

eventually form a single and uniform idea of who they are and what they should do. Rather, it seems probable that the Russian speakers will remain divided, forming various identities and corresponding strategies.

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## Identities in Transition

East Germany  
from the 1980s  
to the Present

Stefan Wolff  
University of Keele

## INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall collapsed under the pressure of a popular protest movement in East Germany. Less than a year later, on October 3, 1990, Germany was reunited and a gigantic transformation project was launched which was intended to bring the former German Democratic Republic to West German standards within a short period of time. The political and legal aspects of this transformation worked out rather smoothly, yet economically the five new federal states are still lagging behind. However, what has given rise to a heated public debate about the success or failure of German unification is the alleged persistence of a distinct East German identity which is said to manifest itself in a 'clinging on' to values of the former collectivist socialist system which are incompatible with the new individualistic, democratic,

and social market economy of the united Germany. I will argue in the following that what is often referred to as 'Ostalgie', namely the seemingly nostalgic glorification of the former East German society, is in fact one way chosen by many former East Germans to come to terms with, and to provide a certain continuity to, their individual and collective identities vis-à-vis of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic. However, as this happens in the light of the experiences they have had since unification, the attempts to acquire a new social competence appropriate for the conditions of the unified Germany express the claim of the former citizens of East Germany to be entitled to create these conditions alongside and together with West Germans.

## POLITICAL IDENTITY AS AN ANALYTICAL CONCEPT

Identity is a closely knit set of values, norms, ideals, and interests which actors consciously share and from which they derive their course of action. Identity is a product of collective as well as individual historic and current experience and, as such, it is equally rooted in public events and private experiences and has to be re-constructed constantly according to such past and present experiences and their interpretation. Identity provides controlling guidelines for social behavior and it ensures behavioral coherence by systematically structuring values and rational considerations (Pye 1965: 7).

Any individual or collective identity is always dependent upon, and changing with, a concrete historical context in both a wider social and a narrower individual sense. In turn, differences in identities, that is, differences in values, norms, ideals, and interests, account for the fact that individual and collective actors, although facing identical socio-economic and political-structural conditions, make different choices and take different courses of action. As such, identities also reflect the way in which actors come to terms with their own biographies and their social environment and how they relate self-expectations to social expectations (cf. Habermas 1975: 96). This mutual relationship between actor and social environment is the place where individual identities are negotiated and where collective identities emerge as a blend between individual and cultural systems, that is, where individual identities integrate into a group-specific concept distinct from the perception of others and by others.

An individual as well as a collective identity, then, is the mesh of all those specific values, norms, ideals, and interests that allow individual and collective actors to interpret, and assign meaning to events and processes in both normative and pragmatic ways. Social movement theory refers to this as 'frame', that is, an interpretative scheme that simplifies and condenses the social environment outside the specific group by selectively highlighting and interpreting objects, situations, actions, and events (Snow and Benford 1994: 137). Such frames tend to provide problem identification as well as potential problem resolutions. A shared collective identity provides leaders with three essential capabilities: first, the ability to generate loyalty and commitment to the collectivity; second, the ability to foster an awareness of problems and their potential resolutions; and, based on this, third, the ability to create a readiness to engage in collective action for the realization of collective goals. Participation in such collective action offers the individual not only the potential benefits implied in the resolution of the commonly identified problem, but also an enhanced sense of identity through the public pronouncement of his or her own status and affiliation with others (Friedman and McAdam 1994: 157). Thereby, the size of the respective collective can vary. The following case study refers to two basic types of collectivities: small circles of (intellectual) dissidents and a population majority outside the political class and the opposition groups.

#### OPPOSITIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

The major form of opposition to the state socialist system in East Germany was emigration. All those people who, for economic and/or political reasons, wanted to leave the country, were thus expressing an individual dissatisfaction with East German life opportunities and political conditions. This form of opposition had existed since the state's foundation in 1949, but became an increasingly political issue after the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall. In focusing on the individual right to emigrate, it did not amount to organized group activity and was, with few exceptions (most notably, the Initiative Peace and Human Rights), not accepted by the opposition groups as a legitimate form of opposition. These groups saw the decision to leave the country as a personal choice and did not condemn it; however, they considered it different from a political commitment to reform East German society which presupposed physical presence in the GDR (Meckel and Gutzeit 1994: 66). Thus, those who wanted to leave the country because of their fundamental opposition to its political system gave no significant input to the more organized opposition groups, which did not oppose the socialist system in the GDR in general, but rather a number of policies and conditions.

