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In this chapter I shall discuss the possibilities and implications of including personal memories as ethnographic data in ‘ethnographies at home’. For many anthropologists who work at home their personal experiences preceding fieldwork and possibly even anthropological training can be expected to inform their fieldwork and writing. Kürti, an anthropologist from and working in Hungary, for example, writes: ‘One of the first questions that should intrigue all anthropologists is: can I be my own informant? The answer to this almost banal question must be a resounding yes’ (2000: 283). Memories will be invoked when reading other scholars’ work. Descriptions of events and cultural practices in these works might be compared with one’s own participation in similar occasions as well as one’s lack of knowledge of such which may lead to a questioning of the analysis one reads. Based on prior experiences anthropologists at home may also choose their particular research interest, on which they may self-reflexively comment; on the basis of these experiences they may look for particular information, evaluate data as true, important or negligible, decide to take up some leads but not others and devise their writing up. Apart from self-reflexive comments on one’s background, anthropologists at home and native anthropologists usually remain quiet about how their personal memories fit into their ethnographic data. This situation has a variety of reasons which relate to the history of anthropology and the still contentious status of such an ethnography of the familiar. However, by including the self only self-reflexively we are omitting potentially important information. Moreover, we exclude information that is highly influential to our work from analytical scrutiny.
This chapter suggests that the anthropologist’s memories are a resource and that their utilisation should be made more explicit. I will present two case examples that show how personal experience reaching beyond fieldwork can be included as ethnographic data. Here, the anthropologist moves between being ethnographer and informant while trying to maintain a double vision that combines both. The chapter begins with a self-reflexive positioning of the author with regard to this chapter. It then discusses some aspects of the debate surrounding anthropology ‘at home’. I will focus on the question of whether ethnographers at home could, like their informants, claim authenticity. With reference to the case-examples, I will discuss the implications of an approach that includes the ethnographer as informant.

**A Self-reflexive Starting Point**

When joining the Department of Anthropology in Durham, UK, in 1999 to read for an M.Phil., I had seen myself as wanting to specialise in Native North America. I had fostered interests in religion, mythology and contemporary Native American literature during three years of previous study at the University of Göttingen, in Germany. My degree programme also included media studies and history. One of my specific interests concerned the education system of the East German socialist state in which I had grown up. I believed then, however, that I could only follow this up in history since social anthropology (Ethnologie) at Göttingen seemed focused on the study of indigenous, non-Western groups. After my arrival in Durham I heard that one of the professors there had an active research interest in the civil rights movement in East Germany. I therefore decided to make an anthropology of eastern Germany the topic of my postgraduate research. From this initial idea emerged my later Ph.D. thesis which explored cultural changes resulting from the fall of the Berlin Wall using the example of the Jugendweihe (youth consecration), a former socialist and now secular coming-of-age ritual, as its pivotal point.

Between leaving Göttingen and beginning fieldwork in Magdeburg, eastern Germany, I took two steps that reflected historical developments in anthropology. First, I consciously moved from the study of non-Western, non-industrialised (or worse ‘traditional’) groups to the study of a Western (or ‘modern’), industrialised country. Therewith, I had moved on to the kind of ‘anthropology at home’ that Strathern terms auto-anthropology (1987: 16–37). With this term, she refers to ‘anthropology that is carried out in the social context which produced it’ (p. 17). With my choice of eastern Germany I reconfirmed this step also with regard to my
own person since I was going to do research in the places of my childhood.

**Anthropology at Home and Native Anthropology**

Anthropology at home is still a fairly young practice in the discipline, Jackson’s groundbreaking volume only dating back to the mid-1980s (1987). Until then, anthropology had been dominated by the idea that, for good ethnography, researchers needed to learn another culture like a child growing up. This would help one ‘To grasp the native’s point of view … to realise his vision of his world’, as Malinowski put it succinctly (1961 [1922]: 25). One’s foreignness to a place and its culture was said to facilitate analytical distance – the maintenance of ‘naïveté’, according to Bernard (1994: 149). Furthermore, there were also notions of this prolonged stay in a foreign place as a test of, or even initiation ritual for, the apprentice anthropologist who had to cope with loneliness and culture shock. Since then, however, a good number of anthropologists have shown that working in a culture that one is familiar with does not necessarily grant insider status (Aguilar 1981; Messerschmidt 1981a: 9) nor does it preclude analytical distance since cultural knowledge is not all-encompassing (see also Abu-Lughod 1991; Narayan 1993).

