of the Wall and who still longs for the certainties connected with the old system, told me about her absolute sense of horror, when her young daughter ran through a tunnel that used to be closed to the West but was now open – what would she find? She remembered this feeling of panic clearly, although it happened nearly 18 years ago (A.M, 05. 2007). When she spoke, this fear also evoked the loss of her past life, her secure job

and the freedom this had provided for her and her daughter instead of their current joint dependence on public ‘handouts’ and constant scrutiny.

For Letti, whose story I tell below, it has always been the visual imagery of art, first her father’s and then art generally, which helped her to connect the often disparate strands of her life, out of which she forged a strong, often painful narrative and an identity that is unique to her, making her strong yet also vulnerable. It is inextricably bound up with German history and therefore relevant here.

Letti’s story

Letti runs the art gallery at the Neighbourhood Centre; it is successful and has gained increasing acclaim. She, like Selma, told me that she had been ‘socialised’ by the regime in the GDR and that she had been apprehensive about unification in 1990 specifically, because the opening of the border would bring in drugs and other ‘negative influences’ in larger numbers than were available in the GDR in the 1980s. Her son, who had recently been through a detoxification therapy, was then eighteen and very impressionable. We had retreated to a quiet corner at the Centre one afternoon in order to talk about how her past experiences still resonated in her present life⁶⁵. Letti talked, almost without interruption, for more than two hours. She had just celebrated her sixtieth birthday, she had returned from her first visit to Israel and was still filled with the impressions of a country she had known about all her life without really understanding ever what it meant to be Jewish and to live in Israel. Letti’s father, the artist H. Sandberg, born in 1908, had been Jewish, but abjured his religion early in favour of communism. “Most young Jewish artists were communist then”, said Letti. She told me that he had also been a rebel against his Zionist family who were then all emigrating to Palestine. Like many

⁶⁵ See Introduction and methodology – most interviews began with a statement about how the past influences the present and continues to play its part.

young intellectuals and working class people, he joined the communist party in the late nineteen twenties when the Weimar Republic attempted to hold an uneasy and precarious balance between political extremists: while being associated with the workers' parties on the left, the government had to deal with the traditionalists on the right, mainly employers and the elite of society, who hankered after the 'golden' times of imperial Germany⁶⁶, leaving an ideological vacuum in the centre which was quickly filled by small party factions and the new party organisation of the National Socialists (NSDAP), which began to infiltrate many social and professional groups. This party's aim was the overthrow of the German parliamentary republic, which had only been established in 1919⁶⁷ and which ended in 1933.

Sandberg, like other artists, used his training in graphic art to attack Fascist propaganda, aimed at attracting the working classes to the National Socialists, whose effective and skilful campaigns were gaining a large following. Communists and Fascists had been fighting in the streets for years during the turbulent times following WWI, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and an attempted revolution in 1920. A succession of failures by the Weimar coalition to cope with the reparations, the depression and the increasing unemployment in the country helped to pave the way for the NSDAP to gain ground. They won the election in 1932 and Hitler was appointed chancellor in 1933. With the institution of the NSDAP as ruling party and the dissolution of the old parliament by Hitler, the persecution of those deemed to be enemies of the

⁶⁶ Fulbrook refers here particularly to the 'lock out' of a quarter million workers in the Ruhr by industrialists in 1928. The dispute between industrialists and workers was one of many that divided the Weimar Republic; the democratic government at that time was considered to be on the side of the workers and trade unionists. The industrialists wanted greater control of national and industrial interests and the support of the state; they withheld funding from the more liberal parties, apparently leaving a political vacuum that was eventually filled by the NSDAP (2009:38-50).

⁶⁷ The Weimar Republic was proclaimed in August 1919 after the election of a National Assembly, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June and the formation of the Weimar coalition government. Fulbrook (2009) provides a detailed account and a bibliography of the W.R. and the rise of the NSDAP.

State could begin in earnest. Sandberg must have been arrested around 1933/4. Letti spoke even faster driven by emotion:

My father was in the KZ (Concentration Camp) for high treason and political agitation. Nazis first put him into prison and then into Buchenwald – he was away for twelve years. He returned a broken man. He was very nervous, suffered from sleeplessness; there were always disagreements, quarrels at home. My father, who was Jewish, had rejected the Zionist religion of his family who had all gone to Israel totally. He was an atheist and communist. The GDR were not interested in the Jews. They were interested in him because he had been and still was a communist. And he had been persecuted. My mother was fifteen years younger than my father. After her studies she worked as a stage assistant. We had a nanny, we were privileged, were supported by the State....When he returned he produced two important work cycles, I'll show them to youMy father was born in 1908 - art and history were always part of my life as long as I can remember.

Letti's mother was Russian, from an old family 'with many famous people in it'; when Sandberg returned from the Concentration Camp to his home in Berlin in 1945 he quickly obtained a licence to work, first from the Americans, then from the Russians, as editor in chief of a political and satirical magazine (the *Ulenspiegel*) that ran until 1951. She said:

Our house was filled with intellectuals, a lot of famous people came (she reeled off a list of names, only some were familiar), reflecting and talking, constant arguing – we children felt redundant - if you as a small child hear how your father screams during the night – there are so many 'inner things', it's like a 'Raster' or blueprint of what has been done to you that you pass on. We, his children, often felt as if he did not even know we were there – (L., 04.2007).

Berlin was divided into four occupational zones directly after the war, but under the influence of the 'Cold War' which began very soon thereafter, and the foundation of two separate German States in 1947, the military fortification of the borders between East and West began to be established, with East Germany taking the lead in erecting fencing and posting border guards (Lindenberger, 2005:101-112). The worker's uprising in 1953 in response to increased productivity demands nearly sparked off a general strike in the GDR; it was brutally put down with the help of Russian tanks. Increasing collectivisation of agriculture to about 85% of available land caused farmers to flee to the West, food rationing cards had to be introduced and about three million people left through the only remaining gap in the border fence in East Berlin until the erection of the Wall in Berlin in August 1961.

When I asked Letti about the Wall she said that they regarded the Wall as something that was necessary. It was a threat and it was odd, but it was never negated at home. The political questions, she said, first arose for her with the so-called Prague Spring in 1968. She remembered considerable arguments with her parents and her friends, some of whom were hard line communists. "The events in Prague affected us very much, we realised then that we lived in a police state, a system that was like a dictatorship, but not like Hitler's".

Letti's memories of her childhood are filled with scenes of chaos. Her father, she said, had a huge need to 'catch up' with the life he had missed. She remembered him as 'manic'. Their whole life seemed manic as he was always in a rush. At the same time he like others who had fought Fascism, was celebrated by the Socialist regime for having been a victim of Fascism. He was put on a pedestal and could use his influence widely, helping friends to obtain positions, for instance. He helped her to get her back to school, when she had dropped out at eleven, he got his son, a musician, out of jail, when he was arrested as a dissident in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Her other brother worked in the Berlin Staatsoper with a famous conductor. 'But they are both mad', said Letti, 'we are all a bit mad'. Asked what she meant by it she explained:

Mad in the way people are when there is chaos all around them, nothing is what it seems. Our father was an important personality with lots of connections East and West, yet at home he was not... we were not happy with him. My parents divorced when I was a teenager⁶⁸ and rebelled. I left school finally at 17 without an 'Abschluss' or final degree. That was shaming and I felt very insecure (L., 04.2007)

She worked as bookseller and lived with a boyfriend in Pankow, Berlin East. One day she was contacted by the 'Kulturhaus' in Pankow (House of Culture) who said they wanted her to work with them. She guessed it was her father's influence since there was, apparently, no vacant position. She continued to feel ambivalent about it but was also very pleased that she had finally got a post where she could work and learn. After the brutal defeat of the dissident's revolt in Prague in 1968, she had joined a small band of young protesters in the East of Berlin and challenged her parents increasingly. Family relations were fraught. Her father, despite his own criticism of the regime and its policies, especially towards artists, still felt loyal towards it. Being respected and well-connected in East and West, he travelled almost freely and used his influence on behalf of artists and the arts generally.

Letti worked and trained at the 'Kulturhaus' (comparable to the House of Culture, Habeck, 2007), a happy and productive time in her memory, despite her continuing domestic instability and failing relationship with her young man, a 'half Jew', who had defected to the West. 'He had been the great love of my life' she told me, yet he left in '75 or '76 to go the West when their small son was four years old. As single parent now, her son in a full time day nursery, she continued to run the gallery at the Kulturhaus, where she built up quite a following of artists. Her mother and other family members helped out. The

⁶⁸ In fact her parents did not divorce until she was an adult; this is the original version of her story.

arts enjoyed some liberalisation during the seventies, as a result of Honecker's new policies and in the context of 'Ostpolitik' and détente⁶⁹. The exchange of cultural and educational visits had become part of the official state policy in the wake of the Helsinki agreement in 1975⁷⁰. Yet at the time of this acceptance of a 'peaceful co-existence', the vigilance by the state for the preservation of its ideology and security increased (Garton Ash, 1994:188-9); the climate of liberalisation had fostered deceptively relaxed relations between the two German governments, which could change often and quite unpredictably. Letti's father and the family belonged to its elite by virtue of his prominence. During this time Letti was asked to become a government informer, which she refused, knowing that this would damage her career and also compromise her beliefs. She learnt later that her father had informed on others on an international basis and had worked actively for the STASI.

In 1979 a new curator was appointed at the gallery who had qualifications and treated Letti condescendingly, asking her to go back to study. Letti felt affronted since she had built up a well-respected gallery with a notable following of artists, amongst them many dissidents. 'Going to work was like running into an open knife every day', she told me. She became ill and had to take sick leave for almost a year. During this time her parents also split up; when her father moved in with a much younger woman, he was finally 'kicked out' by her mother. It seems that Letti left the gallery at the time of growing turbulence in East Berlin, but she did not participate actively in the protest movement. She told me:

I feared the West, I was frightened of capitalism and its power. I had a son of 17 then who was rather unstable, disturbed, not settled, he was a

⁶⁹ The 'Ostpolitik' or policy towards the East introduced by Chancellor Willy Brandt was followed consistently by succeeding governments. 'Change through rapprochement' was the slogan for a bundle of policies that forged new links, many economic, with the government in the GDR. see Judt 2005:497, but also see Lindenberger 2005.

⁷⁰ The Helsinki Accord was signed in 1975, exerting considerable influence on human rights issues in the Soviet Bloc countries, see Chapter 2

musician, the whole music scene here in Berlin was full of drugs, he did get into it (drugs) and got a terrible shock... he went into therapy but it was useless... he is grown up now, but he had an unstable and insecure childhood. He was drug dependent, definitely. He has a daughter of six whose mother is weak and unstable. They no longer live together and I try to do as much as I can for my granddaughter. This cycle of madness needs to be stopped (L., 04. 2007).

Letti told me several times how she had feared the fall of the Wall. Yet soon after its collapse she and colleagues started a magazine for artists and writers, not unlike her father's in the forties, which unfortunately had to close after three years. She showed me some of the copies. Their content was lively, angry and funny, filled with the rather visceral experiences and political comments by people on either side of the former border. It was quite evident from the various texts how many in her circle of friends in East and West deplored the disappearance of the ideal of 'socialism', rather than the collapse of the SED dictatorship. It seemed as if, for them, the last hope of European communism, something pure and ethical, had vanished (see Scribner, 2005).

Although Letti did not share this view entirely there was, nevertheless, sadness that an important part of her life too had been lost. She found herself unemployed for the first time in 1992/3 and felt devastated. Her attempts at obtaining work by contacting friends and her father's colleagues failed. She had to sign up at the Job Centre and experienced for the first time the demeaning process of having to declare her private affairs, her background and hopes for the future in order to qualify for one of the government assisted work creation schemes or ABM's (see Appendix). The agency she contacted, run by a friend and humorously called 'Foerderband' or Assembly Line, had a socio-cultural orientation and contacts to like-minded institutions, with whom this agency collaborated in an effort to set up new projects where people could find work. Her experience as arts curator eventually brought her to the Pfefferwerk organisation in 1997/8 and to the Gallery F 92 in the newly set up

Neighbourhood Centre. She liked the idea of a gallery for the community, looked forward to organising exhibitions with ‘socially engaged themes’ but here too she had to fight for every penny and felt constantly undermined by competing projects.

Her story did not end here but merged with other, similar narratives of endless struggles with checks and impasses as well as new possibilities and gradually diminishing resources. Her helter-skelter telling of her story, had been shot through with the immense burden of guilt and ambivalence left by her late father, who, despite his reputation as an artist and political fighter of some stature in the early years of the GDR, had also, in the eyes of his daughter, failed in his duty as human being, perhaps because of his experiences in prison. In 1989 he had apologized publicly in the news magazine ‘Der Spiegel’ stating ‘how he had been ashamed’ of his behaviour and betrayals; he died in 1991.

Her deep feelings for and against her father, her frequent allusions to the ‘madness’ in the family, from which only her mother seemed to have been exempt, conflicted with her own sense of blame for how she had neglected her son whilst enjoying the favours accorded to her and the family. Her father’s early persecution as a communist had earned him his privileges. Letti’s story rather than Letti as a person, seems to stand for much of the tragic twentieth century history in Germany and in Europe, for the ‘long shadow’ of the wars, especially the 2nd World War and for the roots of the ideological division between East and West that divided Germany.

An Epilogue?

In retrospect the years 1945-1989 would now come to be seen not as the threshold of a new epoch, but rather as an interim age: a post-war parenthesis, the unfinished business of a conflict that ended in 1945 but

whose epilogue had lasted for another half century...It seemed obvious to me in that icy central European December that the history of post-war Europe would have to be re-written. (Judt: Introduction to Postwar, History of Europe since 1945 (2010: 2).

For Letti, her family and many others like her this ‘epilogue’ has not been concluded and much of their history is being re-written as time passes and new insights and interpretations arise. Only the passage of time will cause the past to lose its potency, allowing it to assume its appropriate place in history and in memory. Letti staged an exhibition of her father’s work in 2008 at the F92 gallery at the NBC. I heard and saw her speak with respect about him and his life. She presented his black and white wood cuts as well as other graphic works which were harsh, illustrating turbulent, conflict-laden scenes without embellishments, in the expressionist tradition of his time, leaving imprints on the viewer’s consciousness, that spoke of despair but also of sharp observation.

When I last met Letti, in 2010, she seemed calmer. We talked about her granddaughter who is doing well at high school. Her progress and wellbeing are clearly an important factor in finally interrupting the cycle of the so-called ‘madness’, that so seemed to have haunted her life.

Gains and Losses in the Lives of the ‘Others’⁷¹.

Most of the people I interviewed in 2006 and 2007, and those whom I met through the NBC, were realistic about the disruptive and often traumatic changes they and their friends and neighbours had experienced. “We made the bed – now we have to lie in it”, is an old German proverb that often came to mind when we talked. I also often felt deeply ignorant of the realities they alluded to rather than described in detail. It was, after all, in the past now, not

⁷¹ The title is a reference to the film ‘Das Leben der Anderen’, directed by Henckel von Donnersmark (2006).

as relevant as their current concerns or their work not worth talking about. Other researchers of post-socialist societies found similar themes about hopes and expectations from the past that translated into what I would like to call ‘workable scripts’ for the present. Such scripts are constructed, edited and re-edited to fit the present, bringing together ‘evocative and ambiguous memories’ (Humphrey, 1994:23) that underscore daily actions and aims as well as imagined futures. I encountered many writing and drama workshops, storytelling circles and highly creative theatre groups, such as the ‘Theatre of Experience’, in Berlin and at the conferences I attended. A facilitator told me that these theatre groups, which apparently exist in several European countries, are facilitated for people ‘experienced’ in life events and devoted to the ‘re-enactment the ‘re-editing’ or re-storying’ of the past in ways that is relevant now. Such self-reflexive and creative projects form part of many attempts to bring difficult aspects of the past into the present or to lay them to rest, to ‘let them go’, as Freud might have said, since to him ‘forgetting to forget’ was synonymous with repressed memories that needed to be released (Freud, 1960). I encountered several groups in Berlin, who performed for each other, they wrote and devised their own scripts, including a hilarious sketch about Osis and Wessis. People’s creative and self-parodying use of all kinds of bitter-sweet aspects of their lives brought new and old truths to the participants as well as to the audience (Berdahl 2010; Skultans 1998; but also Jelin 2003).

