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**The Local *Aufarbeitung* (Re-Working) of the SED-Dictatorship:
Governing Memory to Save the Future**

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The Local *Aufarbeitung* (Re-Working) of the SED-Dictatorship: Governing Memory to Save the Future

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ABSTRACT The East German past has been the focus of much debate and scholarly work in Germany since unification in 1990. The government-sponsored discourse on this past, Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung, the 're-working of the past', presents the GDR as the 'SED-dictatorship'. In constructing the East German past as part of Germany's dictatorial past the discourse of Aufarbeitung legitimizes German unification and the transition to democracy. This paper explores how local governmental institutions attempt to realise the national and authoritative discourse of Aufarbeitung. Drawing on ethnographic research it will discuss two projects realised by the 'Working Group Aufarbeitung' on the topic of everyday life in socialism which provides both a challenge –to the categorical certainties of the discourse's narratives- and an opportunity –to attract a wider audience- for this political field of memory-work. The paper will highlight how in this sphere memory-work has become tied to the governmental aim of the further development of democracy that however ties past, present and future together in uncomfortable binary relationships.

KEY WORDS: *Aufarbeitung*, dictatorship, memory, narrative, discourse, government

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The East German past has been the focus of much debate and scholarly work in Germany since unification in 1990. The official, government-sponsored discourse on this past is known as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*, the ‘re-working of the past’, which regards the socialist era as one part of the nation’s *doppelte Vergangenheit*, the ‘double burden in history’. Efforts at *Aufarbeitung* started soon after unification with a parliamentary enquiry commission for the ‘*Aufarbeitung* (re-working) of the history and consequences of the SED-dictatorship’ (SED: the ruling socialist party) and were based in the ‘anti-totalitarian consensus’ that had developed among the main political parties in West Germany in the aftermath of the Third Reich (cf. Beattie, 2008).

The discourse of *Aufarbeitung* is very clear in how it perceives the GDR. Although the official terminology describes the past state as the SED-dictatorship, ascribing dictatorial rule to the ruling socialist party, the term is usually used more inclusively to mean the ‘GDR-as-dictatorship’. The discourse is shaped by particular institutions, many of which either belong to government or receive government funding, and that engage in historical research, political education, support of victims of the regime, commemoration and museumisation (cf. Berdahl, 2005). Following the discourse’s master-narrative of the ‘GDR-as-dictatorship’, events and texts produced under the header of ‘re-working’ concern repression, state control and resistance, and have long had an emphasis on the State Security Police (MfS) as the epitome of state violence. Such a black and white picture of the GDR however does not resonate with most people’s memories according to which the lines between compliance, resistance and just ‘getting by’ are considerably blurred (Fulbrook, 2005).

With growing feelings of resentment due to the speed of the fundamental transformation after socialism’s fall, rising unemployment and socio-economic difficulties, the mid-1990s saw a rise in an assertive eastern German identity that contested West German hegemony in the newly united nation (cf. Berdahl 1999). It went along with the much

discussed *Ostalgie* (Bach, 2002; Boyer, 2006), nostalgia for the East, which was characterised by a re-evaluation of East German things, displayed at events or re-produced, and celebrations, such as GDR discos, which featured socialist décor, 80s music, East German food, and was attended by eastern Germans clad in their old uniforms (Berdahl, 1999). Over the past two decades *Ostalgie* has changed from a social phenomenon to a commercial one now primarily aimed at tourists (Gallinat 2010; Rethman 2009), yet the trope of *Ostalgie* retains much salience among proponents of *Aufarbeitung*. Many policy-makers see nostalgia as an inappropriate and incorrect pendant to a view of the GDR-as-dictatorship that has to be countered. It is deemed to be an expression of a passive kind of individual shaped by life in the dictatorship, as Bonnard and Jouhanneau highlight in this issue (also Buchowski, 2006), and which lacks the political subjectivity required by life in a free-market democracy. Whilst eastern Germans have become so sensitised to the contentiousness of *Ostalgie* that most people actively reject the notion (Hyland, 2013), actors involved in ‘re-working’ consider it to be widespread and growing as a new generation has reached maturity which did not itself experience life in the GDR. The combination of these understandings means that *Aufarbeitung* is increasingly focused on education about the dictatorial character of the GDR and as such it becomes a tool used to foster emotional attachments to and civic skills for democracy.¹

