Chapter 10

How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?

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The following remarks are based primarily on two major research projects. The first one was conducted in the year 1987, together with Lutz Niethammer and Alexander von Plato, as an oral history project with the birth cohorts of 1900 to 1930. At the time, we interviewed around 150 people, many of whom were born in the second half of the 1920s. The authorities at that time perceived this age group as one which gave proof of the GDR as a success story, while we gave this interpretation a rather different twist.[1] After the fall of the Wall, I began to explore the biographical experiences of another cohort, those born after the war, and at the same time, my contemporaries. This latter study combined oral and archival evidence and resulted in a kind of collective biography.[2] In this chapter, I will try to position both cohorts in the society and history of the GDR, by describing their basic patterns of experience, by analysing systematically what they shared and how they differed, and also how they interacted. Finally, I will discuss the question of the ways in which and the degree to which they represent a 'generation', and how they fit into the concept of 'normalisation', which Mary Fulbrook characterised as a process of stabilisation, routinisation, and internalisation.[3]

The '1929ers' and the '1949ers' on one level refer to the exact birth cohorts. But they both also represent a broader age group, in the case of the

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1. Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato, and Dorothee Wierling, *Die Volkseigene Erfahrung. Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR* (Berlin, 1991).
2. Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins. Der Geburtsjahrgang 1949 in der DDR. Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin, 2002).
3. See Chapter 1, above.

1929ers, those who were between 15 and 20 years old in 1945, that is, the so called Hitler Youth generation—born in the second half of the 1920s and living their childhood and early youth in Nazi Germany. In the case of the 1949ers, I can show that those born between 1945 and 1955 share basic experiences (which I will elaborate on later), although I hesitate to label them anything other than 'the first post-war generation'. This brings me to a last preliminary remark in regard to 'generation' as a concept for historical research and analysis.[4] In this article, I use the term in a most general way, that is, as an age group with 'shared patterns of experience' (Mannheim's *Generationszusammenhang*). To what degree these age groups form a conscious unity (Mannheim's *Generationseinheit*), or could even be regarded as a 'political generation', needs to be discussed differently for each age group in question.[5] But even on a more basic level, it should be obvious that not all members of a certain age group or birth cohort share all of the experiences suggested below or were shaped by these experiences in the same way. In this chapter, I focus on what I believe are the most commonly and broadly shared experiences and biographical consequences. Naturally, not each and every member of the cohorts will see my descriptions as mirroring their personal memories. The major differences along such categories as gender, region, class, education, and political affiliation can only be touched upon here.

The 1929ers

Whenever an interviewee or somebody in an audience begins a narrative or statement with the information that he or she was born in 1929, I fear the worst. And very often, I am right. Indeed, it is striking to what degree the anxieties, humiliations, and disorientations of 1945 still dominate the memories and feelings of the Hitler Youth generation and are often expressed as a set of barely hidden resentment and *Ressentiment*. In West Germany, this could easily happen in public, while in the East, official anti-fascism forced the individuals to be silent outside their private circles. And yet, they shared a biographical youth pattern, in which their adolescent megalomania had been fed by an irresponsible and immoral regime. They were terrified by often traumatic experiences at the end of the war, deprived of the hermetic

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4. In the last few years, there has been an abundance of generational studies and discussions about the concept of generation among historians and sociologists alike. See most recently, Michael Wildt and Ulrike Jureit, eds., *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg, 2005).

5. Karl Mannheim, 'Das Problem der Generationen', in Mannheim, *Wissenssoziologie* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964; orig. 1928), pp. 509–65.

Nazi worldview, and left without guidance and credible authorities after the breakdown of the regime. Many of them experienced a major personal crisis in the immediate aftermath of World War II, which has left its marks still today.[6]

