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***Kinship, State, and Ritual:  
Jugendweihe – A Secular Coming-of-age Ritual in  
Socialist and Post-socialist Eastern Germany***

Grit Wesser



## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

.....

Signature

*30 June 2016*

Date



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*The GDR has been dead for ages, but it's still quite alive in my family. Like a ghost that can't find peace. Eventually, when it was all over, nothing more was said about those old struggles. Perhaps we hoped things would sort themselves out, that the new age would heal old wounds. But it wouldn't leave me be. I went to archives, I rummaged old cupboards and boxes, I found old photographs and letters, a long-forgotten diary, secret files. I asked my family questions that I'd normally never have dared go near. I was allowed to do that, because I was a genealogist now. And all of a sudden our little GDR was there again, as if it had been waiting to emerge again, to show off from every angle, correct a few things and perhaps lose some of the rage and grief that were still here.*

— Maxim Leo; transl. Shaun Whiteside (2013) *Red Love: The Story of an East German Family*



## **Acknowledgements**

It has been a real challenge to focus on finishing this PhD thesis amidst the current discombobulation in Europe, and in the UK in particular. I count myself lucky to have had the support of so many people from different corners of the world, whose paths crossed with mine in Scotland or Germany thanks to freedom of movement and based on a mutual understanding of our shared humanity. I am far too aware that this thesis is an accomplishment, which could not have been achieved without the support of these people – and this support merits recognition that is coupled with hopes that the times afoot may not turn as dark as many of us currently fear.

First of all, I owe thanks to Dr Rebecca Aechtner and Prof Jonathan Spencer, who both encouraged me to pursue a PhD five years ago – at a time when I could not clearly see this as a possibility for myself. I often thought of them throughout this process, particularly when the going got tough, but there – I did it! Thanks for believing in me long before I did.

I am grateful for the financial support provided through the Shaw Macfie Lang Scholarship and the Graduate School Scholarship from the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh, as well as for two grants from the Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust.

I would like to express my gratitude to every teacher who has ever taught me. Only now can I truly appreciate what a challenging job it is. Special thanks to my German teacher Ute Meyn and the late pastor Dietrich Henn, who provided space and stimulus for critical thinking during my adolescence and in a time when such encouragement was certainly not the norm. I am also grateful to the staff at the Office for Lifelong Learning (OLL, now Centre for Open Learning) at the University of Edinburgh; especially to Dr John Harries and Dr John Gordon, who prepared me well for my undergraduate studies as a mature student.

My intellectual debt is to the Social Anthropology Department at Edinburgh where I did both my undergraduate studies and my PhD. I would like to offer special thanks to my undergraduate dissertation supervisor Dr Joost Fontein for shaping my thinking about the past in the present.

I am deeply indebted to my primary supervisor Prof Janet Carsten, who has been supportive from day one and who has also gently pushed me into doing things I did not think I had in me. I very much appreciated her structured guidance, invaluable advice, timely feedback, and warm encouragement throughout this entire process. I couldn't have wished for a better supervisor and she deserves quite rightly to be called by the much more profound German term for a female PhD supervisor: *meine Doktormutter* (my doctor mother). I owe also much gratitude to my secondary supervisors Dr Lotte Hoek and Dr Magnus Course. Many thanks to Lotte, especially for her advice to read short stories, her great sense of humour, and constructive, direct criticism – all of which kept me going. I am deeply grateful to Magnus for his reading suggestions, his constant reminders on the 'economy of words', and for keeping his 'interesting' remarks ambivalent (despite claiming to use different intonations) – all of which kept me going, too. Thanks to all three for making me finish this thesis by frequently commenting that 'it doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough'. If there is anything I am absolutely certain I have achieved, it is imperfection.

For having been an excellent proofreader, who fiercely culled so many of my 'yets' and 'howevers' in my thesis draft, I would like to offer special thanks to Koreen Reece. I also owe her for her support during the final stretch toward submission, especially for generously providing a quiet work space and for having had a wee dram with me on a very bittersweet day in June 2016.

I am thankful to all my fellow anthropology PhD students, who have offered feedback on various incarnations of my work during the weekly writing-up seminars. I am also grateful to Prof Sandy Robertson for his comments, and to Dr Delwar Hussain for asking all the right questions at a crucial time in early 2015.

For their thoughtful readings of various draft chapters and insightful comments and discussions beyond the writing-up seminar, I am deeply grateful to my fellow anthropologists: Hannah Lesshafft, Stephen McConnachie, Koreen Reece, Chrissie Wanner, and Michele Wisdahl. Thanks also to Nicola Wisdahl for being a great sounding board on all things German. Thank you all for your friendship, which made the PhD journey much more bearable – and even fun!

I am also grateful to my friends Preston Trent Olsen, Resto Cruz, and Hannah Cook for many illuminating discussions and for being wonderfully supportive officemates during the writing-up process. For their friendship and support at various stages of the PhD, I would like to extend thanks to Gilda Neri, Daisy Fung, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic, Diego Malara, Leila Sinclair-Bright, Pablo Briceño, Barbara Gaweda, Martina Karels, Nikki Dunne, and Katka Ockova. Special thanks to Jules Harrington for sustaining my well-being during the writing-up phase, and to Danny Metcalfe for keeping his calm and good sense of humour when I did not.

There are many people in Germany I am indebted to and who I cannot all mention by name. Thanks must go to the staff of the *Stadtarchiv* Gera, and to Matthias Wagner and the late Ute Heckmann at the *Stadtmuseum* Gera for their insights into local history and their help in locating useful historical documents.

For having provided both academic stimulation and a break from fieldwork, I am thankful to members of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. I am especially grateful to Prof Chris Hann, Dr John Eidson, Prof Christoph Brumann, Drs André Thiemann, Tabea Scharrer, Dimitra Kofti, and Andrew Sanchez for their interest in my project, their insightful suggestions, and warm hospitality.

My greatest gratitude goes to the Thuringians who participated in this research and supported me throughout my fieldwork. Thanks to all the adolescents who participated in one way or another in this project. I am grateful to Cordula Hörbe, parish assistant at the Erfurt Cathedral, for our helpful conversations and for allowing me to gain more insight into non-religious rituals within the Catholic Church. Many thanks also to pastor Sven Thriemer for enabling me to participate in confirmation lessons and for our useful conversations.

I am deeply indebted to the ‘*Power-Frauen vom Jugendweihe Verein*’ – as the women of the local Jugendweihe Association often referred to themselves – for offering insights into their work, and for sharing their office, food, and thoughts with me. Without their support and great sense of humour, my fieldwork would have been not only less enjoyable but my ethnography also so much poorer. *Vielen Dank an den Jugendweihe Ostthüringen Verein, Gera.* I would also like to extend thanks to the helpful members of the Jugendweihe Thüringen

e. V., the Jugendweihe Erfurt e. V., and the Jugendweihe Plus e. V. in Arnstadt. Although I doubt they agree with my analysis, I hope they feel my portrayal has done them justice.

My heartfelt thanks to all my German friends – old and new – who supported my project, in particular to the six families that feature in this thesis. Thanks for your time, kindness, and humour, for allowing me to be part of the coming-of-age celebrations but especially for reminding me that there is something unique about the bluntness of the ‘*Gersche Fettguschen*’. This thesis would not exist without you.

Many of my friends provided much needed escapes from PhD life. Warm thanks to Nasreen Akther Shilpi *apu* and her family and friends for my fieldwork break in Bangladesh, and to Kim Ross for a summer break in Stockholm during the writing-up phase. For our Berlin adventure in 2013 warm thanks to Vena Buchholtz, Anu Sharma, and Eleanor Rideout. I never forget that special August night when we lounged in deckchairs watching *Good Bye Lenin!* on an open air cinema screen at Checkpoint Charlie – in German without English subtitles.

My ‘Edinburgh family’ often generously fed me, provided accommodation, kept me grounded and sane, shared much laughter and tears – and gradually learned not to ask the question: ‘So when are you submitting your thesis?’ Thank you so much for your friendship and all your encouragement throughout the years: Anu Sharma, Eleanor Rideout, Manolo Perez, Colin Morrison, Joanna Marshall, and Vera Pine.

Needless to say that a project, which attempts to understand East German families would have never been conceived as a topic nor materialised in a PhD thesis without my own family. Many of my family members are to be found implicitly or explicitly on the pages that follow. I am deeply indebted to my brother Olaf and his wife, for their unrelenting encouragement throughout my PhD and for patiently answering the seemingly silliest questions on earth. My nephews Philipp Rank, Nico Puhl, and Felix Wesser provided much food for thought and unknowingly offered insights into intergenerational family dynamics – they also never failed to make me laugh. Heartfelt appreciation goes to my parents, whose daily routines were interrupted by their wayward daughter living with them again. I thank them for their patience and care, for having shared many memories and laughter with me, but above all, I thank them for having given me both roots and wings.

*Mutti und Vati: Danke für alles! Diese Doktorarbeit ist euch gewidmet.*

*Für meine Eltern*

For my parents



## **Abstract**

This thesis uses the secular coming-of-age ritual, Jugendweihe ('youth consecration'), as a locus for exploring the ways kinship and politics in Germany are complexly intertwined. Although Jugendweihe emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as a substitute for ecclesiastical coming-of-age rituals, and was adopted by various movements, it is closely associated with the former GDR (German Democratic Republic/East Germany). Under the GDR, young people aged thirteen to fourteen prepared for their Jugendweihe ceremony in ten 'youth lessons', which aimed to craft 'socialist personalities'. Between 1955 and 1989 more than seven million adolescents pledged allegiance to the GDR state during the public ceremony, which was followed by a family celebration. With the demise of state socialism in 1989-90, western observers and the Churches assumed the ritual would vanish, but Jugendweihe continues to be celebrated in contemporary eastern Germany – without a pledge of allegiance. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between November 2012 and January 2014 in Thuringia, this thesis investigates the changed social relations between individuals, families, and the state in eastern Germany after the political caesura of 1989-90. It explores the ritual's abiding relevance within a different socio-political context, and considers how the ritual's metamorphosis is mediated both through the local Jugendweihe Association and the grandparental and parental generations. The research examines what values grandparents and parents, who were socialised under the GDR, seek to transmit to their offspring born after the GDR state's demise. It demonstrates the continued (and changing) salience of connections between kinship, ritual, and politics in contemporary Germany.



## Introduction

It was a bright Saturday morning in spring. A fourteen-year-old girl straightened herself as she stood in a row with her taller classmates, sensing the presence of their families and teachers sitting behind them in the solemnly decorated community hall. Somehow her clothes felt too big, despite having been tailored especially for her and for this important occasion. In front of them was a string quartet; on stage stood the guest speaker behind a lectern bearing the German Democratic Republic (GDR/East Germany) coat of arms: a hammer, a compass, and a garland of corn. The girl's heart pounded as the speaker said the crucial words: 'So answer: Yes, this we pledge!' Her pastor's advice rang in her head as she lip-synched the response: 'Yes, this we pledge.' A tremendous silence filled the hall, and with it came the realisation that everyone had lip-synched, rather than spoken, the vow. She longed to be invisible. The speaker, the headmaster and their class teachers looked from the stage down at the group of roughly forty adolescents, baffled. A slow, astonished murmur swelled up out of the silence; a voice from the back shouted: 'Answer!' Chaos broke out.

As a teenager, I had imagined this scenario in the run-up to my own *Jugendweihe* ('youth consecration') in 1987.<sup>1</sup> It was the reason that I never followed my pastor's suggestion that I mouth – rather than say – the pledge to the state and our socialist future. I was far too afraid that my classmates might have had the same idea, plunging us into a sinister silence and triggering the breakdown of the whole ceremony, which we had all been feverishly anticipating for months. Instead, – standing on the stage I had imagined, with the same string quartet and coat of arms, my heart pounding as I had anticipated it would – I pronounced the words loudly while keeping my fingers crossed, thinking: 'It does not count, I do not mean it.'

Almost exactly two and a half years later, on the evening of 9<sup>th</sup> November 1989, friends and I stood among hundreds of demonstrators in front of the Johannis Church in Gera, the third largest town in Thuringia – and my hometown. A voice, desperate to attract our

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<sup>1</sup> I follow previous scholarship on this ritual by using the German term 'Jugendweihe' (hereafter not italicized) instead of 'youth consecration' to distinguish the coming-of-age ceremony in eastern Germany, conventionally celebrated at the eighth grade, from the youth consecration of the Apostolic Church.

attention, shouted excitedly over the crowd telling us of the announcement just made on the TV news: that one of the main demands of the ongoing protests for more civil liberties had been granted. From now on we were free to travel anywhere. We looked at each other in disbelief. It was as unbelievable as the disappearance of the country – the country we grew up in and wanted to reform – would be, less than a year later.

However, Jugendweihe – the secular coming-of-age ritual during which eighth-grade adolescents had pledged allegiance to this country's future – did not disappear. It continues to be celebrated each spring as an alternative to ecclesiastic coming-of-age rituals – predominantly in eastern Germany.<sup>2</sup> The public ceremony involves an approximately eighty minute festive programme during which adolescents take the stage and are welcomed into the 'circle of adults' (*Kreis der Erwachsenen*). This event – held in either a theatre or community hall – is followed by a large family celebration.

This thesis investigates how and why this ritual survived the *Wende* (turning point) – the political rupture of 1989-90 – and continues to be celebrated in eastern Germany – a quarter of a century after the demise of the GDR state with which it was so closely associated. It uses the Jugendweihe ritual as a unique lens through which to view the changing social relations between individuals, families, and the state in eastern Germany. These changing social relations are the result of eastern Germans' lives spanning two different socio-political contexts – socialist dictatorship and federal parliamentary republic – and which also stand in the shadow of a third – the Nazi dictatorship.

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between November 2012 and January 2014 in my hometown, Gera. It was the first time that I lived there for a prolonged period of time since leaving in 1999, to travel abroad and then to live in Scotland. I conducted preliminary research in 2010 on Jugendweihe in Gera for my undergraduate dissertation, which focussed on the parental generation of Jugendweihe participants. Yet many new questions emerged in this process, which I could not satisfactorily answer –

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I distinguish between the GDR (German Democratic Republic), East Germany, and East Germans and the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), West Germany, and West Germans when referring to the respective states or territories and people associated with them between 1949 and 1990. For the period after German unification, I use eastern federal states/Germans and western federal states/Germans respectively.

which led me to this project. I was particularly interested in illuminating the ways in which the ritual is a site where kinship and politics are intricately entangled, connecting the past not only with the present but also with the vision of a particular future.

In what follows I briefly present the literature that has guided my thinking, then turn to my fieldsite and methodology, before outlining the chapters of my thesis.

## ***Theoretical Orientations: 'Post-socialism', Ritual, and Kinship***

### ***Post-socialism***

The collapse of state socialism in 1989-90 heralded the end of the Cold War. 'Post-socialism' originally emerged as a temporal category for a period in which 'societies once referred to as constituting "actually existing socialism" had ceased to exist' and were 'replaced by one or another form of putatively democratizing state' (Chari and Verdery 2009: 10). The presumptive designation of a 'transition period' was quickly called into doubt by anthropologists, who did not take the shift from a certain past to a certain future for granted but asked: 'Transition from what, to what?' (Bohlman in Berdahl 2000: 11; Hann 1994; Verdery 1991). The term 'transition' also raises the question of when such a process is complete or, put differently, when we can stop categorising a society and its people as 'post-socialist' (Hann, Humphrey, and Verdery 2002). I perceive 'post-socialism' to be useful as a conceptual category 'to think with' to an extent. Given similar experiences of a socialist past, marked by Marxist-Leninist doctrines, which led to particular social, economic and political commonalities, and given the shared experience of a point of political rupture, material from any post-socialist country can raise questions that might prove useful in the study of eastern Germany (Verdery 1996: 11). Yet there are certain spatial-temporal issues that limit the concept as a descriptive and transitory category, which have led scholars researching post-socialist contexts to question whether 'post-socialism' is indeed a fruitful analytical concept (Boyer and Yurchak 2010; Hann, Humphrey, and Verdery 2002; Ringel 2013; Stenning and Horschelmann 2008).

In regards to the question of what post-socialist states might be transitioning from, many scholars have pointed out that socialism and socialist societies were not – and still are not – fully understood in 'the West' (Verdery 1996, 2002; Hann 1994, 2002, 2006; Yurchak

2006). The politics of the Cold War gave Western scholars very limited access to socialist societies, while native ‘scholars were under strict Party control’ (Verdery 2001: 14497). Western scholars thus frequently used a top-down approach in which socialist societies were commonly reduced to ‘totalitarianism’ (ibid). While I will return to this issue and its particular relevance to eastern Germany in more detail in the kinship section below, for now it suffices to say that such top-down approaches are limiting because of their more or less pronounced reification of large-scale binaries – such as repression and resistance – that do not appropriately reflect actual social life under state socialism. Yet such analytical approaches continue, explicitly or implicitly, to define work in the post-Cold War period (Yurchak 2006: 4-10).

In addition, categorising historically diverging countries under the umbrella of post-socialism carries the risk that post-socialist scholars might over-emphasise the socialist legacy and deny people’s own historicity. An investigation of people’s motivations and behaviour can then be easily reduced to ‘the effects of socialism’ without acknowledging that post-socialist societies had a history and culture prior to the advent of socialism. Many post-socialist scholars have pointed out that the concept of post-socialism lends itself to the concealment of cultural continuity, because the collapse of state socialism is understood as a new beginning with a focus on change (Hann 2006; Hofman 2011; Stenning and Horschelmann 2008). Indeed, these criticisms mirror critiques (Nugent 2008; Ranger 1993; Spear 2003) within the postcolonial context of *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) thesis. Furthermore, the categorisation of the eastern German region as ‘post-socialist’ can also conceal intra-regional differences (Peperkamp et al. 2009). Paying attention to regional differences is of particular import in the study of Jugendweihe as a ritual that emerged prior to the foundation of a German nation-state and in the Thuringian region, which – with its specific socio-political history – I suggest, has provided a fertile ground for the ritual’s uptake and spread.

As for the question of what post-socialist states might be transitioning to, many economic and political scientists adopted a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, presuming that socialist societies would simply be transformed into ‘Western style’ free market economies and liberal democracies. However, post-socialist ethnographies were at the forefront of challenging neoliberal transition theories by showing that the change from a socialist

command economy to a capitalist market economy is not universally homogenous. This change was met at the micro-level by people's innovative strategies; enmeshing new rules with old interests and values (Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 2000; Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2002; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996). Ethnographies of eastern Germany are largely concerned with these transformational processes, elucidating their impact on eastern Germans and strategies deployed in response, variously explored through a focus on retributive justice (Borneman 1997a), borders and identity (Berdahl 1999b), East Berlin companies (Müller 2007), military elites (Bickford 2011), material cultural (Veenis 2012), and architectural heritage (James 2012). These monographs are largely based on research conducted in the 1990s. More recent sociological and ethnographic studies have emerged on religion and secularity (Peperkamp and Ratjar 2010; Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein, and Schmidt-Lux 2009) and urban shrinkage (Ringel 2014). Yet most – with the exception of Wohlrab-Sahr et al. (2009) – have virtually overlooked families and intergenerational dynamics, which include a generation of eastern Germans that has no experience of state socialism. This oversight is what my thesis attempts to address.