Gender issues

For women in the former GDR being part of the work force was as natural as it was to be still responsible for the household and child care. Similar to women in the West, women in the GDR and under communism were unlikely to attain high career positions on the whole, but unlike women in the West they were offered generous child care, funding for domestic appliances as well as times off work to deal with their domestic role as child bearers and carers (Haukanes 2001 and verbal accounts). Following the collapse of state services

after 1989, not all women fared as badly as it had been initially portrayed. Some studies, reviewed by M. Dennis and E. Kolinsky (2004) found that it was mostly older women who had definitely been most disadvantaged. Many younger women left to find work in West Germany; others found new work but deferred having children. The birth rate dropped appreciably after unification. According to Schroeder (2000) every second East German working person had had at least two career changes during the last ten years. This certainly matched the biographies I gathered amongst the staff at the NBC, where most people had had more jobs than that. But their life was, as I was told or observed, not about retreat but 'going forward', building something new, it was about creating spaces, literal and metaphorical, about carving out a framework that would enable users to become active in the Centre, to generate projects or to run self-help groups. It could look haphazard to the outsider, disorganised and repetitive; it was, mostly, hard work, including physical work. The spirit of 'voluntary engagement' which was promoted in the Square and in many local projects, as discussed before, also radiated an almost 'missionary' enthusiasm and invitations to join in; the women, in particular, were aware of their 'zeal' and joked about it at times, reminding each other how important it was not to concentrate exclusively on the 'Centre'. On the other hand there were constantly new ideas to explore of which several were concerned with how the less visible members of the locality could be reached. In order to find out the team invited a single parent, a jobless migrant and a young person in 2009 to act as consultants to a discussion of how the Centre could be made more relevant for them.

I chose to tell Selma's story because she, who had grown up in the GDR, had very consciously adapted her life and her practice to the new system without compromising her belief in what she had come to understand in relation to the values of social justice, social engagement and her role as artist and critical observer of the present.

Selma's Story

Selma, as mentioned in Chapter 3, was my main contact and had supported my request from the start. She embodied for me Hannah Arendt's vision of a social organisation where action, rather than 'work' is linked to the political endeavour of achieving greater awareness of the public as opposed to the private sphere (1958, 1968). She was a champion of the 'sozial-kulturelle Bewegung' or the movement for social and cultural development, which has a strong presence in German domestic politics as well as in Europe (Report on Intergenerational Learning in Europe, 2005). Neighbourhood Centres, unlike the Cultural Centres or Houses of Culture in the socialist countries (Grant, 2007)⁷², were based on a 'non -hierarchical' concept of self-help and self-determination as discussed in Chapter 1. According to Selma, activities in the Houses of Culture in the GDR, though valuable, were closely scrutinized and subject to competitive 'voluntary involvement' for which prizes were given; too much independence was deemed to be subversive and discouraged. She told me that despite surveillance and controls, there had, nevertheless, been certain 'free spaces' (Freiräume), in which one could express one's ideas, where one could also be subversive and oppositional, although this was always under threat of discovery and punishment. In contrast to Funder's stark report of persecution under the STASI (2002), Selma's way of dealing with an oppressive regime was more like that of the 'tricksters' described in Pine's ethnography of the Gorale people in Poland (1996). Her way of explaining what she called the 'stupidity' of the former regime was a story about how she and many others had proven to themselves how rigged the elections were:

By following the rules rigidly we all carefully obeyed their instructions for filling in the electoral form, crossing out each candidate we did not want with a ruler – because uneven lines were declared as invalid votes. When

⁷² This is an unfair comparison since Grant's houses of culture in Russia are comparable to those in Victorian England rather than 21st century Berlin.

the results showed an overwhelming majority for the SED, we knew they were false. ‘Trickery’ had become a part of daily challenges to beat the system (S., 09. 2006).

Selma had explained very early on that she was not interested in the creation of ‘high art or culture’ but expressions of natural creativity, available to everyone. She spoke of the many ‘broken people’ after the Wende, the depression and hopelessness; – “die waren so kaput” (they were so broken down) – “that I and others had to think up something to help”. For her, for her friends and former colleagues, harnessing any form of creativity provided a life line since they too needed to build up new existences for themselves and their families. In 1990 Selma had two daughters, who were then still at school, a mother who had taken early retirement and could help with child care, and a very old grandmother who had acted as her main carer, while her mother still worked. In this three generational female household men were introduced only gradually, as friends, as partners and finally through the birth of a grandson.

I have described in Chapter 3 how Selma’s idea of a ‘Werkstatt’ or workroom became the central plank of the application for setting up a Centre in the district where people could meet and express themselves through making things that had some relevance to them and to others. She told me:

We ran from one institution to the next, they referred us to arts councils, but we said we did not want to produce art, or at least not as a primary aim, then we were sent to an institution that provided funding for occupational therapies. Again that was wrong. It was crazy that they could not understand us. We had to make up stories to convince them that we fitted their criteria, rather than the other way round (S., 09.2006)

Eventually they were sent to the Association for Socio-cultural Work (Verband Sozial-kultureller Arbeit), where the umbrella organisation for Neighbourhood

Centres in Berlin was located. Here, their aims were immediately understood, they were sent to look at Neighbourhood Centres in West Berlin and provided with a lot of support.....they could begin (S. 09.2006).

The continuing disagreements and comparisons between East and West are often cited as signifiers of a not yet united city or country. I began to wonder if, in fact, this was a misreading of what was or is actually happening. Selma, who lives with a woman from the Rhineland, told me that they both deliberately observed their differences rather than tried to forget them:

Our differences are important to us as are our backgrounds, we can learn from each other. We were both brought up by our grandmothers, both our mothers worked, but our lives were not the same. She went to university, I was not allowed to go, because I had never been a follower in the political sense.... I tended to go my own way..... I had children, she did not. She worked abroad for a while and I decided to separate from my male partner, staying here. I fell in love with a young woman.... After the Wende I had to retrain, having worked as an engineer during the day and as a potter in the evening in an art centre. Then I trained in adult education and psychology. Nina, who is a social worker, and I met on a training course in the West, and we decided to live together. She brings her experience of the wider world, of Western organisational structures from which I learn. I tell her about how we managed and how important it is now for us here to work together and build up this Centre. She thinks I am crazy to continue to work under the circumstances here, (meaning the Centre, where an administrative crisis was creating unease), but we need to sort it out and learn from it⁷³ (S. 03. 2007).

⁷³ This is an abbreviated version of a much longer interview, direct speech is retained for stylistic reasons, it is not a literal transcription.

Selma and I had many conversations and I only learnt in the course of those how she had dealt with the turbulence engendered by the protests everywhere during 1989 and the politics of change that followed. She had been on the fringes of the protest movement, her interest and passion lay in reform of the system and greater rights for individual expression of freedom, including sexual freedom and independence. She had not suffered for her sexuality, which she had kept private, but her politics were affected by the prejudices in the GDR against homosexuality⁷⁴.

Selma told me that she had not wanted the German Democratic Republic to end. She had wanted radical changes in the way it was governed, in the organisation of its structures. She was and still is a socialist. Her determination to hold onto the values and achievements of her earlier life's achievements, despite the GDR regime, are clear and speak against the industry of Ostalgia, the production of exhibits about times of her life that cannot be wrapped up in museums. Selma like some others belonged to the group of people I encountered in socially engaged projects, who actively promoted socialist ideas and who were creating changes in a capitalist society that seemed to make the system work for them – 'capitalism without capitalist' as Burawoy wrote in the context of post-socialism (Burawoy 1999:301-311). I cannot say if she belongs to the new brand of people he describes but know that her gift of making something creative out of almost anything was extremely useful and her commitment to equality of opportunities and fairness was extremely strong.

Selma told me about Wolfgang who ran the workshop for children and families in the basement of the House. She told me how useful and resourceful he was in every way, not just as a male presence in this more or less female team, but also as someone who created a quiet space to which she and others

⁷⁴ Same sex relationships had been legalised in the GDR in 1968 but only in 1987 did the High Court affirm that homosexual people do not stand outside socialist society and that they have equal civil rights (Evans, J. 2010 in *Feminist Studies*, 36.3, 553-77).

could retreat. The workshop had been extremely beneficial, she told me, for some of the more depressed and disillusioned adults who come here, just to ‘potter’, or to engage in some craftwork without pressure.

I have chosen his story because it seems so similar to many other people’s stories I heard. At the same time his role in the NBC was a very special one.

Wolfgang’s Story

Wolfgang was nearly 60 in 2007, a small compact man, friendly and not very talkative, who is dedicated to his work. When the wall fell he worked as a welder, as mentioned before, in one of the huge smelting plants, south of Berlin.

It was very dirty work, you swallowed a lot of muck, a lot of heat and dust... no, I am glad I am out of there (although) at the time it was hard losing the job (W.S., 04. 2007).

He missed the comradeship at work most. He had been with the smelting firm from 1986, when he came to Berlin from Saxony, and where he worked his way up to become responsible for the welding contracts on the shop floor of the plant. The plant was merged with a Western concern following unification and his contract was renewed to run until the year 2000. But during the last years, from 1998 – 2000, he said, things deteriorated quickly; workers from further east were brought in on lower wages whilst he and his colleagues were paid the standard rate for the east which was lower than the western rates. Yet the eastern part of the concern failed to deliver: ‘wir wurden platt gemacht’ (we were flattened), he said, as production became too expensive and the plant had to be closed. The work force was angry, disappointed and felt as if they had been thrown on the scrap heap. Unions and demonstrations were impotent against the superior might of the main plant in the West and in the face of global changes in production.

Wolfgang's marriage broke up soon after the Wende, in 1990. He was divorced in 1996. He is in a new partnership now and happily settled not far from the NBC in East Berlin. Following his redundancy he was offered re-training by the 'Arbeitsamt' or Job Centre and on-going mentoring as well as enhanced benefits. He chose 'child care' as he had always liked children, and because it was so different from everything he had known.

Wolfgang, like many people in the East, had found a partner when he was young, barely twenty; his first wife had worked in a local laundry and had, he said, also managed most of the household as indeed many women did (Scott 1974:211). Their children were in full time childcare and later in local schools. He told me in his broad Saxon accent:

But I lost out on looking after them, we were both always so tired and they had their activities in school and their groups. I must say they were always occupied and disciplined, better than today... not like the youths today: we had a youth club here, they urinated into the sand pit and damaged toys and garden furniture, it was terrible - we had to tell them to leave....I do not understand parents today (W.S., 04.2007).

After his training in child care Wolfgang found work as an assistant for craft work in a primary school nearby where he experienced a lot of difficulties with discipline and also with local parents, who objected to school rules and were uncooperative. He told me that the school, which had been re-housed in old buildings whilst theirs was being renovated, had problems and needed more resources for equipment and staff than had been allocated. He had become exhausted trying to straddle a lot of conflict in the school and deal with the many different nationalities. About a year ago the job Centre suggested a placement in the Neighbourhood House where he could join Selma in the craft workshop and Wienke, the single parent, who, as mentioned in chapter three, also worked on an incentive scheme, and fitted her hours around the school times of her two girls. Wolfgang loves his craft work, searching endlessly in

markets and second hand shops for beads, discarded buttons, cotton reels and bits of felt or material he liked. They are things from the past, he used to say. Or: “my mother had cotton reels like these”. Yet he did not particularly want to talk about the past. There were large chunks of time, following his job loss and his hopes of new beginnings, which he had not mentioned. Was this reticence a choice not to remember because it was private, not part of his current life? (Connerton 2009). Was his reticence perhaps, like that of the group of women mentioned in the last chapter, part of what he did not want to talk about because it was associated with failure – failure by association rather than deed? There was no doubt that he was mostly content with the changes brought about by unification – he appreciated the repairs that had been carried out in the roads and on houses. He was pleased that his years of work would be counted towards his pension which he was soon hoping to get. He is looking forward to moving further out of town. His now grown up boys were in good jobs, his grand-children were thriving. He regretted a certain loss of discipline amongst the young but, as far as I could tell, little else. Wolfgang was one of the few East Germans whom I met who was reasonable content with the changes that happened to him.

The relevance of these Life histories

The focus on these particular life stories responds to several factors: I could have chosen several others of similar relevance and could, perhaps, have included some examples from those who worked at the Centre and came from the West. But none had experienced the same unexpected ruptures in their lives, the same sudden and unequivocal change in their economic and political environment, including rapid changes in public mood and atmosphere. None had experienced the tension in November 1989, when the border opened and it was uncertain what would follow. People spoke of the extreme tension they felt during the regular Monday demonstrations in cities such as Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin; their fear of reprisals, of military intervention yet also of

their excitement and inability not to run out and join the crowds (Roder and Tacke 2004).

In order to understand the East German people I met in the House and elsewhere, I had to gain insight, as Lambert stated, into where they came from, what they had experienced and how they drew on their experiences now. Letti expressed her apprehension of the opening of the border, because of her fear of drugs and the violence in the West; yet she too had wanted the politics of the regime to change, having become keenly aware of the regime's deception, and of the favouritism prevalent amongst the officials and party functionaries. Letti and Wolfgang experienced deep set-backs, having at first grasped the possibilities the new regime had offered. Wolfgang by hoping for better job prospects in the plant that seemed to be run along more efficient lines than those he had known, Letti by starting a journal with artist friends from East and West Berlin that folded for lack of cash. – Their stories are characteristic of many I heard or read about, where people embraced the new and wanted to succeed under the new rules, but then met rejection and defeat. For people who had been used to secure jobs and used to rely on informal networks to get what they wanted, these were novel and disquieting experiences.

Both were lucky to be able to use local contacts. Wolfgang knew Ka who, as part of her neighbourhood work, was often in the local primary school, encouraging parents to improve the play facilities in the playground and take a more active interest in the school's activities. Through Ka he heard about the NBC and the fact that they were looking for another helper in the workshop. Letti eventually found friends amongst people who now ran the agency 'Foerderband' or conveyor belt, a job-centre, mentioned before, that specialised in arts and community-related placements under the Hartz IV scheme and had close connections with the Pfefferwerk Organisation and its various projects.

Each of the three people I chose is perhaps also typical for the many people in early middle age who had been settled reasonably well into their jobs before the regime change and had to start again from a different base line, in different circumstances and surroundings. They succeeded where others might have failed and this may or may not have been due to a supportive team, to the common aim of being engaged in matters relating to the neighbourhood and the local community in addition to their personal circumstances. The history of the House, which resonated particularly with Letti, added a special dimension to everyone I met at the Centre because of its national significance and poignancy. Letti's story is special and reflects German history in its different phases: her father's persecution as a communist by the Nazis and his special status as resistance fighter under communism had somewhat eclipsed the Jewish heritage, which for Letti became much more important and significant as the story of Jewish persecution became acknowledged and given the importance it had long held in the West. The uncovering of the history of the children's home and the introduction of other Jewish people from West Berlin, including survivors from the children's home, created new relationships and communalities which were carefully handled by Selma and Inge Franken from West Berlin, the researcher and writer of the book about the Children's Home. She involved everyone who was interested in the research and in continuing the work of shedding light on the past, as described in the next chapter. With the help of the team dialogues were opened up about the past in a variety of functions that included schools and attracted considerable local interest. One of many such events, devised by Selma initially and then continued by others, was the imaginary voyage described in Chapter 3. These events brought in people from further afield to think about a common history that should no longer be divided by ideological differences.