In the Soviet Zone and later GDR, this age group was targeted early on as mass basis for the recruitment of personnel to fill in the positions of fallen soldiers and former Nazis, and in addition to create a group of functionaries for the new political parties and mass organisations and to be educated as a new intellectual, cultural, and political elite. The older generations, in particular the teaching and law professions, were largely tainted by NSDAP membership or otherwise active support of the Nazi state—the younger ones had not had this opportunity, although they might have been even more attracted by Nazi ideology and its goals of world domination. Their youth, however, and the critical biographical stage they found themselves in at the end of the war, made them an ideal group in the eyes of the new authorities, a group which promised to be needy of support, of a structure to begin with, of a future perspective, and of a new belief system. The socialist ideological and political system in its Stalinist form satisfied many a young person's need for new orientation, a new authority, and a new system of meaning. To put it bluntly, in the minds of many a 1929er, Stalinist socialism turned out to be an ideal substitute for the Nazi ideology: Stalin could take over the position of Hitler and the Soviet Union offered itself for identification with the invincible country that Germany had failed to be. While those members of the 1929ers who came from a middle class, upper class or educated class background tended either to find any potential cooperation rejected by the new authorities or themselves refused any cooperation, the response from the lower middle and working classes to this offer was overwhelming. Without being able to give exact numbers, we can assume that a large minority of the Hitler youth generation enjoyed, or at least experienced, a major upward mobility, and soon dominated certain professional groups, such as teachers, judges, the middle levels of local and district administration as well as political parties and organisations; and last but not least, they entered the industrial management of the state-owned companies. Many were trained on the job, such as teachers or judges who had to function immediately; others went through the 'Workers and Peasants College' (*Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät, ABF*) before they entered the universities and the new GDR elites.

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6. It is interesting that for West Germany, this generation has been referred to more as the 'Flakhelfergeneration', those members of the cohort who as high school students were drafted to man the anti-aircraft guns at the end of the war. See Heinz Bude, *Deutsche Karieren. Lebenskonstruktionen sozialer Aufsteiger aus der Flakhelfergeneration* (Frankfurt M., 1987).

Most of them stayed in these positions until the end of the GDR, while only a few made it to the top of real power—a third of the members of the SED's Central Committee belonged to this generation in 1989.[7]

The social success of the 1929ers referred to more than a specific constellation of options after 1945. Its attractiveness was heightened by a biographical pattern of upward orientation in the lower classes of the Weimar Republic, which had resulted in a low birth rate and growing investments in education, especially with girls. Thus, biographical interviews inform us about a pattern of social mobility that was prepared for in the 1930s through an education meant to help working class youth into white-collar jobs. This was brutally interrupted by the war, although girls in particular at first seemed to profit from the loss of male competition. After 1945, the massive gaps in the workforce and the naïve trust in the young working class led to options that from the perspective of the young seemed like the unexpected and undeserved opportunity they had thought lost.[8]

Yet this upward mobility came with the price of political loyalty and a strict political and social control. Those who had made a commitment to a career as a rule had to make a political commitment as well; and although this might have met their need for a clear framework and order, as indicated above, at the same time it meant discipline and moral pressure beyond the work sphere. In the 1950s in particular, but also way into the 1960s, the SED functioned as a second—and for its members, the primary—disciplinary institution of setting the rules, sanctioning all transgressions, and granting or denying forgiveness and community. Every task could be turned into a party order (*Parteiauftrag*). Oneself, but also one's partner and children, were under constant observation and expected to lead an exemplary life, according to the saying that the party is represented by each of its members at any place at any time (*Wo Du bist, ist die Partei)*. But loyalty also came with gratitude: gratitude for the social options that were seen as a gift, especially in comparison to West Germany, where the old elites had not cleared the place for a younger generation; here, the GDR compared favourably. They also felt gratitude for being forgiven and re-educated. And thus, most narratives of the Hitler youth generation in the East focus around 1945 as

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7. Alexander von Plato, 'The Hitler Youth generation and its role in the two postwar German states', in Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 210–26. Dorothee Wierling, 'The Hitler Youth generation in the GDR: Insecurites, Ambitions and Dilemmas', in Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience. Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, Oxford, 1999), pp. 307–24. Mary Fulbrook, 'Generationen und Kohorten in der DDR' in Annegret Schüle et al. (eds.), *Die DDR aus generationsgeschichtlicher perspektive* (Leipzig, 2006), pp. 113–130.