While anthropologists have thus refuted 'transitology', and largely have used the term 'transformation' instead of 'transition', transitional thinking is still prevalent in the public and scholarly mainstream (Burawoy & Verdery 1999: 14-15). In other words, issues raised in this respect, such as 'development' and 'modernisation' – in which the (former) 'Second World' is required to catch up with the (former) 'First World' – remain prominent in their various economic, socio-religious and political manifestations.

In the case of eastern Germany this is particularly pertinent due to its accession to West Germany on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1990. This incorporation has led to a comparison that always rests on a contrast between the 'new' (eastern) and 'old' (western) federal states. Despite East Germany's 'reputation as one of the most prosperous and economically advanced countries of the socialist world' (Hann 2006: 10), it was 'underdeveloped' compared to West Germany. East Germany's absorption into the West German state in 1990 was led by the latter's 'hope that soon the East would, essentially, become like the West' (Fullbrook 1994: 211). But this turning of the former East Germany and its inhabitants into the spitting image of West Germany has not transpired. Instead studies have explored eastern

Germans' sense of 'second-class citizenship' (Kolbe 2010) and whether East Germany was colonized by West Germany (Cooke 2005). More recent sociological studies in German employ discourse analysis to illustrate the continued stigmatization of eastern Germans (Kollmorgen, Koch, and Dienel 2011; Pates and Schochow 2012). Pates and Schochow have even received criticism in public media because of their edited volume's title *The Ossi: Micro-Political Studies about a Symbolic Foreigner*.<sup>3</sup> Although today the stigma attached to being from East Germany has perhaps decreased, in order to understand the continuation and adaptation of *Jugendweihe* in post-Wende Germany, I suggest, it is crucial to bear in mind that the treatment of eastern Germans in the immediate post-unification years has shaped a mistrust toward western Germans and the (West) German state. Furthermore, eastern Germans remain viewed as 'the other' within Germany. The Wende was thus a political caesura that Veena Das (1995) describes as a 'critical event' – leading to transformations that impacted upon not just the state, but several institutions: family, community, bureaucracy, the law, and economic corporations. These changes required eastern Germans to adapt new forms in response to the 'new modes of action' that had redefined previous categories (Das 1995: 6). I explore these adaptations that go hand in hand with changing social relations in various ways, in which *Jugendweihe* as a ritual both binds people but also excludes others. I turn now to a discussion of ritual and its relation to society.

## **Ritual**

Because ritual is a feature of all societies, its study has produced a wealth of theoretical and ethnographic contributions from the anthropological discipline to which I cannot do justice here. Rather I only provide a rough sketch relevant to my ethnographic context. The analysis of ritual has pertained largely to the study of religion, but this focus shifted in the mid-1970s with ritual receiving attention in its own right, leading also to an extension of the concept to the secular realm (Bell 1992: 3; Moore and Myerhoff 1977).<sup>4</sup> In the European context, the study of ritual has employed anthropological insights – largely derived from non-European cultures – to the analysis of rituals from the European

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<sup>3</sup> All translations of German texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

<sup>4</sup> Although Durkheim ([1915] 1964) arguably preceded such a shift by making the distinction between the 'profane' and the 'sacred', but viewing ritual as social and not as religious per se.

past, but not so much for contemporary Europe (Borneman 2010: 289). The reason for this, John Borneman holds, is due to the fact that the European present is

seen either as deritualised (Berger 1967; Borch-Jacobsen 1994), at best mere ‘entertainment’ (Caillois 1961), or alternatively, the concept of ritual is applied to extremely diverse repetitive behaviours in large-scale events without asking the more rigorous questions that had been posed about its social significance for the lifecourse of individual subjects in non-European contexts (ibid.; see also Boissevain 1992 on European ritual-revitalisation).

This thesis builds upon previous research on Jugendweihe, and seeks to address this gap in the analysis of European ritual, by exploring further its social significance for the lifecourse of individual subjects, both in relation to the domestic and socio-political aspects of kinship. Following the anthropologist Anselma Gallinat’s work (2002) – the first major study on Jugendweihe in English – I define Jugendweihe as a ‘secular coming-of-age ritual’; in keeping with this definition, I will briefly address the literature on collective public rituals and life crisis rituals.

The capacity of rituals to communicate through non-verbal action links them to power, and they have been investigated thus in their relation to the social structure (Mitchell 2010). Here public rituals have been viewed either as conservative in nature and therefore maintaining a social order (Bloch 1992; Durkheim [1915] 1964; Rappaport 1999), or as fostering social change in which ritual and social structure mutually act upon each other (Cohen 1993; Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Kertzer 1988). Yet Jugendweihe, employed for various political ends, has acted in both capacities at different times (see Chapter 2). In this thesis I further explore this versatility by examining what the ritual does in contemporary Germany.

Given that the GDR Jugendweihe was also a state ritual, it is noteworthy that state rituals are seen to create an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991) and the idea of the state itself (Abrams 1988; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Navaro-Yashin 2002). The GDR Jugendweihe served as a means of legitimising the socialist state self-referentially but also

in relation to others, such as to the Western Bloc. The intention of the GDR's political elite was to produce 'socialist personalities' (ZAJ 1986) who pledged their allegiance to the state and future world socialism during the ritual ceremony, and thus Jugendweihe was an 'instrument in the socialization of a GDR citizen' (Wolbert 2011: 126).

Christel Lane's (1981) study of the Soviet ritual system – perhaps the most prominent – follows Clifford Geertz's (1973) approach of 'models of' and 'models for' a world which, he holds, are reconciled in ritual action. Lane argues that the 'models for' aspect is emphasised in Soviet rituals because of the political elite's attempt to employ rituals as a 'tool of cultural management' (Lane 1981: 13). While the GDR political elite's aim can certainly be categorised as social control, Quack & Töbelmann remind us that 'the notion of ritual efficacy is – largely implicitly – constantly at work in the study of ritual' (2010: 23). Indeed, what is really of interest in the socialist ritual system is not just what state strategies were employed, but whether they were successful and why. Yet, a vague notion of ritual efficacy is inadequate as intentions and effects may vary from the respective agents: they are always relative. Thus we need to carefully establish 'what or who affects what or whom and according to whom?' (Quack and Töbelmann 2010: 17). Here the greater part of the substantial body of literature on Jugendweihe itself has not paid sufficient attention to the complexities of ritual efficacy. This literature can be roughly categorised as based on historical, theological, sociological and ethnographic research, to which I now turn.<sup>5</sup>

Some publications investigate Jugendweihe's origin and emphasise its historical importance for the labour movement (Isemeyer and Sühl 1989; Mohrmann 1999; ZAJ 1988). By contrast, the Swedish author Bo Hallberg traces the origin of Jugendweihe to the German enlightenment, but with only five pages dedicated to the GDR Jugendweihe, pays very little heed to its role in socialist East Germany (Hallberg 1979). Theological studies focussed during the Cold War on comparisons between Jugendweihe and Confirmation and the role of Jugendweihe in GDR church-state relations (Albertin 1960; Gordon 1985; Jeremias 1959; Rabbow 1965; Urban and Weitzen 1984). Theologians have

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<sup>5</sup> There are also two works in educational studies (Illing 2000; Tolke 2006), which are both based on interviews with teenagers conducted in Saxony. While these authors provide a brief overview of the ritual's history, their focus is on the significance of Jugendweihe for the adolescents' development.

also been at the forefront of exploring the ritual's survival after the political caesura (Gandow 1994; Hartmann 1992; Meier 1998; Neubert 2000; Pietsch 1991). These studies present, perhaps understandably, a largely antagonistic view of Jugendweihe due to its role as tool of secularisation in the GDR and as a direct competitor of confirmation. Yet they also struggle with the drawbacks prevalent in top-down approaches described above, since these scholars' puzzlement about the ritual's continuity resonates with Andreas Meier's question: 'Why do so many eastern Germans hold onto a celebration, although the GDR had it forced upon them since 1954?' (Meier 1998: 8). They similarly ascribe the reasons for this continuity to 'the sense-vacuum in the ex-GDR, in which one reaches for rituals and habits in an individualized, uprooted and disorganized society' (Gandow 1994: 91); alleviating the *Wendeschmerz*' – the pain associated with the transformation process (Neubert 2000: 175), and as eastern Germans' 'nostalgic longing for a vanished paternalistic state, that is retrospectively glorified' (Meier 1998: 40). In contrast, Chowanski and Dreier, who both worked in the GDR's Central Committee for Jugendweihe, provide interesting but largely uncritical insights into the GDR Jugendweihe and the immediate post-Wende years (Chowanski and Dreier 2000). Noticeably, many of these studies diverge on the role of Jugendweihe under fascism. Depending on whether they have a more positive or negative view of the ritual, they either emphasise its prohibition or employment by the Nazi regime respectively. I discuss the issue of the Nazi past further in Chapter 7.

The German anthropologist Barbara Wolbert (1998; 2011) questions why the ritual could survive the collapse of the GDR state, given that 'with the end of the socialist state the Jugendweihe itself became obsolete' (Wolbert 1998: 200).<sup>6</sup> She also draws our attention to ritual form, which, according to her, previous ritual theories – with their emphasis on function or meaning – have neglected. While I agree that ritual form itself requires investigation, her characterisation of Jugendweihe as an exceptional and therefore suitable case of 'form-without-content' is deduced from the fact that the ritual is no longer 'affirming *state* order' (2011: 128, my emphasis). Hence, she argues, the ritual survived the political rupture of 1989 because 'recognition and stirred emotions led the participants to overlook the fact that its ritual core – the oath – was missing' (Wolbert 2011: 131). She

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<sup>6</sup> Wolbert's 2011 chapter on Jugendweihe is essentially an updated English version of her 1998 article in German. She appears not to have interviewed any ritual participants.

thus falls into the same heuristic trap of a top-down approach by only considering the GDR state's aims but not ritual participants' motivations for partaking in the socialist Jugendweihe – nor the extent to which the state might have achieved its goals.

Diachronic approaches can shed more light on ritual form as, for example, Bloch's (1986) historical examination of the Merina circumcision ritual reveals how the ritual entailed constant and inconstant aspects, allowing its adaptation to changing politico-economic circumstances. The inconstant aspects were, at different periods in time, either elaborated or reduced, whereas the constant aspects made up 'the core of the ritual process' (Bloch 1992: 1). Similarly, Rappaport (1975; 1999) – addressing both the endurance and the adaptability of ritual – holds that ritual consists of, in his terms, indexical and canonical messages. While the former are the changing aspects of ritual, making it malleable according to (present) societal needs, the latter are the unchanging aspects. These make up the core of the ritual and make it recognisable through time as a tradition. Such a distinction between changing/indexical and unchanging/canonical aspects cannot be easily ascertained. Yet, the fact that the vow during the GDR Jugendweihe has in post-Wende eastern Germany become redundant might suggest that it has been an indexical element. Indeed, the vow's omission does not undermine the recognisability and importance of Jugendweihe to its participants.

It is noteworthy that, while ritual can seemingly unify practitioners by concealing the different meanings they attach to it (Bell 1992; Cohen 1979), it can also be 'an assertion of difference' (Smith 1987: 109). The fact that the ritual is celebrated publicly also makes it observable by others. People who celebrate a particular (public) ritual are therefore also involved in a process of 'othering' in which people who participate belong to a social group, while people who do not participate are outsiders (Baumann 1992). The obvious 'outsiders' are the people for whom the ritual bears no significance and who Wolbert categorises as 'those from the West' (2011: 230). Other empirical studies (Aechtner 2011; Gallinat 2002; Saunders 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003) have – explicitly or implicitly – noted the ritual's two aspects: the (social) coming-of-age aspect and the (political) aspect of initiation into a particular social group. They argue that present adolescents are initiated into an 'evolving eastern German identity' (Saunders 2002) that is based on parents' biographic memories. Yet, while the ritual is celebrated predominately in eastern

Germany, these studies do not shed sufficient light on how such an eastern German identity is defined, by whom and for what reasons – all of which questions I explore in this thesis. Furthermore, none of these empirical studies have addressed the role of the Jugendweihe Association, which – I contend – was a key player in securing the continued prevalence of Jugendweihe after the political rupture (see especially Chapter 6).

Lastly, scholars are divided on whether Jugendweihe is a *rite de passage*. Van Gennep ([1909]1960), who coined the term, argued that these rituals belong to a special category associated with a change in social status.<sup>7</sup> They consist of rites of separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal), and reincorporation (post-liminal), and the liminal phase is particularly elaborated in initiation rituals (van Gennep 1960: 11). Scholars disagree in particular on whether an actual change of status is effected in adolescents who participate in Jugendweihe. Döhnert (2002) and Wolbert (1998, 2011) appear to agree that – unlike in the socialist GDR – adolescents no longer undergo a preparation period (liminal phase) during which they are not only educated in a particular worldview, but also change their membership from a children’s organisation (the Pioneers) to a youth organisation (the Free German Youth) and are acknowledged as citizens by the state through the receipt of an ID card. Others (Aechtner 2012; Gallinat 2002; Saunders 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003) argue that the type of gifts, the change of terms of address from informal to formal ‘you’, and the first public glass of alcohol during the family celebration, reflect such a change from childhood to adolescence. I agree with the latter scholars that a change of status – though no longer ceremonially acknowledged by the state – still occurs within the family, if not the neighbourhood or wider social circle. Indeed, I demonstrate in Chapter 4 that additional aspects of the family celebration symbolically mark such a status change. While scholars have not addressed the family celebration in these terms (or only tangentially), they have also overlooked the fact that – although by German law fourteen-year-olds are not adults – there are various legal changes that recognise that they are no longer children. This leads me to my main interest in the relationship between politics and kinship.

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<sup>7</sup> Coming-of-age rituals cannot be understood outwith the historico-political context in which they take place (see, for example, Alvarez 2008; Horowitz 1993; Pertierra 2015). I explore Jugendweihe in this context rather than in a global comparison of life cycle rituals.

## **Kinship**

Anthropology's past preoccupation with stateless societies focussed on the analysis of continuity and socio-structural organisation through the study of kinship, making kinship central to the discipline. In particular, Meyer Fortes' (1969) dichotomy of the politico-jural (public) and the domestic (private) spheres led to a focus on socio-political institutions in the anthropological study of kinship, whereas 'the family' was believed to be rather unimportant and universally constant (Carsten 2004; Yanagisako 1979; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). In the 1970s feminist anthropologists highlighted that the social position of women – though not missing entirely from anthropological scholarship – had been naturalised, and questions regarding their social roles, their crucial work in the socialization of offspring and, ultimately, a narrowly-defined power politics needed addressing (di Leonardo 1991; Peletz 1995; Yanagisako 1979). I follow contemporary kinship scholarship that views kinship as inextricably linked not only with gender (Pine 2002; Yanagisako and Collier 1987) but also personhood (Bloch 1998; Carsten 2004). I address in this section first the public/private dichotomy, before turning my attention to gender and personhood.

The unexamined dichotomy of the public (political)/private (domestic) sphere, partly causing anthropology's previous disregard of kinship in state societies, is an issue intriguingly replicated in the ways scholars, mainly historians, have studied the 'second German dictatorship' after its demise. Here two influential schools of thought can be distinguished, and categorised as either adhering to totalitarian theory or as showing the limits of the dictatorship respectively (Ross 2002; Moranda 2010; Port 2015). The former is largely concerned with the study of the SED – the GDR's ruling Socialist Unity Party of Germany – and its security apparatus, epitomised in the Stasi, East Germany's State Security. The totalitarian school emphasises the 'withering away' of civil society and holds that 'social politics centred exclusively on the control of – and resistance to – the Socialist Unity Party-dominated public sphere' (Betts 2010: 2). Notably, the stability of the GDR, particularly after the People's Uprising in 1953, is seen as having been aided by East Germans' retreat into the *Nischengesellschaft* ('niche society') (Gaus 1983) – that is, the private sphere of the family. In contrast, the latter school of thought is closely linked to

Lüdtke's concept of *Eigen-Sinn* (one's own sense; spontaneous self-will)<sup>8</sup> and *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), and explores 'how East Germans responded to SED dictates on their own terms' (Moranda 2010: 332). Both of these schools have accordingly been criticized for either reducing life under socialism to a tyranny with little resemblance to actual life in East Germany, or for downplaying the terror of the dictatorship and thereby playing into the hands of a dangerous brand of *Ostalgie* – the nostalgia for the East (ibid).<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, I have mainly drawn on historical studies in English, which engage critically with East German history and challenge clear dichotomies of repression/resistance, state/society, and public/private by paying attention to the everyday life of GDR citizens (Betts 2010; Fulbrook 2005; Fulbrook and Port 2015; Harsch 2007; McLellan 2011; Plum 2015; Vaizey 2014).

The demise of state socialism, however, not only caused a revival of totalitarian theory, there was also an increasing interest in the study of memory – variously described as an 'obsession with memory' or 'memory boom' (Antze and Lambek 1996; Berliner 2005; Hodgkin and Radstone 2003; Huyssen 1995; Radstone 2000). This was not least the case because the disappearance of state socialism 'with its hegemonic hold on memory and history production has allowed and in fact generated an outpouring of counter memories and histories hidden, 'forgotten' and forbidden' (Pine, Kaneff, and Haukanes 2004: 1). There has also been an emphasis on (postsocialist) nostalgia (Angé and Berliner 2014; Boym 2001; Todorova and Gille 2010) that is more closely linked to forgetting as an integral part of the processes of memory (Carsten 1995a; Connerton 2008; Connerton 2009). Nostalgia has been viewed as 'reactionary', 'escapist' and 'inauthentic' which 'greatly simplifies if not falsifies the past' (Hirsch and Spitzer 2003: 83). The danger of such selective memories, explains Luisa Passerini – following the political theorist Perez-Diaz – lies in the 'close link between the formation of a "democratic public sphere" and the memories of the individuals who give life to it: if memory of the past is trivialised, this leads to [...] incomplete and forgetful individuals who can easily become prey of totalitarian movements' (Passerini 2003: 246).