As such, the discourse’s master-narrative of the dictatorship moreover serves to legitimate the current political order - the democratic state that safeguards civil liberties based in the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) (cf. Jarausch, 1994) - by condemning the previous one as illegitimate. In *Aufarbeitung* then past, present and future are intertwined, as scholars in memory studies have argued is the case more generally (Hirsch & Stewart 2005; also Hoem 2005; Pool 2008). It shows up historicity: ‘the manner in which persons(/institutions) operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating

the future' (Hirsch & Stewart, 2005, pp. 262). The fall of socialism through public protest for civic rights has in the political realm, as in others (Verdery, 1996), been taken as proof that democracy is the only right and just order in the present-day. In Germany the memory of the GDR's end and unification, which speak to democracy's triumph over German totalitarianism more generally, have become constitutive of political culture (Schwartz, 1991), so that this dichotomic understanding of authoritarian past versus free and democratic present now not only underpins narrative production in governmental *Aufarbeitung* but rather constitutes its central message.

This article will explore how the policy instrument of educational *Aufarbeitung* (cf. Bonnard & Jouhanneau, this issue) is realised at the local level in one eastern German state (*Bundesland*), dubbed Mittelland, to support government in the present and for an imagined future. It focuses on two specific projects which aimed to address memories of *Alltag*, everyday life in socialism, which is a contentious issue for policy-makers and historians in this realm. The article draws on research conducted during a two-year project in 2007-08.² The research was carried out by two researchers, the author (PI) and research associate Dr Sabine Kittel. It entailed anthropological participant observation and life-story interviews among employees of a group of institutions that belong to the 'Working Group *Aufarbeitung*', most of which were either part of Mittelland's government or funded by it. At the core of the group are the Office for Political Education (*Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung*; LpB) which is a part of Mittelland's State Chancellery, the state's *Stasi*-Commissioner (*Stasi-Beauftragter*; LStU), two local offices of the national Commissioner for *Stasi*-Files (*Bundesbeauftragter für Stasi-Unterlagen*; BStU), and two memorial museums, one of them the Former *Stasi* Prison. The group, during this period chaired by the LpB, coordinates activities, organises training courses and other projects for a range of groups, and

informs policymaking. Its remit concerns both German dictatorships, although during fieldwork its focus was clearly on the East German past.

Governing Memory through Narrative

As a policy instrument *Aufarbeitung* is a technique of ‘governance’: of conducting the conduct of others (cf. Foucault, 1991; Inda, 2007). Since this discourse concerns memory and thus important aspects of the self, it is moreover a technique in, what Foucault termed, the ‘governance of souls’ which delivers ‘the true discourse (...) to convince citizens of the need to obey (...) at least in that aspect (...) which is most difficult to obtain, which is precisely the citizens’ individual life and the life of their soul’ (2010, pp. 204-5). Foucault has shown that discourses frequently entail claims to truth in determining the legitimacy of knowledge and worldviews (e.g. 1977). As such discourse ascribes and categorizes subjects in a way that is non-negotiable, whilst narrative engages listeners who can identify with its subject positions (Franklin 1990). For *Aufarbeitung* to achieve its policy goals of convincing individuals to reconsider their memories of life in socialism in light of the master-narrative of the dictatorship to transform social memory into a remembrance of state oppression, narratives created within this wider discursive field have to be persuasive. Persuasion is a rhetorical task which, so Carrithers (2012; cf. Strecker & Tyler, 2012), underpins all social life as individuals seek to convince themselves and others of the truth of certain ideas and to affect a response. Good - convincing and engaging – narratives are usually linear and based in a certain moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001) employing rhetorical figurations, such as metaphors and tropes. In narrative production actors moreover draw on a repertoire of culturally available scripts that fall into familiar genres, whether comedy or tragedy, and that follow certain themes, such as betrayal or struggles for civic rights (Bruner, 1991). Following Bruner, genres and themes suggest the use of certain symbols and emblems, such

as the *Stasi*-file has come to signify GDR-time political oppression. However, as Ochs and Capps (2001) have shown, not all story-telling is so linear or predictable.

Everyday experiences, for example, are often ambiguous and individuals use collaborative story-telling - with friends, colleagues, spouses - to try and resolve whatever just happened. Such 'living narratives' are constructed as tellers go along changing storylines, turning over ideas as they are challenged by interlocutors, and often end without conclusion as another aspect of life intervenes. As such they provide 'the most likely medium to air unresolved life-events' (ibid. 7). Yet, as the authors point out, there remains 'the desire to sheathe life experiences with a soothing linearity and moral certainty' which stands in tension with 'the desire for deeper understanding and authenticity of experience' (ibid. 56). Master-narratives, such as that of the GDR-as-dictatorship which serves to exemplify the content of this discourse, tend towards linearity and categorical and moral certainty to increase their interpretive suggestiveness, which puts them in contrast with the authenticity and indeterminacy of individual recollections that often concern everyday life. It is therefore unsurprising that memories of the everyday are an important topic for *Aufarbeitung*.