8. See the portraits of Johanna Maczek ('Die Quittung'), Bertha Uhlig ('Die älteste Schwester'), Lisa Gabert ('Die Brücke'), Rudolf Kamp ('Gewalt und Gesetz') in Niethammer, von Plato, Wierling, *Volkseigene Erfahrung*.

a moment of despair as well as hope, of guilt as well as conversion. Behind this biographical pattern, however, a basic insecurity always prevailed. Politically, it was present in the SED's statement: 'The party forgives, but does not forget'. Personally, it was expressed in a deep feeling of insufficiency vis-à-vis those older anti-fascists, whose sacrifice they could not repeat under the conditions of the GDR. It may be for this reason that, for this part of the Hitler youth generation, the events of the workers' uprising in June 1953 appeared as such a challenge to prove their loyalty under the condition of a threat.[9]

The 1949ers

The 1949ers are in the centre of an age group whose essential experiences are first marked by the end of the war, the effects of which were seen and felt in the East much longer than in the West. Material and mental conditions of the post-war period were harsh, and it took the entire decade of the 1950s to overcome food rationing and secure the satisfaction of basic needs. At the same time, Stalinist politics shaped the atmosphere of fear and opportunism, while many East Germans made for the West. On the other hand, an authoritarian educational system was combined with radical educational reforms that made access to higher education easy for those social groups who had always been excluded from it. In the 1960s, cautious liberalisation was countered by repression of adolescent attempts at claiming greater autonomy. The end of the Prague experiment also put an end to any encouragment for a more democratic socialism in the GDR. In the 1970s, this age group entered the workforce and experienced a more than usual reality shock, especially on the higher level, and in consequence, took a leading stand in a general trend towards private life and family as the most important elements of a good life. Thus, the first post-war cohort was stuck between high expectations built up during childhood and youth on the one hand, and limited options in their adult lives, between a promise of future and its loss, on the other.[10]

Those actually born in 1949 became more specifically the object of politics. The GDR began to celebrate itself as a personalised project, first in 1959, at the occasion of its 10th 'birthday', and much more optimistically

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9. Lutz Niethammer, 'Where were you on the 17th of June?' A niche in Memory, in Luisa Passerini, ed., *Memory and Totalitarianism, International Yearbook of Oral History* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 45–69.

10. Dorothee Wierling, 'Wie (er)findet man eine Generation? Das Beispiel des Geburtsjahrgangs 1919 in der DDR', in Jürgen Reulecke, ed., *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 2003), pp. 217–28.

and self-assuredly in 1969, at the height of its economic and political success—then as an innocent child of ten, now as a beautiful blonde of twenty. The 1949ers were encouraged on these occasions to identify with the state and think of themselves as a biographical project, as part of building a utopian future combining technological with social progress.[11]

In life history interviews conducted in the first half of the 1990s, respondents born in 1949/1950 shared significant narrative patterns, some of which I would briefly like to characterise. One was the focus on their families' lives before their birth, that is, the hardships their parents had gone through at the end of the war and in the first post-war years. These family stories centre very much on the parents as victims of war and post-war living conditions. Obviously, the scenes that made up the tableau of the parents' biographical and historical experiences were very close to the post-war cohorts, who often narrated them in the interview as if they had personally been present. I therefore understand the 1949ers as virtual war children, not just because they identify so much with the family's war experience, but also because they tend to understand their own lives as an obligation to compensate for their parents' losses and broken biographies. This obligation is particularly strong for those whose parents had the typical Hitler youth biography as indicated above. One crucial instrument for this age group was, however, the past in another sense than that of private losses and new beginnings: as the past of fascism and the sacrifices of anti-fascists, who at the same time represented the state at its very top. The 1949ers were the last age group for which places like Buchenwald represented an obliging and dramatic legacy, linked with the highest respect for those who had risked their lives. This powerful presence of the past coexisted with a powerful promise of a better future, given both by the parents and the new state; and indeed, much was invested in these children, especially in education, so that I speak of a specific 'mission to happiness' that shaped the lives of the post-war born.[12] It was not until the early 1960s, however, that the GDR managed to establish a broad system of institutions, organisations, and personnel to shape the new generation in regard to a consistent set of socialist norms and ideology, especially through school and the children's organisation 'Young Pioneers' (JP) and the youth organisation 'Free German Youth' (FDJ). In

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11. Dieter Vorsteher, '"Ich bin zehn Jahre". Die Ausstellung im Museum für Deutsche Geschichte anlässlich des zehnten Jahrestages der DDR', in Monika Gibas et. al, eds., *Wiedergeburten. Zur Geschichte der runden Geburtstage der DDR* (Leipzig, 1999), pp. 135–46; See also Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins*, pp. 316–25.

12. Dorothee Wierling, 'Mission to Happiness. Comparing the Birth Cohort of 1949 in East and West Germany', in Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years. West Germany in the 1950s* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 110–25.