However, there remain some problems with anthropology at home and native anthropology. The latter term refers, in particular, to anthropologists from the non-western world (see for example, Srivinas 1952; Abu-Lughod 1991, 1992; Narayan 1993; Kuwayam 2003). It stems from times when anthropologists trained an informant in ethnography, who then went on to study and write about their own groups (Narayan 1993: 672). In recent years the terminological boundaries between native anthropology and anthropology at home have, however, become increasingly blurred.²

Despite the past decade’s flurry of ‘ethnographies at home’, this genre seems to remain contentious as a steady flow of reactive, critical articles suggests. Some authors, have focused on defending this kind of anthropology by criticising the assumptions underpinning the insider–outsider dichotomy arguing that one is never fully at home in one’s culture (Abu-Lughod 1991; Narayan 1993; Collins 2002). Others have highlighted particular implications of native anthropology such as the question of rapport, and of accountability (Brettell 1993; Berger 2001; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Kuwayam 2003). Simultaneously, self-reflexivity, scholarly ‘soul-searching’ (Shokeid 1997: 631), has undergone some criticism (Salzman 2002). For the purpose of this chapter I want to
highlight one issue in particular. This is the question of authority of voice, which potentially separates native and non-native anthropologists.

In an article from 1988 Appadurai discusses the relationship between the anthropological concepts of ‘native’ and ‘hierarchy’. He remarks that nativity seems tied to our ideologies of authenticity: ‘Proper natives are somehow assumed to represent their selves and history without distortion or residue’ (1988: 37). Natives have a claim to authenticity, he argues, whilst ‘we [anthropologists] exclude ourselves from this sort of claim … because we are too enamoured of the complexities of our history, the diversity of our societies, and the ambiguities of our collective conscience’ (p. 37). Presumably, ‘our history’ and ‘our diverse societies’ here refer to the self-reflexive complexity of the Western world. Appadurai’s conservative reading of ‘native’, however, also excludes most native anthropologists since university education has shaped their awareness of complexity and postmodern relativity just the same. I would argue, though, that the boundaries between authentic/native and inauthentic/trained are often blurred to an extent that makes readings of claims to authenticity impossible.

Writing about his work in Armenia, Barsegian contends that ‘native ethnographers can move between observation and participation’ whilst ‘the western anthropologists must settle for observation, his or her only accessible level of fieldwork’ (2000: 123). Whilst I do not quite agree with Barsegian’s terminology, his argument highlights the choice, available to native ethnographers, between being just native (participant) and being an ethnographer (participant observer). Barsegian’s statement therefore also makes a claim to authenticity. The expression ‘an anthropologist playing the native card’ is taken from an article by Jacobs-Huey. She argues that a self-reflexive outing as native anthropologist might be understood as a ‘non-critical privileging of their insider status’ (2002: 791). The possibility of readers understanding native anthropology and/or anthropology at home in these terms is problematic. The fact that such issues are rarely made explicit exacerbates the problem.

If native anthropology is then considered authentic, it potentially precludes any debate about its ethnographic analysis, unless this debate is led by fellow native anthropologists. Such a prevention of debate is a problem for the discipline and we therefore need to ask how native anthropologists should conduct themselves to avoid a playing of the native card. In particular, how should native anthropologists write ethnography? The editors of this volume argue that all anthropologists rely on their personal memories and experiences, not only in order to establish rapport but both when writing down (their notes) and when writing up (their ethnography). The volume’s central argument is that we should do this more openly, making our subjective ethnographic strategies explicit. This
strategy takes us beyond self-reflexivity and opens the ethnographer’s memories to analytical scrutiny. Self-reflexive revelations, in contrast, negate the possibility for analysis, according to Salzman (2002: 805–13). Salzman argues that these add little to published ethnographies since they often consist of brief and very general remarks concerning one’s background, such as Young’s contention ‘because I was born in a city I found it boring to ask about … livestock deals’ (Young 1996: 131, cited in Salzman 2002: 807). In fact, Salzman highlights their potential to mislead and, in the worst-case scenario, to deceive: ‘So it is hard to see how such generalizations – by gender, religion, nationality, race and class – tell us much about the actual experience of any particular individual. It seems odd for anthropologists, of all people, to imagine that individuals, and particularly such peculiar folks as anthropologists, will mechanically conform to some generally held social stereotypes and cultural labels’ (2002: 809). Reflecting on postmodern epistemology Salzman concludes that we ought to ‘replace solitary research with collaborative team research, in which the perspectives and insights of each researcher can be challenged and tested by others’ (2002: 812; see also Salzman 1994). The volume at hand highlights another possibility. It shows how the treatment of personal experience and memories as ethnographic data opens this information to readers’ scrutiny. Srinivas observes that the social position of a native sociologist, which undoubtedly influences their work, can lead to insights. Those insights, however, ‘have to be subject to rigorous testing’ (Srinivas 1969: 154). This chapter therefore makes the case for a native anthropology that draws explicitly on relevant past personal experiences. Indeed, the native anthropologist used to serve as a key-informant to foreigner-anthropologists. Surely, the self continues to function as such in the doing and writing of ethnography today. By making the junctures at which our memories come to play an explicit role it is possible to subject these memories to our own and others’ analytical inspection.