Their general aim was the reform, not destruction, of GDR socialism (Pollack 1994d: 14; Jander and Voß 1995: 902).

These reform-oriented opposition groups began to emerge in the early 1960s. The first group of people who joined together in their discontent with a particular policy were a number of conscientious objectors, reacting to the 1962 introduction of conscription in East Germany. Focusing on the individual right to refuse military service and instead to do some sort of community or social service, they were supported by the Protestant Church in efforts to achieve legal reforms that would have allowed for conscientious objection. In 1972, they founded the "Peace Seminar Königswalde" (named after a small town in the GDR) and, by doing so, they introduced a very important organizational form for opposition groups in future years (Franke 1994: 17). In the late 1970s, another kind of opposition group developed from within the Protestant church: peace and environmental activists that had their roots in social work activities of the church in the early seventies (Franke 1994: 18). Their concern was primarily with 'global problems' of war and peace and environmental destruction, rather than with 'domestic' necessities for political and social reform – although the 1978 introduction of compulsory pre-military education in East German schools was among the triggering events. Generally, the motivating factors for these groups to organize did not come from inside the GDR, but were of a global, cross-bloc nature. They included the accelerating arms race in the early eighties, increasing cold war tensions (deployment of nuclear missiles in both East and West Germany), and growing awareness of environmental problems (Club of Rome Reports, Global 2000 Report) (cf. Jander and Voß 1995: 907). Recognizing and accepting individual responsibility for (anonymous) collective action, these groups and their members insisted on the individual right to contribute to global causes (Bruckmeier 1993b: 19). Their dissatisfaction with the politics of both Eastern and Western Germany led to a rejection of claims to be a political opposition and prompted attempts to act as mediators between the two political blocs. Even though they criticized the militarization of East German society, they explained it in terms of bloc confrontation, and they did not seek to change this militarization process only within the GDR.

It was only in the early eighties, and increasingly after the failure of the peace movement in 1985, that a new approach was followed: a combination of demands for world peace and domestic peace. Besides these topics, new political issues appeared on the agenda of the opposition groups: focusing on internal problems of the GDR, the problem of human rights, and the respect of those rights by the state, became important. The opposition realized that the guarantee of individual and political liberties was impossible without a simultaneous democratization of society. The emerging identity of the opposition groups was determined by specific aims and values which each of the groups had adopted for itself in accordance with its primary focus. Although before the mid-eighties these groups were mostly apolitical and under-organized and did not effectively engage in networking with one another, they had a number of common features that had developed since the early 1960s. These eventually made it possible for them to gain a common identity, although only for a brief period of time. These common features were: a partial identification with certain actual values of the political system in East Germany, such as social security, social justice and equality, and anti-fascism; and an identification with the proclaimed values of socialism, such as progress and continuation of progressive traditions, citizen participation, peace, peaceful coexistence, and solidarity. In addition to these 'group-external' (GDR-specific as well as global) objectives, the groups also cultivated 'group-internal' goals. These, in turn, partly

reflected external ambitions, such as the longing for an ability to act in a wider social context, the introduction of democratic procedures to activities and discussions within the group, and a general openness towards new members and new ideas (Elvers and Findeis 1994: 99).

The explicitly left-wing, reform-communist approach the groups favored was an expression of a predominant political romanticism among them, which manifested itself in an escape from political reality into inner emigration. They avoided any risk of confrontation with the state by means of adjustment and compromise, turning instead to the private sphere and neglecting the need to analyze the ruling system critically (Jander and Voß 1995: 903). One of the reasons political romanticism was so influential among these opposition groups was the lack of a democratic national tradition in (East) Germany. Another was the belief that socialism was a viable social system that, even in its state-socialist form, was capable of reform. The Protestant church applied a similar strategy (Bruckmeier 1993b: 17–19) with its orientation towards *communication* and *participation* in public affairs, provided that a minimum of organizational and theological independence could be preserved. The focus on both communication and participation resulted in an identity common to most of the opposition groups: they did not see themselves as potential political parties but instead aimed at promoting a dialogue between the state and a mobilized population willing to participate actively in the democratic process yet to be established. These particular features of the opposition groups' identity became problematic when translated into mobilization and action, and proved to be a difficult basis for acting together. For a long time, individual group activity did not have political intentions to reform society; rather, it was aimed at delivering individual contributions to proclaimed values of the ideal of socialism with which most of the groups identified. There was only joint and nation-wide activity in response to state suppression of group activities. Not only did the groups have shared interests that were based on the common features of their identity, but they also acted in commonly accepted ways. The major objectives of the groups included the goal to act within the official legal boundaries and to appeal to proclaimed values and norms of the GDR's socialist society in order to ensure improvements of socialism, rather than its overthrow. This commitment to socialism, however, posed another difficulty for the groups' ability to command a large portion of the electorate beyond 1989 – none of them offered a potentially viable social alternative to the existing system for the majority of adjusted GDR-citizens, nor did they offer an alternative for those who identified with West German consumer society, i.e., those wishing to leave the country. By focusing on civic elements of political culture (such as public dialogue and liberalization), the economic situation – and with it the living conditions which most concerned the majority of the population – was almost entirely neglected by the opposition groups. Thus, the identity of the opposition groups increasingly distanced them from the victims of the social, economic, and political developments in the GDR (cf. Klein 1995: 1063).

### COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AMONG THE POPULATION

This identity of the various opposition groups proved to be of little attraction to a majority of the population. More generally, the status that came with this 'opposition' identity did not function as an incentive motivating widespread public participation, let alone activism (cf. Friedman and McAdam 1992: 157). The groups' political romanticism resulted in a general lack of trust in their competence to bring about any

change that would materially benefit the average GDR citizen, and the groups' ideas had very little impact (Pollack 1994d: 14; Jander and Voß 1995: 901). The emphasis on *communication* (between state and citizen) and *participation* (of the citizens in the political process) instead of withdrawal into privacy or emigration (Jander and Voß 1995: 905) did not resonate with a politically apathetic population that was guaranteed social security by the state in exchange for a minimum of demonstrated political compliance. Although the opposition groups and major parts of the population identified partly with the GDR, they did so for different reasons and this resulted in an even wider gap between them. The opposition groups, with their mostly reform communist approach, identified with those socialist values and ideals that had already been realized and believed in the possibility of reform within the socialist system in order to realize more of these values and ideals. The majority of the population, however, had adjusted to the system because they appreciated the social security provided by the state and identified with those aspects of society that provided for a more or less comfortable life and allowed for retreat to the private sphere.

The identity of the opposition groups, thus, did not correspond to the collective identity of a majority of GDR citizens, which was characterized by several factors: political compliance up to the degree necessary to be able to enjoy both social security and privacy; passivity in contributing to the political process in support of, or in opposition to, the system; an interest in an increased living standard measured against West Germany which was hoped the state could provide without necessitating any active involvement on the part of the citizens; and a strong feeling of solidarity and community. As part of this collective identity, identification with the state, as such, was only partially in national terms. The continuing attraction of West Germany, especially in terms of its average living standard, had a strong impact on East German identity, one which blended what was appreciated in the GDR and what was lacking in one German state but apparently possible in the other. Towards the end of the 1980s, something like a target identity came into being which expressed the growing economic and political disaffection with the East German situation and was strongly oriented towards the West (Köhler 1995: 1668). However, this did not result in an increasing desire for unification, let alone belief in the possibility of such a development. Until late 1989 and early 1990, improvement of life opportunities was sought within an East German state which was due to the, if only partial, identification with this state rather than the West German state.

Throughout the existence of East Germany until 1989, the level of collective political agency among the population had remained extremely low – with the exception of the events on June 17, 1953. The tacit agreement between the communist rulers and their population was that political involvement was restricted to periodical ritual acclamations of the regime in exchange for a secured living standard. In addition, East German experiences with collective political agency in the GDR (June 17, 1953) as well as those of other countries in the East Bloc (Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1980 onwards) did not encourage hopes for similar attempts at regime change.

### POLITICAL IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY DURING THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

Towards the end of the 1980s, the GDR was threatened by three simultaneous, self-intensifying crises (Bruckmeier 1993b: 26ff): a political crisis, an economic crisis, and a social crisis. The political crisis was the result of a general unwillingness and inability to allow for reforms, which the population had hoped for in the light of Gorbachev's