1965, an institutional system of 'total' education seemed to be in place; but the state never succeeded in making this system perfect or excluding alternative influences from family and peers.

The 1960s brought to the GDR a 'foreign' phenomenon, the effects of which cannot be overestimated for the 1949ers in particular: a wave of popular culture, especially music, from the West, sucessfully infiltrated the GDR through tape recorder, transistor radio, TV, and the electric guitar. By means of these technical and cultural goods, the GDR youth of the 1960s became part of the West—despite the Wall, and in a very specific way that differed from West Germany.[13] While the idols of this movement—the Beatles, the Rolling Stones—were the same, the restrictions on access to the music and the cultural items and practices which came with it, and—more generally— the disciplinary threats of the authorities gave the music a higher meaning of an existential opposition to the authoritarian traits of the regime. East German youth had to improvise more, had to risk more, and consequently enjoyed more when consuming and reproducing Western popular culture to make it their own. Different factions inside the SED tried to win over youth either through a more liberal or a more strict attitude vis-à-vis young peoples' wishes for autonomy. The support of the Politburo, and especially Ulbricht, for the more liberal faction ended in the late 1960s with a renewed attempt for total control under the emerging authority of Erich Honecker. The 1970s brought a more pragmatic attitude, not just in regard to popular music. The regime had understood that they could not win the culture war against Western popular music and encouraged a home-grown rock music scene.[14] But in more than one realm, the belief in the possible creation of a socialist personality broke down. Disappointment made way for pragmatism, both with the rulers and the ruled, when the 1949ers entered jobs and founded families. We know about their disillusionment through surveys conducted by the Leipzig Institute for Youth Research, the results of which were widely ignored among the authorities, and never became subject of public debate. Certainly, there was no option for changes in politics to address the basic societal problems in the GDR of the 1970s. What was left was the promise of a ever better material life, of growing consumer possibilities, and of continuous technological progress, promises which also turned out to be empty in the 1980s and made the GDR a 'grumbling' society (Fulbrook).[15]

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13. See also Chapter 9, above.

14. Michael Rauhut, *Beat in der Grauzone: DDR-Rock 1964–1972. Politik und Alltag* (Berlin, 1993).

15. See also Mary Fulbrook's most recent descripton of the GDR 'culture of complaint' in her book *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 269–88.

Differences

When I now discuss more systematically the question of how the two age groups in question differ, I want to ask in addition, what might they have in common? First, they were both shaped by the war, albeit in very different ways. The 1929ers represent a group that had often been fascinated by Nazi ideology and the War, and in the end had become active parts of the war effort, be it on the front or on the home front. At the same time, they were needy young adolescents who were overwhelmed by the death and violence that surrounded them—and after the war, the GDR became for many an alternative that provided forgiveness, security, and orientation, along with the—almost uninterrupted—integration into an authoritarian order. In any case, the war presented the most important and often traumatic experience of their lives, an experience that marked the dramatic end of their childhood. For many, it also marked a new dramatic beginning in a system that claimed the future for itself and offered a future to the young—meaning, first of all, re-education.

In contrast, the 1949ers knew about these things only through family narratives—that is, their own parents—and state propaganda, and they found themselves luckily spared from living through these events. At the same time, however, they were also excluded from these bonding experiences, their own lives being lived in the routine of a ready-made system. They were profiting from the new beginning of an anti-fascist state and private reconstruction while the dramatic past their family and society had gone through was present as a collective memory and frightening fantasy. The main feature resulting from this constellation was gratitude—and here the 1949ers were again similar to the 1929ers, for whom gratitude also played a major role.

In 1945, the 1929ers were offered a new ideology, social position, and life out of the ashes, which made them deeply grateful for these undeserved gifts. Given their vague feelings of guilt, however, they remained vulnerable when they were compared, and compared themselves, to those who could claim authentic anti-fascism out of communist roots. That life could change dramatically, that these changes could be violent and dangerous, these were lessons the 1929ers had learned in a very direct way. The result was a deep longing for authority and order, which provided the framework for a life under control—control of others and of a vulnerable self. While the 1929ers had experienced their adolescence in a phase of societal breakdown, the 1949ers entered youth in the early 1960s, when the GDR, safely shut against the West, began its project of modernising socialism. Their childhood appeared as a continuous improvement towards stabilisation and order, the renewed order of state socialism. When they grew out of