Selma struck me as being exceptional in her vision of a future which, to her, was linked to a recognition of what had to be discarded before something new and better could be built. It was by no means only her vision or her ideas that resulted in the creation and setting up of the Centre as explained in Chapters 3

and 4, but she had become central to the decision-making about how to develop projects or push them forward. One example was her determination to support the research of the history connected with the House mentioned in Chapter 3 and 6. Another was her determination to encourage the re-grouping of the local resident's association in the Square, described in Chapter 4, diffusing existing tensions. She seemed to know how to unravel the most awkward knots or barriers of resistance with humour and coaxing, avoiding undue pressures or exertion of power.

Selma, Letti and Wolfgang reflect experiences and the actions taken by many people I met who had been keen to go forward, despite negative circumstances, using their life experience and knowledge to build something new. The work of the NBC has changed since I first went there and it probably provides a different environment and atmosphere today. But the Centre is still primarily dedicated to respond to local need and interests, providing a lively and inspiring meeting place for people who want to make use of what it has to offer. It aims to respond to the diversity of the multicultural population in the vicinity in order to foster a sense of neighbourhood and belonging. This task was important in relation to the changing and shifting character of this area, which had been thoroughly disrupted by the post- unification changes. I do not use the word community in this context since it is such a contested concept. There are however, clear communities of interest, such as those who use and live around the square or amongst those who attend the workshop or the family story telling sessions, as well as those who form political interest groups or attend self-help classes, to name just a few. The life stories I selected above demonstrated, like many others, that most of the people who engaged in socio-cultural neighbourhood work, were aware of the importance of building relationships not only through common interests but also through recognizing and respecting differences.

It was less about differences between East and West than being aware of the meaning of difference, its potential value and its implication. It was the people

from the East, who alerted me to this importance because they had experienced it relatively recently and still had to deal with the consequences.⁷⁵

In the following section of this chapter I want to trace briefly how people from the East presented some of their perceptions of difference during the twentieth anniversary of the Fall of the Wall. Their voices had grown stronger since the unification had taken place, and voices from the West had become more reflective about the changes that had taken place.



Fig. 14 9th November 1989, Berlin Foto: dpa, 1989

‘We are the People’

⁷⁵ The work of Bourdieu is relevant in this context, because it observes and analyses the building of social relationships in often minute details and through repetitive practices, tracing the historical roots and the building up of relationships that also include differentials in power. The work of Putnam on community building through diversity and multiculturalism is very interesting as well and it is important in its emphasis on building trust in a community (1995 and 2007). I chose, however, not to use it in this context as it seemed to me less immediately relevant than the work I refer to in connection with places and inner city spaces.

On the twentieth anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009 many media reports recalled the celebrations of the 'Fall of the Wall' in Berlin on November 9th 1989, which has reached such iconic significance that, according to some commentators, one is almost planning to rebuild the Wall, as tourists apparently complain about the lack of its presence! The anniversary festivities showed a symbolic fall of the wall, it spawned countless exhibitions, events and comments in the media during the whole of 2009. Amongst these were also reminders of the other, far darker anniversary of this date, on 9th November 1938, when Jews in Germany experienced the physical force and terror of the 'Kristallnacht'⁷⁶ when many of them understood, for the first time, the break down in any accepted and known civil code, the utter seriousness of the threats against them (Klemperer 1995). The year of 2009 also, incidentally, marked the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Federal Republic of (West-) Germany, to which the former East Germany has now been 'annexed' and to which it has belonged for the past nineteen years. A new generation has grown up. The process of fusing two separate societies has been fractious and often confrontational. It also appears to have aided the emergence of an East German consciousness and a clearer sense of identification with their history that did not exist as such before. So what was celebrated? Is it the end of the former 'socialist Nation'; is it this new-found East German identity, the very slow but perceptible progress of the former Eastern economy, still so much the poorer cousin of the West? For many observers and participants in those extraordinary years just prior and after the Fall of the Wall, it was, in retrospect, less about success or failure and more about the fact that 'people made their own history'. When images of people sitting on The Wall, waving triumphantly, are played on TV screens round the world, 'it is, perhaps, the

⁷⁶ Kristallnacht: 9th November 1938, Jewish property was smashed, Synagogues burnt and Jews maltreated; these excesses were triggered, not caused, by the fatal wounding of a German diplomat in Paris by a young Jew, whose parents had been deported back to the Polish front from where they had fled in 1911. Herschel Grynszpan was later executed by the Germans.

most famous image of triumph of what we call in English ‘civil resistance’ – popular non-violent action’ wrote Garton Ash (The Guardian, Nov.8th 2007).

The twentieth anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and with it of the ‘Iron Curtain’, spoke of the of the victory of the ‘will of the people’, of a popular determination to push for freedom at a time when their government was stoically still celebrating the fortieth anniversary of its existence in October 1989 ignoring all warnings that change cannot be avoided; when the Russian Prime Minister Michal Gorbachov warned Herr Honecker not to ignore the signs (of people voting with their feet) since ‘he who comes too late will be punished by life’ (Wirsching, 2008: 368). What had not been foreseen to happen with such speed, happened almost by accident.⁷⁷ The West German population and the world were only spectators of an event to which they apparently seemed to have contributed nothing – it left everyone speechless, elated, totally surprised and also apprehensive of its consequences. One of the people who sat on top of the Wall at the time, told reporters how ‘incredibly hard’ the concrete had been, ‘built to last forever’. The vendors of hammers and drills, who quickly seized the opportunity to sell implements to those who wanted to participate in the demolition of the hated Wall, needed to find stronger tools. A friend who brought me a tiny fragment of the old Wall in 1989, burst into tears remembering the swell of emotion and joy she had experienced in Berlin.

Today we know that the event was not quite as unforeseen or unplanned as it then appeared; yet the impact of thousands streaming through the border and hacking down the barrier, created a sense of people power, of freedom that was unique and left memories reminiscent of revolutions, of elation and

⁷⁷ The politician Shabowsky, when asked in a press conference when East Germans’ travel permits would be available, appeared to have his papers in disarray. Not being able to find a directive, he stated to the TV cameras that it could happen ‘well, as of now’ – this sentence was the apparent trigger on 9th of November, which forced the border police in Berlin to open the border. The masses surged through the narrow barrier No-one cared what it said in their passport (original TV footage shown on 9.11.09 WDR TV station).

simultaneous anxiety, of irrevocable ruptures with a past and uncertainty of the future. Goddard (2006:3) refers to Zizek's image of the 'magic moment' symbolised by a hole in the national Bulgarian flag that represented the potential 'Other'; Hannah Arendt's view of revolutions, which to her are never the solutions, unless followed by the creation of a genuine republic (Arendt 1965), is probably more apposite to the German revolt in 1989. 'The constitution of a space of public freedom... a performative deed, executed by persons who decide to act together as equals,' is Arendt's precondition for the creation of something new, a vision that transcends the ordinariness of life (Welmer 2000: 222). Habermas too queried the term 'revolution' in Germany and claims that unlike in other socialist countries, there were no leaders, there was no 'reformist perspective' (a statement that would be denied by many who had pleaded for reforms). He calls it the 'exit revolution' which on the Western side was met with panic about the enormous costs of rescuing a bankrupt state (2003:45). As the GDR state disintegrated with the collapse of the government, its citizens were confronted with a neo-liberal, democratic system but no instructions about how to operate it. He wrote that:

The mode of East Germany's entrance into the Federal Republic deprived four-fifths of the eligible voters of the chance to make a free choice'. 'It created a normative deficit in the knowledge of East Germans about the principles of the Basic Law, enshrined in the West German constitution', and 'it left West Germans ignorant about the difficult task of creating a common nation of citizens (abbreviated quote: Habermas 2003:52).

This factor or 'take-over' by one half of a nation of the other half, contributed to a growing rather than abating sense of alienation between the two halves of the country. It reawakened memories of the immediate post-war division of the country into military zones and the subsequent institution of two German states under two opposing economic systems. In the East, active dissidents soon realized that their ideals of a genuine internal transformation of their corrupt government had been usurped by the popular and urgent demand

from the great mass of people for parity and unity with the Western sibling state (Wirsching 2008: 357-374). 'At the end of the rapid 'Two plus Four'⁷⁸ negotiations between the former occupational forces of both Germanies in September 1990, the Second World War was finally liquidated' wrote Wirsching (2008:374); both former states could begin starting on the difficult task of uniting forty years of division which had upheld the balance of power between Russia and the United States.

Amongst the many unforeseen consequences, which began to challenge tenaciously held perceptions and prejudices on both sides of the former border, was the growing sense of worthlessness and denigration in the East, while in the West resentment about the lack of a quick recovery and a second economic miracle affirmed previously held prejudices about the alleged inefficiency of the East Germans. In popular opinion they were a people that had become accustomed to rely on the State, who lacked initiative and work ethic. The full extent of the GDR's bankruptcy had remained hidden even from its own leadership (TV discussion MDR, 9.11.2009; Wirching 2008; Schroeder 2000).

⁷⁸ 'Two plus Four' negotiation refers to the agreement between the four former occupying forces to the unification of the two separate states since 1951. Their function ceased in Sept. 1990

New Voices

There was a different spirit afoot in the 2009 commemorations, which I had not noticed before. The voice of the people who had been ‘behind the Wall’, those, who at the time and for years after the downfall of the old regime, had not been heard or had not spoken with such confidence about themselves and their experiences, seemed to be more audible in the speeches, in quotations, in articles and commentaries. In addition to the usual list of gains and losses on either side of the former Wall there seemed to be more about the gains for the whole country, which was politically united though it had perhaps not yet found the ‘inner unity’ it desired. There seemed to be a kind of wistful acknowledgement that the East might have brought some of its good qualities to the West, which had previously not been appreciated. The division, according to one commentator, is now more about poverty and wealth, about pockets of deprivation in the whole of the Federal Republic, that have to be addressed (T.V. discussion MDR, 9.11.2009). Other factors that were mentioned were connected with the actual process of unification, the acknowledgement of the loss and the mourning for a people’s former lives and how they ‘arranged themselves’ under a socialist dictatorship; the recognition of their achievements within the failure of the state. This was a new note in the usual discussion on gains and losses, a recognition that many of the younger generation who only have the second-hand memories of their families or elders to rely on, the era of the GDR is, as one of them said ‘like a blank sheet, because it is difficult to know what or whom to believe’ (JA., 04. 2009).

The voices expressing more differentiated sentiments about the Wende are now stronger, more assertive and pronounced. Younger people who have little or no direct memory of the old GDR are beginning to be asked about their views. The older critics of what has been gained do not, as far as I am aware, bemoan the loss of the former political system but express their dissatisfaction

with what they dislike in the new system without the advantage of being able to make comparisons.

Contested memories in 2009

It is interesting that several of the journalists who wrote in the edition of 'Die Zeit, which I purchased on November 9th, had been born and raised in the former GDR. Alexander Camman, must have been 16 when the Wall fell. He wrote that the 'continuing, completely different weighting given to memory in the landscape of history remains a burden for a democratic culture of memory' (Camman 2009, Die Zeit,46:44). For him the memory of the events of 1989 lie 'deeply hidden' in the 20th century. 'The present gobbles up the past', he writes (Die Gegenwart frisst die Vergangenheit auf), alluding to the current global crisis, the constant acceleration of threats everywhere which obliterate the 'immense human and financial costs which unification brought after 1990 for the people in the East, sufficient to regard these past events with a good deal of ambivalence' (my translation).

His view is echoed by Seumas Milne, who at the same time wrote in a British paper that the divided discourse amongst historians about the interpretation of historical events in East and West was heating up as former Communist Bloc countries, which had joined the European Union, were beginning to make their voices heard. The interpretation of the weighting or meaning given to the end of the Second World War is but one instance: for the West the end of the war and allied victory had spelt liberation and freedom from Fascism and an evil regime. The newly drawn border through Europe, first agreed between Stalin and Hitler in 1939 and then established in 1945 by the Allied forces, heralded for the East the beginning of a new oppressive era under communism, a fact, that had or has, apparently, not been given sufficient weight in popular western perceptions of European history. Milne quotes the former Czech president Vaclav Havel as saying that : 'Europe will not be united unless it is able to re-unite its history, recognise communism and Nazism as a common legacy' (Milne, the Guardian, 12.11.2009:27). According to Garton Ash, a close observer of Europe, this history will have a far-reaching bearing on the

interpretation of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and, presumably, the interplay of global forces (T.G. Ash, *The New York Review*, Nov. 2009:8). Lastly, Habermas and several other analysts have highlighted how the process of unification also opened the gaze into the joint past. A past, he states in his essay 'The Past as Future' that is still very contested when it is evaluated for degrees of responsibility, of guilt, of retribution as well as restitution (2003:55-72). I shall return to this debate in the next chapter.

Here it is important to highlight that the debate between the factions retains a local, 'familial' character, orientated by kinship relations, which include intense rivalry and competition and are, nevertheless also part of a much larger East-West re-evaluation process, as mentioned before. Herzfeld found that democratisation produced intolerance to difference in the Balkans (1997:83/4). In Germany memories of a common, shared past before partition, of a cultural heritage and language, of common sentiments and experiences re-surfaced after unification, yet also, almost immediately became subject of multiple contested discourses (Sabrow 2009: 9-11).

Returning to the recent anniversary, it seemed to me that the change I had detected in the voices of the younger generation in their writing and in the debates, suggested a growing confidence in acknowledging differences that merited recognition and should be valued or promoted. There are now indications that the 'Wall in the mind' (*die Mauer in den Köpfen*), which seemed to be a kind of psychological defence against negative feelings on both sides of the former divide, might begin to crumble. There appeared to be less lament about 'Ostalgia' or recriminations. Instead there were in the debates, hard facts about still existing differences between the two economies and real hardships in de-industrialised areas, such as the north east and south of the former GDR. Differences in wages that undercut the West and presented unfair competition, whilst also opening up 'a more flexible labour market' were acknowledged. Debates about the timeliness of fairer distribution of funding to all impoverished communities have existed for some time, as I found when I

attended conferences about civic engagement and participation in 2007, but there now seemed to be more ideas about how the communities could move forward, separately or jointly, with a common purpose. It was a celebration, so perhaps there had to be a positive message. The devastation of industrial waste lands that mark areas of the East where de-industrialisation and chronic unemployment have killed off whole communities is reminiscent of the closing of coal pits in Wales. De Soto (2003:97) cites a German economist in her essay on Contested Landscapes who wrote in 1996 that:

Unification was not based on a dominating drive to grow together two German parts and to create in the eastern part, as Chancellor Kohl had promised, 'a blossoming landscape'. On the contrary, competition was prevalent in which the desire for private property dramatically changed into euphoria and lust.....a frightening decline of values and ethics took place. Anonymous industrialists and businessmen snatched up millions of marks, while smart and crude adventurers took advantage of the chaos of restructuring to make fast money.....East Germany's property became part of a monopoly game (C. Luft 1996:174).

For the celebrations in 2009, however, I would like to give the last word to the journalist Camman, who sees in the fall of the Wall an event that 'enabled the Germans to experience the belated, successful foundation of their democracy. ...'" With the downfall of the GDR the provisional arrangement of the Bonn government also died, he wrote:

West Germany too became a little freer and a little bit more independent.... the strange, highly dramatic frozen and temporary in-between time from 1945-1989 also ended at that point, (a time) which is already hard to explain to the younger generations. The twentieth century was suddenly over – and a completely new present began, which perhaps will only be comprehensible in the future and retrospectively (Caman, die Zeit , Nov. 2009, 46:44).