Addressing these recollections allows institutions to better connect to their audiences as well as to counter nostalgia by addressing popular 'GDR myths' (e.g. Grossbölting, 2009). At the same time there are concerns that such memories may in turn 'water down' the discourse's important central messages, weaken its governmental effects, if not allow nostalgia to seep back in. Below we will see how local agents of *Aufarbeitung* approach this problematic which affords insights into the local, governmental production of memory to safeguard an imagined future.

Education in History for Democracy

The remit of most member institutions of the Working Group *Aufarbeitung* include education or *Öffentlichkeitsarbeit* - publicity work - to increase knowledge about the dictatorial regime, in addition to the support of victims, remembrance and commemoration. The local branches of the BStU and the two memorial museums, for example, have an explicit 'educational remit' (*Bildungsauftrag*). The memorial museum Former *Stasi*-Prison thus developed a framework for education in 2005, when with the passing of time and a new director focus moved from supporting victims of the MfS, whose remembrance remains a core task, to passing on knowledge about state repression to the next generation. According to this framework the memorial museum works with teachers by providing space and resources for project days, which may include a tour of the prison and talks by historic witnesses (*Zeitzeugen*), with the university on teaching degree programmes, and with the LpB and other institutions to provide professional development for school teachers. The memorial museum's overall goal is to transmit knowledge about 'oppression by the MfS' and the 'control exercised by the SED' and to inform about 'resistance and civic courage' (*Zivilcourage*) to further 'democratic values'. The framework sets these aims within the context of a society where memories of the GDR are transmitted primarily orally in families. According to the text this situation leads to lacking knowledge and furthers *Ostalgie*. Both the *Stasi*-Commissioner and the Commission for *Stasi*-files have developed similar documents on the support they can offer history teaching including materials on 'repression', 'resistance', 'refusal' and 'perpetratorship'.

The rhetoric used here suggests particular understandings of the past state and society through the use of metaphors, which 'make(s) a movement and lead(s) to a performance' (Fernandez 1986, pp. 8). Key tropes are 'oppression' and 'control' in relation to the GDR state, 'resistance' and 'refusal' with regard to GDR citizens and 'civic courage' and 'values' in relation to democracy. These metaphors describe the East German past as dictatorial and

thus illegitimate and the democratic present contrastingly as legitimate and desirable. As the framework of the memorial museum above moreover indicates, the East German past is not defined here for the sake of memory alone, but rather in order to ‘further democratic values’, so for present and future. This is made explicit in a text from Mittelland’s *Stasi*-Commissioner:

‘An engagement with the mechanisms of the dictatorship and knowledge about the repressive character of dictatorial systems as well as their impacts on life are an effective help against disenchantment with democracy and the threat of totalitarian thinking. Examples of resistance provide sources for positive identification.’³

Within the realm of *Aufarbeitung* in Mittelland education then has to be understood as an attempt to transmit a view of the GDR as characterised by political violence and resisted by the population in order to affect attachments to democracy. It is a highly purposeful engagement with the past that tells causally linear and categorically clear stories to have a bearing on how both society at large and individuals relate to the present. This was moreover motivated by concerns about eastern Germans lacking civic skills in the present which Mittelland’s government saw most clearly expressed in the appeal of Neo-Nazi groups to the (primarily) young men, often in the state’s deprived rural areas, and during fieldwork more specifically a worrying low voter turn-out at recent local elections (for details see Gallinat, forthcoming).

Not only the memorial museum but the Working Group more widely was acutely aware of this generational change that brought familial memory to the fore. Anecdotal evidence had it that GDR history, the last topic of a chronologically organised curriculum, was quickly omitted from school teaching if time was tight. Members worried also that some

teachers did not wish to discuss this recent past, which was part of their own lives. Regarding families, their sense was that many parents were reluctant to broach the topic and/or would limit conversations to somewhat nostalgic common-places: that bread rolls used to be nicer back then, the health system better, or that everyone who wanted to had work. To counter a potential increase in nostalgic recollections due to this situation and to further young people's appreciation of the democratic order, the group decided to increase its efforts to affect school education.