childhood, however, the discipline to which they had been exposed began to feel like a prison. Together with the experiences provided by the products of popular culture mentioned above, youth for them was a concept linked to a very liberating, exciting, playful acting out of passions and dreams, which were almost impossible to control by the state and party authorities.[16] Even the restrictions which followed in the late 1960s could not totally destroy the spaces of personal freedoms that people had created for themselves. I see the beginning of the so-called niche society here, which developed parallel to the party state's attempts at total institutional control over peoples' lives.[17] In contrast to the 1929ers, the 1949ers did not seek, but rather tried to avoid the control of authorities, thanks to the conditions that had allowed them, but not the 1929ers, to experience autonomous realms in their youth. While the longing for order came out of the disastrous breakdown of society for the young 1929ers, the 1949ers' wish for autonomy came out of the controlling and disciplinary system of their own childhoods. But the 1929ers had been able to reconcile their wishes with those of the state, while the 1949ers necessarily put themselves in contradiction to the state, which had by no means given up its control; on the contrary, the state had sought to perfect it.

Thirdly, the 1929ers were the only GDR generation of upward mobility. They achieved what had never been promised to them, or rather, what they had given up expecting at the end of the war—and they were very aware of this as a favour, as an offer that depended not only on their own ambitions, but on a generous state—especially in contrast to the West. Most of them had been trained on the job, and their peculiar position as a badly prepared new elite made them especially dependent on the authority of the state. Thus, their leading positions on the local or company level were not always comfortable, and their lack of training for each new step up the ladder would sometimes go beyond their strength and capacities.[18] The 1949ers, in comparison, started out with the promise of a near future of technological and social revolution, a society where they would be able to reach anything, if

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16. This argument needs qualification not only in regard to the immediate end of the war, where youth were practically on their own, but also in regard to the so-called 'Halbstarkenproblem' (rowdyism), that is, the young, male working class, who presented a major problem throughout the history of the GDR, including the 1950s. See Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), esp. pp. 91ff.

17. The concept of the so-called niche society was developed by Günther Gaus, in his book *Wo Deutschland liegt*. It has since turned out to be a favourite term of description—and self description—for GDR society, at least that of its later period.

18. Most of our interviewees, who in 1987 held a management position, mentioned some major psychosomatic illness, had asked to be downgraded or planned to do so.

they only believed in this future and in themselves and did not shy away from the hard work it needed. The education they needed to master this future was provided, at least for those who were either believers in, or willing to give lip service to the achievements of socialism. But the future indeed seemed bright. High expectations were raised in all social strata—a blue-collar worker at times was regarded as superior to his more educated colleague, although in the 1960s the engineer became the essential figure of socialist progress. But the reality of working life seldom fit the expectations, and this was true in particular for those with higher education and the prolonged adolescence it came with, which in the GDR meant being somewhat sheltered from the reality of society and the work sphere. The lack of open positions for those who had been trained for them at university resulted in a rather flat curve of upward mobility, if not stagnation. Compared to their aspirations, this led to frustration and resignation, and a fading away of the early gratitude they had felt vis-à-vis the enormous efforts of family and state to provide a good life and glorious future for them.[19]

Inter-generational Dynamics

The 1929ers and 1949ers interacted in a very specific way and this interaction had a deep effect on the texture of social relations and conflicts in the GDR. Given the demographic situation in Germany after 1945, men between 20 and 40 representing the age group with the largest percentage of war dead, the older segment of the Hitler youth generation made up the bulk of the parents of the 1949ers, both mothers and fathers, while some parents were relatively old.[20] At the same time, the overwhelming majority of teachers and low-level functionaries in the mass organisations and on the local level were members of that same Hitler youth generation. Thus, in most educational constellations, be it at home, in school or in the childrens' or youth organisation, this generation represented *the* generation of reference for the 1949ers— and it is worth looking closer at this generational dynamic.

First, the family bonds between parents and children were very close, and there is little evidence of a generational conflict in the families. Children

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19. See the studies of the Leipzig Institute quoted in Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins*, pp. 358ff.; and Johannes Huinink, Karl-Ulrich Mayer, and Heike Trappe, 'Staatliche Lenkung und individuelle Karrierechancen: Bildungs- und Berufsverläufe', in Johannes Huinink et. al, eds., *Kollektiv und Eigensinn–Lebensverläufe in der DDR und danach* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. 89–143.

20. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1955* (Berlin, 1956), p. 36, gives the age of the mothers. Fathers tended to be of the same age or much older.

and youth tended to bond with their parents vis-à-vis the state, so that families could serve as a community of mutual support in material, emotional, and social ways. Certainly, there is nothing similar to the generational conflicts that dominated many families in 1960s West Germany, where cultural and political protests were acted out in the living rooms, at least in those of the middle classes. In particular, GDR parents in the 1960s were not challenged by questions about their attitude and activities in Nazi Germany, but were regarded as victims of the Nazi regime and spared any critical doubts. Children, as is evident in contemporary sources such as school essays, and certainly in life history interviews with 1949ers, were not only aware of the daily hardships their parents had to endure, but they also identified with the parents and their attempts to build a new life, and this included identification with those who had decided in favour of re-education and re-politicisation. And although many observed the costs of these attempts, such as political pressure and fear of state authorities, the reaction was solidarity and a wish to conform, to make the parents' lives easier. In some cases, the children also followed their parents on their path of political commitment, taking their examples as an obligation for themselves.

There was a generational conflict, however, but it was acted out in schools, in the workplace, and on the streets. Indeed, although the existence of a public sphere—or its special features—can be debated for the GDR,[21] the generational conflict between the 1949ers and their elders was more a public than private one, and the 1929ers and 1949ers confronted each other about various issues.

First, there was the issue of education. The Hitler Youth generation were largely to build the group of new teachers and public educators. By the 1960s, the older generation of teachers from the Weimar Republic had vanished from the schools. The 1929ers very much depended on the idea that education was necessary and possible—beginning with their own re-education after the war, and fed by Marxist-Leninist concepts of the power of education to create a new kind of man (and woman), as soon and as long as all of the circumstances of childrens' upbringing were under control. Since the 1949ers had been born after Nazism, after the war, and even after the chaotic early post-war years, it was expected that they would be the first to realise this dream of a 'socialist personality'. As children they seemed promising—as adolescents, however, they disappointed and eventually destroyed the pedagogical optimism of the teachers, functionaries, and masters. The fact that the SED and the state would make the educators responsible for

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21. See Fulbrook, *The Peoples' State*, p. 250ff.

the failures of the educated was an important reason why disappointment often turned into hatred.

Secondly, there was the more specific issue of discipline and authority. For the 1929ers, discipline was crucial. They had learned it in school and in the Hitler youth, it had been demanded from them during the war, and afterwards discipline and the recognition of a new authority had rescued them from chaos and despair. Discipline and authority meant security, that is, protection from the dangers of outside and inside anarchy. For the 1949ers, this basic security was a given, provided by families, by institutions, and by the promise of a peaceful and structured life. Thus, the restrictive effects of discipline and authority became more obvious, and the children growing into adolescents began to long for autonomy instead of authority, and for pleasure instead of discipline. But their teachers, foremen, and youth leaders were there to keep up work discipline, make sure that hair was cut short, that dance steps were not wild, that dress codes were kept, and gender roles respected—and with a mixture of envy and fear, the elders tried to impose their values and rules on an obstinate youth.

Thirdly, the workplace became a major field of generational competition. In the 1960s, apprentices and young workers threatened many older workers and employees with their hedonism, their lack of discipline and ambition, as well as their better education and the greater ease with which they grasped technological change. In 1963, the SED-Politburo issued the 'Youth Communiqué' praising youth as the social group that naturally tended towards progress, a group which would and should challenge the older ones as the avantgarde towards modernisation; the reaction among the elders, namely the Hitler youth generation, was mixed, sceptical, and sometimes outright defensive: they saw the recognition for their achievements and the recognition of their authority endangered, when young people were encouraged too much to question them.[22] In the 1970s, however, the generational balance of power had changed: those coming from the universities were ready to take over leading positions, but they found that these were largely occupied by the Hitler youth generation, who would stay in their place up to the very end of the GDR. The younger ones were put in positions that were far below the formal level of their education, and the money they earned and the tasks they were in charge of were way below

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22. 'Jugend von heute—Hausherren von morgen. Der Jugend Vertrauen und Verantwortung.' This document, created by a reformist group established by Ulbricht and issued as an official Politburo declaration, is published in *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, vol. 9 (Berlin, 1965): 679–706.

their promised options and their theoretical and often practical skills. This would not change until the end of the GDR.