Conclusion

Often forgotten in these individual accounts, or barely mentioned now, is surely the greatest achievement of all, the success of a bloodless revolution under difficult and dangerous circumstances, when people decided to ‘act together’, in Arendt’s words for a single purpose, which, on that day and at that time of night, was to open the border and to get through the Wall. Plans had been made for street battles, hospital beds had been vacated and police as well as army stood prepared to intervene when thousands protested on November 4th and 8th while thirty thousand left through the opened borders of Hungary and Austria (Monk 2005). It seems clear now that many protesters at the time did not see much beyond that hour or that day. They wanted a regime change, the abolition of the STASI, less corruption, more freedom to travel. But when the final push came, when the state security services were not ordered to intervene with force or refused to use force - everyone surged with the crowd. It was a ‘critical event’ in Veena Das’ meaning of the word. An event that overrode fear and swept people along despite their fear. Twenty years later Germans celebrated unification but also reflected on what might have been different. Both sides are more prepared to participate in this exercise now, both appear to value their differences rather than to denigrate them. The denigration and devaluation will continue, however, or be revived as long as the population of the former GDR is seen to fail catch up with the West. In the current economic climate, as the skilled and young are still leaving their homeland to seek their fortune elsewhere, this is an almost impossible task. Yet some areas have had economic success and overtaken the West; whilst others lag behind with little prospect of catching up. According to some commentators the spectre of a further decline is looming unless there are drastic changes (Boss 2010:37).

Chapter 6

The Past in the Future: Ghosts Revisited

In this chapter I want to discuss aspects of racism after unification, which, in the context of Germany, raised the 'collective phantom' of a discredited past as well as questions about identity and belonging in East Germany. The varying positions over questions of responsibility for the crimes perpetrated during the Hitler regime are rooted in ideological differences and in the different ways of dealing with the aftermath and consequences of these crimes. For the GDR regime the NS-State and its crimes held a central position in the state-sanctioned historical and political justification for its existence. Despite a careful later 'uncoupling' of the genocide from imperialist capitalism and its aims, the murder of the European Jews remained hidden until the end of his regime, though no longer suppressed in the GDR (Sabrow 2005:132-151). Sabrow refers to Kocka's work (1993) in stating that both, antifascism and anti-totalitarianism led to political instrumentalisation in each of the two ideologically opposed German states, legitimating their differences against each other but also aiding in the maintenance of internal political stability (see also Borneman 1992).

This particular German and European past and the constant reproduction of an ambivalent context, form the background to the first part of this chapter, which presents an ethnographic account of a Berlin-wide campaign against racism in 2006/7. The campaign followed a number of racist attacks and a particularly horrendous incident in Berlin in 2006, when a black Ethiopian was beaten unconscious and maimed for life. The campaign was coordinated by one of the major welfare organisations in Germany, the 'Paritaetische Wohlfahrtsverband', (PWV), described below. The Verband or Association

asked the thirty-seven Neighbourhood Centres in Berlin to devise and manage their own local events. I shall describe the particular response to this request in the Neighbourhood Centre (NBC) in the Prenzlauer Berg (PB) district, in the borough of Pankow, where two other Neighbourhood Centres also hosted events and where, coincidentally, a Muslim Mosque was going to be built, against considerable local opposition.

The second part of this chapter discusses theories and views about the allegedly unexpected appearance of racism in East Germany and relates these to the unease and ambivalence that can still be detected, primarily in West German politics, about the national image, tainted by association with guilt about Nazi crimes.

The chapter's conclusion re-iterates the dilemma, transient perhaps and temporal, of two separated nations in one state that share common histories and cultures but are also confronted with the shadows and ghosts of particularly traumatising crimes at different times and in different political systems. These experiences create new meanings and insights for the future, through being re-confronted and re-remembered in each generation.

The Anti-Racist Campaign in Berlin 2006/7

The leading slogan for the campaign was taken from the first Article of the Basic Law of the German Constitution, which appeared on every poster:

*The Dignity of Every Person is unassailable. No to Right-Wing
Extremism, to Racism and Anti-Semitism*

This rallying call was accompanied by the emblem of two firmly clasped hands, one white, one brown, as shown below: The poster for the borough of Pankow offered a series of discussions under the theme: 'No fear of foreigners', and 'Pankow remains open'.

The Paritätische Wohlfahrtsverband (PWV), which had organised the campaign, is one of the four largest independent social welfare organisations in Germany, with representatives in each Federal State and in 13 national and European welfare organisations such as AGE and the European Anti- Poverty Network NGOs, to name but two. The Association grew out of the European tradition of funding health and welfare projects through large charities; it directs funds to community projects and ventures that adhere to the subsidiarity principle of help towards self -help, ‘from the bottom up’ (PWV Publicity, Sept 2006 and Newsletter Nr.1).



Fig 15 Poster for the campaign against racism in Berlin 2007

According to the Association’s final Berlin Campaign Newsletter in September 2007, the operation had been concluded successfully. It had resulted in an increased budget to enable Berlin Neighbourhood Centres to continue their

anti-racist campaigns in future, but also to extend the Campaign nationwide (PWV, 2007:14). The final report of the campaign was sent to the United Nations in the autumn of 2007, rewards were allocated for outstanding projects, including one to the campaign in Pankow for their documentary film of the main events.

The attack which finally triggered the campaign after many other racist transgressions in Berlin and elsewhere in the north East, occurred in April 2006. An Ethiopian man, who had been living and working in Berlin since 1987, had been assaulted at a tram stop on Easter Sunday at 4 am in the morning and had been left for dead by his two assailants. The victim's mobile phone had recorded his conversation with his wife and then the attackers' insults and his cries for help, all of which were subsequently relayed over the media. This created outrage and led to swift and determined local actions. 'Anti-Nazi' demonstrators gathered in Berlin and marched with banners proclaiming that 'Every victim is one victim too many! United against Nazis!'. The Minister of the Interior of the State of Berlin announced that:

We will not tolerate that people are persecuted, beaten up or even murdered by extremists because of the colour of their skin, religion or political views' ([www.spiegelonline international](http://www.spiegelonline.international) 18/04/06, accessed on 3/4/2010).

At the Neighbourhood Centre in Prenzlauer Berg, the initial reaction to being asked by an official body to engage in an anti-racist campaign was not immediately positive. Selma told me that when the campaign was first mooted, she and others, but particularly Cornelia and Ka, her co-workers, as well as the two senior members of the Self-help Centre (KIS), were rather put out to be dictated to by the PWV. 'It was like before, when we were told by party functionaries (SED) to volunteer for this and that; I hated to be volunteered to

be ‘subbotniked’. Especially by those above.... the others (colleagues) felt the same⁷⁹. According to Selma, they, as a team, never wanted be exposed to this kind of ‘manipulation’ again although they subscribed to the idea of voluntary social engagement in the community. Requests from an authoritative body had triggered an ‘embodied memory’ of regular coercions by the State to engage in activities that were conditional on the dictates of a dubious reward system. Selma said she had hardly ever participated and suspected that her passive form of resistance, which for some, according to the dissident historian Wolle, had been an invitation to challenge the system (Wolle 2009), had been largely responsible for her not obtaining a place at university.

It was Selma, however, who eventually initiated the first draft of their contributions to the campaign, as she saw that it was important in the light of what had happened. She devised a programme for a number of the events and conversations, which was subsequently worked out collectively with the rest of the team, each event in a different NBC. It was an ambitious programme on a tight budget with several presentations, amongst them a film about a famous transvestite, ‘a real local character’, who had left to live abroad eventually because the STASI had persecuted and haunted her⁸⁰. This film as well as the exhibition at Gallery F92, were the only events focussing on acts of discrimination in the GDR. At the local high school 6th formers presented their research of the lives of former local Jewish residents, in particular the life of one former pupil, who had been persecuted but luckily escaped. He attended as one of the ‘time witnesses’⁸¹. Selma’s ‘Journey into the Past and back into the Future’, described in Chapter 3 had also been part of the campaign events.

⁷⁹ See also Chapter 4. ‘Subbotnik’ refers to delegated but ‘voluntary’ contributions by Citizens in the GDR, usually on week-ends. The term comes from Russia and was used in schools, by the FDJ, in associations and leisure groups, often infiltrated by the STASI or their voluntary helpers (IM) who earned privileges through spying on their friends and neighbours.

⁸⁰ This film was the only example of discrimination and infringement of a person’s right not to be harassed.

⁸¹ Time witnesses or ‘Witnesses of the Past’ are well established in Berlin and other towns and often appear at historically based functions or in the media in order to report what they witnessed and experienced (see Chapter 3, and Glossary)

Having taken the initiative, Selma expected that someone else might sort out the organisation of the publicity. This division of labour and allocation of tasks did not run smoothly and was, as I found out later, not only related to lack of funding and possibly experience, but definitely also to the reluctance by the team to engage in wooing the public to participate in what appeared to them to be a political directive from a higher level. They understood the need for education and participation in projects that highlighted racism in the past and combatted it in the present, as in the project 'moskito', which regularly exposed racists' attacks in the borough as described in Chapter 3. Yet the manner in which they had been requested to engage in a campaign against something for which they did not feel responsible and for which they were not given either guidance or additional resources, challenged their political and individual engagement with the process to make the campaign a success. This divergence of intent and consequence seemed to be an example of assumptions based on different experiences and on different positions of power, producing a typical impasse and dilemma that reproduced itself in many other situations, as discussed by Gledhill, (2000:139) with reference to Bourdieu's theory of habitus (1990:72) . Here the actors in the dilemma rebelled against the endless repetition of a previous patterns of power-dominated exchanges and decided on their own direction, their own way of creating a pathway for the campaign.

At the time none of this was clear to me, however, and, as far as I know, it was not raised in the later evaluation. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems that the PWV did not attend sufficiently to the fact that those in the former East of the city might have had different experiences and ways of tackling the campaign, that they might have required more resources than other NBC's in West Berlin, which had more experience and different funding structures. On the other hand might the PWV have considered and discounted such a move as being too interfering, too paternalistic?

The local campaign involved past and current local residents, focused on ethnicity and racial, but not political discrimination and on sexual persecution during both dictatorships. At no time was there a discussion or even mention of a comparison between these regimes; the emphasis seemed to be on everyone's involvement with discrimination at different levels. This became particularly clear in the Gallery, which showed one exhibition about the Women's Resistance movement in 1943 in the Rosenstrasse in Berlin⁸² and one about current perceptions of what is popularly considered normal compared to what is eccentric or weird, in a series of photographs of so-called outcasts of society, people with visible abnormalities and deformities, or unconventional physiques. Each exhibition was accompanied by a series of talks and debates. A local Youth Group participated in a discussion, where images of well-known neo-fascist leaders locally and nationally, were blown up on a screen, leading to a heated debate about the exposure of such images and the legitimacy of the claims made by the presenters, who showed them. Many of the events were filmed for the PWV⁸³. A scheduled debate about the proposed building of a Mosque, which happened to be highly topical in the north of the borough, had not been planned to receive particular attention. Unfortunately, however, this topic began to dominate each public discussion on the importance of tolerance towards differences in ethnic, religious and national identities amongst the population and consequently highlighted, usefully, as it turned out, the strength of local opposition to religious and cultural differences. It failed however to raise awareness at the time of how to deal with the level of aggression and antagonism which the protests attracted far beyond the boundaries of the borough.

⁸² The women and children of the 'Rosenstrasse Resistance' in 1943 stood outside their apartments in which their Jewish husbands and sons were incarcerated by the Nazis for days, until their family members were allowed to come out. One of the girls, now a local general practitioner, talked about her experience, and another, the sculptor Ingeborg Hunziger, commemorated the event with a sculpture that is still in its place today.

⁸³ The PWV sent the film as well as an evaluation document of the whole Campaign to the United Nations in New York at the end of the Year as proof or token of what had been done in Berlin to commemorate the 1948 Declaration of the Human Rights Act.

Other projects ranging from story-telling and drama to research and the documentation of a journey undertaken by pupils to Poland, in order to trace one family's tragic flight from Germany in 1939, introduced the past into the present without the usual stress on guilt and shame. The audience could work this out for themselves. The final event, a two-day commemoration and celebration in the Neighbourhood Centre on September 9th 2007, presented the history of the House as a Jewish Children's Home, through the collection of photographs by A. Pisarek and conducted tours through the house (see Chapter 3). Three Jewish visitors, who now lived in Jerusalem, and who had visited before, were welcomed with traditional offerings of cake and coffee. The arrival of eighty-five year old Tosca, who came from New York after her son's visit in February, had particular importance, both for her and for all who met her, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4.

The success of the campaign locally and the memories it left with many, was only possible because of the innumerable hours spent by volunteers and staff in the preparation and management of each event. Naturally there were some undercurrents of tension and open disagreement, as well as an unease that one was constantly only talking to the 'converted', an inner circle of the same audience, which I found puzzling. Selma thought that this was the way it was: 'if people want to come they know where we are, it's in the papers and outside in the square'. Perhaps more effort went into the organisation of events than into finding audiences for them? Perhaps audiences preferred other things? I was interested in this open-ended and interactive approach to events: the organisers seemed to work for themselves, their friends and their own enjoyment as much as for others, who could, if they wanted to, participate by attending. Such a philosophy is in tune with voluntary engagement and the emphasis on collaboration 'from the bottom up'; such an approach runs counter, however, to the usual emphasis on attendance ratings as evidence of accountability and success, to targeting carefully researched demand and risks, which I had come to expect of public functions from the UK and which, I

gather, have now been introduced as part of the justification for future funding.

In Pankow two campaigns soon commanded different energies and management: one series of events focussed on the persecution and expulsion of victims of Fascism during the War; racism under communism, (where anti-Semitism did exist but was bracketed with Zionism and hence Fascism), did not feature at all although discrimination did as mentioned earlier. Racism as a current topic was debated with young people and in intergenerational discussion groups. In the North of the borough another, rather topical series of events were soon dominated by the heated debates between opposing factions concerning the building of the Mosque. On one side were those who, with the support of the local conservative party (CDU) and local activists, had organised a fierce resistance to the building of a mosque for the sect of Ahmadiyya Muslims in Berlin; on the other were smaller groups of residents and representatives of local government and the neighbourhood centres, who opposed these protesters (Laurent 2007).⁸⁴

Fighting Windmills or Monsters?

In August 2006 the house of a local conservative politician and opponent of the mosque had been attacked with a fire bomb. Luckily no-one was hurt but each side suspected the other of having carried out the attack (Laurent

⁸⁴ The Ahmadiyya Muslims had bought a piece of land in the suburb of Heinersdorf, in Pankow, in order to build a mosque for their community of about 200 members, who lived in another part of Berlin. According to reports in the local press, the land had been purchased in 2006, an application for building permission was made and granted in August 2006, apparently without sufficient consultation; this triggered the local political factions on the left and right, including an antifascist group, who accused the locals of acting like 'garden dwarves'..

The Amadiyya comprise about 30,000 believers worldwide. They are persecuted in Pakistan and in the more fundamentalist Muslim countries. For further information see www.ansar.uk.org (accessed 9.2.09)

2007:23). The media at the time criticised the local people of Heinersdorf, in north Pankow, for their racist and narrow-minded attitudes to foreigners, whilst the local opposition groups expressed their increasing anger at what they perceived to be local and national indifference to their stated wish, not to have a practising 'Muslim Sect' in their community. Lack of information and an alleged 'undemocratic' consultation process incensed the more politically motivated group of local citizens, particularly amongst the conservative party (CDU), who saw a recurrence of 'state dictatorship'. They soon organised themselves formally into a citizen's initiative (IPAHB)⁸⁵, which received active and growing supporters from the right-wing NDP (National Democratic Party) and the more radical elements of extremist groups, not only local. As there was at present no Muslim community in the area, local activists on both sides of the argument used this fact either in favour of or against the building of the mosque, creating a local platform for a national debate about the danger of 'Muslimisation'. Those pleading for tolerance of newcomers to the local community repeatedly cited the influx of Huguenots, religious fugitives from persecution in Catholic France, in the 18th century, and other minorities, who had since become valued members of the local community. Those against insisted on their right to oppose the influx of a religious group who had no cultural ties with them, whose cultural values were allegedly opposed to those of a Christian society and whose laws, allegedly did not adhere to the legal system of the German State. Despite protestations to the contrary by men and women of the Ahmadiyya group, whose views were publicised in the local press, the confrontations escalated. The Muslims attended one meeting only and declined further invitations.