policies, and of the simultaneously decreasing ability to manage an ever more complex and differentiated society as a single organization (Pollack 1994d: 14). These crises became most apparent in the 1989 local elections. The opposition groups, which had long been concerned about the lack of democracy and public communication, took this event as an opportunity to become actively politically engaged. After an attempt to nominate independent candidates failed, the groups organized a nationwide control of the vote counting and reported election frauds to public prosecutors, though without any success at the time (Jander and Voß 1995: 908). By doing so, they continued to contrast proclaimed ideals to GDR reality, but this time on a national level and not within the geographical limits of single group activity. This commitment and the repressive response by the state organs increased widespread politicization and led, during the summer of 1989, to the emergence of political platforms of opposition groups who were urging more vehemently than ever for public communication and citizen participation. The economic crisis manifested itself in the decreasing ability of the state to keep its promise of a continuing increase in the living standard among the population. Simultaneously, the destruction of the environment obviously increased. Both issues negatively affected the GDR citizens' quality of life. The economic crisis was closely linked to the social crisis of increasing disaffection with a socialist system: it was unable to satisfy popular demands for higher living standards and the freedom to travel.

All three crises meant that the collective identity of political passivity and complacency, which the majority of East Germans had adopted, began to become less and less attractive as the state was ever less able to deliver the promised rewards. As a result, when the opportunity presented by the opening of the Austrian-Hungarian border for East Germans arose, a massive wave of emigration shook East German society. With the party remaining silent in face of increasing confusion and unrest among the wider population, the opposition groups, the activities of which had been monitored by West German media for a long time (Heinze and Pollack 1994: 89) were seen as an alternative source of information or even an alternative public. Thus, the population initially turned to the opposition groups and made their pre-'Wende' existence and activities a symbol of popular protest (Pollack 1994b: 277). The groups themselves made no attempt to mobilize the public; on the contrary, as they were afraid of being made accountable for a potential violent escalation of the mass protests, the opposition groups withdrew from the public, media-effective participation in the mass demonstrations. They also preferred to act as mediators in a society-wide dialogue, a position they did not want to endanger (Pollack 1990: 301ff). Moreover, this reluctance of the opposition groups to participate in the mass movement explains why Berlin remains the center of group activity throughout the 'Wende', not only detached geographically from Leipzig (and to a lesser degree Dresden) but also in terms of organized protest (Bruckmeier 1993a: 60). The protest movement emerged spontaneously as a result of the power balance in East Germany: as soon as the crisis was full-blown and it became obvious that the political system was unable to fulfill its promises, the almighty political leadership could be held responsible for the situation and all blame directed at it (Pollack 1990: 276ff).

While the small number of opposition groups had been active for some years already, mass political activities were a new phenomenon in East Germany. Since the workers' protests in 1953 no widespread popular movement had challenged the state and the ruling communist party. Although dissatisfied with a variety of living conditions in the GDR, a majority of the population had adjusted to the political system and its economic conditions. Until the end of the 1970s, the percentage of people regarding the living conditions as good or very good had, on average, been twice as high as those regarding them as poor, and always more than 50 percent regarding them as mediocre. (For these

and the following figures see Köhler 1995: 1655ff.) After 1979 these figures were turned upside down. Despite a slight improvement in 1986-87, by 1989 almost three times more people were dissatisfied than satisfied. A similar development could be observed for attitudes towards the political system. Until 1978 the number of supporters was higher than that of opponents, with again about half of the population indifferent; this changed in 1979, and by 1989 almost four times more people considered themselves opponents than supporters of the political system. Thus, 1989 marks the year when both political as well as economic dissatisfaction reached record highs and eventually resulted in collective action against these conditions. The population only gradually became politicized against the political system of the GDR despite the fact that orientation towards political and economic conditions in West Germany had been consistently high.<sup>1</sup> It was only in 1989 that the yardstick 'living conditions in West Germany' was translated into political action as a result of the changed opportunity structure presented by policy changes in the Soviet Union and the examples set by Poland and Hungary. As a result, a wide-spread shift in one decisive feature of identity occurred: a shift away from passivity and retreat into privacy toward active and public political participation. This political activity, however, was still aimed at an improvement of living conditions within the GDR.