Self-understandings

Although people would use the term 'generation' when they referred to an older or a younger birth cohort, using it in the everyday sense they had learned with the German language, 'generation' with capital letters was not a legitimate social or political category in the GDR, nor was generational conflict. Instead, no other concept than that of class could be used to indicate basic differences and conflicts, and in that sense, all antagonistic differences had been eliminated in the GDR.[23] Consequently, the public sphere to develop a sense of generation was missing in the GDR, at least the public sphere as it existed under the control of the SED. However, the former Hitler youth was granted a limited space to identify themselves as a generation, the *Aufbaugeneration*, the 'generation of reconstruction', and they developed a specific biographical pattern—meaning both a pattern for their lived and narrated biographies—which focussed around 1945 as the moment of their personal conversion. This fit well with the public narrative of a weak and broken Germany, activated and elevated by socialist conversion into a new Germany with a bright future. The Hitler youth generation thus stood for the basic possibility of turning national-socialism into socialism, war into peace, Nazis into socialists; but also for the basic tragedy of a murderous and vicious past.

In a way, the 1949ers also provided the stuff generations are made of: the children of this new beginning, the first generation blessed by socialism, the proof of what a good socialist education could do, their lives parallel to the state. As I mentioned above, the GDR celebrated its 'birthdays' by linking the lives of those born in 1949 to its life as a socialist state, and the 1949ers had to perform who they were supposed to be as ten, twenty, thirty, forty year-olds.[24] But the real 1949ers turned against this concept and instead became proof of the limits of education and the limits of authoritarian control. They chose their own heroes from the West, they shared basic orientations with an international post-war youth, and although they were surprisingly loyal and by no means rebellious, they were regarded as a failure and indeed

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23. Thus, when the politics of reform were denounced after 1965, the Politburo issued a letter to all First Secretaries at the district and local levels, which bluntly proclaimed that young people did not pursue any 'class goals' (Klassenziele) that differed from those of the older generation. Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins*, p. 211.

24. In 1984, the 'Oktoberklub' came up with a rather melancholic song about the 'Wir über Dreißig' citizens of the GDR: *Oktoberklub, Das Beste* (Berlin, 1995) (CD).

represented the failure of educational dictatorship as such. In the end, they stood for stagnation and resignation, for those who had got lost in the *Mühen der Ebenen* (travails of the plains).[25]

How the 1929ers and the 1949ers experienced the society they grew up in, how they tried to find their place and their happiness, how they interacted—all of these became important aspects of social change in the GDR and had political implications at the same time. To look at generations therefore is to look at one origin of societal dynamics and change. But it would be wrong to try to analyse the history of the GDR through a generational pattern alone or even to structure its history in the rhythm of generations, meaning nothing more than mechanical cohorts.[26] If we go back to Mannheim, we can conclude that, if any, only the 1929ers—that is, the Hitler Youth generation—may be defined as a political generation, given their political commitment and willingness to keep the GDR functioning. In contrast, the 1949ers (or the first post-war generation) had no active political impact, even if we concede that the active body of the small GDR opposition of the 1980s was formed by the post-war cohorts. But by doing so, they did not experience or define themselves as a generation; rather, the phenomenon of a relatively homogeneous age group in the opposition was due to the older ones having left for the West before 1961, leaving the younger ones to grow up in the East almost without older mentors.[27]

Generation and Normalisation

The two cohorts in question differed in the share they had in a 'normal' life. While the 1929ers had lived their childhood and youth through the most dramatic periods of German history, through violence, death, and enormous material and human losses, through often traumatic upheavals with long-term psychological effects, the 1949ers were born, albeit under the shadows of these catastrophes, under a private and public promise of 'normality'.

All of the 1950s can be defined as the tough struggle for normalisation in its crudest meaning of stabilisation. Families were reunited, left for good or were newly founded; people established themselves in apartments, even if

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25. Bertolt Brecht.

26. Bernd Lindner: '"Bau auf, Freie Jugend!"—und was dann? Kriterien für ein Modell der Jugendgenerationen der DDR', in Reulecke, *Generationalität*, pp. 187–215.