Possibilities for the deployment of memory have emerged for me on a number of occasions. As a child and especially as a teenager I collected evidence of passing times in the form of material items, documents and memories. As Coleman shows in this volume our past experience underpins very well our later professional choices. It is therefore not surprising to me, now, that both memories and material evidence accumulated during my past appears relevant to current fieldwork.

Case One: Ostalgie and ‘East German’ Identity

In recent years, anthropologists have described post-GDR eastern Germany with regard to a rising sense of identity and particularity, a
privatisation of remembrance and a reaction to western German cultural and moral hegemony (Howard 1995; Berdahl 1999a/b; De Soto 2000: 96–113; Ten Dyke 2001a: 253–76). It seems clear that identity and change in eastern Germany are negotiated on the basis of significant personal and communal experiences made during GDR times, the Wende years of 1989 and 1990 and in the reunited present. Therefore, what people remember and which personal and social memories they talk about are crucial to the ethnographic enquiry (for example Berdahl 1999b; Glaeser, 2000; Ten Dyke 2000: 139–56; 2001b). My own field research reflects this tendency. Apart from participant observation I used life-story interviews to gain insights into how people made sense of both past and present after these great upheavals.

The phenomenon of Ostalgie, nostalgia for the East, has attracted attention among scholars and in the German public discourse alike. The former see it as the performance of an assertive ‘East German’ identity that glorifies the socialist past. The latter blames ‘ostalgic’ viewpoints for the failure of reunification, referring to ‘the Wall in people’s minds’. Being aware of the scholarly and German public debates, I had looked for Ostalgie during my field research period, albeit unsuccessfully. I could find no evidence of the Ostalgie parties that Berdahl describes: parties ‘featuring East German rock music, party propaganda songs … and a double of the former Communist Party leader Erich Honecker’ (Berdahl 1999b: 192). Neither did my informants seem to engage in Ostalgie; one exception to this rule will be discussed below. Most talked about this as something that other eastern Germans were practising and that was a bit too ‘nostalgic’, ‘euphemistic’, ‘subversive’ in the reunited present. Instead, there seemed to be a commercialisation of Ostalgie in the form of music compilations featuring socialist songs, board games drawing on knowledge of the GDR, books including recipe collections, jokes, anecdotes, books on interior design, and other goods. This suggested to me that since the mid-1990s Ostalgie had changed from a communal celebration of the once shared and now devalued past to commercialised objects, which were used selectively and carefully by people who were well aware of these objects’ connection to the political identity claim of being ‘East German’ (Gallinat 2008). This interpretation seemed plausible since it reflected some of my personal experiences.

Whilst my informants would not talk much about Ostalgie, I could not escape the fact that I myself had come across it some years before undertaking this fieldwork. I had very nearly attended two Ostalgie parties similar to those described by Berdahl. The following is a written account of my personal memories of these two occasions. I shall then compare these with instances reminiscent of Ostalgie that I came across
during fieldwork in 2001. This will highlight the differences between various kinds of memory practice and identity claims.

It must have been around 1994 and I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I had a number of older friends from the karate club where I was training. I was then living with my mother in a small town in the more western parts of Saxony-Anhalt, eastern Germany. Some of my friends from the club had heard about a local night club that regularly organised ‘GDR discos’. Apparently these discos featured 1980s music, beer was sold for its GDR price and the place tried to recreate some atmosphere of the old times. We decided to try this disco out. It somehow sounded like an interesting thing to do, partly also because of its subversive connotation. Unification was only a few years ago and, although there were some voices of criticism and resentment by then, there was still a widespread expectation of having to appreciate the recent changes.

However, the four or five of us met somewhere in town to go to this disco together. Most of us had pulled a neckerchief from the Pioneer organisation we used to be members of out of the wardrobe. I carried mine stuffed into my pocket feeling uncomfortable about wearing it in public. One of our friends had not brought any item of uniform at all; one or two others, in contrast, had put on their blue FDJ blouses but were wearing their coats over them. For a little while we compared our manners of dress, commenting on individual choices. Then we made our way to this club. We never attended this disco and I am not sure why. I have a vague feeling that at least some of us did not enter because of my being under age and not allowed entrance to the party. This was the first encounter with Ostalgie that I can remember.