The mass protests already signal the emergence of a new political identity: GDR citizens started to see themselves as sovereign and masters of their own destiny. This identity gradually shifted its focus from reforms in the GDR (in order to approximate West German living standards) to German unification. The mass movement in Leipzig – the most active and conscious expression of political identity among the population during the 'Wende' – with its increasing support for German unification is the most obvious manifestation of this. Although initially a rather spontaneous movement, it soon came to carry all the characteristic features of conscious collective agency. It had clear and unifying objectives, namely an improvement in living conditions, an increase in political liberties, and the overthrow of the corrupt political leadership. Its course of action was through peaceful demonstrations involving ever greater numbers of people. The increasing attention to German unification clearly shows the impact of identity and historical contingency on collective agency: the choices made by the population were a specific response to the opportunity of German unification against the background of a particular structure of their identity shaped under the conditions of their socialization in East Germany. This identity involved a certain material orientation, the desire for political passivity in exchange for secured living conditions, and the inclination to accept the care-taking role of a political system endowed with the competence and legitimacy provided by forty years of successful political and economic development. The East German Christian Democrats together with two former opposition groups – the Demokratischer Aufbruch (Democratic Renewal) and the Christian Social Union – seemed to be more trustworthy representatives of the continuity with this tradition than the Social Democrats. This widespread perception among the East German population explains the more or less unexpected election victory of the Christian Democrats, the

1 Those indifferent towards the GDR's political system decreased by half, from 67 percent in 1973 to 32 percent in 1989, and of these, the overwhelming majority regarded the living conditions in West Germany to be better than in the GDR. At the same time, the number of people who had strong political interests but hardly identified themselves with East Germany rose from 19 percent in 1973 to 59 percent in 1989, while those politically interested and did identify themselves with East Germany, decreased from around 15 percent in the late seventies to nine percent in 1989.

defeat of the Social Democrats alongside with other former opposition groups, and the growing enthusiasm for German unification.

This development of the population's collective identity was very different from that of the opposition groups, and these differences explain why the former opposition groups were unable to command higher support during the elections. These differences in identity also reflect the difference in responses under the same political structural conditions. The objectives of the opposition groups were to establish a society-wide dialogue about the current crisis, to create opportunities for widespread popular participation in social reforms, and to introduce political and individual liberties and their constitutional guarantees within a reformed socialist society in the GDR (Rein 1989: 15–16; 34–37; 106–109; etc.). The opposition groups, due to their higher degree of organization compared to the rest of the population, were the nuclei around which popular protest could build and with the help of which it could be articulated (Bruckmeier 1993a: 42; Heinze and Pollack 1994: 89). This does not mean that the aims of the opposition groups and those of the majority of the population coincided. While the primary aim of the majority within the oppositional groups was still the establishment of a sphere of communication between state and population, the majority of the population were most interested in an improvement of the ever worsening economic situation in which they found themselves (Pollack 1994d: 14).

There was, however, a minimal consensus between the opposition groups and the population condemning the current situation and, above all, a consensus against the hegemonic rule of the communist party. The opposition groups were seen, and used, as facilitators of a dialogue between a declining political system and its representatives and a deeply dissatisfied population. The particular position of the opposition groups as neither leaders nor representatives of the masses (even though they were used to articulate protest and communicate with the ruling party) as well as their own view of their role, prevented them from actively struggling for power and a position of political influence (the most notable exception here being the later Social Democratic Party). Even after the Round Table was set up in December, 1989, the grass-roots democratic popular movement's concept of political participation prevailed among most groups, adhering to the concept of the round table as an alternative way to conduct the political process by means of reconciling adverse, antagonistic positions (Maaz 1991: 112).

The reformed former bloc parties (Christian Democrats, Liberal Democrats, and National Democrats, who had, together with the communist party, formed the so-called democratic bloc in Eastern Germany after 1945), in contrast, maintained their party-political identity. In the eyes of the GDR population, they managed to overcome the general competence deficit characteristic of almost all East German political actors, as they were adopted by their West German sister parties. The newly formed Social Democratic Party in the GDR and a minor conservative party, the DSU (German Social Union) were soon to enjoy this advantage as well. With the sudden possibility of German unification and, as a consequence, with the potential of satisfying demands for improved life opportunities, the population began to withdraw its initial support from the less coherently acting former opposition groups and turned to more promising political actors – the reformed former bloc parties, the new liberal and conservative parties, and the new Social Democratic Party. These parties were entrusted with the legitimacy and competence of their West German sister parties and their impressive and seemingly trustworthy leaders, such as chancellor Helmut Kohl and foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. They also seemed to be able to satisfy the increasing hope among a majority of East Germans that someone else would improve their living conditions for them. The possibility of participating actively in the project of social

reform seemed a more attractive perspective than what the opposition groups had to offer, and consequently, support for the opposition groups decreased. In an opinion poll carried out at the Leipzig Monday demonstrations, the support figures for the *Neues Forum* dropped from 70 percent in November, 1989 to only 47 percent in February, 1990, not to speak of the disappointing 1990 election results of the *Alliance 90* (the election alliance of three of the opposition groups) of only 2.9 percent of the overall vote (Haufe 1993: 120).