Laurent, a social science student from the FU in West Berlin, who researched the protest as part of his master's degree, found that the xenophobia in this suburb of Pankow had its roots not only in the lack of consultation about the building of a mosque, but in much deeper prejudices against any 'invasion' by

⁸⁵ Interest Group for Pankow and Heinersdorf Burgers e.i.V.i.G. (registered organisation).

'strangers' who were perceived, not only to threaten fundamentally the existing traditional and almost rural structure of the locality, but potentially to import racial strife as well as religious fundamentalism (Laurent, 2007:56). He found that stated prejudices repeated the language of racism and ranged from 'foreign criminality' to 'social scroungers' as well as a rejection of foreigners on biological or socio-cultural grounds.

At one of the meetings, the local immigration officer cited earlier patterns of immigration into the area but omitted to point out that in the eighteenth century Prussia needed settlers and that these settlers were protestant Christians and later Jews. Today, said the opponents, Europe and even this small district in the north of the borough of Pankow with just over 6000 inhabitants, is far less inclined to accept foreigners into a settled area against their wishes and in an atmosphere where the local population feels politically marginalised and unrepresented.⁸⁶ In each meeting one soon got to know the speakers and began to observe what emerged as a local drama where 'the others', the objects of the debate, were conspicuously absent.

Laurent's conclusion, that the residents in Heinersdorf lacked a 'deeper democratic understanding and acceptance of human rights', is somewhat one sided, I think, since it does not address the need of the opposing locals to feel heard and to have their opposition acknowledged. It does not account for the depth of sentiment against anyone 'foreign', who is perceived to threaten an already delicate local structure in an economically depressed climate. It was clear, however, that the manner in which the protesters expressed their views was confrontational and unacceptably offensive, particularly to all those who were not local. The concept of 'territoriality' as described by Malkki (1995:208⁸⁷) in 'Purity and Exile', though under quite different circumstances,

⁸⁶ This text is based on detailed notes taken at different meetings in May, June and July 2007

⁸⁷ Malkki writes that the invitation to integrate Hutu refugees with Tanzanian citizens was perceived by the Hutu as 'perilous progress, a descent into servitude' a memory of having been in servitude as slaves once before.

is relevant here, especially in the context of rapidly changing social and political systems, where the crisis in socialism was followed by a crisis in global capitalism and broken promises. Without any defence of neo-fascism Niethammer, who wrote on the institution of the 'collective' or 'das Kollektive' in the GDR, warns readers that the traditionalist, romantic sentiments belonging to concepts of 'Heimat' and 'Gemeinschaft' (Tönnis 1887/1935) are 'carriers of emotions' and part of the dialectic of modernisation:

He who ridicules them will not contribute to the integration of sentiments and intellect but paves the way to exhortation and instrumentalisation of delegitimised emotions (Niethammer 2009:280, my translation).

Both German dictatorships have demonstrated how to exploit these sentiments shamelessly and successfully and it seems important not to repeat the same mistakes.

The final debate in the series on 'Tolerance to Difference', in June 2007, was organised to take place in the local town hall with the mayor and representatives of the local government parties and experts in community relations in attendance, as well as the organisers from the three local NBC's and representatives of the umbrella organisations. Very few of the general public and no representative of the Ahmadiyya attended, despite having been invited. The aim of the meeting was to reach some conclusion to the question as to how the borough of 'Pankow could remain open' to all newcomers and to diversity. The opponents of the Mosque appeared as an organised group including several young children. They filled the public benches opposite the invited members of the Council who were lined up behind a large table in a rather formal chamber of the Town Hall. We, the organisers of the Campaign, counted few in numbers, sat in between, 'like lambs between opposing factions', as someone commented. The meeting no longer had the atmosphere of an informal debate but of a confrontation, where 'we' felt physically uncomfortable as one had to turn round to face those behind. After the

preliminary introductions and speeches the 'opposition' presented the same arguments as at previous meetings, but now included the complaint that they were branded as 'extremists' despite their right to voice their views. What about the left extremists? They again accused the Muslim community of violating human rights, particularly those of their wives and daughters, and of persecuting Jews. They accused the mayor of not giving their protest the recognition they claimed as citizens and tax payers. Raising their voices they soon took it in turns to shout that they demanded their rights to be properly represented and their rights as citizens not to be exposed to 'foreign' and 'hostile' religious influences. It was a well-rehearsed ritual charged with emotions.

Despite efforts by the mayor and other speakers to diffuse the anger, to mediate and point out the advantages of welcoming a new community – the Huguenots were mentioned again – the tone degenerated into a shouting match. Large banners were unfurled and hoisted high to demonstrate protest and to assert the right to keep the local area 'free' (from what?)⁸⁸. 'Germany for the Germans' read one banner, others showed emblems of flames, swords and raised fists. I could not see clearly and was too shocked by this development to concentrate on detail. I tried to catch the eye of the boy directly behind me, but he stared straight in front of him and I wondered what he thought. The mayor closed the meeting as there was clearly no common ground and the benches emptied rapidly under continuous shouting. Bunches of flowers, which had been intended for the female delegates, I presume, lay forlornly in one corner as everyone else left very quickly.

What was being played out here was an ancient conflict, it seemed, an old strife between normative authoritative power and the expression of opposing and impotent anger, deeply rooted in nationalistic folklore but also, perhaps in

⁸⁸It was interesting to see the word 'free' and 'freedom' used liberally on both sides of the campaign, as Linke also noted in his essay on the 'Politics of Memory' (2003) in A.L.Hinton(ed) *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*.

the mistaken belief that the ‘newly elected democratic local government’ would respect local people’s views more than the previous communist leaders and give them priority over national or even European directives as how to deal with tolerance of ethnic differences.⁸⁹

I hoped for lively discussions following this final debate and debacle, but had to remain disappointed. Very little was said as people made their way home. Any discussion that might have taken place, and certainly did happen, was not in my presence. The evaluation of the whole Campaign was not written up until after I had left Berlin. When I asked Selma, she was evasive. ‘There will have to be a discussion but at the moment I don’t know what to say’ was all she could tell me and I stopped asking.

For the local organisers this final event was extremely disappointing and disconcerting as transpired later. The NBC’s evaluation document, when it finally arrived that year, concluded that, on the whole, most activities and events had been very successful but that the authors did not want to give further space to fundamentalist organisations in any form, as they had felt ‘misused and set up’ by these extremists. At the same time they asked themselves how they could challenge and confront rationally such ‘unconstitutional and racist groups’ in future, and against the support of larger organisations, whose mouthpiece such groups became? What arguments are there, they asked rhetorically, to convince people, whose misdirected but not unusual fears (about foreigners) include the real threat of not finding work? The questions reveal considerable uncertainty amongst the organisers about how this should or could be answered. The evaluation also reveals that this first experience of how to deal with racism in a non-confrontational and conciliatory way by a group of primarily East Germans, had left them

⁸⁹ Glen Bowman wrote on ‘Xenophobia, Fantasy and the Nation: the Logic of Ethnic Violence in former Yugoslavia’ (1996) using a Lacanian analysis of the primitive nationalistic characteristics of ethnic hatred which echoes Niethammer’s warning earlier, that governments must attend to the integration of these basic sentiments.

perplexed, disappointed but also keen to learn from the experience. They posed a number of questions for themselves and concluded their evaluation with the statement:

Our vision is to be able to live together side-by-side and to achieve tolerance. The series of discussions and debates can be viewed as a first step in that direction. (NBC Evaluation document 2007: 15, my translation.)

The second notable contribution to the campaign focused on the German and Jewish past locally which had been carefully researched and put together with the help of the 6th form at the local highly school and the members of the NBC team. It also raised questions about widening the debate, to include the flaws in debates about racism. How would the extremists with their flags and symbols, for instance, have reacted to the presentations at the High School? What could those students have told them about tolerance to ethnic differences?

A visit to the local High School in February 2007

The 'John Lennon' Gymnasium is not far from the NBC and housed in a large, turn-of-the century building with various annexes. The corridors, filled with noisy youth, sported images of John Lennon, his songs and statements. We were first ushered into the Headmaster's study and offered the customary coffee with large plates of open sandwiches before being ushered into the big 'Aula' or school hall, where all the senior students were already waiting.

One of the former pupils, Herr Zwig, a man now in his late seventies, who had come from Israel to speak at this event, had published a book about his experiences following his initial arrest and deportation to a camp at the age of seventeen. As part of the presentation a team of sixth formers interviewed him in front of the invited audience, and Zwig, lively, jovial and entertaining,

looking much younger than his age, brought the events of over sixty years ago much closer, almost as if they had happened recently. He held the attention of the audience with his often hair-raising stories of repeated escapes and recaptures until finally the war ended. He had managed to survive the final round-up of Jews in Berlin by a hair's breadth while the rest of his family were deported and killed. The questions of the young interviewers and researchers focused mainly on technicalities of his escapes and his survival, all of which were hard to contextualise and seemed more like stories from films or books. It was interesting to see how his lack of emphasis on suffering and persecution in favour of survival and wit were appreciated by the young audience, although it alarmed one or two teachers, who mentioned 'trivialisation' of serious crimes. I was reminded of the Italian film by Roberto Bengini 'Life is beautiful' (1997) which left one appalled as well as entertained – an uneasy, ambiguous as well as powerful, mixture of sentiments.

Another group of sixth formers had researched the fate of Tosca's family, mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4. Her parents and her sister had been deported shortly after Tosca had left Berlin in 1939 with one of the last 'Kinder Transports' organised by the British Government and members of the Quaker Community⁹⁰. Her entire family had perished in different concentration camps. Tosca's son Anthony, a tall quiet man of about forty, had come from New York for the event. He was interviewed by the five Sixth formers, who had travelled to Poland with their history teacher and Inge Franken, who also works in the school as a 'time witness' (Zeitzeuge). They had searched for traces of the family's origin and the camps, to which they had been sent prior to being transported to Auschwitz. The students, clearly nervous, spoke with great eloquence about their journey and how it had affected them personally

⁹⁰ I attended a memorial event of the sixtieth anniversary of the last transport in London, in 2009 and met several other survivors but none who could remember the young girl Tosca.

not to be able to find any evidence of the camps or of the village from which Tosca's parents had emigrated to Berlin⁹¹.

'Going there brought the whole shameful and terrible history of our parents' and grandparents' generation into our lives, it was painful. It also helped me to confront this history' said one of the girls; 'it was knowing that we were walking over earth with a terrible past, and the birds were singing as if nothing had happened,' said another. They asked Anthony how it was for him to be in Berlin? 'How can I answer that?' he said with a shrug – 'I was not born then, I know what my parents suffered, but you here are a different generation.... I love Berlin... I love the streets and the town and the people' (A.,02.2007).

How could he answer this question, standing there as the living heir to persecution and murder, in front of a whole large hall filled with expectant young faces? How could he say anything else, even to himself without getting into the whole complex dilemma about blame and guilt and the terrible burden of history? He affirmed their place in history as being of a different generation and therefore not to blame. In the afternoon we walked to the house where his grandparents and his aunt had last lived before being deported in 1941. Three bronze cobble stones had been set into the pavement as a tribute to them⁹². There was a brief ceremony and flowers were strewn onto the pavement. Anthony squatted down in front of the house by the stones and said that now at last he felt that his ancestors, this part of the

⁹¹ The documentation of their trip represents a detailed and moving account of their experiences. Inge Franken was the author of the book "Against Forgetting", that deals with the persecution of Jewish Children in the House, described in Chapter 3.

⁹² Stolpersteine or tripping stones have become well-known and acceptable ways of commemorating victims of Fascism and can be found in most German towns. Some towns have voted against them on the basis, that these metal cobblestones, which are set into pavements, are unworthy of the departed as they are being walked over, often without being noticed. The sculptor, Gunter Dennig, whose invention they are, maintains sole copyright and manufactures each stone in bronze, inscribed with the name, date of birth and death (if known) of the person to whom it is dedicated. See www.stolpersteine.com

family, had a proper resting place; not knowing where they were buried, had always bothered his mother and him. It was good to have this place, where they had last lived, commemorated. He got up and stretched his arms and shoulders. Squatting there in front of these stones and the house must have been uncomfortable, both, physically and emotionally. On the way back he told me that he looked forward to spending the evening with American friends in town, and he stated again how much he liked the city and the people here, almost as if to ward off these uncomfortable ghostlike intrusions from the past.

His experience puts in mind Carsten's comments on 'alternative dispositions in time' and 'suspended temporalities' in kinship memories need to be located 'in their own geography' (2007:18). Naumescu mentions 'a space where individual remembrance can be integrated into a generally accepted memory of the past' (2004:253). Hirsch wrote about memories dominated by 'narratives that preceded their birth' (1997:659), which is what Anthony and Letti, (chapter 5) along with thousands of others experienced in their childhoods when they heard their fathers' screams during the night. It is possible that Anthony's experience of placing these memory stones enabled his mother, Tosca, to finally return to the same spot six months later?

As previously discussed, Nora emphasises the significance of the historical sites, the 'lieux' at times of ever changing environments and movement (1989:3). The testimony of the students' journey and the pictures of it on display in the school brought history alive and inscribed a memory. They will become future markers of a story that will not lose its power. In a different way Zwig, the survivor, also raised vivid images of violent state persecution in the midst of chaos where families, torn apart might or might not meet again. Such witnessing of the past, through research or lived experiences, establishes important connections between the present and the future, a continuity of kinships as well as cultural belonging. Here this was transmitted through a common language and symbolic reminders of a city and a Europe linked by journeys to places where the past of some had been erased, and to others,

where a symbolic site had been erected. The stones on the pavement in the street where a family once lived trigger thought, memory but also enquiry; they offer meaning, which may be different for each of those who pass over them. The accounts of these commemorations as well as the account of the Campaign, of which they were a part, form threads of different pasts that are woven into the much larger cloth of history and of the ghosts carried within it.

Memorials and counter monuments

For native Germans, particularly in the West, the crimes committed during the National Socialist era are an almost constant presence like a permanent sound that rises and subsides but never ceases, at least for those, who know and recognize it. Berlin, as capital of the ‘Third Reich’ under Hitler and as the historical centre of war-time policies and the ‘Final Solution’ is steeped in memories and ghost-evoking memorials, many of which were and are critically discussed and contextualised in the literature, the media and by graffiti, often sprayed on its walls (Young 1993, Till 2005, Forty 1999). Young discussing the counter monument by the artists J. and E. Gertz, which consists of a disappearing column, writes of these monuments that

They are heirs to a double-edged postwar legacy: a deep distrust of monumental forms which had been abused by the Nazis and a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers through memory (Young 2003:431).

Referring to the Memorial for the Murdered Jews in Europe, in the centre of Berlin, Habermas suggests that ‘present day Germans seek a symbolic expression for their political self-understanding (which is) essentially characterised by the historical reference to Auschwitz’ (Habermas 2006:43); it is a reminder that the iconography of Auschwitz has entered German

consciousness without necessarily retaining its meaningful historical context. Both Young and Habermas commend counter memorials that do not dictate what people have to think but elicit people's reactions to certain events. The sinking column in Hamburg with citizens' graffitis and defacements will disappear into the ground and only leave a stone above it, a memory not unlike the 'Stolpersteine', a reflection back at the viewer of their own thoughts and phantasies.