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<sup>8</sup> For a concise definitional history of Lüdtke's concept see Lindenberger (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Port notes that these charged debates have become on both fronts 'more meanspirited, marked by a disturbing tendency to mischaracterize the arguments of one's adversaries, as well as engage in *ad hominem* attacks and self-righteous moral posturing' (2015: 7)

In contrast, nostalgia can also be viewed more positively – ‘as a resistant relationship to the present, a ‘critical utopianism’ that envisions a better future’ (Hirsch and Spitzer 2003: 83). In the 1990s and early 2000s, *Ostalgie* was viewed by some as a stigmatising term to refer to any symbol or positive memory of the socialist past as condemnable GDR nostalgia. This analysis, in turn, led to *Ostalgie* being re-interpreted as a particular form of eastern German self-assertion (Ahbe 2005; Berdahl 1999a; Boyer 2006; Dale 2007). However, I believe that nostalgia for the socialist past needs to be better contextualised, and in this thesis I attempt to pay attention to who performs nostalgia and why, what this nostalgia consists of, and in what spheres of life it is expressed (Todorova 2010: 7-8). Since kinship discourses are entangled in personal memory and wider politico-historical events (Pine 2007), I illustrate how a particular memory is transmitted to a generation that has no experience of the socialist past (see especially Chapters 2 and 7).

It is noteworthy that Jugendweihe consists of both a public ceremony and a family celebration. Empirical studies of Jugendweihe (Aechtner 2011; Chauliac 2009; Gallinat 2002; 2005; Saunders 2002) have shown that today’s parents – who celebrated the GDR ritual – stress the social/familial aspect over the socialist/political aspect of the ritual. Asking Thuringians about their ‘Jugendweihe’ may garner replies in reference to both the public ceremony and private celebrations; but the private family celebration is always emphasised. I argue that this distinction is less indicative of a neat split in East Germans’ lives between private and public spheres, than of the complex interdependence between those spheres, both in socialist East Germany and in contemporary eastern Germany. Borneman holds that the ritual was possibly ‘the best example [of] how parents and the state struggled for the control of children and youths’ (1992: 164) during the Cold War. He argues that ‘parents turned the Jugendweihe into a kinship festival, connected to the event but privately celebrated’, which ‘by the 1980s [...] had become a symbiosis, where neither the state nor parents got exactly what they wanted, but both participated, though in a discordant rhythm, in a mutually advantageous relationship’ (Borneman 1992: 165).

Empirical studies of Jugendweihe (Gallinat 2005; Saunders 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003; Aechtner 2011) have somewhat too readily accepted the notion of a ‘family tradition’ and appear to view ‘family’ as politically neutral and homogenous across time and space. Throughout this thesis I pursue the line of inquiry in *Vital Relations*, arguing

that kinship in modern state societies has not been relegated to the domestic realm but is complexly entwined with the project of state-building, and an organizing force in political, economic and religious structures and processes (McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Similarly, in his comparative study of family life under five different dictatorships (Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Turkey) between 1900 and 1950, Paul Ginsborg (2014) argues that these political regimes not only aimed at moulding families, but that families themselves proved to be political actors in historical processes. Each of the societies he investigated was at the time in a period of dramatic transformation meant to herald in a new and better future (Ginsborg 2014). This was the case for the GDR at its foundation, when – like the FRG – it needed to make a clean break with its Nazi past. Unlike West Germany, however, it pursued a path toward communism; and a crucial aspect of that pursuit was the adoption of the Soviet or socialist family model. The Soviet or socialist family model views patriarchy as an essential hindrance to achieving a communist utopia. Because of this, women’s role as mothers and workers was a political issue, and women under socialism were often more closely associated with the state – or at least with ‘its redistributive, social support aspects’ (Gal 2002: 90; Pine 2002). In particular, women’s relation to the (new) state changed, and as will be evident throughout this thesis, it is especially women that promote and insist on the public ceremony as an integral part of the contemporary Jugendweihe.

The current generation of eastern German parents, I argue, plays a crucial role in gluing the family together, but also in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (managing/coming to terms with the past). In the early 2000s, childhood memoirs emerged from the so-called ‘Wende generation’ or ‘Wende children’ – East Germans who were children or young adults at the time of the political rupture in 1989-90 – in an attempt to recuperate their own memories of everyday life in the GDR (see, for example, Hensel 2002; Rusch 2003; Tetzlaff 2004). Although these accounts varied, they were united by each dedicating a chapter to their Jugendweihe celebration, and by having been branded ‘nostalgic’ within the public discourse about the East German past – for their supposed lack of criticism of the GDR’s political regime. Yet the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Wall also marked a shift in how this generation dealt with the GDR past and the Wende period. For example, the formation of the network ‘Third Generation East’ in 2009 united various ‘Wende children’ from East and West Germany with the explicit aim of opening a different and

more frank ‘dialogue between old and young and between East and West’ (Hacker et al. 2012: 9).<sup>10</sup>

In literary accounts, too, eastern Germans took a more critical stance towards their origins and socialization, and investigated the *Wende* period in terms of loss and chaos, but also political and moral disorientation, especially in light of the rise of neo-fascism in eastern Germany (Rennefanz 2013; Richter 2015). These ventures share the project of unearthing the ‘quiet rage of the *Wende* generation’ – the subtitle of Sabine Rennefanz’ book – and they make visible how these larger generational tensions are also replicated and produced within the nuclear family (see Prochnow and Rohde 2011). In this sense, the *Wende* – with its dramatic economic, social and political changes – needs to be understood as a caesura in Stephan Feuchtwang’s sense, that is, a before/after event that also maps familial generations onto it (Feuchtwang 2011). Recent family memoirs (Leo 2011; Ruge 2012; Brasch 2012) – largely about privileged families under the GDR – highlight the complexity of eastern German kinship across three generations that also span three different socio-political contexts and two caesurae. Here family tensions are of a political nature, that is, when kin and political loyalties diverge (Feuchtwang 2007). In this thesis, I explore the relations between the contemporary teenage generation born in unified Germany, and their parental and grandparental generations – not to overstate the difference between socialist generations and the post-unification generation, but to illustrate the generational differences that also exist between the grandparental and parental generations. Each generation, of course, experienced the GDR differently, in part because it was differently exposed to the social manipulations of its political elite – which were not only about constructing a socialist family model. Rather, because the SED knew that ‘to have the young is to hold the future’ (Saunders 2007: 11), it aimed at creating a new generation of ‘socialist personalities’. In the mid-1970s, this ‘socialist personality’ was officially defined as someone

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<sup>10</sup> The Third Generation East (TGE) narrowly defined its ‘generation’ as Germans who were born between 1975 and 1985 and has been – externally and internally – criticized for somewhat arbitrarily limiting its members to a decade by birth and/or applying both ‘generation’ and ‘third’ incorrectly. Yet this debate also highlights that ‘generation’ is a rather volatile concept, especially in relation to political rupture. A year’s age difference at the time of the caesura can make a crucial difference to a subject’s perception and lifecourse choices.

who has a comprehensive command of political, specialist and general knowledge, possesses a firm class outlook rooted in the Marxist-Leninist worldview, is notable for excellent mental, physical and moral qualities, is thoroughly imbued with collective thoughts and deeds, and actively, consciously and creatively contributes to the shaping of socialism (Fulbrook 2005: 115; her translation).

As social institution in the GDR, Jugendweihe was designed to ‘contribute to cultivate and educate all children of the people to become all-round developed socialist personalities’ (ZAJ 1986: 177). However, Borneman argues that the focus on the collective, encouraging people to think beyond the individual, was difficult for East Germans to consolidate with the state’s over-bearing paternalistic role, in which ‘the individual was to be a loyal *Kleinbürger* dependent on the state for goods and services, financially secure from cradle to grave, and hesitant to use his/her own initiative’ (1992: 200). Anna Saunders’ (2007) study of youth and patriotism in eastern Germany from 1979-2002 suggests that the official state rhetoric often failed to yield loyalty from youths, but that ‘the death of the GDR clearly did not imply the death of young people’s loyalty to an eastern set of values, but in many ways its rebirth’ (ibid: 225). In this thesis I explore what these ‘eastern values’ are that the grandparental and parental generations intend to transmit to today’s adolescents, and how they attempt to transmit them.

## **Fieldsite: Gera, Thuringia**

*Almost all other tribes attempted to seize political power – never the Thuringians. Our [German] culture owes them unspeakably much, our state precisely nothing.*

– German Historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1882 cited in Rassloff 2010: 7-8)

Thuringia has been of great significance to Germany's cultural history – a significance reflected in its many nicknames, such as 'heartland of German culture', 'stronghold of the Reformation', 'land of classicism' or 'home of the Bach family'. But it was also the epitome of Germany's *Kleinstaaterei* – scattered regionalism (Rassloff 2010). While the German nation state was founded in 1871, Thuringia – ruled by various dynasties – only united in 1920 as the Free State of Thuringia, with Weimar as its capital. Often poetically referred to as the 'green heart of Germany' due to its fairly dense forestation and its location in the centre of the country (Map 1), its cities with their textile, optical and car-manufacturing industries grew rapidly during the Industrial Revolution. However, even today the region resonates with a 1947 report, which noted: 'despite heavy industrialisation, Thuringia has a distinctly agricultural character' (cited in Allinson 2000: 17).

There are several reasons for why I chose Thuringia, and in particular Gera as a fieldsite. Firstly, I wanted to make use of pre-established good relations with the local Jugendweihe Association. Secondly, the Association has a monopoly on conducting Jugendweihe in East Thuringia, whereas in most other regions various associations compete over ritual participants, which in turn renders it extremely difficult to establish any meaningful participation figures. Thirdly, during my previous research I learnt that Jugendweihe originated in Thuringia, yet the region itself had been neglected by previous research on this ritual. Last but not least, there were considerations pertaining to both finances and kinship that made me decide to return to my hometown and stay with my family.



*Map 1: Location of Thuringia in Germany*

Source: <http://www.petersingerlinks.com/das-gruene-band.htm>; amended by author

Legend: red – ‘green strip’ border between East Germany (light green) and West Germany (cream) during the Cold War.

Röpsen, the village of 300 people in which I was raised, and in which I lived again during my fieldwork, became part of the city of Gera in 1993. Like Gera and its other incorporated villages, it has transformed in a variety of visible and audible ways since unification. For visitors the village presents itself – like many other Thuringian villages – in a picture postcard-like fashion, pretty and clean. Still, I was also aware of the process of beautification it had undergone. Most houses had been refurbished, because now the

materials to do so were available; the village square in front of the church had been newly cobbled, and there was yet another lovely square for village gatherings below it; most of the streets were now properly tarmacked, instead of the much re-patched potholes I was used to from the 1970s and 1980s. Some parts of the village, with their traditionally half-timbered houses and barnyards, could have passed easily as places right out of Grimm's fairy tales, if it were not for the many cars parked on the streets. The persistent swoosh from the nearby *Autobahn*, clearly audible when I lay in bed at night, remained for me a marker of difference from my childhood years when the motorway's proximity had been almost unnoticed because it had had so little traffic.

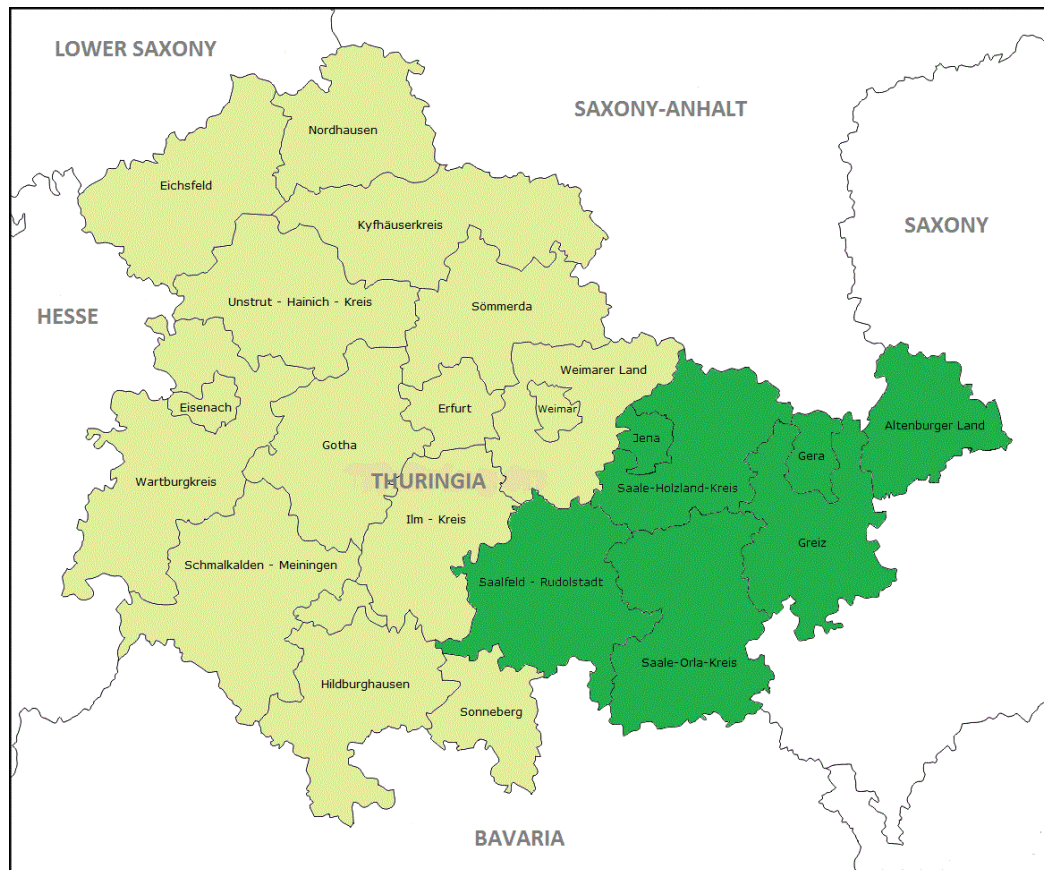
Whereas to an outsider it might have seemed that there were only improvements, I was also conscious of the village's losses: there was no longer a *KONSUM* (the GDR's chain store), nor a *Tante-Emma-Laden* (corner shop), no pub nor voluntary fire brigade, and even the sports club had become somewhat redundant. Once a week a bakery van would stop in the village, but only a few immobile pensioners would buy some bread or cake. There were some events organized by the *Heimatverein* (local heritage society), formed post-unification, and social gatherings for pensioners. Yet all the regular social meeting places, where people would exchange greetings, the latest gossip, share sociality and commensality beyond the family, had vanished. There were rarely people at the bus stop across the street, because – unlike in GDR times – most villagers owned a car. It was not uncommon for me to be the only person using the comfortable public transport to the city, which had been modernized in 2005.

Gera, situated in East Thuringia along the river Weisse Elster, had roughly 100,800 inhabitants in 2013, and is Thuringia's third-largest city (see Map 2). Since 2005, Gera has carried the byname 'Otto-Dix-city' after its honorary citizen, the famous painter who was born there. During my fieldwork, proposals were made for a new arthouse, which was hoped to draw more tourists, not least in an attempt to alleviate the city's financial difficulties. Yet when I discussed this topic with Jutta, a Jugendweihe Association member, she dryly responded:

Well, art and Otto Dix – that's all well and good, but I doubt it'll attract more tourists. I mean an arthouse for Gera – what's all this good for?

Gera is and always has been an *Arbeiterstadt* (worker's city). They don't care for art.

The arthouse project was also aimed at revitalizing the cultural scene, since Gera often felt 'deserted'. Inhabitants of all ages commonly noted that there 'is nothing happening' in Gera, or that 'the pavements are folded up straight after 6 pm' (*die Bürgersteige werden gleich nach 18 Uhr hochgeklappt*).



Map 2: East Thuringian Region

Source: [www.thueringen.de](http://www.thueringen.de); amended by author

This unattractiveness was frequently contrasted by its inhabitants with Gera's heyday during the Industrial Revolution, when it grew rapidly due to its booming textile industry. Today, many Geraer – as people from the city are known – appear to reminisce more nostalgically about the prosperity of their *Heimatstadt* (hometown) at the turn of the century than about socialist times. They often proudly pointed out to me the many prosperous Art Nouveau villas that scatter its cityscape, which have been beautifully

restored in the post-Wende years; or they noted that the first forerunner of the Hertie department store – which was to become one of the leading chain stores in Germany – opened in their city in 1882, and that in 1892 Gera became the second city in Germany with a functioning electric tram. However, these visible architectural or infrastructural remainders of a more distant past whitewash the significant social disparities of their time. A study of Gera’s housing situation in the early 1910s, conducted by a local teacher, disclosed that many of Gera’s working populace lived in squalor, with poor health and high infant and child mortality (Uhl 1913). Undeniably, these intertwined factors of industrial growth and simultaneously terrible working and living conditions among workers contributed to making Gera – as one twenty-something-year-old pointed out to me – ‘a socialist city’.

Thuringia, too, can be categorised as a stronghold of the labour movement, having hosted three major conferences of German socialism: Eisenach (1869), Gotha (1875) and Erfurt (1891) (Allinson 2000: 17; Grebing 1969). The historian Mark Allinson summarizes that ‘the region’s most striking political feature, however, is its tendency to lean towards extremism and/or exaggerate national trends’ (Allinson 2000: 18). Indeed, the fairly equal proportions of an industrial and a non-industrial working populace may have been one of the reasons for ‘a very close balance between the parties of the left and the right’, with ‘the absence of any moderating centre forces of consequence’ leading to an ‘exaggerated importance for minority parties, and a high degree of political polarization’ (Tracey 1975: 24). Traditionally socialist, the support for the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in Thuringia was always higher than the national average; but so was the support of national socialism in its different forms in the 1920s and during the Third Reich (Allinson 2000: 18; Tracey 1975). Under the Nazi regime, Thuringia became not only a celebrated centre of great German culture but also one of horror, with Buchenwald – one of the largest concentration camps on German soil – located just 10 km outside Weimar.

The US Army conquered Thuringia in April 1945 but in July of the same year, the territory was taken over by the Soviet Union, as agreed among the allied forces. Thuringia became part of the Soviet Occupying Zone (SBZ), and political parties began quickly to form: first the Communist Party (KPD), followed by the Socialists (SPD) and later the Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberal Democrats (LDPD). Later, the DBD (Democratic

Farmers Party of Germany) was founded in order to weaken the CDU and the LDPD, while the NDPD (National-Democratic Party of Germany) sought to provide a political outlet for former NSDAP (National-Socialist German Worker's Party) and Wehrmacht members. In 1946, the KPD and SPD merged to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED) – a merger that the Soviet Union enforced. However, it also reflected the will of many socialists and communists, who believed the disunity of the labour movement to have been a contributing factor to Hitler's rise (Grebing 1969: 184; Thomanek and Niven 2001: 24). In Thuringia, this merger was supported by many of the socialist and communist political prisoners who had survived Buchenwald and who became key political players in the region (Allinson 2000: 21; Kachel 2011: 16, 122). Increasing Cold War tensions between the western Allies and the Soviet Union led, in May 1949, to the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG/West Germany) with Bonn as its capital. In October, the SBZ followed suit, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR/East Germany) was founded, with East Berlin as capital (see Map 1; white former FRG; green former GDR). While the political elite simulated political pluralism through the variety of parties, it ensured the SED's rule by 'synchronizing' (*gleichschalten*) them all, and an electoral system of voting for the *Nationale Front* that consisted of the SED and all its bloc parties (see Allinson 2000: 23-38).