27. Robert Havemann is a rare exception, an 'original' anti-fascist of Honecker's age and an important figure for someone like Wolf Biermann and others. His refusal to leave the GDR was probably—from the perspective of the SED leadership—his most annoying oppositional activity.

their quality was still poor; they also gained new positions in the worksphere, they made decisions in terms of their political commitment or abstinence, they found a more or less permanent social place, at least direction to follow— and be it to the West. All of these acts of stabilisation were hard biographical work for the cohort of the 1929ers—their children, however, found these new stable structures ready made for them to fit in. And, as it turned out, below these new structures, central mental dispositions, sets of rules and beliefs, had survived the upheavals and would now contribute to stabilisation as the normative side of normalisation.[28] The 1949ers, as children, felt quite comfortable and secure in the framework of normative order in a 'normal' life, where war belonged to a past that was shared in family stories. The fear of war, this latent danger of the early Cold War period, fed the longing for this kind of normality long into the 1960s.

It was not until the 1960s that routinisation came about. Then, the educational dictatorship was established in the remotest villages, all of the institutional and organisational structures were in place, and the generational change towards the Hitler Youth generation was finished, keeping the very top in the hands of the political 'activists of the first hour' and leaving only a few technical experts in place. The country was closed off against the West and those who had dreamt of the West German option. The basic precondition for routinisation, the confidence of finding everybody still in place the next day, was thus ensured. For the 1929ers—certainly not all of them—this was the historical period of their breakthrough and of the fulfillment of their hopes: having gained considerable positions in society, they lived in a world with clear rules and a more or less transparent hierarchy. The authorities were there for support, sanctions, and appeal.

Unfortunately, it was in this historical moment of gained security that the 1949ers began to feel the normative pressure of normalisation, the depressing boredom of stabilisation, and the emptiness of routinisation. They wanted autonomy, passion, and adventure—something that the GDR as it was could not provide or grant them. The cultural rebellion that evolved out of these deficiencies and was fed by an international cultural youth revolt became the thorn in the flesh of the 1929ers. The conflict was about much more than political and cultural hegemony; it meant a direct attack on the self-understanding of the 1929ers—that authority was an absolute necessity for society, and for themselves, to function. The 1929ers had rescued this knowledge over the gap of 1945. It was the frame of their innermost existence.

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28. Christoph Klessmann, 'Die Beharrungskraft traditioneller Milieus in der DDR', in Manfred Hettling, ed., *Was ist Gesellschaftsgeschichte?* (München, 1991), pp. 254–70.

The degree to which 'playing by the rules' was finally secured by internalisation is a very difficult question to answer. First, following rules is an activity which can be, but is not necessarily, driven by internalised norms; thus, nothing can be concluded from the obedience and conformity we observe or find proof of in the archives. On the other hand, we may ask what following the rules and participation in routines—especially those routines which claim deep personal commitments—do to people, if these activities can be performed without the slightest impact on the performer; at the very least, we may assume a continuous and growing experience of humiliation, a notion which might be avoided or denied by beginning to believe in what you are doing. If we follow standard psychoanalytic interpretation, constant and strict external control is counterproductive for the process of internalisation of the normative set—since internalised rules could and would be followed according to personal beliefs and needs that have become independent of the authority who originally established them. The implosion of the GDR and the mental heritage it left without a controlling state and the rules it had imposed, the so called East German identity, also give a mixed message. It seems most likely that it was not so much the explicit, but the implicit rules developed on the societal level, often against the outspoken rules of the socialist state, which have been internalised to stay, at least into the foreseeable future.[29]

It is possible, however, also to look at these 'official' rules as internalised values, as long and as far as they fulfil basic emotional needs, such as security, order, equality, peace, predictability, and authority.[30] The case of anti-fascism can serve as an example. Certainly, the dramatic and powerful story about those anti-fascists who died as martyrs or survived to create a new Germany of morality and justice had an enormous, deep, and long-lasting effect on the 1929ers and also still on the 1949ers. It was only a younger generation on whom this religious message was lost, worn out by constant repetition and the discrepancy between proclaimed values and everyday life. Thus, we would see a weakening of internalised norms, norms questioned ever more by the normality of daily experiences.

Still, living one's whole or half-life in the GDR left its mental marks, as we all know. These marks, however, are not as deep or as conspicuous for everyone; age, cohort, and generation are important factors here; and they are not the absolute other of what West Germans learned after the war. How the 1929ers and the 1949ers in the East differ from those in the West—this is another question.

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29. Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen, Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin, 1999).
30. See also Chapter 13, below.