The continuing trend of keeping the Holocaust in emotional 'isolation', steeped in guilt, rather than integrated into the history of the century, was challenged by the memorial practices that emerged from the East of the former border after 1989. Here monuments had been erected to the glory of the revolution and the defeat of Fascism; the rebuilding of Berlin (East) in itself 'from rubble and ashes into the capital and metropole of the GDR under the leadership of the SED' was the 'true emblem of Socialism on German Soil', according to the party functionary E. Milke (quoted in Sabrow 2009:195). Many monuments, which had been erected everywhere under the SED leadership as visual affirmation of the new ideology celebrated the 'liberation' of German workers and farmers and of socialists from Fascist oppression.

According to Leonard who had been a member of the initial leadership team and trained for this role in Moscow (Leonard 2007) the policy for how to deal with NS perpetrators had been dictated by Moscow and was successful in diverting attention from all victims of War and Fascism onto socialist victims, antifascists and the importance of building a new socialist state. A parallel policy in the West was equally successful in absorbing the shocked post-war silence in West Germany, which was tolerated and even encouraged by the Bonn Government, aiding the integration of the Federal Republic during the fifties and sixties into the ethos of free western democracies. Here is not the place to list the competing and destructive narratives between the two German nations about their shared past. Each narrative was the product of Cold War politics, a 'religious war' of opposing political beliefs, where power, and

security prevailed creating mixed sentiments of and hysterical fear on each side' (Bender 1999:). In his contribution to the significance the 9th of November in German history he argued that the whole post-war history needed to be written from a 'united German perspective' in order to build a united German future (1999), a theme that is also echoed by other scholars, notably Sabrow (2005) and Kocka (1998). Others argue that it is important that each side of the once divided nation work out its own narrative first before such an undertaking is possible. It is, however, evident in almost every text on the subject how the interpretations of the politics in each country created myths and ogres located most frequently on the opposite side of the fence, providing evidence of the long and enmeshed relationship between the two nations (Borneman 1992) during forty years of separation.

Racial tensions in the East

Racism and racial tension did not disappear with the demise of the NS-regime in Germany but became generally less visible until immigration politics and a rising culture of neo-nationalism sharpened the conflict in West German cities during the seventies. The emergence of horrendous racist crimes by groups of 'skinheads' in regions of north east Germany against immigrants and asylum seekers after the fall of the GDR regime, however, surprised the public and the media. The number of incidents escalated between 1991 and 1995, they have remained steady since, although they appear to have decreased in severity. Several explanations have been advanced of which three or four seem the most plausible; how they interacted with each group or individual, however, is more specific to each incident and subject to other factors not discussed here.

Firstly there are the devastating effects of regime change resulting in the chaos of large-scale industrial decline, particularly in the agrarian areas of the north east, where also a large proportion of able younger people left to find work elsewhere (Jarausch 1997); secondly there is a theory about the relative lack of

contact with foreigners by East Germans, especially in rural areas, advanced by Jaschke (1993) who spoke as an expert on domestic security; thirdly there is the theory that latent xenophobic tendencies, which had been absorbed by communist ideologies and anomie, were re-awakened by the now more widely available xenophobic cults and ideologies via the internet and media, filling the void left by the loss of work-related social activities and associations (Berger 2001: 249-270). Lastly there was a trigger, according to some theorists, for the eruption of vicious attacks on foreign asylum seekers and guest workers: the arrival of young Asians and Africans in Brandenburg in 1991 and 1992 who had been sent there by immigration authorities because 'there was space' (Jaschke 1993). They had been moved to these relatively 'empty' areas without regard to the profound demographic and social transformation that had taken place since 1989. In the autumn of 1992 two fifths of the workforce had lost their jobs in the GDR. The agrarian sector was most affected with 70% of the workforce unemployed, closely followed by industry and the manufacturing sector where 50% of workers lost their jobs (Berger 2001:259). The existence of particular racist and anti-racist movements in major centres in Germany including Berlin, but also, as Back demonstrates in his article on 'Racism on the Internet', throughout Europe,⁹³ is indicative of heightened vigilance, possibly on all sides, and active use of the internet. Statistics about the actual extent of racially motivated attacks are unreliable and vary according to who collects the figures. Racial attacks increased by 27% in the year of 2008 compared with the previous year; the majority occurred in the former Eastern States. These figures are interesting if compared with those of the small watch-dog organisation of 'moskito', at the NBC, which runs a local register of reported offences relating to race or disability in the borough of Pankow. They recorded an increase of 29% in the number of racist offences in the Prenzlauer Berg district alone during 2008; the agency ascribes this increase to the opening of a Music café, which had become a meeting place for

⁹³ Back, Keith and Solomon (1999) 'Racism on the Internet: Mapping Neo-Fascist subcultures in Cyberspace'. In: Jeffrey Kaplan and Tore Bjorgo 'Nation and Race', a collection of essays on the developing Euro-American Racist Subculture.

right-wing Neo-Nazis, and a group called the ‘Nordic Brotherhood’. The café has since been closed. But no doubt others will open elsewhere since it seems that there is a ground swell of sympathisers who are attracted by the ideological bait of neo-fascist organisations. There are well known areas in Berlin, where foreigners and particularly people who are recognisably ‘alien’ are advised not to go. According to other commentators too, the Fascist or ‘skin head’ groups, who appear to be often associated with the attacks, are visible but are only the ‘tip of an iceberg’ that gains strength from the apparently growing presence of the NDP and similar parties in regional state parliaments (Jarausch 1997; Lehnert 2007). Many of the attacks occur in areas with few ethnic minorities, confirming the theory advanced earlier in Jaschke’s analysis of sub-cultural aspects in right-wing extremism, that lack of exposure to ‘foreigners’ may be one contributor to xenophobic tendencies.

The ‘Camp’ of right-wing extremism, according to Jaschke, retains special features in Germany because of its history, leading to policies of ‘political hygiene’ and scepticism about how to deal with it since there are fears that it may be part of the German psyche, as suggested by Goldhagen in his treatise on Germany’s Willing Executioners (1996)⁹⁴. According to Jaschke:

Public reaction against right-wing extremism swings between down-playing and dramatisation, suppression and overreaction, appeasement and scandal, ritualisation and moralisation (Jaschke, 1993:134).

According to him sentiments result in uneven and often badly co-ordinated responses by the state to excesses of extremist actions and attract much media coverage, affirming the impression that there is still cause for concern about extremism, which, in turn, is gratifying feedback to the perpetrators. My own limited observation would bear this out.

⁹⁴ The book contends that Germans are intrinsically anti-Semitic, a thesis that is widely contested by academics but apparently accepted by the German public.

Schroeder, who wrote about the 'Price of German Unity', was, like many other writers, in no doubt that the increased presence of xenophobic and racist behaviour amongst East German youths was due to the rapid changes just prior to and after unification and the dislocation of firmly established rules and guidelines which, having unsettled the older generation, rendered them incapable of providing guidelines for the young. According to him such adults meet the unaccustomed complexity of the New with simplified 'friend versus foe' (Freund-Feind) thinking patterns to which they were accustomed under Socialism (Schroeder 2000:181). The change in social structures and the creation of social inequalities between East and West as far as wages and salaries were concerned, created ruptures and upheavals in the lives of young people, which, collectively, created new narratives of second class citizenship, of being devalued and denigrated in a world where East Germans at one time played a leading role. Kuehnel quotes a study by Heitmeyer of young people in Germany following the 'Wende'. He concluded that radicalism and violence were 'products of a disintegration process', which, unsurprisingly, led to loss of identity and a search for 'new types of involvement, through violence, ethnic exclusion or Machieavellian self-assertion' (Kuehnel 1998:151).

The collapse of existing youth organisations in the East clearly accelerated the tendency to imitate and to join dominant Western 'skin-head' cultures. The offer of strong allegiances and desired membership entailed the exclusion of the proverbial 'other', be they ethnic minorities in the USA, Turks in West Germany, Gypsies in Hungary or Muslims now in East Berlin.

Before concluding this limited exploration of the context in which the campaign in Berlin was planned, the lecture by Esther Lehnert, from Humboldt University, should be mentioned as she presented her study of a specific female contribution to the right-wing extremist scene (2007) at one of the campaign events at the NBC in February 2007. She saw a rather insidious growth of nationalist ideas invested in cultural practices, such as summer

camps⁹⁵, kindergarten groups and women's groups, where traditional German cooking, children's stories and songs were encouraged and the virtues of traditional female roles presented in re-designed, modernist fashion, in clothing, music, informality and style. Rather than carrying the obvious emblems of their groups, these women, she said, tended to 'melt into the background', inculcating values of a wholesome 'Familienkultur' or family culture. By evoking nostalgia for historical continuities which included parallels to female ideals in socialist ideology, they appealed to a wider public in East and West and attracted particularly those who lived at the margins, isolated and friendless. The appeal of these women was seemingly harmless, she said, but at the core, followers to their nationalist creed were being recruited (Lehnert, lecture in March 2007). In the ensuing discussion, the audience drew parallels with similar proselytising activities of religious and political groups in other, poverty-stricken parts of the world and asked what could be done. It was noted that the relative invisibility of these women, who do not normally engage in violence – although these also existed – enabled them to operate in the fore-field (Vorfeld) of much larger groups who then carry out particularly 'anti-Islamic waves of racism' (Özcan 2003). Muslims are now the largest religious minority in Germany and women are often caught in the so-called 'headscarf' dispute⁹⁶, which performs the function of becoming a rallying point for radicals of all factions seeking affirmation of their positions (Tarlo 2010).

Fear of foreign contamination and dilution of what is still perceived or understood to be an essentially Christian and German-speaking society, united but also still divided, is clearly present. The sense of a national individual, as

⁹⁵ One of the Youth groups that organised military style camps, calls itself 'Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend' (HDJ) or German Youth Faithful to the Homestead. It was banned very recently; another group, calling itself the 'Vikings' or Vikerger, was banned in 1994, proving the continuing re-organisation of new groupings and affiliations (www.spiegelonline.international, 31/3/2009).

⁹⁶ In this case the court ruled that an Islamic teacher from Afghanistan did not have the right to free religious expression and to wear her headscarf in school, as it interfered with the children's right to freedom from 'foreign' religious influences (Özcan 2003).

well as collective identity is weaker in Germany, than the sense of belonging to regions, to localities or even to Europe, as testified in opinion polls, but also by scholars, like Mary Fulbrook, who wrote about German National Identity after the Holocaust. She concludes, rightly I think, that ‘essentialising’ nationalism is futile, it would be more important now to look towards questions about ‘the conditions and processes of collective identity construction’ (Fulbrook 2005:239), to look toward a common future that acknowledges the past without being undermined by it. This discourse relates only in part to the previous discussion about finding a common approach to the past. Unification did raise new hopes that a form of ‘normal’ national pride might be re-established⁹⁷ after the much discredited past, but it seems that this requires vision and patience, a mental approach which includes as an essential binding material the recognition of and respect for difference (Berdhal 1999). Pride in ones ‘Nation’ has become a contested term and is often carefully rephrased as the image of a ‘constitutional nation’ (Anderson 1983). Yet in 2006, when the finals of the World Championship in football, staged in Germany, hit the screens, the national flag, which had not been seen for years, suddenly appeared in in streets everywhere – particularly and somewhat ironically amongst the Turkish supporters, who did not have a team of their own in the final games and enthusiastically hung the German flag from their windows, untroubled by doubts about identity. The enthusiasm was infectious and liberating; one felt rather than knew that this event contributed to a sense of unity that had been missing before. Even if it did not last, it may have planted a memory of joy and festivity reminiscent of the day in 1989 when East and West could embrace without fear.

I conclude this section with a quotation by Jaschke, as it seems to summarize not so much the causes, as the processes that play into the apparent rise of this worrying trend in Germany’s extreme right-wing revival:

⁹⁷ Relevant here is Angela Merkel’s speech in Munich in October 2010 and the ensuing debate about what constitutes normality which included a critique of ethnic separatism.

The pre-political sphere in which many of the racist extremists operate is less decisive than the expressive group dynamic, the styles and symbols (of which) provide a strong common identity. Radical, xenophobic and militant expressions preserve concepts of the enemy and legitimate their own behaviour as just. They also provide an internal code which guarantees togetherness and mutual identification (Jaschke 1993:132).

Conclusion

Ghosts assume many shapes: ogres can become heroes as the display of fascist and communist symbols illustrated and as we know from the research of growing fascist and nationalist groups around the world. Nightmarish memories can be soothed and helped to settle through public or private acknowledgements. The naming of displaced or forgotten or never-known family members, the enactments or re-inscriptions of past events, the externalisations of internal traumas can, as discussed throughout this chapter, become useful ways of restoring an inner equilibrium. Anthropological research provides many examples from different parts of the world (Manz 2002; Antze and Lambek 1996; Goddard 2006; Humphrey 1994; Pine 2007) of how people deal with their memories and narratives. 'Ghosts of Memory', as Janet Carsten has called her collection of narrated remembrances and relatedness (2007), are useful reminders of unfinished business, of injustices or unresolved moral conflicts between the people of one or several nations. Kwon shows this well in his book on 'Ghosts of War' (2008) through his description of families who were divided politically and morally by the war in Vietnam. Ghosts, writes Kwon, in deference to Dickens, tend to appear at times of social rupture and unrest, of violent changes and uncertainties (2008:166), and he describes their successful re-integration into modern family life. As far as the ghostly memories and ogres mentioned in this chapter are concerned, they

will, presumably, live on in their varying forms, until their messages are recognized and attended to or until their power has faded.

This chapter deals with the unexpected emergence of anti-racist sentiments and acts in the early 1990s in East Germany, juxtaposed with a campaign in Berlin devised to combat racism and hostile attitudes towards foreigners. The still ambivalent and thus ambiguous stance in coming to terms with an uncomfortable past which is discussed as a complicating factor in dealing with racism, was also discovered in Eidson's research in West Germany (2004:59-91). Ethnographic examples taken from the Campaign as well as from contemporary reports in the media problematize the challenge posed for the Neighbourhood Teams, confronted with 'old ghosts' of Fascistic behaviour' and expectations from a new authoritative power. The relative lack of experience in dealing with these considerable external challenges at the time of internal, organisational tensions, was aggravated by the subject matter of the anti-racism.

The impact of these displays of extremism were eclipsed, however, by the students of the local school who had researched the lives, the extreme pain and loss of former German Jewish citizens in the district, pupils of the same school then. Their conversations with Jewish visitors from Israel and New York were moving and inspiring, demonstrating the power of positive remembering and the strength of kinship in its widest sense in situations of extreme danger. The young people from the school earned respect for their honest approach to a very difficult subject which was sufficiently distant for them not to be implicated in the emotional charge of previous generations. The narratives of this anti-racist Campaign are, I think, a fitting ending to my ethnographic research in Berlin. In the conclusion, which follows, the main themes will again be extracted as well as those from previous chapters as part of a small but rich ethnographic exploration which, nevertheless, opens more questions about the future than it can answer.

Conclusion

‘We are far removed from a united view about our divided history’ (Kocka, 1998)⁹⁸

The last chapter ended with a description of the Campaign against Racism and the commemorations of the stories of survivors who had chosen not to carry bitterness about the past back to the places where they were first experienced. The previous chapters presented the evidence of ethnographic research that explored the interrelationships between the collapse of the former GDR and the process of unification in East Germany following a peaceful revolution in 1989. Different aspects of how memories, narratives and forgetting from the past intervene and disrupt the present and how rupturing experiences in the present can affect memories of the past (Olick 2007) became clearer in the course of interviews, discussions and participation in the daily practices of the Centre, in the Square, at conferences and in academic seminars at Humboldt University. The research demonstrates how such ruptures can also generate new energies and lead to the creation of imaginative and socially useful projects through engagements with a locality and its people. The aftermath of the process of unification in Eastern Germany had, as the literature confirms, deeper and more long-lasting consequences than had been generally anticipated. The chapters provide examples of how memories interfered with, sustained or challenged present thoughts and practices.