Members of the group therefore met in June 2007 at the *Stasi*-Commission in Tillberg to discuss the re-organisation of an annual training course for history teachers that had recently failed to attract sufficient numbers. The meeting in a leafy suburb of Tillberg was attended by Frau Wolf, responsible for teacher training and the GDR past at the LpB, *Stasi*-Commissioner Schumacher, whose institution took the lead, and another of his staff, and the director of the memorial museum Former *Stasi*-Prison Franke; Sabine attended from the research team.

In discussion, the group established quickly that they all considered a teacher training event on East German History worth organising together. A draft programme for a potential two day event, supplied by trained historian Franke, was briefly considered. This included the topics of 'State Security Police', the 'dictatorship' and the 'everyday', as well as 'democracy' and 'system-comparison'. The second day would focus on learning and teaching methods. Schumacher's own, verbal suggestions were similar. He proposed to highlight how the topics of the 'State Security Police' and 'the everyday' interlink and to showcase teaching approaches of 'talks, excursions, literature and witness testimonies'. Although the group seemed happy with the ideas, at this meeting the limited finances, and additional partners, primarily to raise more funds, remained at the forefront of discussion. Noteworthy is the inclusion of the GDR everyday in this first discussion.

The GDR Everyday in Aufarbeitung

Proponents of critical approaches to the GDR past often assume memories of the everyday to be nostalgic. Recollections of the everyday are seen to concern for example those superior bread rolls, better health system, education, which in their brevity seem to point to apolitical views of life in the GDR. Thus when a commission, consisting of historians and civil rights' campaigners, suggested in 2007 that a new all-German Memorial Concept (Deutscher Bundestag, 2008) would include 'the GDR everyday', discussion was rife at the publicly held parliamentary debate (also Sabrow et al, 2007). It highlighted a number of particular concerns of the invited experts all of whom were historians. For example, although the concept's draft text stated clearly that comparison of the two historical periods was to be treated with much caution, historians with expertise especially on the Third Reich asked why the GDR everyday should be included when it had never been seen legitimate to include it in remembrance of the Third Reich and the holocaust. Similarly Klaus Schroeder, head of the Research Network 'SED-state' (Free University Berlin), and Joachim Scholtyseck (Bonn), one of the experts whose expertise straddled the Third Reich and the GDR, argued that the everyday had little place in publicly funded structures, which should always forefront the remembrance of victims. If anything, it might be justifiable to portray 'German division' and 'the dictatorship *in the everyday*', it was said. Proponents of the inclusion of the everyday included Martin Sabrow, the head of the Research Centre for the Recent Past (Postdam) who had led the previous commission. Another protagonist was Stefan Wolle, a colleague of Schroeder's, and the only academic at the public debate who experienced political oppression in the GDR when he lost his University place and was demoted to work as handyman for a number of years in the 1970s.⁴ They contrastingly argued that social history was a necessary aspect of history-writing; that it allowed showing how the dictatorship functioned and was reproduced

in society. This understanding is usually described with the tropes *durchherrschte Gesellschaft*, the ‘thoroughly controlled society’ or ‘life in the dictatorship’, which emphasise the dictatorial character of the socialist regime. In the finalised concept section c), ‘the GDR everyday’ in the draft, was thus entitled ‘society and everyday’ (Deutscher Bundestag 2008) pointing towards a social history instead of an attempt to memorialise everyday life. Since then, two publicly funded exhibitions on *Alltag* have been developed in Berlin, at the Tränenpalast and the Kulturbrauerei. These two sites mirror the longer standing memorial museums to MfS oppression by focusing on the intrusion of political violence into everyday lives (Jones, 2015).

Bruner (1991) explains that narrative’s genericness, that is the tendency to play to familiar scripts when producing stories, also has the power to seduce listeners into overcome understandings. If political actors within governmental *Aufarbeitung* have become used to associating the topic of the everyday with nostalgic and apolitical views, they may overlook alternative understandings. And such apolitical views would threaten to confuse the clear categorisations and moral certainty of narratives of *Aufarbeitung*. This begs the question how the Working Group decided to incorporate issues of the everyday in its teacher training event.

A Teacher Training Event on ‘Central Historical Events’: Re-Interpreting the Everyday

The second meeting regarding the teacher training course took place about one month after the first, again at the *Stasi*-Commissioner’s offices now with an increased number of participants. The original three institutions have been joined by the memorial museum Border Checkpoint and the Commissioner for *Stasi*-files. The Institute for Education and Teacher Training had also come on board and would provide the majority of funding but their representative was unable to attend.