Some years later, in 1997 or 1998, I went to another Ostalgie party. This happened in the small village where my boyfriend’s family lived. The party was an annual event in the village pub and had a firm place in people’s social calendar. I agreed to go even though I had some qualms about attending. I had become very conscious of my own family’s history with the GDR state, which was a critical and difficult one. I had taken this criticism on board and rejected nostalgia for the GDR. However, not wanting to spoil the weekend, I agreed to go. This was also a social occasion for me, a chance to meet many of my boyfriend’s friends, which I was looking forward to. However, I refused to wear any piece of socialist uniform. I remember that we arrived at the door to the pub where we ran into a few others of our age most of whom were wearing FDJ blouses. It was immediately noted that I had not dressed up.

The event started with a dinner, for which we had a choice between two popular East German dishes; neither of them were favourites of mine. Later on the disco opened and we danced and sang along to socialist propaganda songs as well as pop hits from the 1980s. In another part of the house someone had prepared a small bazaar. We had a look at it and I seem to remember some technical appliances (an orange hair dryer?) and an NVA
(East German army) uniform. I am not sure whether these items were for sale or just exhibited or on auction. When we saw the uniform I seem to recall that my boyfriend exchanged some jokes with another villager about whose attic this piece had come from.

The atmosphere throughout the event was jovial. The purpose was to have fun together whilst remembering and also celebrating the past. During the evening we young people – there were maybe five or six of us – also received a certificate. In GDR-style language it congratulated us for having ‘participated in this event in a true socialist spirit’.

These two events exemplify the character of ‘ostalgie’ practices. The parties were inherently communal activities that provided space for new shared experiences on the basis of an active re-evaluation of the past. In this way the practices also served to reconnect past and present in a situation of great upheaval. Such a connection is paramount to identity whether personal or social. In all this, ‘ostalgie’ practices were also about contesting the new hegemonic order, which was perceived to be primarily West German. The practices described above could therefore be called a wave about a re-evaluation of the communal past, which is undeniably the socialist past, and an affirmation of this new nostalgic view of life in the GDR as a shared interpretation. This movement appeared at a particular historical point in eastern German history (see Berdahl 1999a: 205), some years after reunification when the harsh realities of the new situation began to be acknowledged and mixed with the experience of western German hegemony which included a devaluation of the East German past as a totalitarian period.

During my fieldwork in 2000 and 2001, I found no such social practices. However, I observed two instances that were reminiscent of Ostalgie and yet of a different character. For this research I stayed in a small town in Saxony-Anhalt. In order to make contact with people living in this urban setting I joined a number of clubs and groups, one of which was a choir. It was at the choir’s Fasching party (German carnival) that the following incident took place.

The evening had been spent in a good-humoured and lively spirit, eating, drinking and talking and, later on, also dancing. This mood only changed when the DJ announced at 1.00 a.m. that he was leaving. Even though most of the older members had departed by that time, our group of about ten younger people, most being in their early thirties, did not feel like breaking up the party. Instead we stayed on and soon enough a friend got a guitar out and we were singing along to popular oldies. After a few numbers he intoned an FDJ song. The only person who was somewhat puzzled was myself, but when I announced that maybe I should take notes, I was told to ‘drop it’. The recital of ‘socialist propaganda songs’ (Berdahl 1999a: 192) continued for some more time until we ran out of tunes.
The second incident occurred during an interview. I had visited a middle-aged woman to do a life-story interview with her. The interviews had been planned as open interviews followed by a semi-structured part that included questions about interviewees’ memories of the Fall of the Wall and their thoughts about Germany/eastern Germany today. During this particular interview the woman’s husband had walked through the room and every now and then commented on the matter of our conversation. He had particularly strong feelings about my question asking whether they thought there were any differences between eastern and western Germans. His wife had before voiced a fairly stereotypical view of West Germans as ‘insidious’. This seemed motivated by adverse experiences her husband was having at work. He explained that his colleagues, all of whom were from western Germany seemed to expect him to leave his thirty years of GDR experience behind. He felt that any criticism he voiced about procedures, about any aspect of work, was rejected as invalid because of his lack of experience with this, the West German, system. However, he felt that his experience of two different systems gave him more expertise, rather than less. Most certainly, he felt the need to be taken seriously as a professional. Talking about these difficulties, he suddenly got up to fetch a CD from the shelf. He showed it to me explaining that he had greatly enjoyed the CD’s success and agreed with its song. This CD features just one song by an eastern German singer called Kai Niemann. It was produced in 2000 and was an overnight success in the eastern parts of Germany. The song is called ‘In the East’ and highlights some of the attributes and quirks that make eastern Germany distinctive. This song does not, however, embrace past socialism. Rather, it is a cautious and self-critical parody of the hailed East German identity.6