In 1952, an administrative reform – part of the GDR's adoption of the Soviet Union's 'democratic centralism' – dissolved all the states of the federal system and restructured them into 14 *Bezirke* (counties). Thuringia was split into three new counties named after their administrative capitals – Erfurt, Suhl, and Gera. The county of Gera is congruent with what is described today as East Thuringia, the region that also marks the catchment area of the local *Jugendweihe Ostthüringen e.V.* (Jugendweihe East Thuringia, registered association; hereafter (Jugendweihe) Association).

During socialist times, Gera's growing main industries (textile, machine tools, and electronic equipment) and the Soviet-German uranium mining company SDAG Wismut led to a steadily increasing population. The high-rise blocks of flats in Gera's city centre erected to accommodate this increasing population – like those in Lusan and Bielblach-Ost, districts newly created in the 1970s and 1980s – were highly sought after at the time, as comfortable and inexpensive dwellings with central heating. In contrast, villages were

generally regarded as ‘backward’ because of both their traditional – often religious – views and their lower living standards. Yet with the Wende, Gera suffered high unemployment and outward migration that went hand in hand with a reversal in preference for and affordability of housing space. Many high-rises were abandoned in the 1990s, some were destroyed, and others refurbished. These parts of the city are now predominantly inhabited by people with lower incomes, while many others – those who could afford to do so – have moved outside the city centre into single-family or two-family detached houses in the sprawling villages that were incorporated into Gera in 1993 (see Map 3). Only one of the families in this thesis lived in the city centre, while all others lived in the village-like areas of Gera. Yet only three people of the parental generation had lived in villages during socialism, whereas the majority came from Gera’s typical workers’ districts.



*Map 3: Gera City and its districts (incorporated villages)*  
Source: [www.gera.de](http://www.gera.de)

With German unification in 1990, the free state of Thuringia was re-established, and Erfurt became its capital in 1991. Belonging in both population and territory to the smaller federal states of Germany, it nevertheless has seven regional dialects. Two of these, the

East-Thuringian and South-East-Thuringian dialects, are spoken in the area with which this thesis is concerned. These dialects developed with the Upper Saxon dialect and are today often conflated or perceived to be (Upper) Saxon dialects. Notably, because many of the East German political elite spoke Saxon dialects, including the first head of state Walter Ulbricht, West Germans often associate this dialect with East Germans per se.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary films on East Germany reify this notion by commonly featuring East Germans with a Saxon dialect when they represent some sort of – usually incompetent – GDR state authority, such as border guards, Stasi agents, or policemen.

The distinctive character of the region, resonating through time and reflected in its intertwined social, economic and political particularities – and also mirrored in the city of Gera – may account for why the Jugendweihe ritual emerged here, and was adopted by so many different movements (see Chapter 2). This political polarisation remains today, at both the local and the regional level. Gera's cityscape, for example, sports antifascist graffiti, but the city has hosted the annual Neo-Nazi music concert, 'Rock for Germany', since 2003. Thuringia has been ruled since 1990 by Conservative governments, yet it became the first federal state in post-unification Germany with a coalition government led by The Left party in 2014.

## **Methodology**

### **The Jugendweihe Association**

'Hey, you foreigner!', quipped Sonja, a part-time staff member of the local Jugendweihe Association, when our paths crossed in November 2012. She was a slim, dark-haired woman in her sixties with brown warm eyes and a contagious smile, and asked, 'Are you already here? Did you want to come to this or are you here just by accident?', while simultaneously hugging me tightly. I explained to her that I had arrived in Gera the night before, and wanted to see the laying of at least one of the twelve new *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) that commemorated local victims of the Nazi regime. There were a few familiar faces among the roughly 25 people that had gathered on Karl Liebknecht

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<sup>11</sup> In German it is referred to simply as *Sächsisch* (Saxon, i.e. without the Upper) or *sächselt* (to speak/sound Saxon) – yet it is unconnected to the *Niedersächsisch* (Lower Saxon) dialect.

Street that crisp Friday afternoon. Among them were party members of *Die Linke* (The Left), holding seats in either Gera's city council or the Thuringian parliament. I recognized some of them, like Sonja, from my research on the Jugendweihe ritual in 2010. Sonja and I chatted briefly, and she inquired whether I would continue to the last two locations where stumbling stones would be laid for Helene Fleischer and Erwin Panndorf. Both communists, born in Gera, their names were familiar to me; under state socialism, a street and retirement home had already been named after the former, and the local *Sporthalle* (gymnasium) carried the name of the latter. As darkness was already creeping in, I explained that I was too tired and had to catch one of the infrequent busses home. Sonja admitted that she herself felt like going home, but added, 'I really need to go to the Erwin Panndorf one, because we made this information board on him and I feel...' she paused. Instead of continuing her sentence, she tapped with her right hand on the left side of her chest, signalling that the matter was close to her heart. She smiled at me gently.

A week later, I was at the Association's office to discuss my research project with Sonja, Dagmar – the sixty-year-old vice chairwoman of the Association – and Jutta, another full-time staff member in her mid-fifties. We had first met in 2010 when I conducted seven weeks of field research for my honours dissertation on Jugendweihe, which had focussed on the parental generation of Jugendweihe participants. I explained to the Association members the change in focus and the wider scope of my new research project: my interest in the family and in Jugendweihe as 'family tradition', and my intention to understand the motivations for celebrating Jugendweihe across all three generations: teenagers, parents, and grandparents. At the same time, I elaborated, I wanted to gain an insight into the Association's work, and how they related to both adolescents and families. They agreed that they would support me as much as they could in my research.

Working with the Association enabled me to observe the public Jugendweihe ceremonies, which are ticketed events, and also allowed me to gain insights into what was going on 'behind the stage'. Because of my links to the Association, I was able to speak with a wide range of different people who would have been inaccessible to me otherwise, including teenage volunteers of the Association, performing artists, photographers, ritual guest speakers, and members of other ritual associations. But my main interest was in understanding the motivations behind the Association and its members' work, which has

continued to enable East Thuringians to celebrate a public Jugendweihe ceremony after the political caesura of 1989-90. Working through the Association, I felt, would add a different perspective to the academic literature on Jugendweihe, which has neglected research on the role local associations have played in the ritual's continuity across the territory of the former East Germany.

I arranged with the Association members to work in the office twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, mainly because the Association's *Sprechzeiten* – open consultation days – fell on Tuesdays. This schedule enabled me to observe more closely who would enrol teenagers for Jugendweihe, and how Association members and their 'customers' interacted. Despite my offer to do 'proper work' in the office, members seemed reluctant to let me fully work-shadow, or to train me in the whole range of tasks involved in their work. The reasons for this reluctance, I believe, were due largely to the fact that it was not worthwhile to train someone who would not work with them for good; but it also involved a process of distinction-making in which I was 'the academic'. They offered significant support to my project and provided the use of a computer in Sonja's office so that 'you can read your books and write your thesis'. Especially at the beginning, but also throughout my fieldwork, I explained that I was less interested in what had been written in books than in what was currently happening within the Association and beyond. Over time, Association members appeared to understand this, and I was not only invited to local and regional Jugendweihe Association meetings but also on work outings. My 'hanging out in the office' was limited to simple tasks, such as opening the doors, welcoming parents, stuffing envelopes, and double-checking names or tickets. The only benefits for them in having me were restricted to my consulting role – providing feedback as an outsider, for example, on marketing issues – and to reaffirm their Association's importance by way of almost always introducing me proudly as '*unsere Doktorandin*' (our PhD candidate). Indeed, Dagmar once made a comment that 'there are people who are theoretically minded, and then there are people, like me [her], who are just pragmatic and good at organizing'. This assessment was bizarre to me; I did not view myself as a particularly 'theoretical person', and I had many years of work experience in administration and finance that demonstrated both my pragmatism and organisational talent, which they could have utilized. Yet this peculiar tension between me being a local – like them – but an academic – unlike them – was also felt by others, such as Jutta, who

expressed a few times her surprise about my accent. She would start laughing after I had said something, and then exclaim: ‘You know I am sure your English is really good, but you do speak German just like us!’ The East Thuringian vernacular that I speak in German was certainly an important marker of being from there. Nevertheless, a German academic was not only expected to solely engage with books and theory but to also speak *Hochdeutsch* (High German); that I did not do so made me both familiar (as local) and unfamiliar (as an academic).

During the annual meetings of the local and federal state Associations, in November 2012 in Gera and in December 2012 in Erfurt respectively, I met members of other Jugendweihe associations in Thuringia, and I made use of their invitations to visit as well. In September 2013, I attended two secular naming ceremonies for children conducted by the Jugendweihe Plus Association in Arnstadt (central Thuringia). Silke and Renate were helpful in providing me with a great deal of information on their work. I also attended a Jugendweihe in May 2013, and a secular naming ceremony in October 2013, which were conducted by the Jugendweihe Association in Erfurt, the capital of Thuringia. Ilona, the vice chairwoman of the Erfurt Association, patiently answered my questions on another day, and provided me with additional archival material on the ritual. While I refer to these other Jugendweihe associations and the naming ceremonies only tangentially in this thesis, they have helped me in identifying regional differences and commonalities, in tracing the way these differences relate to the eastern German lifecourse, and in understanding the role of the associations in those processes.

Prior to the ‘ritual season’ in spring, I attended the ‘Wedding Fair’ in the beginning of March in Erfurt, where the Thuringian Federal Association had a stand. I also attended a fashion show in Gera and the ‘Day of Jugendweihe’ in Jena. All these events served teenagers and their parents as preparation for the ‘big day’, but also gave the Jugendweihe Association an opportunity to represent itself and its work in a particular light. My observation of other preparatory events offered by the Association was limited to a couple of *Knigge-Kurses* (etiquette courses) in Gera and Jena, held by a freelancer. However, I also gathered data on these through conversations with Association members, teenagers and parents.

## **Archival research**

At the very beginning and the very end of my research I made use of the materials available at Gera's city museum and Gera's city archive (*Stadtarchiv*) to gain a better understanding of the historical context of Jugendweihe. From my fieldwork in 2010, I knew that the city archive had been given material from the former *Bezirksausschuss* (County Committee) for Jugendweihe in Gera, which – at the time – had not been indexed. I focussed largely on this collection of reports and working papers, which proved incredibly useful for illuminating the discrepancies between the GDR state's official version and its actual reasoning behind the introduction of Jugendweihe, its regional and local record taking, and its efforts geared toward making Jugendweihe not only an acceptable but also an enjoyable event for the entire family, as well as a social institution at a local and national level. I had to sign a confidentiality agreement in order to view these records since none of the names in these documents were redacted.

## **Rituals: Secular, Protestant, and 'non-Catholic'**

During the 'ritual season' from April to June 2013, I attended a total of 20 coming-of-age rituals, all public ceremonies in various locations. 16 of these rituals were Jugendweihe ceremonies, and 15 were in the East Thuringian region in Altenburg, Gera, Greiz and Jena, with another ceremony in Erfurt. I also attended two Lutheran Confirmations on Pentecost, and two *Lebenswende* ('life's turning point'; the Catholic Church's alternative to Jugendweihe for non-religious adolescents) ceremonies, each of which were on the same day in different locations. While an in-depth analysis of these different rituals is beyond the scope of this thesis, observing them all was extremely valuable in helping me elucidate convergences and divergences with Jugendweihe that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. During Confirmation and *Lebenswende*, my role was limited to being a guest or observer, but my role regarding the Jugendweihe ceremonies was slightly different. As part of the Association's work, I helped out with setting the stage, checking the certificates and books, labelling the seats with the teenager's names, presenting flowers to initiands on stage, collecting donations at the venue's exit, and cleaning up afterwards. From this experience, I learned much about what goes on behind the stage in terms of social relations, but also about the work put into coordinating and preparing Jugendweihe in order to make these ceremonies successful. Observing the Jugendweihe ceremonies

helped me notice changes and continuities not only in comparison to socialist times, but also between 2010 and 2013. Besides the secular naming ceremonies mentioned above, I also attended a baptism, a wedding, a golden wedding anniversary, and a few big birthday parties. All of these observations aided my thought processes on the lifecourse, but also helped me grasp the emotional significance of these events better, not only for the main protagonist(s) but for the nuclear and extended family – regardless of their belief or ideology.

## **Families**

Of the six families included in this thesis, I knew four reasonably well prior to my research, while I met Andrea and Franka and their families during my fieldwork. The maternal grandparental generation of these six families either lived in the same house (3) or next door (1) or both maternal and paternal grandparents lived fairly close; the maximum distance was 15 km away (2). This residential proximity of three generations in itself highlights the importance of familial bonds including a grandparental generation – despite a less traditional view regarding the role of women. Perhaps one limitation of this research is the fact that these families are all of German ethnic and heteronormative backgrounds, which is largely due to the region's fairly homogenous population regarding ethnicity and family types. According to the most recent census of 2011, Gera has only 1.4% foreigners and only 4.1% of its German citizenry have a migrant background (FSO-1 2014), while 'alternative' family models are very rare with civil unions, for instance, making up only 0.1% of family types (FSO-2 2014).

Although I had envisaged participating in several family celebrations to shed light on aspects of Jugendweihe that have been sidelined in the literature on this ritual, this was not as straightforward as participating in the public ceremony. It was somewhat awkward to explain to Thuringians that a family celebration could be the subject of anthropological research (and for me, work). Rather these celebrations were perceived very much as private, family functions to which one was only invited as a family member or a close friend. I was able to attend Lukas's (Andrea's son) family celebration, because I had explained to Andrea in depth my interest in family matters but also because we quickly became friends. I attended Fabian's confirmation family celebration because I have known his mother, Daniela, since I was a child. I also participated in two Jugendweihe

family celebrations outwith my fieldwork, one in 2012 and another in 2015 – experiences I have also drawn on in this thesis.

During my research in 2010, I was intrigued by the fact that the young adults (18-22 year-olds) I talked to were entirely unaware that the GDR Jugendweihe – which their parents had celebrated – not only involved preparation classes within the school context, but also included a pledge of allegiance to the state during the ceremony. However, members of the parental generation did not seem to have a problem discussing these features of the GDR Jugendweihe with me. My aim was to understand better what, how, and why certain aspects of the ritual were or were not transmitted to the adolescent (post-socialist) generation. Thus I was particularly interested in conducting family interviews in which three generations would communicate with each other, so that I could pay better attention not only to the content but also to '[p]auses, hesitations, slowing, speeding and emphases [...] because they indicate feelings, embarrassments' (Feuchtwang 2000: 69). Yet I only managed to conduct three such interviews with two families, as there was a general reluctance about participating in family interviews.

Although I had met Andrea's parents twice, for example, they refused to participate in such a conversation. After Andrea had asked them a few times to no avail, we gave up. Similarly, while Sandra's mother (who had not celebrated Jugendweihe herself) was forthcoming during such a conversation, when her husband (who had celebrated Jugendweihe) was asked by her to join in, he did not want to divulge any information. Partly, of course, he felt somewhat coerced into it; he started off by questioning the value of my research, which he simply viewed as '*brotlose Kunst*' (i.e. there was no money in it), before continuing to challenge anything to do with the humanities and social sciences. Both his wife and stepdaughter felt embarrassed by his attitude and repeatedly demanded him to tell all of us about his own Jugendweihe in the 1950s. At some point, he stated that [the GDR past] was long ago and of no interest to anyone. I responded that this was not exactly true, that there was much continued interest, and ongoing research. Nevertheless, it was his son-in-law who impatiently exclaimed: 'This is history. History – this exists still now in school [as a subject]! To which he immediately responded: 'Yet this is all falsified – the history!' While such incidences were extremely uncomfortable, they

were also illuminating in terms of intergenerational dynamics, silences, and different views and perceptions within one family.

Both my local dialect and the fact that I had celebrated the GDR Jugendweihe myself made members of the parental generation in particular feel comfortable in talking to me, because I was not simply a local but we also shared particular experiences. In contrast, in her study on Jugendfeier<sup>12</sup> in Berlin, German-Canadian researcher Rebecca Aechtner (2011) highlights her initial difficulties in finding interlocutors, who inquired suspiciously about her full motivations for researching Jugendweihe before they made a decision on whether to participate in her research – including questions about ‘biographical details such as, family tree, political leanings and religious observance’ (Aechtner 2011: 16). For some, this reluctance or refusal to participate in her research was due in part to the fact that her parents were West German (*ibid.*). Indeed, while American anthropologist Andrew Bickford’s eastern German interlocutors agreed to talk to him because of their shared military background and his status as a supposedly objective American ‘scientist’, they explained that they would not speak to western Germans as they ‘were simply out to demonize them’ (Bickford 2011: 17).

German researchers on East Germany are well aware of the importance of dialect, which can also be an indicator of whether the researcher is from the former East or West Germany – the latter categorisation potentially leading to mistrust or indeed failure of research projects (Wohlrab-Sahr, Karstein, and Schmidt-Lux 2009: 31-36; personal communications with Hann 2013, Schmidt-Lux 2013 and Thelen 2015). During family interviews, Wohlrab-Sahr et al. simultaneously used an eastern German interviewer to gain rapport, and a western German to ask questions that would have been strange for an eastern German to raise. Yet I was on my own, and my interlocutors often replied along the lines of: ‘Well, you know what it was like back then’, or ‘Why are you asking this, you are from here?’. I tended to circumvent these situations more or less successfully by, for example, noting that I had attended a different school, at a different time, or a different location, or that I was female, to point to factors of variance. However, sharing parts of my experience of the ritual celebration in 1987 was most fruitful because parents and

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<sup>12</sup> Jugendfeier is the German Humanist Association’s equivalent of Jugendweihe; see Chapters 3 and 7.

grandparents could easily draw comparisons, flagging up differences in their experiences, memories and perceptions, while also confirming similarities.

Although I had no intention to involve my own family in my research project, my relatives have not only helped me in making connections to other Thuringians, but living with my family has aided my thought processes on inter-generational familial dynamics as much as our conversations about the socialist past and contemporary politics have helped shaping my arguments.