At a time when almost all achievements and values linked to the still existing GDR were being devalued and increasingly meaningless in the eyes of a population majority looking forward to a rapid unification and the promise of 'blooming landscapes' in Eastern Germany, the argument by the opposition groups for reforms within an independent GDR was a very obvious minority position. The possibility to regain the initiative and act jointly – which had been briefly achieved after October 4, 1989, with the foundation of the contact group of all opposition groups – was also diminished by arguments about the organizational structure and a lack of leadership (Heinze and Pollack 1994: 90). With the resulting increase in political and organizational differentiation among the opposition groups and German unification becoming the predominant election campaign issue, the initial advantages of the citizens' movement (loose framework of goals, dialogue orientated, grass-roots democratic approach) became a decisive disadvantage for their performance in the election: the lack of a comprehensive political program, the lack of charismatic leadership, and the lack of legitimacy and competence in the eyes of the electorate accounted for the defeat in the election in March, 1990. After the tearing down of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, the opposition groups had been confronted with an entirely different situation dominated by national issues and reunification, which they were not prepared to handle from either an organizational or programmatic point of view (Bruckmeier 1993a: 52). The very general demands of the opposition groups served as a framework in which a wide range of interests could be incorporated. With the realization of these interests, however, such generality turned out to become a decisive disadvantage in its lack of political vision and concrete social alternatives for identification and consequently for mobilization and action.

## DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE UNIFICATION

Despite the fact that former East Germans have had very different individual experiences since October 3, 1990, I contend that it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct a specific East German identity, defined as an identity regionally and historically distinct from that in former West Germany, on the basis of collective experience prior to, and after, unification.

The transformation process in the former GDR in the course of which the legal, political, economic, and social systems of former West Germany were introduced to the East, led to a serious identity crisis. Some examples of this transformation process include: the devaluation of all personal and social achievements in the former GDR; the biased approach to personal biographies and GDR history on the part of political actors from the West and the instrumentalisation of this history; the economic transformation and crisis resulting in high unemployment rates and a devaluation of work as part of a person's identity; the deconstruction of social relationships (increased individualization, different life styles, and increased social and economic competition); the disappointment following the artificially raised high expectations about German

unification; the wide range of theoretically possible choices, which were practically limited by material and informational constraints; the complexity of the new society and of social, administrative and political processes; and the inability to appreciate and embrace the majority of values offered from the 'new' society. Social competence was lost for the time being and with it the ability to interpret comprehensively and assign meaning to a wide variety of social and economic processes and political events. This identity crisis produced a number of compensation modes: first, an initial resignation and apathy, and in extreme cases even suicide; second, the attempt to identify completely with all new values, norms, and ideals, and the rejection of anything even remotely GDR-related; and third and most common, the examination of one's self and one's past in the GDR and the GDR in general with approaches ranging from critical evaluation to nostalgic appreciation of the past. This latter approach has generated a heated debate about the alleged glorification of the GDR, oftentimes termed 'Ostalgie'. With the actual unification in October, 1990, the core interests which prompted the drive to unification and which were derived from the desire for improved living conditions and increased life opportunities, had been satisfied for the moment, while at the same time only remotely familiar values of a liberal democracy (social market economy, party competition, high degree of individual liberty, independence and responsibility) were adopted. These immediate interests, once satisfied, ceased to function as cornerstones for identification and left behind them a vacuum which could not be easily filled by those new values, norms, ideals, and interests that the united Germany offered by way of introducing the West German model to the East.

Within this process, there seems to be hardly any room for the former opposition groups, which have become marginalized in the transformation process and now command only an insignificant proportion of the vote in East Germany above the local level. The gap between collective identity among the majority of former East Germans and the political identity of the former opposition groups has, if anything, become wider. The issues that the *Alliance 90/The Greens* (the party that emerged from the unification between the West German Green Party and the East German election alliance) stand for are far from popular in the East: neither is environmental protection seen as a priority in a situation where unemployment has reached an average level of about 20 percent in 1997, nor is the issue of the *Stasi* (former East German secret police) highly popular among a population that resents the fact that the public discourse about the GDR past in all its aspects has been, and still is, dominated by West Germans.