The programme had moved on considerably since June. Under the title ‘Dealing with central events of GDR history in school lessons’ it centred on three events: the popular uprising on 17th June 1953, the building of the Berlin Wall on 13th August 1961 and the autumn of 1989. It begins with a talk by a professor of history from the local University on current historical knowledge on these three events, followed by a talk on ‘learning and teaching methods’ from a lecturer in education, and another talk by Franke on ‘teaching outside school: working with memorials’. After the presentations the participants were to divide into workshop groups to develop teaching materials on one of the events. There was no more mention of the GDR everyday in this programme. Instead of tackling the topic head on, the Working Group had decided for an event that was in line with a history teaching that focuses on incidents and dates. The everyday remained present only implicitly, through the use of the experiences of ‘ordinary people’ to explore these historical events. The approach taken here was akin to that taken in the exhibitions at the Tränenplast and Kulturbrauerei, which focus on the ‘extraordinary experiences’ of repression and state intrusion into the lives of ‘ordinary people’ (Jones, 2015, pp. 227).

The three events that had been chosen here were simultaneously constructed as significant to a particular story of the GDR. This portrays this past as dictatorial in keeping with the discourse of *Aufarbeitung* in Mittelland: the popular uprising against the socialist state in June 1953 developed in the wake of post-war deprivation and low wages, and was militarily suppressed by the Soviet Army. The fortification of the inner-German border in 1961 is emblematic of rising state control over a population ‘which had been voting with its feet’ as the state’s Ministerial President was to put it at a commemorative ceremony later that year; and the Berlin Wall fell due to a mass social movement against the regime and for freedom and democracy. There are other key-events that are not chosen, such as the foundation of the GDR state in 1949, collectivisation in 1952 or the first free elections in

1990. These events are less emblematic to the vernacular narrative emerging here of an SED-dictatorship that controlled a population which continuously strove for democratic rights succeeding in 1989.⁵

Beyond questions of substance, the draft programme links to existing resources: for all three events teaching materials and expertise were already in place. During the 1953 uprising Tillberg's *Stasi*-prison was conquered by protestors and over two hundred political prisoners freed, many of whom were able to make their way to West Germany. The locally significant event has been documented by the memorial museum Former *Stasi*-Prison, the *Stasi*-Commissioner and the Commissioner for *Stasi*-files. The memorial museum Border Checkpoint has expertise with regard to the border's fortification in 1961. Both the *Stasi*-Commissioner and the Commissioner for *Stasi*-files have accessible materials on the *Wende* of 1989, and the documentary centre of the Citizen Initiative, which is affiliated with the Former *Stasi*-Prison, hosts a permanent exhibition on the autumn of 1989. So whilst it seems clear that the selection of dates suit the narrative-production of *Aufarbeitung* in Mittelland, it is moreover predicated upon existing expertise allowing judicious use of resources that are in themselves an outcome of ongoing 're-working'. This shows up the local historicity of the discourse within which narratives then seem relatively immune to change.

The final agenda point of this second meeting was the question of a cultural entertainment on the evening of the first day. Neumann raises the question and makes a couple of suggestions, one a novel and the other a documentary. Grabowski from the border memorial suggests another film about a young East German border guard, who struggles with the pressures of service, develops a relationship to a local girl whose brother seeks to flee the country thus working through a range of conflicts (*An die Grenze*, 2007, 'to the border'), which most seem to favour. But suddenly a disagreement erupts between two colleagues about what kinds of film may be acceptable at such an event.

It is likely that an aside comment from Neumann - that even though a movie is a good choice there are certain movies he would not show - started this. Neumann particularly dislikes the movie *Sonnenallee* (Haußmann, 1999); a popular film that follows the trials and tribulations of four adolescent men providing a quaint and caricatured picture of life in 1970s East Berlin. He considered it to be historically incorrect, plain 'awful', and in any case 'unsuitable'. Head of the Commission for *Stasi*-files in Tillberg, Fuhr, however was taken aback by this categorical rejection, which reminded him of GDR time censorship. He explained that it was not up to this group to judge what is and is not allowable in fiction or to decide who may be allowed to watch what. Neumann defends his position with reference to young people's lack of historical knowledge and perception of the GDR as a 'fun society'. In his opinion, there is no need to reinforce this view with their choice of film: 'it is not my GDR that's represented in that movie', he adds. Adding persuasive force to his argument by presenting himself as a *Zeitzeuge*, a 'moral witness' who endured suffering (cf. Margalit, 2002), he notes that he 'experienced repression' and '*that* movie made light of it'. Fuhr argues in contrast that works of fiction cannot be historically correct in every aspect.