### **Adolescents**

Adolescents proved to be perhaps the greatest challenge for me. While one-to-one conversations (before and after their coming-of-age celebration) with teenagers whom I had known prior to my research went fairly well, others had an unnatural flow in which I remained the asker and the teenager the answerer. I ascribed these difficulties largely to the age differential between us, and although I suggested they call me by my first name and use the informal you, very few teenagers did so.

Prior to the start of the 'ritual season', I had created an anonymous online survey to gain a general sense of teenagers' views. Two teenagers, female and male, who had celebrated their Jugendweihe in 2012 tested the survey for me before I started collecting responses. I drew teenagers' attention to the survey by including flyers either in the letters sent out to the families prior to the celebration or in the keepsake books they received on the day of their Jugendweihe. During the brief rehearsal before the ceremony, they were again made aware of the flyer and its content. From the more than 2,800 teenagers that the flyers were circulated to, only 55 teenagers took part in the survey (a return rate of less than 2%), with 50 providing useful answers in regards to monetary questions. Nevertheless, the survey was helpful in three ways: a) it aided me in establishing what I needed to further clarify in conversation, and thus I tailored questions for group conversations accordingly; b) it confirmed the unpopularity of secular naming ceremonies in East Thuringia, with only 1 out of 55 Jugendweihe participants having participated in one; and c) because adolescents were reluctant to volunteer how much money and what kind of gifts they had received on their Jugendweihe, the anonymous survey provided much insight in this regard. After fieldwork, and having had more time to think through

my data, I also created another survey for the parental generation, solely related to gift-giving practices regarding their GDR Jugendweihe, which I distributed among friends and to which I garnered 30 responses. This survey helped me in drawing comparisons between the late socialist and contemporary time periods and the associated moral discourse on consumption and frugality (see Chapter 5).

Ideally, I would have liked to conduct focus groups and discussions with entire school classes. However, this approach was difficult to pursue, and would have required me to have a very specific set of fixed questions and a clear research proposal, which would have needed to be approved in advance by the Thuringian Ministry of Culture. Because I sensed from what I gathered in the public discourse on education that such approval was unlikely to materialize, and also because I learned in conversation with John Eidson at the Max Planck Institute in Halle that his application to conduct research in schools was denied, I decided against this route, which would have cost much time and effort. Instead, I hoped to observe classes, since the Thuringian school authorities demand the approval of only the headmaster of a school for *hospitieren* (sitting in on classes). I sent emails to five schools but only one of them responded. When I met with the headmaster, he carefully inquired: ‘I don’t understand why you want to sit in on classes? We, as a school, have nothing to do with Jugendweihe!’ I explained that I wanted to participate in everything that adolescents at this stage in their lives undergo, in order to understand their motivations for celebrating Jugendweihe. Ethics and Religion classes did not exist during GDR times, and I wanted to get a sense of their purpose and how adolescents responded to them. Another opportunity arose when the Jugendweihe Association donated money to one of the schools that had been affected by the May/June 2013 floods. I accompanied them and asked the headmaster whether it would be possible to observe some Ethics and Religion classes in his school, which he immediately allowed. My observations in both these schools and my informal conversations with various teachers informed my understanding of how much and in which ways the relations between teachers, adolescents, and families had changed (see Chapter 3).

I conducted three group conversations with Jugendweihe participants after their Jugendweihe: one with three male and one with three female adolescents, all of whom had celebrated Jugendweihe in 2013. I had another group conversation with three female

adolescents who had celebrated their Jugendweihe in 2012. These conversations were held in the office of the Jugendweihe Association in Gera and included a variety of techniques, from writing answers down individually to triggering open-ended discussion between them and me through the use of video clip excerpts of their ceremony. I usually knew at least one of the adolescents fairly well, and he or she would have a friend or two tag along. I explained the purpose of my research and they received €5 in exchange for their time and having to travel to the office. I provided something to drink and sweets, and teenagers were fairly relaxed due to their being in the majority, so that these conversations were both enjoyable and productive.

I also conducted group conversations with three female and male confirmands respectively, the former having celebrated confirmation in 2013, while the latter would do so a year later. These group conversations were made possible through the help of one of the local pastors who had allowed me to participate in confirmation classes (Sunday school) and encouraged confirmands to support my research. They were held in the parsonage familiar to the adolescents, and I provided sweets as well. Adolescents did not require extra time for these conversations, as I held them during their confirmation classes (in a separate room).

Although I explained my research to teenagers, because of their age (13-16 years) I gave them each a business card, and clarified that their parents could contact me, if they should have any questions or concerns regarding the purpose of my research or my use of their data. Unlike one-to-one conversations, I recorded group conversations with Jugendweihe and confirmation participants, as I did with intergenerational family conversations. I explained that these recordings were to ensure that I captured these conversations correctly, since it was too difficult for me to take notes when several people were discussing at once. In all such cases, I asked for participants' consent, and usually the conversation quickly developed a natural flow in which the Dictaphone was somewhat forgotten. Yet I recorded next to none of the one-to-one conversations I conducted, as I was well aware that such practices had problematic resonances with the Stasi past. Indeed, Aechtner notes that out of 31 students and 46 parents she interviewed between 2008 and 2010, 'only seven consented to being digitally recorded' (Aechtner 2011: 17); and one father explained his refusal with direct reference to the Stasi (ibid: 17-18).

It was exactly because of this GDR legacy of suspicion and betrayal, emanating from the Stasi's monitoring techniques, that I had anticipated that issues of trust could be a delicate matter during my fieldwork. For example, I avoided using the term 'informant', because people would make an immediate link to a Stasi informant. Although transitional justice had aimed at rebuilding social trust after the end of the GDR regime, mistrust seemed to intensify in the early 1990s when the extent of the Stasi's activities came to light. It was the revelations of the Stasi's encroachment in what is supposed to be the private or family sphere – free of state interference – which upset also many eastern Germans. I expected to face difficulties in regards to gaining access to, and developing rapport with, my interlocutors, especially because I was interested in family matters. Prior to fieldwork I felt that I had considered these issues carefully and how they may impact my research. Yet I felt rather unprepared for and overwhelmed by the way this past became an issue for me and for what I was (supposed to be) doing. In the course of my fieldwork I experienced unexpected anxieties and doubts about whether what I was doing was ethical and I only began to grasp what the issue was almost a year into my fieldwork when the media reengaged with the National Security Agency (NSA) scandal. It was revealed that the US security agency had not only been spying on ordinary German citizens but had also tapped Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone. It was through her oft-cited response to the media, 'Spying out among friends – that's a no go!', that it dawned on me what I had increasingly felt guilty of doing during fieldwork.

I recognized the parallels in practice between that of an unofficial Stasi collaborator and that of an ethnographer (see also Verdery 2014), which made me mistrust myself. It led me to repeatedly question whether I was really a good friend or whether my motivations were for some sort of personal gain, that is, for the sole benefit of my research project – betraying rather than protecting the intimacy of such social relations. Frequent references to the Stasi made by my interlocutors and in the media exacerbated these sensations to the extent that I seemed to internalise the issue. I could no longer see what the difference between me and a Stasi informant was, that is, divulging information to a third party, such as the state, in the knowledge that this information could potentially be used against my interlocutors. Instead, for a great part of my fieldwork, I had already sabotaged this possibility by not asking further questions so that I could not gain certain information, and by not writing conversations down, I also limited the potential for that information

to become available to others. These strategies, which meant that I preferred feeling inadequate as an ethnographer to feeling the sensation of reproducing the Stasi legacy, were counterproductive to my research project but were crucial to my own socialist past.

I grappled with these feelings for a long time after fieldwork and learned how to make use of them by realising the ways the public and private, politics and kinship are entangled in complex ways and draw on intimacy. As I explored the socialist past it was rendered so much more tangible and painful to me that the ‘possibility of betrayal is the ever-present dark side of intimacy, taking on new and ever more frightening forms in the context of state-building’ (Kelly and Thiranagama 2010: 3). This thesis thus shows how the GDR’s political elite created allegiances to a state project by using ‘what is immediately intimate, the local, the familial, the neighbourly, the friend [...] that are projected and enlarged by analogy to country, state and people’ (Feuchtwang 2010: 227). It seeks to understand the ways in which these social relations were created intentionally by the GDR’s political elite through *Jugendweihe*; and how these intimate relations needed to be renegotiated and adjusted after the demise of the GDR state – an ongoing process also within families, and for me personally, too.

## **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 1 (the lifecourse) demonstrates the interdependency of politics and kinship. The crisis of the GDR state in 1989-90 was mirrored by a freezing of state-recorded kinship activity, such as births and marriages, which further plummeted after unification because the relations between individuals, families, and the new state were in a process of re-organization. East and West Germany's social policies diverged substantially, oriented around either a 'socialist family' or a 'housewife marriage' model respectively. The GDR Jugendweihe served as a site where the state, its families, and citizens were intimately connected as part of the state's aim to craft 'socialist personalities' and 'socialist families', both deemed necessary in the evolutionary project toward communism. I argue that Jugendweihe became an integral part of the East German life cycle and marked the coming-of-age of a child at the age of fourteen, the age of heterosexual consent. The East German lifecourse had been largely predetermined. Yet today only the school entry celebration and the Jugendweihe remain as life-cycle events at a particular age, and hence the only two constant reference points for East Germans across three living generations. While the school entry celebration is marked nationwide, Jugendweihe is only part of the eastern German life cycle. The importance of reproduction is conveyed to the young generation during and beyond Jugendweihe ceremonies in references made to sexual maturity, and the ceremony bears special potential for reproducing the family and also eastern German society.

Chapter 2 (religion/church) investigates Jugendweihe as medium of the historical secularization process. The ritual emerged in the second-half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a substitute for ecclesiastical coming-of-age rituals, and has been adapted over time by diverse movements that were united in their anti-church stance, and challenged the contemporary social order. I demonstrate how families' oscillation between Jugendweihe and confirmation resonates with the political contexts of different time periods. It is the political/ideological aspect (the initiation into a particular community), which sustains communities into the future, and that is responsible for Jugendweihe's special importance as a site of contestation over the past. I focus in particular on the relationship between Protestant Confirmation and Jugendweihe during GDR times, which both reflected and produced church-state relations. Under the GDR, Jugendweihe lost its critical status and

became a means of maintaining the GDR social order. I illustrate how these church-state relations play out within the family and highlight the need for families to make a decision over which institution they publicly aligned with. The ritual's political significance and its oppositional character to confirmation is largely not transmitted to the younger generation of contemporary Jugendweihe participants. I argue that Jugendweihe played a significant role in the secularization process in the GDR, when it became celebrated by the great majority of East Germans. Today it has returned to being the celebration of a minority within the context of unified Germany. It has also become a signifier of eastern Germany's *Konfessionslosigkeit* (being non-denominational) in contrast to western Germany's widespread (cultural) church affiliation.

Chapter 3 (collectivity/school) illustrates how school education in the GDR was not simply concerned with the formal transmission of knowledge, but also with conveying moral values. Moral upbringing – previously deemed to be a task shared by state, church, and family – was increasingly brought under the aegis of the GDR state in an effort to restrict the authority of the two other social institutions. Jugendweihe, 'youth lessons', and the GDR school system were closely intertwined and transmitted such moral values. One of these values was to imbue youth with collective thoughts and deeds, emphasising a larger social group over the individual and also the family. Today, Jugendweihe and the school system are supposed to be separate, and preparatory lessons for the celebration of Jugendweihe are no longer required. However, the collective form of celebrating the public ceremony – as part of the school class – is maintained and re-created by the Jugendweihe Association, and also preferred by parents and grandparents. The socialist generations negotiate the rearranged relations between familial home and state through a moral discourse that judges today's schooling as geared toward individuality, including 'less dedicated' teachers. Yet parents and grandparents are often unaware or do not acknowledge that past forms of collectivity and teachers' roles were not politically neutral, but were part of the state's effort to create social conformity. I argue that parents and grandparents attempt to inculcate collectivity in various ways in the adolescents, in an effort also to recuperate the sense of sociality that has been deemed lost after the political rupture.

Chapter 4 (coming-of-age/home) focusses on the family celebration that follows the public ceremony and explores what it attempts to accomplish and how. I illustrate how

the family celebration can be thought of as having two interrelated aims in providing roots and wings to the adolescents. The consumption of particular cakes, the first glass of alcohol in public with parental permission, the initiand's thank you speech, and the accumulation of wealth are symbolic manifestations of the adolescent attaining moral personhood. I argue that the way commensality, conviviality and gift-giving are performed also entails a moral message about work. Affection is shown and recreated through the 'labour of love', that is, the labour put into creating a festive ambience, in making or organizing food specialities, and making or presenting gifts tailored to the specific tastes of the gift-recipient. These features create familial continuity through time, and recreate ties to the familial home. They also strengthen ties to the wider Thuringian *Heimat* (regional home) as a significant constituent of personhood, that is, of being Thuringian – and having roots. However, what it is to be a good Thuringian is expressed in a moral discourse and practice of how gifts are presented, inculcating the significance of work in adult life. I argue that the promotion of a particular work ethic was the aim of the socialist state, and is now undertaken by the older generations in their moral discourse and practices regarding work – adolescents are 'given wings'.

Chapter 5 (distinctions/economics) examines the economic aspects of celebrating Jugendweihe, which not only reflects the increasing socio-economic stratification of (eastern) German society but itself serves as a site of distinction-making. I argue that the change in economic system from a former socialist 'economy of shortages' to a free-market economy – which has led to a proliferation of choice and increased availability of goods – has not had an impact on the prevalence of conspicuous consumption itself. Rather, it is marked by a shift in the type of presents, from trousseau gifts to an increased emphasis on monetary gifts. Today, valuable consumer products have a shorter life-span and are subjected to fast-changing fads compared to the socialist past. Unlike money, the value of such gifts for a future household has therefore diminished. This shift in terms of consumption also signifies a change in socio-economic relations, in which kin no longer have to rely on social connections, or networks of extended kin and friends, to procure particular valuable consumer goods, and thus, the sole necessity of financial capital is emphasised. While monetary gifts appear, at first, as a sign of greater individualism and the freedom of initiands to dispose of their money, they are embedded in and countered by a moral discourse on frugality. Older generations not only decide that money needs to be saved but also promote spending it wisely in order to help set up the initiands' own

future households. A new cycle of consumption is not only deferred, it also reifies socio-economic differences into the future.

Chapter 6 (Jugendweihe Association) explores the ways that the local Jugendweihe Association negotiates its new place within unified Germany by moving from a former GDR state association to a registered association. Older members of the Association, especially, refer to themselves as family, which I argue is not mere idiom, but based on their shared socialist past and their shared hardships in the post-socialist context. Both these pasts are inextricably linked with members' survival and the survival of Jugendweihe in a different socio-political environment, which they feel has been hostile toward them and the ritual. Association members are only deemed kin if they work for the cause of Jugendweihe, and are willing to put personal interests aside. The kinship idiom is also extrapolated to eastern German ritual supporters at large, but this attempt is fraught with tensions over ritual authority. I argue that both competition over ritual authority and critiques of ritual design indicate that eastern Germans think of the ritual as collectively owned. This sense of the collective ownership of Jugendweihe, I suggest, emanates not solely from the fact that more than seven million East Germans underwent the GDR Jugendweihe. Rather many East Germans feel that Jugendweihe was not a top-down state-designed ritual, but that they actively helped in shaping it, and thus identified with it. I argue that the continuation of Jugendweihe not only gives meaning to the Association members' work and their current lives, it also justifies their socialist biographies – and those of other eastern Germans.

Chapter 7 (memory/political allegiance) investigates how the endurance of the ritual is illustrative of divergent memories between eastern and western Germans that have ghostly echoes of the Iron Curtain, and symbolically redraw Cold War boundaries. While grandparental and parental generations wished their offspring to celebrate Jugendweihe largely because they themselves had done so under the GDR, it also helped them grapple with the burden of two dictatorships. I explore how the older generations attempt to create a harmonious familial continuity and cohesion through silencing or toning down of the political aspects of the GDR Jugendweihe in two ways. Attention is deflected away from both periods of dictatorship through emphasising the ritual's origin in the free-religious communities in the second-half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus defining Jugendweihe as a pan-German tradition. Secondly, both family and ritual are portrayed as

free from politics and/or ideology. I further examine why many members of the socialist generations still do not feel at home in unified Germany, although they have always remained in Thuringia. I argue that this sense of displacement has partly to do with the way familial, political, and geographical identifications overlap emotionally. Most East Germans identified during the socialist past not as GDR citizens but as German, which became complicated with German unification when eastern Germans were 'othered' in a discourse that either portrayed them as 'too German' (read authoritarian) or not 'German enough' (read not like West Germans).

## **Intermezzo: The Big Day**

Nils opened the door to his room. It was plastered with a sign, in black capital letters on a yellow background akin to German town signs, which cautioned anyone with the intention to enter: 'Here begins the state territory of Nils'. The soon to be fourteen-year-old showed me his recently refurbished room in which only a slight hint of childhood lingered – one wall had been left wallpapered with aeroplanes. Showing me each element of change in his abode, Nils explained that he had inherited the old living room cabinets from downstairs when his parents had acquired new furniture the previous year. But this year, the blue-eyed teen continued, his parents had bought a new sofa for him, and a new TV had been attached to the wall above his desk. He no longer inhabited a *Kinderzimmer* (children's room), but a *Jugendzimmer* (teenager's room). Because he was now a *Jugendlicher* (an adolescent), his room had not only been transformed according to his changing needs, it also reflected his own transformation to anyone whom Nils would permit to enter. He was no longer a child. Today was the day on which this change would be ceremonially marked by the celebration of his *Jugendweihe*.

So far, we felt like we were hiding from the flurry of last minute preparations downstairs. It seemed we would be more in the way than of any help to what I jokingly referred to as Nils's parental 'Jugendweihe organisation committee'. Beate, in her mid-thirties and Nils's mother, had described to me the concerted family effort of setting up and decorating the hired venue in a neighbouring village. Although diverse tasks had been spread across not only the nuclear but also the extended family, the cost and the majority of work necessary for the celebration was the responsibility of the parents as hosts. Everything needed to be set for the family party, which was to start at 5 pm, because there would not be much time between getting back from the public *Jugendweihe* ceremony in the Gera theatre and the first guests arriving at the venue.

Beate came upstairs and announced that it was time to get ready, before rushing to the bathroom to freshen up and apply her make-up. She then hastened to Nils's room, bringing him his new black trousers and light-blue shirt, which he was supposed to put on only at the last minute to avoid spoiling it in any way. She inspected the trousers, adding: 'You need to go over them with a lint roller before you put them on!' and

disappeared behind the open bathroom door. He sighed in annoyance, to which she shouted from afar: ‘This is going to be a proper event and you need to be dressed properly!’ His mother returned with a lint roller and as soon as she had explained to him how to use it she attended to Finn, his five-year-old brother, who – unaffected by the commotion around him – continued to play with his Lego bricks. Once he was dressed, Beate put on a new black shirt and shoes, and a previously-worn light-blue suit. Then we all went downstairs just as Lars, Beate’s husband and ten years her senior, finally returned from running the last errands, and stated: ‘Everything is set; now I am really nervous!’ His wife laughed anxiously, remarking: ‘Me too, my hands were already trembling when I cut the cake earlier’.