These latter two examples are distinct and quite different from the Ostalgie parties mentioned above. Whilst the Ostalgie parties were intended and arranged celebrations of the communal past utilising socialist symbols, the incident at the Fasching party was inadvertent. A number of people had come together to celebrate Fasching, as is customary. They thereby also drew on a shared past but one that was not, as yet, politically tinted. When the DJ had left a small group of friends decided to make music themselves. For this purpose they utilised a stock of shared songs which somewhat unwittingly came to include socialist propaganda songs. These were, however, not sung because they symbolised socialism. Rather, they came in handy because everyone knew their text. They also have a simple tune and a catchy rhythm. Everybody had sung these songs during their childhood and as teenagers, and these times of their lives happened to have taken place in East Germany. Whilst it is plausible that these songs were also attractive because of their
ambiguity in the postsocialist present, they had not been selected as signifiers of East German identity in the same way in which the parties had been orchestrated.

The second case of the song by Nieman is again different. This example shows very well how in a moment where the individual past is under attack the person reaches for an oppositional identity, which he expects to be shared by others. This incident distinguishes itself from the Ostalgie parties in that it is not a social practice but rather the rhetorical strategy of a single person that utilises more widely shared symbols. As explained above, the song itself contains a good portion of self-critical humour. Whilst it calls on some socialist symbols, it uses a wider range of references than just these (see note 5).

Comparing the incidences that occurred during fieldwork and the commercialisation of GDR attributes (also noted during fieldwork) with my personal experiences in the mid-1990s, I suggest that Ostalgie itself is a thing of the past. It was a communal practice that occurred during the mid-1990s when eastern Germans were awakening to the harsh post-socialist realities and exploring the need for connecting this present to their past and developing a shared criticism of reunification. These needs, which were not experienced by all eastern Germans in the same way, were, with time, satisfied and ‘ostalgic’ practices transformed. Feelings and assertions of East German identity have remained but occur on a more individual plane, where they mix with an acknowledgement that East–West German stereotypes do not always mirror social reality (Gallinat 2008). The material expressions of the Ostalgie movement have been customised by the commercial world.

Returning to the subject of this chapter, the example above shows how my personal memories play an integral part in my reading and doing ethnography in eastern Germany. This goes beyond the establishment of rapport with informants on the basis of our shared upbringing, as Berger, for example, highlights (2001: 504–18), but concerns instead the importance of my personal memories as ethnographic data. Maintaining an ethnographic double vision of my informants and of myself as informant, my own voice adds crucial information to the analysis. I have therefore included my voice explicitly here, marking the section in the same way in which I would mark excerpts drawn from interviews and other textual sources.

The second example of ethnographic double vision consolidates my argument and raises some further questions. It is concerned with notions of the person in eastern Germany.
Case Two: Personhood in Eastern Germany

During socialism East German authorities had promoted the development of so-called ‘socialist personalities’. This was a notion of the person that was informed by the East German version of Marxism–Leninism and contemporary psychology and applied, in particular, in the education of children and young people. As Kürti states, ‘In European societies, ideas about controlling and monitoring children and youth are rooted in Christian beliefs and values. Beginning with the modernist period, however, regimes on both the right and left took it upon themselves to control and monitor young people’ (2002: 113). This was due to a ‘belief that youth had been corrupted by the previous regime and thus must be brought under control and re-educated according to the needs and wishes of the new state’ (ibid.).