Given that the group had already settled the question of entertainment this seems an odd conflict. Yet it reveals that the linear certainty of vernacular narratives in *Aufarbeitung* can at times be contentious and how such contestations pertain to individual memories and convictions where, for eastern Germans at least, they may become pressing concerns. Neumann and Fuhr belong to the same generation of eastern Germans and both experienced difficulties with the regime. As an adolescent with a Christian family background, Neumann had felt increasingly under the watchful eyes of the MfS. The *Stasi* made an attempt to recruit him as an Informal Employee (IM), which he was able to avoid; the disconcerting incident has become a watershed memory for him. As a young man Fuhr had had an anti-authoritarian streak which caused him to regularly encounter limitations although he was not put through

direct encounters with the *Stasi* as a result. Both men are now making arguments based in their not too dissimilar experiences but in contrasting ways. Neumann contests the story he feels the movie *Sonnenallee* presents in a bid to protect the moral certainty and causal linearity of the teacher training event, and beyond that the master-narrative of the dictatorship, whose moral stance he feels personally invested in. Like some of the historians at the parliamentary debate, who argued for an inclusion of the everyday in the memorial concept, historically trained Fuhr sees less danger in opening some of the discourse's categorical certainties. His concern is rather with the interpretive pre-determination with which the past appears to be treated by some of his colleagues. This he perceives as reproducing the authoritarian and controlling structures of the socialist state he rejects. After some back and forth the disagreement settles. Neumann gladly summarises their agreed choice, the film 'To the border': 'a love-story that also shows the harsh reality', in keeping with the event's vernacular narrative of an SED-dictatorship that sought to control an unwilling population.

The teacher training workshop came to portray the GDR as a forceful regime that was rejected by the population and eventually overcome by civic strive. As Bruner (1991) explains, this theme suggests particular emblems, which are here moments of repression like the building of the Berlin Wall and of popular resistance such as the uprising in 1953. The potentially disruptive power of memories of the everyday was controlled by interpreting the issue as the extraordinary memories of ordinary people, which supported the event's theme of repression and resistance. Through the binary logic of illegitimate past versus legitimate present the story sets up the eventual failure of the socialist regime and triumph of the democracy that people had long striven for, which re-evaluates present-day civil liberties as achievements that now have to be safeguarded. Although this rather tight logic is not uncontentious, it was maintained at this event because: it seemed to be the most persuasive

and thus effective for government; it could be realised with existing resources when money and time was limited; and it supported the discourse's moral messages which are intertwined with the individual lives and fates of some of its producers.

Teaching Army Officers, About the Everyday

The issue of the everyday was approached more explicitly at another event organised by the Working Group *Aufarbeitung*, a two-day long educational course for members of the federal army (*Bundeswehr*). The day was co-organised by the LpB and the memorial museums Border Checkpoint and Former *Stasi*-Prison. Attendees were a group of officers from a local regiment, the majority of whom was eastern German and a considerable number had started their military career in the East German army NVA. Entitled '*Stasi*, NVA and border-regimes' the workshop was to focus on the armed security forces of the GDR giving current soldiers a historical perspective on their work.

The course's programme was largely in keeping with this title. It began with an opening address by the director of the memorial museum Border Checkpoint which included an introduction to the former border crossing. For illustration he told the life-story of a young man who after imprisonment in the GDR and release to West Germany facilitated escapes and removed East German border enforcements as evidence of human rights abuses, and was shot dead at one such attempt. The remainder of the day was spent in small group work, and presentations, on four topics: border security; escape; passport control, and displacement. In the late afternoon attendees explored the Border Checkpoint and specifically the GDR-time border-enforcements. The second day, then at the Former *Stasi*-Prison, was dominated by talks including one by the memorial's director about the former prison, a presentation by a local *Zeitzeuge* - a lady now in her seventies who had been in political imprisonment for

thirteen years in the late 1940s to 1950s, and a talk about the NVA by a military historian, all interspersed with time for discussion which was amply used.

During the two days the topic of the everyday in socialism came up twice, first during the opening address. After presenting the life-story of the escapee turned political activist, mentioned above, head of the memorial museum Schneider, turns to address the officers ‘as fathers’. He talks about East German parents’ difficulties who, due to the threat of *Stasi* surveillance, had to teach their children to lie and to use ‘double standards’. He explains that teachers would ask children what the Sandman looked like or the clock of the evening news to deduce whether the family watched West, instead of East, German TV.⁶ Parents had to prepare their children by telling them to lie, which, to his mind, was the worst thing a state could force parents to do, who would always thrive to bring their children up as morally proper individuals. More in the vein of a moralising plea, the injunction is left uncommented; the four small group leaders introduce themselves and lead into the next activity.