The more general problems the opposition groups encountered during the transformation process were similar to those that had become obvious as early as the run-up to the elections in March, 1990. Most goals they had were aimed at, and had been developed under, GDR conditions, and there were hardly any concepts related specifically to the time after the election. With goals either fulfilled or irrelevant, an important part of their identity was lost – lost not only for the opposition groups themselves, but also lost as a potential basis for identification on the part of supporters and subsequent mobilization. Apart from that, the consequences of the peaceful revolution of 1989–90 were different than those aimed at initially. The belated distancing of the opposition groups from socialism and its being discredited in the unification euphoria in 1990 deprived the opposition groups of an essential part of their legitimacy (Pollack 1994c: 270f). While before 1990, developments in other East European countries, especially in Hungary and Poland, demonstrated the possibility of democratization under socialist conditions, this source of legitimization for the East German opposition groups ceased to exist. In addition, the political situation in the totalitarian GDR system allowed a quantitatively small minority to achieve political

attention by symbolic action; the political system of united Germany, in contrast, is a system of party competition where much depends on the resources each party commands to present itself as being the most attractive among a broad range of political choices. The opposition groups lacked these resources both in terms of personnel and in terms of finances. While it was possible for the individual to feel superior vis-à-vis the rather simple, ineffective, and immobile system of the GDR, the highly complex political system of West Germany produced a feeling of inferiority. This experience influences the preparedness to engage in political activities as the potential impact of a citizens movement is considered low (Pollack 1994b: 283). And, finally, the members of the former opposition groups experienced the same social insecurity as the majority of former East Germans. For many, political activities could not remain a priority when jobs were threatened and rents rose. Many of the former activists, therefore, resigned from active politics, thus further increasing the lack of personnel (cf. Pollack 1994a: 303).

At the same time, the former East German population, including the former opposition groups and their members, faced, and still faces, a biased Western German approach towards the GDR and the role of the individual citizen within it, condemning the GDR and likewise everyone who finds anything good about it. Although there are certainly uncritical, whole-sale appraisals of the GDR and also significant political and economic interests involved, the above mentioned 'Ostalgie' is more properly described as an attempt to review the GDR past critically and, seeking historical continuity, to incorporate life histories and socialization experience in the GDR into a new identity within the united Germany. At close examination, it turns out that those issues and aspects of GDR life with which former East German citizens identified already before 1989, and which were part of the identity of the opposition groups as well, are among the core values named first by East Germans when asked about their nostalgic feelings. In 1990, 87 percent of East Germans assumed that the then still existing GDR was, compared to West Germany, superior in terms of women's rights, 65 percent said the same about social security, and 62 percent were of that opinion in terms of protection from crime. By 1995, these figures had changed as follows: women's rights superiority – 67 percent, social security – 92 percent, protection from crime – 88 percent (cf. *Der Spiegel* 1996: 64–70). In addition, an increasing number of people claimed in 1995 that the former GDR had provided better services in several areas, including professional and vocational training (70 percent in 1995 and 33 percent in 1990), education (64 percent and 28 percent), availability of apartments (53 percent and 27 percent), and health care (57 percent and 18 percent) (cf. *Berliner Zeitung* 1995). This does not express the desire for a restoration of GDR conditions at large; it symbolizes instead a longing for a particular life quality that people enjoyed in East Germany. It was characterized primarily by secure living standard and wide ranging social equality with a limited number of choices which were available to all, and a general feeling of social justice and solidarity among people. Before 1989, these were the conditions under which a specifically East German identity had developed. This identity had represented an appreciation of such values as equality, justice, security, and solidarity and it had brought about typical behavioral patterns to cope with the shortcomings of a society that provided an institutionalization of these values but demanded a certain political complacency.

The insistence on a number of values that do not have the same status in the eyes of former West Germans is not only a natural attempt to maintain a certain life-historical continuity as part of one's individual identity. It should also be seen, and appreciated, as an attempt to re-construct and re-define individual and collective identities among a

population that had been socialized under dramatically different economic, political, and social conditions and now has to cope with severe changes in its living environment for which an entirely new social competence is needed. This social competence cannot be established without a self-assurance regarding one's individual and collective identity. As a complex, regionally specific, and historically and politically conditioned phenomenon, 'Ostalgie' is not simply an aspect of consumer politics favoring East German products or of identity politics preferring the particular party or candidate that best expresses the alleged ethno-cultural distinctiveness of East Germans. It is also an attempt to resist the biased discourses about the GDR-past that are cultivated by both the extreme left in the former East Germany and the whole specter of political parties in the former West Germany.