In East Germany the aim of creating a ‘new human being’ in socialism had been included in the programme of the ruling party in the late 1950s. The exact expectations of socialist personalities were changed and reformulated various times but constituted a coherent argument in the 1980s. This was presented to fourteen-year-old teenagers during the Jugendweihe (youth consecration), for example, a socialist coming-of-age ritual (see Gallinat 2005) that included a vow of loyalty to the socialist state. During the ceremonies the young people also received a book published specifically for these ceremonies. The latest Jugendweihe book from 1983 includes an entire chapter on personhood: ‘You and Socialism’ (pp. 209–61). The socialist personality is here described as follows: ‘We understand thoroughly developed socialist personalities to be educated, politically aware, to be human beings strengthened in morals and character, who are able and willing to fulfil the manifold demands that are asked for in social life, in work, in learning, and in political activities, as well as in spare time and family life’ (Zentraler Ausschuß 1983: 214). Unsurprisingly, the socialist personality is introduced as one that complies with the social rules and norms that are deemed valuable by the ruling elite. The text nevertheless recognises and encourages the individual constitution of persons: ‘Personalities are people who distinguish themselves by individual attributes and creative abilities’ (Zentraler Ausschuß 1983: 211). However, it links these individual developments closely to the communal purpose of societal progress: ‘To develop a socialistic personality includes the firm conviction to be capable in a certain field ... All this for the good of the whole society and the own good’ (Zentraler Ausschuß 1983: 219). This notion of the person is also inherently relational, which is best expressed by the concept of Kollektiv (collective). These were organisational groups that existed almost
anywhere in the social environment, whether at work, in the classroom or even in the block of houses one lived in. The *Jugendweihe* book explains that *Kollektive* are important decision-making bodies, which should seek unanimity. In cases of disagreement the collective should have primacy: ‘the solution of upcoming contradictions requires subordination under a collective aim’ (Zentraler Ausschuß 1983: 247–48). Relationships formed the basis of the social organisation in *Kollektiven*, and finally society. In a logical conclusion, the ability to sustain these is emphasised by the text: ‘The ability to establish relationships with friends and colleagues, to shape them in such a way that they become productive for everyone ... also belong to it [character traits of socialist personalities]’ (Zentraler Ausschuß 1983: 213).

This is an ideal view of personhood that is presented to young people with the intention of shaping and moulding their development into good and faithful citizens of the socialist GDR. Whether teenagers ever read this chapter in their *Jugendweihe* book is doubtful. These ideas, however, also related to practice in various arenas of GDR society. For example, *Kollektive* were real existing social groups at school, in the workplace and in the mass organisations (see Kharkhordin 1999; Anderson 2000: 18–19, 43–55). The Pioneer and FDJ organisation emphasised socialist values and engaged their members in suitable activities. Sights of, or at least propaganda about, groups of pioneers cleaning parks, collecting waste for recycling and helping elderly citizens were not uncommon.

The unofficial structures created by the socialist economy of scarcity, where people had to develop skills of accessing and storing scarce goods that was strongly reliant on connections (see Verdery 1999: 27), further underpinned ideas about relationships and communal values although the closeness of social networks thus developed stretched the official notion of *Kollektivo*.

When doing field research in 2001, I was interested in whether the Fall of the Wall had had an effect on notions of the person and, if so, how this was perceived by my informants. As I was also interested in their perception of unification, I asked in my interviews whether interviewees saw any differences between eastern and western Germans. This was often responded to in the affirmative, although with varying degrees of dichotomisation and relativity. The main contrasts that were discussed related to stronger individualistic attitudes among western Germans and more socially oriented character traits among eastern Germans. In the former case this was often expressed in terms of ‘careerism’ and ‘elbow mentality’. These terms describe an orientation towards one’s individual success at the expense of social relationships. The elbow mentality refers literally to the use of elbows to push others out of the way whilst climbing the career ladder. In this regard many interviewees also said that ‘western
Germans can sell themselves better’. With regard to eastern Germans there was acknowledgement that they often lacked such marketing skills. Additionally, ideas about modesty and humbleness with regard to individual aims were expressed. Nadine put it like this: ‘We here ... Not everyone but many, are still a bit more ponderous. ... Or we have less need to present ourselves ... that you rather let yourself be guided. Rather [that] than to guide yourself.’

It was also acknowledged that dispositions in the eastern parts were changing or under threat of change. In a later part of her interview Nadine explored the different strategies of two county administrators she has worked under, one from the western parts, the other from the eastern parts of Germany. She explained that the western administrator, being happier to make decisions and to take leadership achieved more in the new united Germany: ‘So that in the first four years with our Westler we did more than in the six or seven years with our East [administrator].’ Other interviewees explained that they were expecting the more communally oriented values in eastern Germany to change because stronger individualist dispositions seem facilitated by the current political and economic context.

The evidence presented so far suggests that a crucial change in emphasis regarding personhood from pre- to post-Fall of the Wall eastern Germany is seen to be coming about, which is reflected in my interviewees’ commiserations about potential differences between eastern and western Germans. The change is due to the new economic structure but also different political and philosophical values that come with processes of westernisation. Various authors have highlighted the relation between economic, political and cultural factors and personhood in ‘high modernity’ (Giddens 1991; see also Rose 1989) and/or Euro-America (Lutz 1988: 81).