This seeming mixture of an educational and historical - which is often assumed to be factual - approach with one that is emotive and moralising, is mirrored in the discourse of *Aufarbeitung* more generally. From the outset in the mid-1990s *Aufarbeitung*, and at the time the two parliamentary enquiry commissions (Beattie, 2008), was to incorporate both historical re-working and commemoration (Sabrow, 2007). In this vein many institutions of *Aufarbeitung* include both historical research and remembrance in their remit. In educational initiatives these twin goals, which are not always easily reconciled, fall together in the aim of preventing repetition, as they do in memorial museums (Williams, 2007, 131). As Williams observes these often ‘purport to be morally guided’ (ibid.), something that museums usually avoid in favour of less value-laden documentation. It thus seems that the need to ‘govern souls’ (Foucault, 2010) for a future in democratic freedom increases the pressure on interlocutors in the realm of *Aufarbeitung* to achieve persuasion. This may prompt some to

favour the emotive arguments this discourse already encapsulates over a more neutral presentation, when presented with a captive audience. Yet, as Strecker and Tyler (2012) point out, powerful rhetoric is not always successful. Overly emotive or categorically overdetermined narratives may also alienate listeners who feel that such representations are at odds with their memories of their lives (Gallinat, forthcoming).

On the second day of the course issues of everyday life in socialism were raised even more explicitly. The second talk of the day by historian Stefan Wolle (see above), a last-minute addition to the programme, concerned memories of the everyday in historical accounts of the GDR. Wolle developed his talk by discussing several tropes that are connected to positive perceptions of East Germany, which he links to repressive aspects of political rule. For example, he mentions the sense of social security ‘back then’ that many people hold dear, which is usually explained with the wide availability of vocational training and near one hundred per cent employment rates, which were however, so Wolle, intertwined with political control of access to education and occupations. Similarly, he goes on, the regime presented itself in a convincing manner as safeguarding peace, which enabled authorities to cast regime-critics, even the churches, as endangering the peace that was of great importance to a post-World War society. Course participants follow the arguments attentively and several attendees raise their hands as soon as it is time for discussion. This turns quickly to the question of the East German school system which is often perceived as more successful and rigorous than present-day approaches to education. Soon there are comments that the *Abitur* (highest school qualification) is ‘not worth much these days’. The conversation is redirected at this point by the military historian, Matthias Rogg, who had joined the session. He reminds the audience that, for example, access to higher education was severely limited and determined by political rather than academic merit. Speaking confidently

in the manner of a higher ranking army official, he returns people's thinking to the event's central message of the GDR as a repressive state.

Over afternoon coffee Sabine (Sabine Kittel, see page xx) enquires with the regiment's education officer whether he had found the course useful. He is not entirely satisfied. Specifically the talk on the GDR everyday had not fitted the brief, to his mind. He explains that he organises such courses every year, and he had envisioned this event to deal with the East German army, the border-regime and State Security Police, so in short with the armed forces and questions of security. That would have been of more interest to his staff than a talk on the East German everyday life, he concludes. As one of the presenters joins them conversation turns to the question of what topic could be considered in the final session.

At this event it seems that the local organisers used the opportunity of a captive audience to address the issue of memories of everyday life in the GDR head-on, seemingly at the expense of the event's agreed remit. The topic is used to connect to individuals by calling on their own recollections (and their social roles as fathers), but not to cultivate these, rather to put misperceptions right. Especially in Wolle's talk topics are chosen that are commonly regarded as indicative of the rose-tinted nostalgia that *Aufarbeitung* in general, and the Working Group in particular, seek to counter, and linked explicitly to repressive facets of socialist rule. The narrative of the 'thoroughly controlled society' that is thus presented gains validity through the presenter's status as a historian lending it truth value. Whilst it could be of interest here to discuss the life-stories of the academics involved, of greater concern to the aim of this article are the decisions taken by its organisers regarding the event's content. After all, both Rogg and Wolle were invited.⁷ The organisers' choices and the interactions during the day furthermore highlight the seductive powers of the discourse's master-narrative (Bruner, 1991) vis-à-vis its own producers, and the potential for misunderstandings this creates. Following the discourse's binary logic when participants begin to compare GDR time

school education to today, this is immediately understood as a nostalgic *revaluation* of the past and *devaluation* of the present, instead of a potentially legitimate critique of falling educational standards. The military historian's response, which focused on Higher Education instead of the Secondary Education discussed by attendees, recreates the narrative binary of illegitimate past versus legitimate present. Within this governmental realm then a considerable predetermination regarding the character of the past GDR leads not only narrative production but also guides actors' interpretations of their audiences' arguments and motivations.