Many political and economic actors try to exploit the phenomenon of 'Ostalgie' but they are not really able to control the process. Different value priorities among East and West Germans do not so much result from political manipulation of the electorate, but rather from distinct socialization patterns in East and West before unification (cf. Schmidt 1995: 10; Noelle-Neumann 1995: 27; *Der Spiegel* 1996: 64–70). Against this background, it is quite obvious that the values attached to social security and solidarity rank much higher among East Germans than the values of traditional political liberty. This pattern has been persistent in surveys since April 1990 when East Germans for the first time encountered the actual availability of political liberties but contrasted those against fears of possible unemployment (85 percent), increasing crime (83 percent), increasing egoism and social competition (78 percent), and rising prices (69 percent) (Förster and Roski 1990: 86; for later surveys see especially Noelle-Neumann 1995: 27 and *Der Spiegel* 1996: 64–70). This does not mean that East Germans do not value the liberties they are now able to enjoy, it simply means that their value priorities are influenced by the socialization processes they underwent in the GDR which have had a significant impact on their identity.

However, these value priorities are also influenced by the experiences East Germans have had since the unification of Germany: experiences of subordination and, to a lesser degree, neglect, at the hands of West Germans. This status contrasts sharply with the ability to be the master of one's own destiny in a living environment in which one is socially competent to act, as experienced during the peaceful revolution. It is also in contrast to the expectations raised about German unification and to socialization patterns in the GDR, where the state actively portrayed itself as performing the role of a father, taking care of the needs of its obedient children. This desire for political passivity under more or less secured living conditions, which the West German welfare state is still able to provide and the lack of leaders charismatic and legitimate enough to mobilize the dissatisfied, explains why – despite the enormous demands vis-à-vis East Germans in the transformation process and a widespread dissatisfaction with its economic and social outcomes so far – collective agency among East Germans is, if anything, expressed in protest voting and abstention rather than in a new protest movement. This shows, at the same time, an appreciation of democratic values and opportunities, such as articulating discontent by means of voting and abstention, but it also shows that East Germans are disillusioned about their own ability to influence political decisions actively as a 'minority'. Most importantly, all the above described developments in the identity of former East Germans signify that what is referred to as 'Ostalgie', namely the nostalgic feeling for the GDR past, is actually something completely different: East Germans are standing up for their individual and collective past, that is, their socialization in a politically different system with all its

consequences, in order to be able to re-construct and re-define their particular East(ern) German identity. This is not just a backward feeling of nostalgia, but more importantly a future-oriented self-assurance that implies the claim for self-determination within a united Germany.

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## (Homo)Sexual Politics

*"Identity and sexual politics are not issues defined by particular sexual preferences."*

(Leo Bersani)

### Theory and Practice

*Judit Takács*

Budapest University of Economic Sciences

On an April evening in 1997, several Hungarian gay and other human rights activists came together to listen to Agnes Heller, a Hungarian-born social philosopher who was invited by the Habeas Corpus Workgroup to speak about her views concerning sexual and gender identities. At the end of the meeting questions were raised by participants about the necessity of homosexual identities, and as far as I remember, there was only one general agreement reached: everyone should be able to create and use his or her self-definition. This paper will focus on special forms of self-definitions connected to homosexuality (gayness,

queerness, homo-ness, same-sex desire, etc.), and the context in which they can become politically activated.

I once read that "integration of homosexuality does not mean anything when the concept of homosexuality itself is not given theoretical and practical contents" (Hekma and van der Meer 1992: 128). Although in the original context integration was meant to be integration into Dutch society, I am now using it as a reminder to integrate homosexuality into this paper by attempting to provide the concept with theoretical and practical contents.

### DEFINING HOMOSEXUAL POLITICS

The main question is if it is relevant at all to speak about homosexual (or gay, and maybe queer) politics, especially in Hungary. To answer this question, we should first make the question meaningful. In a broad sense homosexual politics can be defined as a symbolic space to challenge definitions, descriptions, discourses and categories which structure social space in ways disadvantageous to homosexuals, i.e., people who identify themselves and/or identified by others as homosexuals. Ideally typically the actors in homosexual politics are homosexual subjects whose homosexual identities imply necessary references to the social category and meanings of homosexuality. Homosexuality without a homosexual subject is purely a specific form of human sexual behavior which can be practiced by anyone. In this context, same-sex erotic experience is not relevant to what we call homosexual politics.