The people of East Germany had decided to rebel against their rigid and also corrupt system following the liberalizing moves in other States of the former Soviet Union, notably Hungary, not realizing how their entire lives, their world

⁹⁸ This reference is taken from Kocka’s article in *Blaetter fuer deutsche und internationale Politik* 43, (1998) 1: 104: *Geteilte Erinnerung: Zweierlei Geschichtsbewusstsein im vereinten Deutschland* (Divided Memories: Two kinds of historical consciousness in the united Germany).

views and assumptions about life would be challenged in unexpected and dramatic ways through electing to join the capitalist democracy of their Western sibling state.

Kocha's quotation is still relevant two decades after the events in 1989 and, in particular, relates to the main theme of this thesis. The research revealed the persistence of tenacious and contested views and memories that appeared in the wake of unification which surprised in their manifestation and led to debates as to their ontological value. Was it 'Ostalgia', a nostalgic longing for the past or was this apparent longing for a vanished way of life an intricate and essential part of the process of transformation and the phases of coping with the transitions that followed? In the introduction and the literature review I discuss the roots of these differences, which were found to lie not only in the 'divided history and economy' of the two parts of Germany but also in the manner in which the process of unification or re-unification (Wiedervereinigung) as it is mostly referred to in the West, impacted on the population of the former GDR.

I have discussed how, according to the literature, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the often traumatic changes that followed, brought forth a 'war of imported neoliberal theories' into Eastern Europe (Verdery 1996:229-230). These messianic-type messages from the West, however, had also been challenged in established Western systems by the shifts in global economies which affected western capitalist countries and clearly had repercussions for the newly capitalised post socialist states (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). The ensuing chaos was not an ideal pre-condition for going into the future. In East Germany conditions after unification were also far from ideal for a better future despite the determinedly peaceful revolution. There was, however, no 'war of theories'. On the contrary, there seemed only one way to go, as repeatedly shown in this thesis, which was West, and indeed this was the way that the people chose to go in 1990 in the absence of viable internal reforms.

Had they not always looked West, just as post World War II West Germany had been formed by Western ideas and ideologies?

It was a unique opportunity for the Bonn Government under Chancellor Kohl to 'seize the day' after the Fall of the Wall and to work towards unification, against the initial advice of his allies (except the United States), by promising democracy, parity of currency, as well as freedom, certainly freedom to shop and freedom to travel. Wollmann was a member of the specially appointed Federal Commission to monitor and report on the development of the social and political changes necessary in the new Federal States. He wrote:

The challenge of creating simultaneity of these processes (of creating political and administratively effective institutions) 'is like steering a ship through a hurricane while rebuilding it with a largely new crew and unknown machinery' (Wollmann, 2001:33).

It seems an apt comparison, capturing the uncertainty and precariousness of those initial times, which for many lasted much longer than initially anticipated. The Commission (KSPW) was an interdisciplinary project between Eastern and Western social scientists led by the West German Council for Science and Technology. It reported in 1996 and the individual, carefully researched contributions make fascinating reading, confirming the often voiced but until then only reluctantly acknowledged fact that East Germany did lose materially in the unification process, and that these losses had debilitating consequences for the whole society, its self-perception and self-esteem. Even short-term losses left a trail of emotional and existential reactions, some of which had long lasting consequences, as illustrated in the narratives of members of the team in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. One of the narrators clearly expressed the isolation and exclusion she experienced when none of her former colleagues and friends would or could help her find work in the early nineties. She suddenly realised the fundamentality of the change that had taken place, 'the snapping of the links between generations', described by

Hobsbawm (1995:15) in the context of the loss of 'traditional societies' in the course of the last century.

The poignancy of losses and gains gathered during the ethnographic part of the research became more important during the writing up process when I found my impressions discussed and often confirmed in the literature. Wollmann, cited above, goes on to say that 'the creative destruction' necessitated by the paradigmatic break with the socialist state and all existing communist structures left no choices. In comparison with his studies in other post-socialist countries he found that:

The integration and incorporation of the former independent German Democratic Republic into the constitutional, legal, economic and civil social system of the old Federal Republic of West Germany [was] herculean in scope (Wollmann 2001: 33-34).

This image of a 'creative destruction' and the considerable cost in terms of loss of work, status and self-esteem, is acknowledged, as I have outlined, in the literature and in many reports. The visible effects on people, especially older people, who felt disorientated and destabilised through unemployment or enforced retirement had been palpable after the *Wende* and spurred others into action. It led to the creation of alternative places where people could reconnect with themselves, with their former lives and with a future in which they could play a part. Yet I did not find that the idea of a 'creative destruction' and its effects had left any impression in the West. The popular perception, still prevalent in 2006, apart from indifference, was an expectation that the new Federal States would soon catch up with the West because of the enormous sums of money that had been invested. More recently, awareness of what actually happened in the East appears to have grown in Europe, but interest in the long-term fate of East Germany and its inhabitants still seems to be superficial unless there are special reasons to be more actively engaged.

This disparity between East and West Germany became a central strand of my research project, although it was rarely mentioned overtly in discussions, unless I brought it up. I had found a society in East Germany which seemed to be in a state of temporality, change alternating with stagnation. It was a transient state, in the process of re-establishing its identity within the united country as part of the future. There was, however, also the process of looking back into the past in order to retrieve an identity that seemed to have been devalued, a heritage that had been buried under the debris of the destruction of the old GDR.

The uncovering and writing up of the Neighbourhood Centre's particular history as a Jewish Children's Home emerged as a uniting factor for the teams who worked in this house and who were, almost by accident rather than choice, recruited from East and West Berlin. Their differences in social background, outlook and daily practice were the subject of discussions, good-humoured critique but also of acceptance of difference. The teams consisted of a mixture of mature people, former designers, dramatists, engineers and teachers as well as people on work incentive schemes and volunteers, mostly younger from all walks of life. The ethos of running an open centre in the locality where people could find resources and support to set up their own vision for activities, ideas and public engagement, was familiar to me but the enthusiasm and dedication which I observed in overriding daily challenges were new, especially in the context of an institution. The House had become a 'complex idiom' as Setha Low wrote, 'for defining social groupings, naturalizing social positions and as a source of symbolic power' (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2007:2).

I became increasingly aware of the role played by past experiences, by the memory of competence and resourcefulness and the importance of acknowledging these in the present. The search for survivors and families who had been connected with any of the children or adult carers, who had lived in this house during the thirties, became a collective endeavour, especially as

several of the team members knew little about the fate of Jewish families in Europe. In this way the House also became a living tribute to the lives of its former inhabitants, not a museum or monument, but a container of history with all its horrors, as enacted in the voyage of boats, in plays and walks through the district, in political debates about continuing discrimination and through the stories of Time Witnesses⁹⁹. The continuing awareness of these threads to the past is woven into the present and future through the way the teams at the Centre continue to think and act in their work and in their commitment to an ethos of making themselves available. Lambek writes about the 'dialogical' quality of remembering as an expression of the ethic of care (Lambek 2007:220). This quality for caring by 'holding in mind', the capacity to be aware and conscious of the other as if he or she were kin is also a cornerstone in attachment theory, in child care and kinship studies.

My exploration of the country's history and the realisation of how deeply embedded some of the contested views and memories were, became another focus of the research showing how historiography conveys its own dialectic and hegemonic differences. They engender debate and provoke thought, but can also lead to silent acquiescence and collusion. The ethnographic evidence gleaned through people's informal narratives and testimonies confirmed this. Ideas and perceptions that had passed through generations informed the present – which in itself is not a novel discovery. I was struck, however, by the tenacity of some of these 'inscriptions', spatial and intergenerational, which could block questions about the past as in the groups of pensioners I met, or lead to entrenched positions, as noted during the Campaign. Close neighbours who had lived around the Square all their lives professed to have no knowledge about the Jewish children's home in this Square although many other memories survived with great clarity. Perhaps this had to do with the taboo and, perhaps, silent acquiescence to persecutions of the Jews during the War, perhaps those who were then children, would not have been told?

⁹⁹ See Glossary

Silence and tacit agreement with the organisational set-up in the Pfefferwerk Organisation was inadvertently revealed by one of the managers from the West, whom I interviewed in 2007. He saw few to no problems in the hierarchical relationship between newly instituted layers of the administration. The NBC team on the other hand, who had ‘created’ this neighbourhood project ‘from the bottom up’¹⁰⁰, felt resentful at the time that their informal, egalitarian style of working and managing should be questioned and fitted into a ‘box’ that was not of their own making.

The Square, discussed in Chapter 4, reflects spatial as well as social inscriptions as elaborated in the anthropology of time and space, the ‘multilocality’ and ‘multivocality’ mentioned by Rodman, which are involved in the production of meaning in a space (2007:207). The production of empowerment through the participation in and collective care for the maintenance of the square is part of the same process, creating another set of meanings about responsibility and participation. The relational properties of the square with its memories going back over generations leave relevant markers in the present, invite comparisons and raise questions about belonging and citizenship in a changing environment. The ‘being in’ and ‘belonging to’ a space such as a square can evoke episodes of temporal culture as observed by Richardson (2007:74-90) in her comparative analysis between formal and informal environments. At the time the demographic changes in the area were worrying, disturbing a precarious economic balance and giving rise to protests which have since escalated, affirming the fears of local observers. These protests also had an impact on the work of the NBC where these changes were just beginning to be logged but had not yet been translated into policies for the future.

¹⁰⁰ This expression features in several of the Centre’s publications stressing the informal, organic growth of its activities

In Chapter 5, the life stories of three of the many I was privileged to hear, illustrate the impact of life during GDR times on their narrators and their enduring qualities through all the changes, despite the tensions and turbulence. This is juxtaposed with a discussion of the celebrations on November 9th, 2009, twenty years after the 'Fall of the Wall' during which I note how the East German voice appeared to be stronger and more assertively represented in the media. Comments by East German journalists highlight the differences in the historical perspectives between the two former political systems and the need to find a common approach to the different historiographies before a truly united future can be developed. (Bender 1999; Kocka 1998; Wirsching 2008). Although this view appears to be primarily debated amongst scholars, it also emerged in the ethnography: Both Letti and Selma, told me explicitly at the start of our interviews that they had been 'socialised in the East'. For them it was an essential factor in the understanding of differences between those who had grown up in the East and those who had not. It is interesting that several West Germans mentioned in conversation how much they resented the insistence by East Germans on their differences as if it were a criticism of western ways of life, rather than a fear of being engulfed by it.

Building Bridges and laying Anchors

Kocka's quotation above raises the question why a united view of the past, as suggested by the historian Bender (1999) and others, is necessary to develop the inner unity between the two former States that is still so elusive and apparently so necessary to go forward? Why can there not be an agreement to differ about these separate yet intertwined pasts and an acknowledgement that the differences were conditional on their context? We know that differences in views and memories can and do contain new information for the present and are constantly reviewed.

The research suggests that this question about these historical and ideological differences that still affect present mind sets may be linked to another factor, which concerns the almost obsessive contemporary preoccupation with the past generally, in the media, in workshops, in the proliferation of ‘witnesses’ who appear as experts. Things happen so fast and at such a pace that it seems to require an almost equal pace in the production of narratives, drama documentaries, exhibitions of ephemera and more, which are all clearly popular and avidly consumed, linking our present to the past, providing a foothold in an imaginary past for those who have no direct knowledge of the vanished GDR. The ambitious attempt by the Federal Government to research the essence of the vanished GDR, to ‘work through’ its legacies in order to find an appropriate representation of life under its dictatorship, is an attempt to position this post-totalitarian regime along the trajectory of European history.

The ceremonies and events in Chapter 6 illustrate an intergenerational and post-unification approach to conciliation and commemorating and the ritual of re-inscribing the lives of a family whose lives and ancestral traces had been erased. The discussion of the campaign against racism in the GDR demonstrated that the myths and ogres, which were ‘manufactured’ by each of the political systems for over forty years, have perpetuated prejudices, fed into misconception and continue to promote yearnings for a fictitious romanticised historical myth of certainty and purity that raises frightening spectres for the future¹⁰¹. The evidence gathered during the campaign indicated clearly the intractability of countering racism at a time of unemployment and economic recession. It also pointed to the challenge of having to implement an essentially political message dictated by a higher authority at the same time as hierarchical changes in the organisation had not been adequately negotiated.

¹⁰¹ The series of 3 films under the title of ‘Heimat’ by Edgar Reitz (1987) presented a German family chronicle from 1918-1982. It tried to avoid stereotypical typecasting and achieved through its representational images and social drama stark reminders of a past that provided quite haunting evocations for each generation in the present.

Olick, who writes with great insight about Germany and who also noted this tenacious hanging onto the past quotes Huyssen (1995:9) who argues that the contemporary memory boom:

Represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information... to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload (quoted in Olick 2007: 183-4).

The quote brings to mind the group of women and one man, whom I mention in Chapter 4, who clung onto their memories in order not to confront either the more uncomfortable aspects of their past, or their futures. They compared the pressures of their children's lives negatively with the seemingly carefree days of their regulated existence in the service of the local authority under a post-totalitarian dictatorship. They seemed to live in the ever present past and feared the future. Others, like Letti in Chapter 5, Selma and Wolfgang, used their past experiences to build new futures retaining a critical stance towards both past and present, a stance much valued by writers, such as Arendt and Benjamin, to name but two. Benjamin in particular seemed to 'mine' the past for ideas that might have enduring value; his stance as 'flaneur' uncovers insights provided by the past in old city streets; he believes that the passing of time produces a process of 'crystallisation' which, similar to the concept of spatial inscription, is of relevance to the present and the future because of its timelessness (Arendt quoted in Bernstein, 2000: 279; Benjamin, 1968:249¹⁰²). His is an almost romantic image but it concurs with Huyssen's by emphasising the anchoring properties in the past that are often so carelessly wiped over by

¹⁰² Benjamin describes a picture by Paul Klee which depicts the Angel of History being propelled by a storm 'irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress'. In: Thesis on the Philosophy of History.

the speed, and emphasis on speed, in the present. The process of retrieval on a personal or collective level is, in itself, creative and informative: Selma's memories of her grandmother's subtle but determined resistance to the Nazi State had inspired her to practice passive resistance to and avoidance of oppressive control. It had also engendered in her a life-long dislike of controlling power. The memory of uncovering varying pasts not only in the House of the NBC but also in the Square and in the surrounding area, which is still on-going, builds bridges to the future as the 'doing' takes place in the present. Bridges had been constructed financially after the Wende, but there appeared to have been little understanding of the emotional journey that East Germans had to make to allow the West to take over their country.¹⁰³

As so often in social research, the temporality of its time and place is significant but also restricted to what is there. An earlier or more recent study would have revealed different temporalities and findings although I believe that the main points which I extracted from this research would probably still hold.

Outcome of the research

The research has clearly demonstrated that the speed of change, which followed the final toppling of the Wall, and the manner in which these changes were enforced, became a far more serious destabiliser in the construction of the new society than had been foreseen or reckoned with. The assumption that East Germans themselves made about how life would improve and how greater freedom to travel and work would bring a greater sense of well-being, proved illusory for many, for others the disappointment and sense of betrayal had serious effects. Despite these disadvantages the majority would

¹⁰³ This observation is also recorded by the Chinese anthropologist Li Zhang in the context of China. She regrets the lack of research into the cost of rapid political and economic changes on people's psychological and emotional ability to make successful 'inner transitions' (Li Zhang, 2008:13).

not vote to return to the old system, but time, comparisons and reflection has enabled many to recognize the relative value of their old world compared with the life gained in exchange.

The research and the literature about the aftermath of post-socialist societies demonstrate that changes, particularly sudden existential changes, are like ‘critical events’ as discussed by Veena Das (1998). Whilst ordinary life goes on other, less observable processes are at work emerging in time and which, in the case of East Germany, are comparable to those observed in transitional phases entailing loss of identity and security, disorientation and search for a more secure base in the memory of past success or achievement. The transmission of such memories spans more than one generation as the research findings in schools have indicated, or the narratives of some of my respondents. The research has also confirmed that self-respect and a sense of identity can be re-established through ‘action’ with others for a common aim (Arendt 1965).