Conclusion

The discourse of *Aufarbeitung* is predicated on a view of the past GDR as dictatorial through its master-narrative of the GDR-as-dictatorship. This premise stems from a longer-term West German tradition of regarding the post-WWII state as the legitimate counterpart to the totalitarian Third Reich and thus of democracy as an achievement to be protected and the only means to counter dictatorial thrive. The East German story is developed in a similar vein and put to the same political usage. Education about the SED-dictatorship is, through a simplistic binary of illegitimate past versus legitimate present, seen as a crucial technique in fostering attachments to the democracy that will ensure the nation's future in freedom. In this sense the re-working of the past has become a technology of government that aims to 'make up citizens' capable of living in a free and pluralist society (Rose & Miller 1992, pp 272). This governmental purpose has powerful effects on the stories that are and can be told. Approaches to the GDR everyday serve to highlight some of the tensions that arise as a consequence. Often regarded as a source of nostalgic reminiscing, which according to actors in this realm trivialises the past and whitewashes the repressive regime, it is seen as a topic that should be dealt with to derail apparent misconceptions, which was the primary aim of the

presentations at the event for army officers, but that has to be managed carefully, as we saw with the teacher training event, given its potential to dilute the central message of the dictatorship. In Mittelland this led to a number of seemingly contradictory situations. In the case of the teacher training workshop nods to everyday life in the GDR were reinterpreted to support an unambiguous narrative of the past state as oppressive and eventually overcome by a movement for civic rights through a focus on emblematic key events. Here the use of ordinary people's everyday life experiences without the explicit context of extraordinary historical events could have reinforced, so the fear, a sense that the GDR everyday was unpolitical and allow for reminiscing. At a workshop for army officers in contrast, which aimed to discuss structures of the East German armed forces, the everyday is pulled into discussions on two occasions in an almost missionary drive to reform participants' thinking, due to the underpinning conviction that a recognition of the past as illegitimate will prompt individuals to embrace present-day democracy. Here the format was not the use of memories of the everyday but contrastingly a lecture-style problematization of aspects of everyday life to educate the audience about the context of the dictatorship on which all those aspects, of social security, education depended, according to the presenters. It was clear during fieldwork that the GDR everyday had become a hot topic for *Aufarbeitung* and actors both at the national level and in Tillberg increasingly felt the need to address it. The question was always how to do so without causing or allowing any kind of romanticised associations that would challenge the binary logic of illegitimate past versus free, democratic present. These attempts moreover bring into sharp relief that in the political and instrumental discourse of *Aufarbeitung* much more than the past is at stake. Rather, narrative-production here concerns an all-German narrative of *becoming* a free and democratic society through *overcoming* totalitarianism, which points to an imagined future within which democracy has been

protected by engaged and interested citizens whose souls have been successfully governed (Foucault, 2010) in the present.

Endnotes:

¹ The use of history education to rally support for democracy and the German constitution also occurs in relation to the Nazi-past (Neumann, 2000; Pearce, 2008), although some of these dynamics changed with unification (cf. Niven, 2006).

² The research was made possible by an ESRC grant (RES0061-23-0035). To maintain informants' anonymity, pseudonyms are used for personal names, places, the *Bundesland* and institutions unless they are generic titles (such as the LpB). References to documents produced by these institutions are also omitted. Further information can be obtained from the author.

³ See endnote 2 above.

⁴ More than social trajectories (these four experts were all in their fifties), the experts' epistemological concerns illuminate these differences. Both Sabrow and Wolle maintain an interest in meso- and micro-level approaches, social history and the history for the everyday. Schroeder is known for macro-structural approaches that emphasise the state. Sabrow is moreover a critic of aspects of the politicisation of historical research in Germany (2007).

⁵ Mitter & Wolle (1993) similarly portray the state as in perpetual conflict with the populace inevitably leading to its fall in 1989, which is portrayed as a continuation of 1953 (Fulbrook, 1997).

⁶ Both East and West German news shows began by showing a clock counting down the start of the show, but each looked slightly different. The same applies to the children's bedtime show of the Sandman.

⁷ Rogg is the younger of the two, then in his forties. He combined a military with an academic career and has published on the 'GDR military and society' (2008).

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