The boys did not seem to understand all the excitement, and Nils confided in me that he was not nervous at all. I chuckled at his remark, recalling my own Jugendweihe, and assessed dryly: ‘Perhaps because – unlike the girls – you don’t have to take the stage in high-heels!’ He looked at me baffled: ‘What do you mean by “I have to take the stage?”’ I realized his coolness was less a matter of a boy playing tough rather than due to him not knowing what awaited him in the theatre. Lars changed into his suit, and Beate checked the attire of all ‘her men’. She sighed in relief: ‘We are so lucky to have boys – they are so easy. Imagine, with a girl we would have also had to go to the hairdresser this morning!’ Once we were all in the car and had buckled up, Beate double-checked whether she had the tickets, and the family left the Thuringian village for Gera city centre.

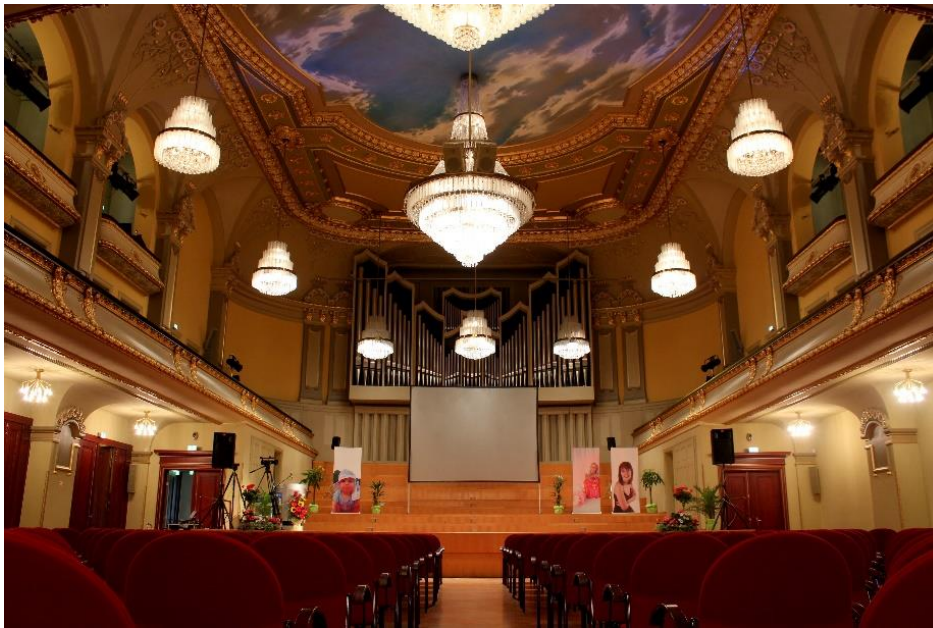
As soon as we had arrived in Gera, we gathered in front of the Gera theatre to wait with other initiands’ families for the Jugendweihe ceremony to start. Two ceremonies were commonly being held at the same venue on Saturdays in spring, commencing at 11 am and 1.30 pm, lasting approximately 80 minutes each. It was a crisp spring afternoon, and once Lars’s parents had found us, we were glad to be able to go inside the building.

While we remained in the theatre’s foyer, Nils and the other adolescents entered the concert hall in order to take their seats in the front rows. They received a short induction by a female Jugendweihe Association member on how and when to walk up onto the stage. Most of the girls wore dresses and high heels; some had put on make-up, and had their long hair pinned up. Many of the boys sported suits; others opted for the more casual

combination of shirts and jeans, with or without a tie. After a small rehearsal, they remained seated in the front rows of the theatre. We were then asked to enter, and took our seats as indicated on our allocated tickets, in the balconies, while most families filed into their places in the rows behind those to be initiated.

Three large pictures adorned the stage, showing, from left to right, a baby, a girl with a school bag and a *Zuckertiite* (a large, colourful cone filled with sweets and toys received on the first school day), and a teenage girl. Centre stage, a large screen bore the pink and green logo of the East Thuringian Jugendweihe Association on a white and golden background. In the right corner stood a lectern and flower arrangement. Behind them, on the far right of the stage, were two tables on which books and certificates were stacked. Besides several plants as decoration, there was also sound and filming equipment on stage (see Figures 1 and 2).

The lights were dimmed and the Association's promotion trailer, accompanied with soaring music, was projected onto the screen. Nils's parents, his brother, and his paternal grandparents almost in sync craned their necks over the railing not to miss anything on stage. By the time the theme tune of 'The Simpsons' boomed forth from the speakers, the audience had settled in a little, and started to be amused by the picture of the Simpson family crossing the road – a take-off on The Beatles' Abbey Road album cover. The image served as background for large yellow lettering, which scrolled up the screen announcing in a satirical way what was happening in the 'Thuringian Springfield'. 'After 14 years of care from parents, grandparents, teachers and friends', the lettering proclaimed, 'adolescents have increasingly developed their own will, which also led to much trouble'. But today they are encouraged to 'cross the street with us – you've got the green light for great plans!'



*Figure 1: Gera Theatre, concert hall, May 2013*



*Figure 2: Stage set for Jugendweibe ceremony, Gera, June 2013*

The same female member of the Jugendweibe Association who had led the rehearsals entered the stage and stood behind the lectern, officially opening the ceremony with the following words:

At all times, in all cultures it has been peoples' custom to incorporate their own offspring, in a dignified manner, into the community of adults. The celebration of Jugendweihe is part of it.

For you, who sit in the first rows, this day will remain a life-long memory.

Today and here in the beautiful Theatre Gera I wish you, your parents, grandparents, and guests enjoyment during the festive hour of Jugendweihe!

Then a music group took over the stage and performed a cappella a popular song before they introduced themselves as *Die NotenDealer*. Next a youth dance ensemble delivered a performance, followed by a young woman who recited a poem, all of whom were received with applause (see Figures 3 and 4). When the theatre had quietened, the screen displayed saccharine images of cute children posed in train stations and at various other locations. These were accompanied by a voice-over, talking soothingly and metaphorically about life as a train journey (*'Der Zug des Lebens'*), with passengers getting on and off at different stations. The ceremony had so far resembled a theatre performance of sorts, simultaneously attempting to entertain and to encourage contemplation of the 'meaning of life'.



Figure 3: Dance performance by *Bewegungsküche*; Altenburg, April 2013



*Figure 4: Performance by a cappella group Die NotenDealer; Gera, April 2013*

Without any introduction, a guest speaker then took the lectern, welcoming the audience and talking for roughly 15 minutes about the importance of this day for the adolescents, and about familial tensions during the time of puberty, offering advice for teenagers on how to master the future. The guest speaker ended by congratulating the teenagers on their Jugendweihe, wishing them all the best for their future lives and them and their families an enjoyable family celebration.

Photographs of the initiands as babies or young children were then projected onto the screen, accompanied by popular music. These photographs prompted laughter from the audience, and many sparked shouts and applause from those who recognised a friend, child or sibling. Beate and Lars eagerly looked out for Nils's photograph. When it appeared, they pointed out the image to Finn, who had increasingly grown tired of having to sit still, but smiled at the sight of his brother's younger self. Like the 'life as a train journey' sequence, this part of the ceremony evoked a rather emotional and reflective pondering on the passing of time. Many of us in the audience – parents in particular – found ourselves tearing up. The photos ended, the music faded out, the commère who earlier offered instructions and opened the ceremony once again took the lectern to announce that the time had come for the adolescents to receive, solemnly, their certificates and books on stage.

To gentle instrumental music, the first group of teenagers walked slowly and in single file onto the stage, positioning themselves at its centre. While their names were read out, the festive speaker presented them each with their Jugendweihe certificates, and another member of the Association with the book *Worldview – Adolescents Change the World*. Both shook the initiands' hands and offered congratulations. The adolescents then each received a rose from members of the dance group. A proverb was read, such as 'Shared happiness is doubled happiness.' While the audience applauded, one or two photographers took pictures of the adolescents, who then left the stage while another group entered (see Figures 5 and 6). This procedure was repeated until all the initiands had received their congratulations. When it was Nils's turn, the whole family clapped their hands energetically, and Beate and her mother-in-law quickly searched for a tissue in their handbags. The members of the Association and the festive speaker then left the stage, and more music and dance performances followed.



*Figure 5: Members of a dance group present a rose to the initiands, Gera, June 2013*



Figure 6: Photographers taking pictures of the initiated, Gera, June 2013

At last, the commère returned to the stage to thank the festive speaker, who we now learned was a *Die Linke* politician, and the performers – all of whom re-entered to be met with flowers and applause. Technical staff and helpers were then thanked before the details were announced as to how to buy DVDs and photographs of the event. An appeal was made for donations for those unable to afford the entire ceremony fee of €95. The adolescents were asked to leave for group photographs, taken in front of the theatre, while the relatives and friends were asked to remain in their seats, and were treated to another music performance. Photographs completed, everyone reunited outside, and initiands received congratulations from their families and friends. Beate and Lars wore big and proud smiles on their faces when they hugged their son. His grandparents patiently awaited their turn, wishing Nils the best, accompanied with much advice on good behaviour, before they parted to get ready for the celebrations. After I had congratulated Nils, his parents became so anxious to leave for the family celebration that I had to persuade them to quickly take some photographs of the nuclear family in the nearby park, then we dashed off.

As explained in the Introduction, between 2012 and 2015 I attended 17 Jugendweihe ceremonies organized by the local Jugendweihe Association, all conducted to similar scripts. From this intermezzo we can gain a first glimpse into the ritual's importance for

the family. Yet the simple public ceremony, which – unlike other initiations – seems to demand very little of the initiands themselves, is also suggestive of Jugendweihe’s societal significance. In the following chapters I explore more closely parts of the public ceremony in relation to wider social changes after the political caesura. Chapter 4 explores what the family celebration attempts to effect, while Chapter 6 is concerned with the role of the Association itself. But firstly, in Chapter 1 I set out the relationship between kinship and politics and examine Jugendweihe’s role for the eastern German life cycle.



## Chapter 1

### **Kinship and Politics: Jugendweihe as Part of the Eastern German Life Cycle**

*...it is simply ahistorical to talk of the family as a 'niche', as though it were some unchanging little cell to which one could escape from the big bad world of politics.*

– Mary Fulbrook (2005: 117)

The white and bright-yellow tram of the Gera public transport company squeaked as it came to a halt at the tram stop, where I boarded it for the final stretch of my journey to the Jugendweihe Association. Among the other passengers were two elderly Thuringians, who took seats next to each other, in my earshot, so that I involuntarily overheard their conversation. Perhaps they were former colleagues or neighbours; they appeared not to have seen each other for quite some time but seemed happy to have met by accident. They were catching up, and after a few minutes of exchanging reassurances that their families were well, the questions became more specific. ‘So how old is your little one now?’, the woman asked the man, presumably referring to his granddaughter. ‘She’ll have her Jugendweihe next year!’ – ‘Already!’, the woman replied with a deep sigh, adding, ‘Well, you need nerves for this age in particular! – Our grandson has his *Schuleinführung* (school entry celebration) this year. Time just flies.’

In the course of my fieldwork I overheard or partook in many similar conversations, which ordinarily included questions about the entire families of acquaintances or friends who had lost track of each other’s lives. However, what struck me about such exchanges was that the children or grandchildren – of whom people often spoke longest – were frequently situated within a seemingly predetermined trajectory of the lifecourse, either by kin or by their interlocutors. In particular, when the offspring’s age was between five and seven or thirteen and fifteen years, conversations would rarely mention an actual age, but instead make reference to either their school entry celebration or their Jugendweihe. Because the school entry celebration signalled to any Thuringian – and indeed any eastern German – that a child was about six years of age, just as a child celebrating Jugendweihe was about fourteen, there was no need to state an actual age. Such events – which Arnold van Gennep (1960 [1908]) has called *rites de passage* – were also commented upon because

of their significance: they not only punctuated the lifecourse of the individual concerned, they demarcated changes in the status of the individual in relation to their family but also to society at large.

When in 1990 the GDR state disappeared, the Christian churches and West Germany expected that it would take with it its secular coming-of-age ritual, Jugendweihe. At first the ritual’s disappearance appeared likely, as participation figures dropped dramatically; but by 1993 they began to rise again (see Table 1). This rebound was partly because, as the above conversation suggests, Jugendweihe had become embedded within the East German lifecourse. In fact, when I had explained to my parents that I intended to research Jugendweihe in order to understand how the ritual had become so successful, and why it remained meaningful to people today, my father, who had never undergone Jugendweihe himself, had a quick explanation: ‘This is just how it is – it’s in the *Ossi* – you just can’t take it out of him any more’. His assertion suggests two things: Jugendweihe is inseparable from *Ossi*, the colloquial term for eastern Germans – which also means that it does not belong to western Germans. This inseparability in turn indicates that the lifecourses of eastern and western Germans are somewhat different, largely because – as I will demonstrate below – the two states related differently to their citizens for forty years.

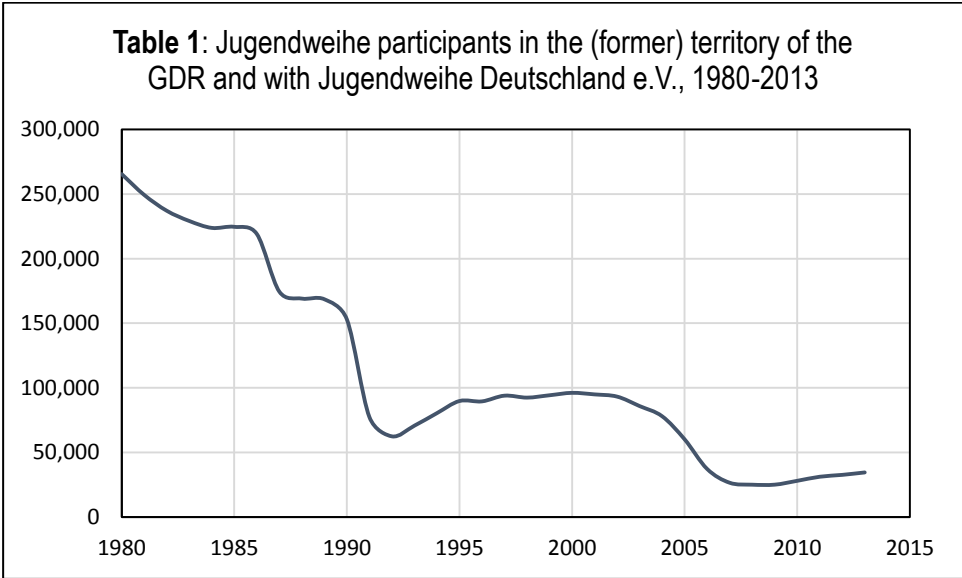
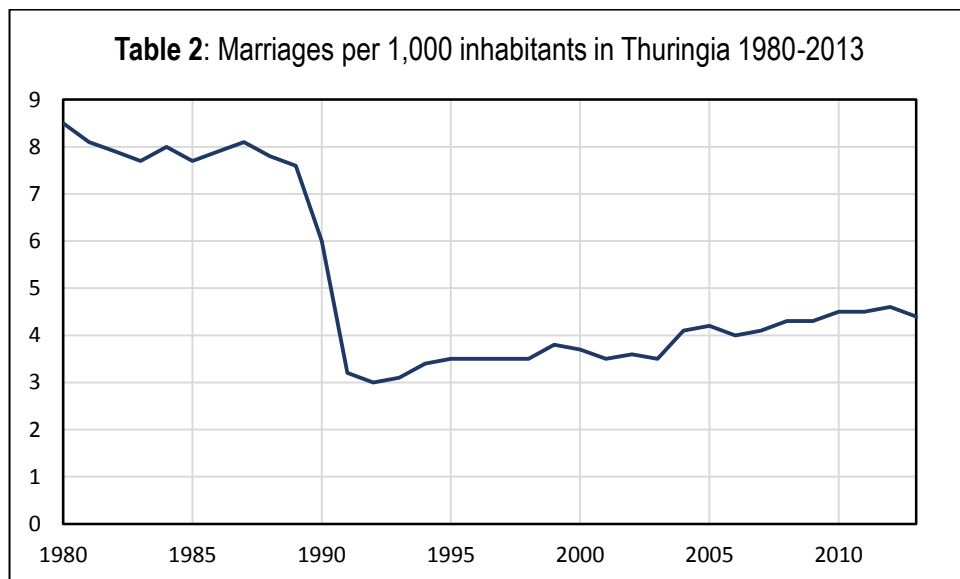


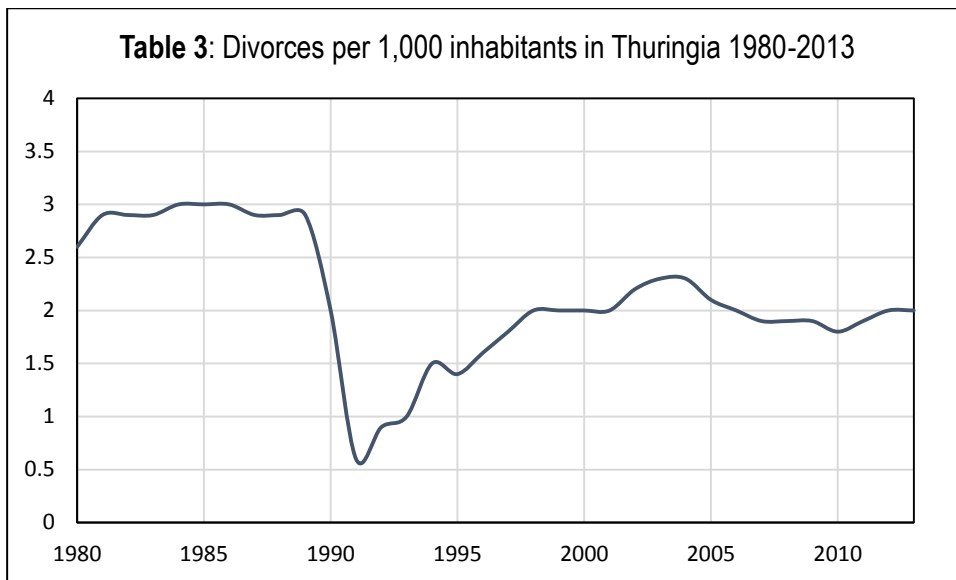
Table 1: Jugendweihe Participants 1980-2013.