This change concerns a move from a notion of personhood that was oriented towards social relationships and community to a personhood that is oriented towards individual agency and self-actualisation. The latter term is used by Junghans in a description of the discourse of civil society initiatives in Hungary (2001: 383–400). Such initiatives are usually based on training courses in the United States or western Europe. The therewith imported discourse of self-actualisation and techniques of spontaneity and improvisation based on individual choice and agency jar with some Hungarians’ ideas of mastery as depending upon actual knowledge and practice (Junghans 2001: 393).

The evidence presented with regard to changes in values and personhood in eastern Germany has been far from ideal, however, being patchy and inconsistent. My argument is indeed exemplified best in East German pupils’ school records. At the end of every school year the head
teacher wrote a report for every pupil, which was presented together with the final grades. In this report he/she would praise or criticise certain skills, character traits or mannerisms of the pupil in question. Set within the educational system this discourse stands in direct relation to the language used and favoured by the current government. In the following I shall present excerpts from my own school records, which remain the only ones I have unlimited access to. The reports quoted here stem from the years 1988 to 1990, during which I was eleven to thirteen years old.

Under the socialist system, in 1988 precisely, the certificates described me as ‘possessing a sense of duty, which positively influences the class’, as being ‘helpful and reliable’, thereby highlighting social abilities and a sense of community (Zeugnis 1988). A year later my teacher wrote that I was ‘friendly and polite’ and ‘ready to participate in class actively’ (Zeugnis 1989). This wording is slightly less oriented towards a moral purposefulness but still appreciates skills in social interaction. The report from 1989 reads in detail: ‘Anselma is a friendly and polite student. She works purposefully and industriously. This also shows in her willingness to participate actively in class. Because of her exemplary behaviour towards her fellow pupils and the teachers she is respected and accepted.’

In 1990, however, only the term ‘purposeful’ connected my self to my previous incarnations. Now I was commended for possessing a ‘broad general knowledge’ and ‘an ability to think logically’ (Zeugnis 1990). Moreover, the report states that ‘she thinks critically about problems and develops her own standpoint’ (Zeugnis 1990). Individual abilities such as logical thinking had, at times, been mentioned before 1990, for example in 1986. Now, however, they became skills that supported a pupil’s success and were worthy of praise. Critical thinking had never been included in the reports before being a trait that is underpinned by self-actualisation – ‘she develops her own standpoint’ – and by the individual as ‘the source of morality’ (Lukes 1973: 101), in contrast to moral values set externally and followed by individuals, as the socialist personality suggests. Simultaneously, communality moved from the centre of the character evaluation to its periphery. Communal values used to be the first listed. By 1990, however, skills centred on individual talent took the first place while socially relevant abilities had moved to the back (Zeugnis 1990). The report from 1991 says: ‘Anselma’s work has been characterised by purposefulness and continuity for many years. She has a variety of interests and strives to expand her knowledge. Her ability to think logically is well developed. She thinks critically about the problems of our times. Her helpfulness and comradeliness are praiseworthy.’ It seems that by 1990 and 1991 (Zeugnis 1991), within the space of just twenty-four months, individual traits had become more significant than the relationships between pupils in the class. Whilst social skills were still
being evaluated they had moved from the top of the educational agenda to its bottom.

The changes in the school’s discourse about personhood, which are expressed in the school reports, show clearly the move from a communally oriented to an individually oriented notion of the self in the education discourse. The former is associated with character traits that concern social skills, helpfulness and a concern for the group. The latter, in contrast, centres on notions of individual choice, morality and self-actualisation. However, how this tendency was realised in social practice leading to cultural change is a more complex question that concerns ongoing longer-term developments. The interviews nevertheless suggest that, whilst there remains an emphasis on communal values, which is perceived as different from western German values, it is realised that this is likely to change.

Playing the ‘Native Card’?

Various authors have defended the practice of anthropology at home against critics who argue that geographical distance from the field also supports analytical distance from the observed. These authors usually argue that one is never truly at home in a culture. In this chapter I have taken a further step by using my memories and documents from my childhood as ethnographic data. Is my writing in this fashion a playing of the native card that hinders critical reading because of my claim to authenticity?

Appadurai seems to argue that this is not so because my own anthropological training has made me too aware of social and cultural complexities. Yet the observed instances of Ostalgie occurred before this training. This, however, raises yet another problem, that of memory. These observations differ from fieldwork observations firstly because they were made prior to anthropological training. They are therefore not the ethnographer’s observations but rather the memories of a native participant, a young girl/woman from eastern Germany.