The research showed that the ‘inner unity’ amongst people from the East and the West, who worked at the NBC, was, as they themselves said, primarily due to a shared value system, to acceptance of difference and to an ethos of how to promote engagement and commitment through action and involvement. They had inadvertently created a kind of egalitarian ‘house society’¹⁰⁴ that is neither predominately gender nor class based, although these differences existed. Because such differences were acknowledged as they arose, and commented on, they were easier to diffuse unlike those that still existed often silently, between East and West Germans. Differences were accepted as temporal phenomena, peculiarities of a kind that had to be tolerated unless they interfered with the task in hand.

¹⁰⁴ Reminiscent of but unlike that described by Levi Strauss and discussed by Carsten and Jones in their Introduction to ‘About the House – Levi Strauss and Beyond (1995)

Those of the team members who had participated in the research and collation of information relating to the House and its long history as Jewish Children's Home were, without exception, convinced that this joint endeavour as well as the discoveries of the individual fates of the children, their families and carers had changed how they related to this particular time in history and how it affected them each individually¹⁰⁵. The majority of people who worked at the Centre or had dealings with it agreed with Anat, the Israeli artist, that there was a 'spirit' in the house which was pervasive, maintained by reminders in each room of current activities that there are tangible links to the historical continuities of time.

The ethnography revealed how space and the relationships between space and time interact with memories; the use of objects and their display in the House trigger memories of what had been forgotten; they raised many questions, particularly amongst those who had little previous knowledge of the past. The images stimulated discussions and thoughts about differences in time as well as in social conditions and questions about past morality and justice. Seeing photos from the 1930s of children exercising in neat rows, which hang on the wall above prams and shoes outside the room for physical exercise, collapses time, creates a direct link and a jolt of recognition that their lives transcend time and speak directly to us in the present.

My research leaves me in no doubt that some of the energy and determination with which people in the former GDR rebelled against their government and opted for unification – and we now know that this process started long before 1989 – is still present, but that the disillusion, the loss of employment and of self-esteem as well as a sense of being considered inferior by their Western peers have damaged and diminished this energy and may have lasting consequences that are too early to assess, except in the economic field. Here it

¹⁰⁵ The historical differences in how each of their respective societies had dealt with the Holocaust was not, as far as I know, discussed.

seems that despite huge successes in some parts of the former GDR, some areas of the East were being compared to the Mezzogiorno as early as 1992 (Kielmansegg 1992:188); this pessimistic prognosis was repeated last year, twenty years after unification. (Boss 2010:7).

The research demonstrated that shared experiences and interests in the layers of local history, especially of the House and the Square, and the recognition and tolerance of differences in their respective backgrounds had helped to create an ethos of working together – of sitting in the same boat – that underpinned the principled approach of the teams at the NBC to their work and their engagement with their task. It is not at all certain how this House and the activities within will fare in future, given the degree of commitment that is required, the increasing demands as result of financial constraints, and the rapidly changing demographic structure of the locality. It would be tempting to think that the inner unity between people from East and West that I encountered in this part of Berlin and especially in the Centre, might one day also become a reality in the united but internally still rather divided country.

I close with the image below, which was taken during the Open House Meeting in September 2007, when several of the survivors from the former Children's Home met again and talked about their experiences. The occasion was a lively round table discussion hardly interrupted by the camera team who made a film of this memorable day for future generations.



Fig. 16 Four visitors from Israel and New York chat about old times.

10 September 2007

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Chronology of significant dates relating to the Separation and Unification of East and West Germany¹⁰⁶

1944	Allies land in France. July 20: Failure of 'July Plot' to assassinate Hitler.
1945	May 7 and 8 German surrender and Allied occupation begins. Four zone occupational zones. July-August: Potsdam Conference. September: Start of land reform in Soviet Zone.
1946 Zone	April: Amalgamation of KPD and SPD to form SED in Soviet
1948	Six Power Conference in London; recommendation to set up separate West German State. August: Berlin Blockade. September: First parliamentary council established in Bonn
1949	May: End of Berlin Blockade. Announcement of West Germany's Basic Law. August: Election of first West German parliament. Konrad Adenauer (CDU) elected as Chancellor of Free German Republic (FRG). October: Establishment of German Democratic Republic (GDR). W. Pieck is president, Walter Ulbricht leader of the ruling SED Party.
1950	Foundation of Ministry for State Security (MfS) in the GDR
1953	Death of Stalin; June uprising with widespread strikes and demonstrations in the GDR, suppressed by force.
1955	West Germany becomes member of NATO. End of occupation status. Founding of Warsaw Pact of which GDR is a member.
1956	Foundation of National Peoples Army (NVA). Stalin cult denounced at XX Congress of CPSU. Uprisings in Poland and Hungary, suppressed by military force.
1957	The Saarland joins Federal Republic following plebiscite, under Article 23 of the Basic Law. Treaty of Rome establishes European Economic Community (EEC).
1960	W. Pieck dies and is replaced by a Council of State.
1961	August: Berlin Wall erected
1963	First agreement on trans-border travel from West Berlin to the East and GDR
1968	Student demonstrations in the FRG. Parliament passes Emergency Decree. GDR passes new constitution which

¹⁰⁶ The dates are taken from M.Fulbrook, (ed) (2001) and Gruenbaum, R. (1999), compiled 29 Sept. 2011

- enshrines greater powers for SED. Warsaw Pact troops invade Czechoslovakia to suppress Prague Spring Uprising.
- 1969 Formation of coalition government between SPD and FDP under leadership of Willi Brandt who becomes Chancellor
- 1970 Willi Brandt (SPD) and Willi Stoph (SED) meet and begin negotiations known as 'Ostpolitik', aimed at normalisation of relationships between the two states at a time of 'Détente' between the super powers.
- 1971 Honecker replaces Ulbricht as leader of the SED in the GDR. Signing of Four Powers' Agreement in Berlin, regularising the status of Berlin. Agreement on negotiations rather than use of force to resolve issues. Serious opposition to 'Ostpolitik' by conservatives in the FRG as this might prevent eventual unification.
- 1972 FRG election following dissolution of parliament fought and won by W. Brandt, largely on issue of Ostpolitik with unprecedented turnout of 91%.
December: Treaty which recognized 'two German States in one nation', which was ratified in 1973.
- 1973 Both German States become members of the United Nations. Hallstein Doctrine renounced but both states agreed on having permanent representatives rather than ambassadors in each country.
- 1974 Brandt resigns. GDR revises its constitution to build up national image.
- 1975 Helsinki Final Act of Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), signed by FRG and GDR and 35 other nations. The Accords initiated standing conferences for security, economic and technical exchange and collaboration as well as cultural and information exchanges with the aim of preserving peace. Human Rights and Environmental issues were not prominent items on the agenda but became important levers in the actions of dissidents in the Soviet Union.
- 1976 Exile of Wolf Biermann from GDR followed by protests in East Germany and immolation of Pastor Brueswitz in GDR.
- 1977 Height of terrorist attacks and assassinations of Bubac, Ponto and Schleyer by the Red Army Faction in FRG.
- 1979 Decision to deploy nuclear missiles on German soil. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Global oil crisis leads to economic crisis.
- 1985 Mikhail Gorbachov becomes Soviet Leader. Visit to Bitburg military cemetery by Chancellor Kohl and President Reagan, including SS Graves
- 1987 Honecker visits FRG officially. Peace march in GDR and STASI raid on environmental library in East Berlin
- 1988 January: Mass arrests by STASI at Luxemburg/Liebknecht demonstrations in East Berlin

- 1989 May: East German dissidents detect falsification of May election results through civil action. In July Hungary relaxes its border controls with Austria which starts a stream of refugees from East Germany to West Germany, using embassies as safe havens.
- 4 June Massacre of Protesters in Peking Square of Heavenly Peace which gained approval of SED Party leadership
Negotiations between FRG and GDR about relaxing travel conditions and preparation for influx of refugees into West Germany.
- Sept. Foundation of 'New Forum' as unelected opposition in the GDR.
- 2 Sept. Demonstration in Leipzig for reforms in the GDR. People are arrested. Further demonstrations are stopped by the police who beat and arrest people.
- 30 Sept. 400 000 demonstrate for freedom and democracy; the Monday demonstrations continue always under threat of police brutality.
- 7-9 Oct. 40th anniversary of the foundation of the GDR. Lavish celebrations to which Gorbachev is invited and states that 'those that come too late will be punished by life', an enigmatic warning to the GDR regime. Demonstrations in Berlin are again countered by police forces and arrests. Monday demonstrations continue in Leipzig and other cities with ever increasing numbers.
- 18 Oct. Abdication by Herr Honecker as head of the Party, he is replaced by Egon Kreuz.
- 3 Nov. Germans who are waiting to travel on from Czechoslovakia are permitted to travel on trains that travers the GDR and cause riots in Dresden.
- 4 Nov. More than 500 000 people demonstrate in Berlin. Largest demonstration so far.
- 9 Nov. Fall of the Wall following unclear message from the ZK about opening of the border.
- 13 Nov. H. Modrow is elected president of the GDR and forms a new government. Proposal to the FRG to form a Consortium for Negotiations. Free elections are planned for 18. 3. 1990.
- 28 Nov. Chancellor Kohl presents his 10 point plan for a German-German Confederation and an eventual Federation.
Demonstrators begin to shout for a united Germany ('Deutschland einig Vaterland')
- 1 – 19 Dec. The Volkammer decides to alter the constitution by cutting the powers of the SED. People storm STASI headquarters and destroy their files. E. Kreuz abdicates and the first sessions of the 'Round Table' interim government begin to take place in which 14 political and other representatives of organisations take part.
- 22 Dec. Opening of the Brandenburg Gate.
- Feb 1990 Chancellor Kohl negotiates the prospect of German unity with M. Gorbachov in Moscow. More than 2000 People still leave the GDR daily to go to the West.

	Chancellor Kohl and M. Modrow prepare for a union of both currencies.
18 March	Free elections in the GDR which result in a majority for the 'Alliance' for Germany (including FDP and SPD) under L. Maizière (CDU)
5-6 May	First of 'Two Plus Four' negotiations by foreign ministers to clarify external aspects of German unification. Negotiations ended on 12 September 1990. This contract ended 45 years of European division and confrontation.
3 Oct 1990	Accession of the GDR to the FRG under Article 23 of the Basic Law which enables German states to join the existing Federation

Appendix 2

Glossary

ABM/MAE	Work incentive scheme under Hartz IV – see Appendix
Bpb	Bundeszentrale fuer politische Bildung (Federal Centre for Political Education and Information)
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland or Federal Republic Germany
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Conservative Party led by A.Merkel)
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (protestant church)
FDJ	Free German Youth movement (communist)
FDP	Free German Party (Liberals)
FRG	Federal Republic Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IM	Informal Informer (surveillance system of GDR using ordinary Citizens)

KSZE	Strategic Defence Initiative
NBC	Nachbarschaftszentrum - Neighbourhood Centre
Ostalgie	Nickname for 'nostalgia' for things missed from the past
SED	Socialist Unity Party (former leading party of the GDR)
SPD	Socialist Party of Germany
SIS	Seniors in Schools
STASI	State Security Service
ZK	Central Party Committee (GDR)
ZZB	Zeitzeugenboerse – Agency for Time-Witnesses Berlin

Appendix 3

Interviews and participation in activities at the Neighbourhood Centre between Sept. 2006 and 2007.

The table below presents the numbers of oral testimonies on the subject of the Wende, memories of the past and their relevance in the presence. This is followed by a list of main events in which I participated and an evaluation of the Questionnaire given out to the personnel in July 2007 at the Centre.

Arranged Interviews 2006-7

I interviewed 23 people from the former GDR and 14 from the former BRD. I used material from most of the interviews but found the interviews with the people from the NBC most useful for the thesis because they were closely linked with the Centre and with the events that led to its foundation.

I selected to interview people who were connected to the NBC rather than an equal number of representatives from each part of the united country, because I was interested in what might emerge from these interviews rather than make a direct comparison. I also spoke with a lot of other people who attended functions and events, again from East and West.

Location	No of East	No of West	Employed	MAE/ABM	Ages
NBH	8	0	3	5	37-63
Self-help Centre	2	1	2	1	40-50
MOSKITO	0	2	2	0	34/38
'Projekte Buro'	0	3	3	0	35/50
Students	2	1		Temp	25/28
Youthworker	1		1	0	35?
TimeWitnesses	5		Pensioners		65+
Local Residents	1	1	1P/ 1 vol.		35/73
Architekt		1	Employed		45+
1 SED Funct.	1		Pensioner		72
E.G.		1	ZZB	Vol.	60
I.F.		1	Author	Vol.	65
S.W		1	SIS	Vol.	71
Students	2	0			22/23
Sculptor from Israel		1	Freelance		30+
Pfefferwerk Managers	1	1	Employed		30-40

Participation

I attended 3 Conferences in connection with the Projekte Bureau, 2 in Berlin and 1 in Glauchau, near Stettin.

I regularly participated in the sessions of the Theatre for Experience and the monthly breakfast for Seniors. Both were attended by people from East and West.

At the Centre I participated in weekly meetings and functions, researched the more recent history of the Neighbourhood Centre and attended events in the Square and in the vicinity.

Evaluation of the Questionnaire June – Sept, 2007

I devised a questionnaire which was given to all the personnel at the Centre to fill in anonymously. Of 20 potential responses 14 were returned.

The questionnaire was overlong. It addressed 6 areas:

1. Details of personal circumstance (age, household, area of resident and if private or rented)
2. Education, experience, current employment or ABM or voluntary status
3. Opinion about the House, its history and what else might be relevant
4. Opinion about current activity at the Centre and relevance to the neighbourhood
5. Opinion about unification and the view that there are one nation and two people in Germany (a popular view often discussed in the media)
6. Hopes for the future of the House and its institution

Age: The ages in July 2007 are shown on the table above and represent a mixture of mainly middle-aged but also some younger and older people

Status: 4 were single, 4 had partners, 6 were single parents

Sex: 12 were female, 2 male

Empl /MAE: 7 employed, 5 MAE, 2 were volunteers

Household: 9 lived rented apartments, 3 were owners, 1 lived in a community

Training/Qualif.: 11 university, 13 special add. Training,

Job designation: 3 Social workers, 1 family worker, 1 neighbourhood coordinator, 1 gallerist
2 Theatre pedagogues, 1 admin., 1 project leader, 1 workshop/child care op., 2 students of Social work

Work satisfaction: average good. 1 not good

Improvements? : An inhouse café in which to meet (8), more office space, more transparency between management and teams (3), better maintenance of building (5)

Importance of History: House history very important (14). 10 mentioned relevance to present and its function to act as warning for the future (3). Respect for history and listening to witnesses of the time (5)
What else do you want to know? History since 1942/45 and more about the GDR history (12).
We know enough history (3) Respect for history and listening to witnesses of the time (5)

Are offers of events and courses sufficient? Yes (10) could be better (3) no comment (1)

What would users say? More offers perhaps (3) A welcoming place with lots to do (7) we as workers have no time (2) cannot comment (3)

What about being 'One Nation and 2 people'? Most did not agree with the statement (11) but qualified it by stressing the importance of difference, the fact that there are differences which are regional or local, the fact that there are different habits, different socializations. 1 person mentioned the fact that there are different wage structures which divides the country, 1 person mentioned a lack of pensions, 1 person wrote: when Ossi and Wessi meet, one says 'we are one people' and the other says 'we too'.

Conclusion

I did not use the details of this questionnaire as it had little value for the outcome of the research; it confirmed what I knew more or less when I gave it out, apart from the details of ages, status and personal details.

I was very grateful, however, for the fact that so many of the NBC's staff responded and filled it in thoughtfully.