Sources: Chowanski and Dreier (2000) and Jugendweihe Deutschland e.V. [http://www.jugendweihe.de/files/Staistiken-JWDL-2013-JW\\_qtas787r.pdf](http://www.jugendweihe.de/files/Staistiken-JWDL-2013-JW_qtas787r.pdf)

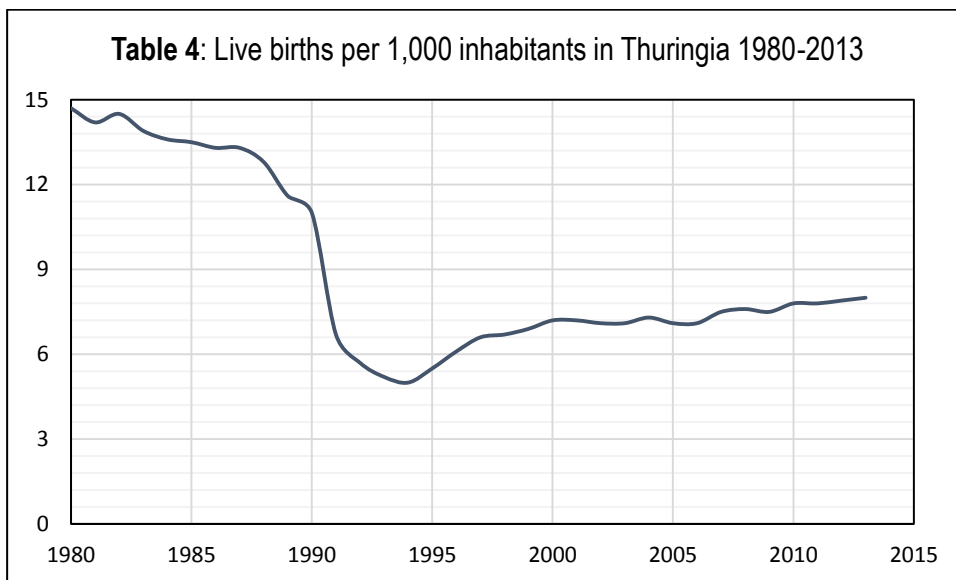
Indeed, when in 1989 the GDR state entered into a major crisis that in 1990 resulted in its disappearance, the eastern German family mirrored that crisis – it seemed almost to have been frozen in time, at least for a few years. There was a dramatic drop in births, marriages, and divorces alike (see Dennis 1998), which in the early 1990s reached record lows. For example, the East German total fertility rate (TFR) dropped in 1992 to a level of 0.8 children per woman, and – if East Germany had still existed – ‘this would probably have been the lowest TFR ever recorded for a country’ (Goldstein and Kreyenfeld 2011: 453). This quite drastic decline in all state recorded kinship activity, that is, family events that require vital records (apart from death), was certainly also palpable in the geographical region of Thuringia – as Tables 2 to 4 demonstrate.



*Table 2: Marriages per 1,000 inhabitants in Thuringia 1980-2013.*  
*Source:* Statistical Office of the Federal State of Thuringia (I.L.S.), 2015.



*Table 3: Divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in Thuringia 1980-2013.*  
*Source:* Statistical Office of the Federal State of Thuringia (TLS), 2015.



*Table 4: Live births per 1,000 inhabitants in Thuringia 1980-2013.*  
*Source:* Statistical Office of the Federal State of Thuringia (TLS), 2015.

These quite clearly quantifiable signs of drastic change have been variously analysed as ‘demographic shock’ (Eberstadt 1994) or ‘crisis’ (see Kreyenfeld 2003), and are understandable responses to an atmosphere of heightened uncertainty caused by the political caesura. Yet the East German case has been highlighted by many researchers as unique not only among post-socialist societies in transformation, but in particular regarding the abrupt drop in fertility as ‘unprecedented for an industrialized society during

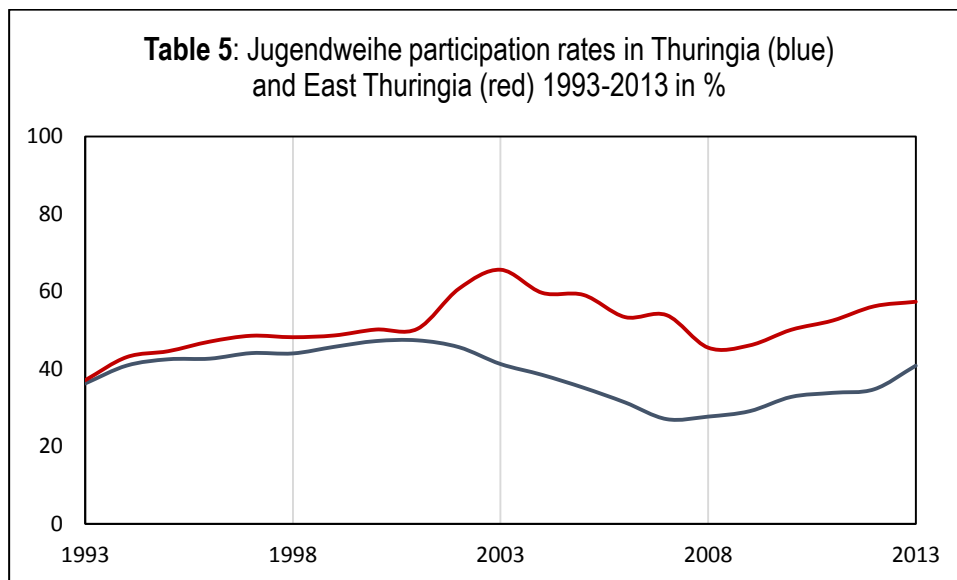
peacetime' (Eberstadt 1994: 137; see also Adler 1997; Dorbritz 1997; Kreyenfeld 2003; Schwarz 1992). More notably, the upheavals experienced in this time period are rarely openly recalled in family narratives other than in terms of job losses (see also Chapters 5 and 6). In one such rare instance, a mother in her mid-fifties described the Wende-years to me as a 'horrible time' during which 'the entire family was glued to the TV screen every evening' in order to have the latest update on what was happening, and in an attempt to comprehend it. While she explained in a matter-of-fact manner how unsettling this time period was for her and her husband, what made it all so 'horrible', it seemed, was how hard it had been on their children. Her voice became softer when she volunteered to me that her older daughter suffered especially, which she reinforced by stating that her child – at the age of eleven – had begun to wet her bed again. Because all family members, regardless of age or gender, were in the Wende-years so involved in making sense of – and trying to adapt to – the swift changes around them, there was no time to spare a thought for an unpredictable future beyond the following day. Everyday life had turned upside down: it had become so extraordinary, to an extent that it seemed impossible to keep up with. In such uncertain times, it is not particularly surprising that there was no time or felt need for extraordinary life cycle events.

While all these aspects play a role in the reasons that state-recorded kinship activity seemed to have come to a sudden halt, it is noteworthy that the lowest numbers for births, marriages and divorces were not reached directly in the Wende-years but in the early 1990s – *after* German unification.<sup>13</sup> For example, while the Thuringian live birth figure slumped in 1991 to 6.7, it reached its low of 5 only in 1994. Although from then onward the Thuringian birth rate slowly but steadily rose, reaching 8 in 2013, it has not come anywhere near the 1980s figures. These low birth rates evidently also impacted on Jugendweihe participation figures fourteen years later. Since Table 1 consists of only nominal participants, showing a largely decreasing trend, Table 5 illustrates that although Jugendweihe participation rates vary across the past twenty years from 1993 onward, they have always been higher in East Thuringia compared to the Thuringian federal state at

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<sup>13</sup> A monthly analysis of the fertility rate reveals that the drop in the East German fertility rate cannot be associated with the opening of the Hungarian border to Austria in September 1989 nor with the escalation of the Monday demonstrations and the feared use of fire arms in October 1989. Rather it only slowly commences *after* the fall of the Wall when the end of the GDR became increasingly conceivable (Dorbritz 1997: 250).

large, and have remained well above 40% since 1994, with a clear rising tendency since 2008.



*Table 5: Jugendweihe participation rates in Thuringia and East Thuringia, 1993-2013*  
*Sources:* Thuringian school authorities (total of pupils at grade 8 per year) and Jugendweihe Thüringen Association (participants per year)

In this chapter I suggest that the continued relevance of Jugendweihe in East Thuringia needs to be understood within the context of the eastern German life cycle. The kinship crisis of the early 1990s was not due simply to the disappearance of the socialist state, but also to the replacement of the former state by another state, the Federal Republic of Germany. This process led to a reshuffling of relations between the state, its citizens, and its families. Although such relations between individual, family, and state are always fraught because of different perceptions about how much parental and state *Fürsorge* (parental care or state welfare provisions) is deemed to be good, many eastern Germans are on the one hand relieved that the socialist state no longer exists, but simultaneously nostalgic for the different kinds of social relations it produced. Such different types of relations were created through the state's goal of crafting 'socialist personalities' and aspiring to a 'socialist family' model, because they were deemed essential for the greater project of achieving communism. Jugendweihe played a significant role in both, and throughout this thesis I will explore how the ritual reflects the ways that eastern Germans have dealt with these changes in social relations, which socialist values they hold dear, and endeavour to transmit to the younger generation. However, in this chapter I want to

clearly set out the interdependence between the state and the family by focusing on the East German socialist family model, which hailed women simultaneously as mothers and workers, and thus changed attitudes about what family means and how it is lived. By situating Jugendweihe within the trajectory of the eastern German life cycle, and in particular in relation to marriage and birth, I demonstrate that contemporary eastern German kinship still remains different from western German kinship – because it entails aspects of both continuity (with socialist times) and change (due to a different socio-political context). I show that the GDR state’s combination of somewhat contradictory pro-natal policies and socialist feminism has also left its mark on the (post-socialist) eastern German family.

### ***The GDR’s Pro-natal Policies and Socialist Feminism***

Dagmar, the vice chairwoman of the local Jugendweihe Association, opened the door, and I greeted her with a cheerful ‘Good morning!’. As I passed her, the sun made her short dyed hair glint in a lively dark red, and I pretended not to hear her sarcastic remark, ‘Good morning? Well, have you had a good lie in then?’ It was just after 9 am, but 9 am was considered late in Thuringia, where most ordinary employees would have had their second breakfast by that time, and where school started between 7.30 and 7.40 am.<sup>14</sup> We had agreed on flexible times, not least because my parents insisted that I have breakfast with them, and because I relied on the infrequent public transport from my parents’ village. Yet the Association members often enjoyed mocking my ‘lateness’ – a sign that served to characterise me as work-averse. After I hung my jacket on the coat rack in the hall, I made my rounds in what was essentially a ground floor flat in a tenement house that the Association had been using as office since, they guessed, about 1993. Opposite the bathroom on the left were two offices. The first had a wall unit with books and flyers, a table with four chairs and a desk with a PC, and was used by Sonja, who only worked part-time, and me. Next to it was the largest office with several wall units, a photocopier and two desks at which Dagmar and Nicole sat. Because of this office’s spaciousness it was also used to receive and deal with parents on ‘Tuesdays’ open consultation days. ‘Morning!’ I called out to Nicole, the youngest and most recent member, who looked up

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<sup>14</sup> The federal state of Saxony-Anhalt has used the nickname ‘federal state of early risers’ in its promotional campaign. The same might be said of Saxony and Thuringia.

from her laptop. She exchanged a brief glance with Dagmar, who had just sat down at her desk opposite, before the thirty-year-old woman noted: 'What, are you already in? You are really early today!' I left the office and walked through the small kitchen, whose PC sliding doors almost always remained open, to the back. In the smallest office Jutta, Nicole's mother, stared at her laptop and without looking up, smilingly commented: 'Are they riling you again, Grit?' I waved it away and replied, raising my voice, so that it could be heard next door: 'Nah, I'm used to it and anyway it would be more worrying if they stopped, because that would mean they no longer cared about me.' We heard laughter and an immediate response from the main office: 'Hear, hear!' I went back to the kitchen and shouted so that everyone in the office could hear it: 'So does anyone want coffee?'

It was common that in the morning between 9 and 10 a.m. someone would make coffee for everyone, though the coffee would usually be consumed at our desks. We only occasionally had a coffee break in the afternoon, during which everyone would sit and chat together. However, lunch was regularly shared around the kitchen table. During these lunches together we would not only discuss work matters but also share the latest gossip or just talk about last night's TV programme. On one such occasion, Dagmar asked whether anyone had seen the TV documentary on the German feminist movement. Because only I had watched it, Dagmar explained to Jutta and Nicole that the programme looked at equality between women and men in historical perspective, but largely portrayed the western German experience. She continued to voice her dislike about this bias, but then added, 'Although I was really surprised, towards the end they actually mentioned that it was different in the GDR. They just asked some random eastern German women in the street and they all replied that they felt that life under socialism was pretty gender-equal. It was actually quite interesting.' She turned to me, 'Did you see the bit about how they [West German women] still in the 1970s had to ask their husbands for permission when they wanted to work?' While I nodded, she continued, 'Imagine, if we *had to* be housewives! – We really were so much more progressive than them!' Jutta concurred, exclaiming in her typically outspoken manner: 'Of course! We *were* far more progressive than West German women – I tell you, we still *are*!'

Although gender equality had been enshrined in the constitutions of both German states in 1949, this was not – or not fully – reflected in actual social life in either country. While both states made claims to strongly protect the family, their divergent social policies aimed

at constructing a different type of family in each other's mirror-image (Borneman 1992). The West German state, with the support of the Catholic Church, began to restore the old patriarchal family type that promoted the *Hausfrauenehe* ('housewife marriage') (Borneman 1992: 86, 106). In contrast, East Germany set out to construct a new family type based on egalitarianism. While the West German political elite viewed family as a private affair that may be of concern to the Church but not the state, for East Germany's leadership the family was a political issue. The GDR state's family policies were inspired by Friedrich Engels' (1884) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, and the writings of feminist communist Clara Zetkin, who held that both family and state would develop progressively, and that women's emancipation were key to such progress (Borneman 1992: 83). The socialist state viewed the family from the beginning not as a private matter but as a 'basic collective' whose progress was required in order to accomplish society's greater goal of communism. In order to erase the division between production and reproduction that traditionally associated men with the former (public) sphere, and women with the latter (domestic) sphere, women were encouraged to become *Facharbeiter* (skilled worker). This role for women was in line with the state's ideological aims but also had pragmatic reasons because, unlike West Germany with its rapid post-war reconstruction and increasing affluence hailed as 'economic miracle', the East German state relied on its female work force. Yet the 1950 Mother and Child Protection Law also encouraged women to become mothers by guaranteeing female employees paid maternity leave and providing mothers with a small monthly allowance as well as a one-off payment per childbirth (Harsch 2007: 134-5). Whereas in the 1950s women still carried the double burden of being mothers and full-time workers, the state aimed to mitigate women's workload not only through a monthly paid day off work for women to attend to their housework (*Haushaltstag*) but increasingly also through better provision of childcare and public facilities (Borneman 1992: 90-92). Childcare provisions in turn also allowed the state to limit parental authority and increase its ideological influence over its youngest inhabitants at an early age. While I will discuss this struggle over authority in more detail in Chapter 3 with regards to the GDR school system, what is noteworthy here is that not only did women's employment become the norm, but the state's provision of child care became taken for granted and was seen favourably. In a survey conducted in 1994, 69% of western German but only 30% of eastern German women agreed that a child at pre-school age was likely to suffer because of their mother's employment (Schober

and Stahl 2014: 987). Although these figures dropped in 2012 to 32% and 13% respectively, they still illustrate a disparity in attitudes regarding extra-familial childcare (ibid.)

### ***Tying the Knot or Not: Becoming a Parent, Marriage, and Divorce***

Social policies are legislated by states with the intention to achieve particular aims, yet the effects of such policies are difficult to predict and can have unintended consequences (see Blum 2003; Borneman 1992; Friedman 2005). This issue was no different in East Germany, where some policies were fairly quickly adopted by citizens, while others were rejected, so that the state had to master intricate balancing acts that more often than not tipped towards pragmatism on part of the state (see McLellan 2011). While the GDR state hoped for a woman to give birth to at least three children, birth rates remained low compared to other socialist countries but still higher than in West Germany (Kertzer and Barbagli 2003: xxii; McLellan 2011: 57). Overall, the birth rates followed a European fertility pattern that tended to rise until the mid-1960s due to improved living conditions and then decreased in part due to birth control. In fact, the availability of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion on demand in 1972, increasingly enabled East German women to make their own reproductive choices. Despite a declining birth rate, childbirths outside marriage steadily increased. Today there is a noticeable trend of an overall decreasing birth rate across the 28 countries of the European Union; yet the share of live births outside marriage has continuously increased from, for example, an average of 29.5% in 2002 to 40% in 2012 (Eurostat 2015). At 34.5% in 2012, Germany is well below the EU's average of 40% (ibid.), which seems to suggest that Germans at large still follow the more traditional pattern of marrying first and then having children. Indeed, a 2012 report on Germany's live births by the Federal Statistical Office explains that until 2009 records in the territory of the former West Germany comprised solely the mother's age and not her legal status, because until the early 1990s more than 90% of all children were born in wedlock (Pötzsch 2012: 10). More importantly, the report points to stark regional differences – live births outside marriage in the territory of the former West Germany accounted in 2010 for only 27%, while such births total 61% in the territory of the former East Germany (Pötzsch 2012: 19). Although figures from other post-socialist as well as Scandinavian countries range between 40% and 59% – remaining well above the EU's

average – only Iceland beats the eastern Germans’ high birth rate among unmarried mothers with 64.1% in 2010.

This trend seems to be continuing; I have calculated the proportion of live births outside marriage for western and eastern federal states (without Berlin) as being 29% and 62% respectively for 2013 (based on data provided by the FSO 2015: 33-34).<sup>15</sup> While in East Germany many children were already born outside marriage in the 1960s (Pötzsch 2012: 11), in West Germany this trend started only in the mid-1990s – not least because Germany’s 1900 Civil Code (BGB) regarding the status of children born outside marriage was only reformed in 1997, granting the same legal status to children regardless of their mothers’ marital status (ibid: 18). GDR family law offered support to more than just (single) mothers; the category of *unebelich* (illegitimate) children was removed in 1950, which seems to have worked in favour to reduce social stigma previously attached to children born outside wedlock.