They differ from fieldwork observations secondly because they were not noted down in field notes, to which I could now refer. Instead, these recollections are memory accounts that are given in the present of a particular research agenda. Could it therefore be that I only recall instances that suit my intended argument, or that I frame my memories in a preordained fashion?

Although this is an important point to consider, I believe it should not hinder this type of auto-ethnography. Part of my research was the collection of memory accounts from all my informants. Just as for me, it
can be argued for each one of them that they presented their memories in a way that suited their personal agenda in relation to this interview with me. This personal agenda will have been influenced by their interpretations of my research project and my personality. This is particularly so in the politically charged climate in Germany, where most people are highly aware of identity claims and stereotypes that may challenge German unification. My own power of recollection seems no more fraught here than that of my informants. Anthropologists always deploy memories from fieldwork: why not memories from before fieldwork as well, as long as these do not become the only voice to be heard? Additionally, there is the problem of bias and subjectivity. Although my informants pursued their agenda, I had the final say in selecting certain interpretations and certain interviews to substantiate my arguments. This is a problem of all types of interpretive approaches that use highly qualitative methods. The detailed representation of my own experiences, however, renders these subjective aspects more explicit and allows the reader to critically engage with them.

These issues also emerge in case two but in a less problematic fashion. Because written records were used, the question of framed recollection is of less relevance, the question of honesty in the presentation remains. Other issues include the extent of self-revealing that was part of this case example. Might it be embarrassing to readers that I, the author, out myself as someone who did well in school, and, more importantly, someone who did well in socialist school? According to theorists such as Jowitt, I was then a subject and performer prone to dissimulation (1974), in contrast to the western autonomous individual I should be now. Generally, I would argue that, considering this academic chapter, readers could guess that I did well at school, maybe was even ‘a bit of a nerd’. Indeed, my relationship to the GDR state should always be part of any self-reflexive introduction to any of my ethnography. If it remained there, however, it would be a piece of information that has little further value. Last but not least, this section may have conveyed ability to ‘see the absurd’ and ‘laugh at myself’, as Srinivas would encourage me to do (1969: 163).

In this chapter, I have shown that the anthropologist can usefully draw on her own experiences and memories of that experience. Furthermore, I have made clear that including personal memories as data in the text contextualises them and opens them to analytical scrutiny. I have provided two case examples of how this can be meaningfully achieved. As one voice amongst many from the field the recollections of anthropologists at home have an important role to play in making the doing and writing of ethnographic research more transparent, honest and illuminating about the nature of humanity.
Notes

2. Eastern European scholars for example, who are university-educated anthropologists, consider themselves and are referred to by anthropologists from abroad as ‘native anthropologists’ (Balzer 1995; Kürti 1996: 11–15; Barsegian 2000: 119–29).
3. The Pioneers (Jungpioniere and Thälmannpioniere) were socialist children’s organisations for pupils of six to fourteen years of age. Children then advanced to the Free German Youth organisation, the FDJ.
4. See above.
5. The literature on memory, for example, highlights its importance to both social and individual identity (Jedlowski, 2001: 29–44; Climo and Catell, 2002: 1–36; Berliner 2005: 197–211;). Linde discusses the role of coherence in the individual telling of life stories (1993).
6. An excerpt from the song, translated by the author:

   The real experts know that the men in the East are the better kissers, …
   That the walls in the East are more durable,
   That most people here get it quicker,
   That nearly everything is somewhat better than in the West.
   …
   Everybody knows that we here always did our best and that the Ossis [East Germans] also invented the Golf [a VW model],
   That time does not pass quite as fast,
   …
   That the butter here tastes more of butter and the Sekt a little more like Sekt [sparkling wine].
   (Niemann 2001)

7. The Soviet Union had also developed ideas about personhood. Throughout its history these took various forms including the notion of lichnost, the heroic figure, and the later Homo Sovieticus, which also became a literary character. See, for example, Kharkhordin (1999).
8. The term collective is most often connected with agriculture and the collective farm (for example Humphrey 1983; Verdery 1996: 146–52. On personhood and collectivity in the Soviet Union see Kharkhordin (1999), on the Czech Republic see Holy (1996: 20 n. 3).
9. Kharkhordin (1999), for example, shows well the tensions and contradictions inherent in the authorities’ views of personhood, which, in the later SU, encouraged individuality but not too much individuality. Similarly the official discourse in the GDR encouraged the establishment and maintenance of social relationships as long as these were purposeful and geared towards socialist ideas and goals, and not too close.
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