Similar to the FRG, the GDR’s social policies focused on and idealized a heteronormative family model: ‘one man, one woman, married for life with children’ (Borneman 1992: 92). But in reality, the East German marriage rate declined, while the divorce rate steadily rose (McLellan 2011: 77). Wolfgang Engler postulates that the reason for this conundrum was that East Germans did not perceive their partners as providers either at the beginning or the end of their relationship, but rather they ‘married or moved in together because they loved each other, and broke up because they didn’t love each other anymore’ (Engler 2000: 258). This argument, however, seems a bit over-simplistic. For example, Jutta had already lived with the father of her first child before they got married, and chuckled when she explained to me: ‘You know what, we only married because they [the state] had brought in this *Ehekredit* (marriage loan). This was 5,000 Marks or so and we needed this money to refurbish that old flat we lived in!’ Indeed pragmatism – in Jutta’s case to access a marriage loan, but frequently also to make a claim on the housing list – was often the main reason for affirming an already existent relationship through marriage. GDR citizens increasingly learned how to make best use of social policies but also of official socialist language for their own needs.

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<sup>15</sup> 2013 figures for a European comparison are unavailable.

This know-how was also increasingly used in cases of marital problems and divorce. Despite the state's promotion of marriage for life, the GDR's divorce rate had been one of the highest in the world (Kolinsky 1998: 135), and women increasingly made up the larger share of marital partners who filed for divorce: 53% in 1958 and 68% in 1984 (Mertens 1998 in McLellan 2011: 77). This trend seems to suggest that women gained more confidence to separate from their husbands due to greater socio-economic independence, but indeed – as Betts (2010) and McLellan (2011) have illustrated – it was also indicative of the persistence of patriarchal norms within the 'basic collective'. In his investigation of divorce court records in East Berlin, Betts notes that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, priests and pastors had been moral educators and key mediators in negotiating the intimate life of couples, a role that was taken over by family doctors in the Nazi period, and assumed by judges and social workers in the GDR (Betts 2010: 96). More importantly, in the 1960s 'courts voiced great concern that strong patriarchal attitudes were still all too present in many homes, and that their mission was to eradicate this social poison and to support aggrieved female citizens' (ibid: 105). Similarly, McLellan (2011: 77-78) points out that in the 1970s infidelity and alcoholism ranked highest among the reasons for filing for divorce; a 1975 report from a marriage guidance office elaborates that these were not the root causes but responses to an unhappy marriage. Indeed, marital complaints resounded the traditional gender conflict about unequal division of labour: women criticised their husbands' lack of support in the household, men argued that their wives were too house-proud, putting too much of their energies into housework instead of sex (ibid.). These issues seemed to continue in the early 1990s, and were exacerbated by new experiences of loss of self-esteem due to and anxiety about unemployment, which also increased familial tensions as households attempted to adjust to these new circumstances (Dennis 1998: 96).

Although many interlocutors from all generations made reference to the importance of both life partners and children, these references did not necessarily go hand in hand with marriage. For example, most eastern Germans found it somewhat puzzling that I was unmarried and childless. Locals I had known as a teenager, and who I bumped into during my fieldwork, would almost always bluntly ask whether I was married, and when I replied no, the follow up question was: 'But you've got someone? – Well, as long as you're not alone, that's all that matters!' Similarly, Association members would frequently, but good humouredly, inquire about my 'love life' and encourage me to 'find a man'. When I

explained that I had no interest in finding a Thuringian man, adding that it seemed pointless given that I would return to the UK after my fieldwork, it became clear that they did not want me to find a marital partner – as I had often experienced in other countries – but that they were more concerned about my sexual and emotional well-being: ‘Well, just someone for now. We just want you to be happy.’ That marriage was not seen as something set in stone, that is, meant for life was poignantly expressed at every Jugendweihe ceremony. Towards the end of the ceremony, when the commère explained how to procure photographs and DVDs, and in an attempt to persuade indecisive parents, she would jokingly point out that parents should consider one thing: ‘You have Jugendweihe only once, but you can marry more often!’

Nonetheless, while my disinterest in matrimony was largely understood and accepted, at times even positively commented upon, not having children remained incomprehensible to most. ‘Don’t you want to have kids?’ was a common question directed at me, often followed by listing the great incentives of motherhood, such as that I would ‘see the world with different eyes’ or that a smile from one’s own child was priceless. Although marriage has by no means become superfluous, it appears not to be seen as essential for the founding or indeed sustaining of a family. In Gera, the great majority of families include married couples, but more than 15% are single parents and more than 16% cohabit (see Table 6). Thuringia ranks fourth in its share of single parents out of the sixteen German federal states, which is particularly high, considering that it belongs to the more rural regions (similar to numbers 12 and 13) and that the three highest ranks are large cities with predominately Protestant (and atheist) traditions (see Table 7). Among the six East Thuringian families that inform this thesis, none of the parents were married before the birth of their first child. Three couples had a child before they got married, and another couple married during my fieldwork, though they already each had a child from a previous relationship as well as a child together. Two sets of parents remained unmarried.

Type of family nucleus (by living arrangement)	Regional units		
	Gera, city %	Thuringia %	Germany %
Married couples	68.4	71.6	74.8
Registered civil unions	0.1	0.0	0.1
Cohabiting couples	16.1	14.0	12.2
Single fathers	1.7	2.3	2.1
Single mothers	13.7	12.1	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Single parents	15.4	14.4	12.9

Table 6: Family types in comparative regional units (by living arrangement) in %  
*Source:* Census 9 May 2011; from the adjusted stock of registers Federal Statistical Office & the Statistical Offices of the Länder, 2014.

Table 7: Proportion of single-parent families by federal states  
with child(ren) in Germany (in ascending order)

Regional key	Regional unit	%
8	Baden-Württemberg	11,8
3	Lower Saxony	12,3
5	North Rhine-Westphalia	12,4
7	Rhineland-Palatinate	12,4
9	Bavaria	12,4
1	Schleswig-Holstein	12,5
14	Saxony	12,5
0	Germany	12,9
6	Hesse	13,1
12	Brandenburg	13,6
10	Saarland	13,8
15	Saxony-Anhalt	13,8
13	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	14,1
16	Thuringia	14,4
4	Bremen	15,2
2	Hamburg	15,4
11	Berlin	18,6

*Source:* Census 9 May 2011; from the adjusted stock of Registers, Federal Statistical Office & the Statistical Offices of the Länder, 2014.

Franka, in her early forties and one of the unmarried mothers, had lived with her partner and their two children for about two decades above her parents in their tenement house in Gera's city centre. When she asked me about the wedding I was due to attend, I explained to her that I was not particularly keen on weddings, especially the fairy tale image of a princess-like wedding dress. I elaborated that I felt that such events were too costly, and that I personally would prefer to spend that kind of money on a proper honeymoon abroad, instead of on a white dress and a big celebration. Franka ran her fingers through her short blonde hair, while listening, then suddenly burst into laughter, and in her raspy loud voice she exclaimed: 'Grit, you are like me! If I really *had to* marry, I think, I would just go during my lunch break to the registry office, have a takeaway Bratwurst from a street grill (*eine Roster auf die Faust*) and then go back to work.' She insisted that she would also rather use the money for something else instead of inviting all her relatives.

At the time, I did not think much about this remark; but later I realized that her unwillingness to invite all her relatives to a wedding sat at odds with the fact that she had been very willing to make a big fuss for her children's Jugendweihe – to which she invited as many relatives as possible. It seemed less an issue of the relatives and the associated cost of hospitality, than an issue of to whom attention was drawn on this special day. Put differently, she had been very happy for her children to be the centre of attention, but she seemed to be uncomfortable with taking on this attention for herself. Franka's attitude toward these two life cycle events, however, also highlights that while marriage's significance has decreased, the significance of having a family has remained high – largely because of the importance placed on children as sources of emotional support and happiness in life. This emphasis on children as an integral part of a fulfilled life was mirrored in the type of photographs that families had selected for showcasing in their living rooms. Wedding photographs were conspicuously missing in all of the five non-denominational families, while in the one family whose son had only celebrated Confirmation, a framed wedding picture adorned their living room sideboard. Naturally where there was no wedding there cannot be a wedding photo, but even in the families whose parents were married, wedding photographs were not present in rooms where guests would be received (though they might have been in the bedrooms). Instead what all these rather diverse homes had in common was their display of plenty of photographs of their children.

This emphasis on the adolescents – exemplified through the celebration of Jugendweihe – is intriguing, especially since the Soviet ritual system attempted to introduce substitutes for all life cycle rituals. A comparison between Jugendweihe, baptism and wedding as well as between these life cycle rituals of the Soviet Union and of the GDR, as a satellite state of the Soviet Union, might usefully bring to the fore differences in popularity of various life cycle rituals – and reasons behind these differences.

### **The Unpopularity of Other Socialist Life Cycle Rituals**

Of course, cohabitation, birth outside marriage, and single parenthood had become acceptable during GDR times in part because the influence of the church and religion had diminished. Indeed, the GDR state re-introduced Jugendweihe in 1955 as a secularisation tool in its struggle over authority with the church, and in direct competition with the Protestant confirmation, which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter. But Jugendweihe also created a bottom-up social demand for introducing other socialist life cycle ceremonies, to replace baptisms, church weddings and church funerals. For example, the County Committee for Jugendweihe in Gera noted in its 1956 and 1958 annual reports that the main reasons adolescents did not participate in Jugendweihe were the persistent, widespread ‘superstition’ fuelled by pastors that ‘youths would end up in hell’, and threats that the church would deny sacraments and ecclesiastical rights, such as the ability to become a godparent or to participate in future church ceremonies (SAG 01 and 03). The 1957 annual report cited the incident of a girl who withdrew her Jugendweihe registration because of the pastor’s pressure to deny her a future church wedding. It concluded that ‘overall the contra-work of the church works better on girls’ and that ‘it is again demanded to henceforth forcefully develop a non-church system of dignified celebrations at the time of child baptism, wedding, and death.’ (SAG 02: 3-4)

In various regions East Germans themselves made attempts to introduce such secular equivalents to these religious life cycle rituals, but – unlike Jugendweihe – the political elite did not see the ideological relevance of such events, and they were scarcely promoted and lacked the state’s financial support (Lange 2004). Although in March 1958 the registry office in Gera conducted the first socialist *Namensgebung* (naming ceremony; SAG 09), there is little further archival evidence of such ceremonies, partly because they never

became very popular. Nevertheless, in the 1960s the state indicated an intent to harmonize socialist naming ceremonies throughout the republic by providing guidance on their ceremonial features and standardized naming certificates (see Lange 2004). The political elite hoped that naming ceremonies would be celebrated in people-owned enterprises, which were to carry both the organisational and financial responsibilities for the events, thereby linking the celebration's emphasis to the work collective rather than just the family. Yet most families seemed to prefer to celebrate the naming of their new-born as a family event, while companies opposed these plans because it meant an increased workload for them. As a result, as Ines Lange (2004) points out, collective celebrations were the exception to the rule, and most socialist naming ceremonies were conducted at registry offices – if they were conducted at all.

Unsurprisingly then, most East Thuringians I spoke to had never even heard of these naming ceremonies. In a conversation with Dagmar on this topic, it emerged that she was not particularly fond of them even during socialist times. However, she explained, they had been fairly popular in cases where the father of the new-born was a soldier because the ceremony enabled him to be away from the barracks and to have a brief holiday at home. The other advantage, she added, was that when these ceremonies were celebrated at the place of work, under the direction of the labour union of the particular plant (*Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung; BGL*), one would also receive a present from the company. Here pragmatic considerations, in which the family could gain some sort of advantage, seemed to trump any other reasons – much as they did in the celebration of weddings. Yet Dagmar explained her dislike of naming ceremonies with the comment that she 'did not see what the point [of them] was' in relation to the life cycle. Although she understood that people baptised their children in order to have confirmation, she also asserted that many did so because they wanted to enable their children to have a church wedding, because 'apparently it [the church wedding] is much more solemn or something much more special!' The 'pointlessness' Dagmar saw in such ceremonies emanates from the fact that while confirmation in the Lutheran Church was not a sacrament and required baptism in order to be celebrated, Jugendweihe was not dependent on the celebration of a naming ceremony, nor was the celebration of a (non-religious) wedding dependent on either Jugendweihe or a socialist naming ceremony. Furthermore, one already had a birth certificate, and a celebration at a registry office appeared to be an unnecessary addition or duplication (Lange 2004) – much as a workplace celebration might seem to be redundant.

During the Protestant Reformation, and in keeping with Luther's view of weddings as 'worldly things', for Protestants matrimony was also eliminated as a sacrament – unlike in the Catholic Church. In 1875, during Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* (the cultural struggle between the nation state and the Catholic Church) it was established that weddings in Germany ought to be conducted with a registrar as a prerequisite to a religious wedding ceremony, because the latter is not in itself legally binding. Religious weddings are thus always held in addition to, and only after, a civic ceremony. In East Germany the family law of 1965 allowed for the possibility of marrying outwith a registry office, but the 1966 Civil Status Act decreed that all marriages had to take place at a registry office. Both these contradictory laws and widespread petit-bourgeois conceptions of marriage may explain why collective socialist weddings never became popular either (Lange 2004). Indeed even Walter Ulbricht, the head of state at the time, declared in the session on the Civil Status Act:

I am for state order. A registry office is a registry office and no association nor club. A marriage has to take place at a registry office and nowhere else. That's how it is. Whether you celebrate your wedding afterwards in a club, you can do as you please. But the marriage has to take place at the registry office (cited in Lange 2004).

Lange (2004) notes that socialist wedding ceremonies were rarely taken up, and while she does not cite any figures for the county Gera, in the neighbouring Thuringian county of Erfurt they amounted in 1963 to only 5.4% – and most of these were held at a registry office, not at the workplace. Socialist weddings became increasingly formalised registry weddings in which the young couple received a 'family book' (*Buch der Familie*) which recorded not only the wedding but the births of any future children that would spring from this union. While it served as documentary evidence of family life, it was also embossed with the GDR state emblem, and promulgated the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment of socialist morals: that marital partners raise their 'children in the spirit of peace and socialism to all around educated, highly principled, and physically toughened people'.

Today, civic weddings are still the norm, and bride and groom – albeit often 'traditionally' dressed, with the bride in a white wedding dress and her husband in a black suit – tend to spend only 15 to 20 minutes in front of a registrar. They are usually welcomed outside the registry office by extended family, friends and/or colleagues, who may have prepared

more traditional customs, such as throwing rice (or confetti) at the new couple, presenting them with bread and salt to eat, or giving them a wooden beam they have to saw. The wedding is then celebrated with close friends and families at a different venue, usually a restaurant or hotel. In contrast, church weddings are comparatively rare in Thuringia. Taking into account the Thuringian marriage statistics from 2009 to 2013 (TLS-1 2015), on average roughly 17% of all marriages also had a church wedding – 12.1% in the Protestant Church and 4.8% in the Catholic Church (TLS 2015: 34; TLS 2013: 34; TLS 2012: 34). Here it is worth emphasising not only the limited number of religious weddings held in the region. Rather, the concurrent failure of both collective socialist naming ceremonies and weddings highlight the limits of collectivization and indeed failure to eradicate familial boundaries. Nonetheless, Jugendweihe appears to have been effective, at least to a certain degree, in facilitating collective thoughts and actions. I will return to the question of why and how it achieved such success in Chapter 3.

In contrast, in the Soviet Union the secular wedding was the first life-cycle ritual to be introduced, and became ‘the most widely established and accepted’ (Lane 1981: 74; Drobizheva and Tul’tesva 1983). While there had been so called ‘Red Weddings’ and ‘Red Christenings’ fairly soon after the revolution, with the discrediting of Trotsky’s ideas – including his advocacy of such rituals – and the party’s decision to promote them as anti-religious rather than valid in their own right, their popularity declined under Stalinism (see Binns 1979 and 1982). However, after Stalin’s death, the new leadership feared a religious revival and the possibility that the churches – as the sole extra-state institutions – would turn into centres of political disloyalty for disenchanting gulag returnees (Binns 1982: 299). Secular life cycle rituals were first re-introduced in republics where the Soviet authorities faced particularly strong and popular churches but, unlike under Stalinism, they were geared toward the feelings of people concerned, having a markedly personalized approach (Binns 1982: 300). In Lutheran Estonia and Latvia, for example, secular coming-of-age rituals that entailed many of the features of the Protestant confirmation were introduced in 1957, and Binns (1980) mentions in a footnote that the idea was very likely borrowed from the GDR Jugendweihe. Yet, unlike in Germany, these rituals were held at the age of 16 and increasingly became harmonised to be celebrated at the school-leaving age of 18.

In these Baltic republics secular weddings and naming ceremonies were also taken up and led to the opening of the first Soviet Palace of Weddings in Leningrad in 1959. Because of their success, in 1964 the party approved a general policy and campaign to roll out secular life cycle rituals across the country. Unsurprisingly, in a country as vast and ethnically diverse as the USSR, the popularity of these rituals varied among the different republics, not least because of geographically and historically varying religious traditions. Weddings became the most popular secular life cycle rituals, although most of them were just an ‘elaborate form of registration’ (Binns 1980: 177). Christopher Binns postulates that in the Ukraine, for example – the model republic for secular weddings – their popularity was due in part to the fact that many churches had closed, and that old registry offices were transformed into Palaces of Weddings, making compulsory registrations ceremonial (1982: 303). Yet Soviet people were also attracted to the regal splendour of these palaces, and in the mundane everyday these ceremonies increasingly afforded them ‘otherwise unavailable opportunities for frivolous consumer enjoyment and “special occasion” uplift, for which they were prepared to make ideological obeisance as a nod to political loyalty’ (Binns 1982: 301). Nevertheless, majority Catholic or Muslim republics still recorded high percentages – varying from 50 to 90% – of additional (‘duplication’) religious weddings (Binns 1980: 177; Drobizheva and Tul’tesva 1983; Lane 1981: 80-82).

Comparison of East Germany with the Soviet Union, then, makes clear the extent to which pre-socialist (often religious) traditions account for the uptake of new socialist life cycle rituals, an issue which I will revisit in Chapter 2. Unlike in the Soviet Union, in East Germany, Jugendweihe became the most widespread secular life cycle ritual. This ritual played a pivotal part in attempting to win over the youth for the communist project, in moulding them into socialist personalities, and in changing their future lifecourses; but it was also a locus for forging intimate connections between the state, the family, and the individual. To similar ends, Jugendweihe also plays a part in encouraging a positive view of sexuality, and cultivating an appreciation of parenthood and of children in association with adolescents’ sexual maturity, which I address in the last section of this chapter.

### ***Love & Sexuality: The Age of Consent***

It was a pleasant late Sunday afternoon in May when I joined a birthday party. We were sitting in the garden, conversations and alcohol flowing, while Thuringian sausages sizzled

on the barbeque behind us. After I had explained that the reason for my long stay in Germany was due to my research on Jugendweihe, the host's best friend Michael, a confident, tall, dark-haired man in his late forties, immediately offered: 'Grit, I can tell you also about *my* Jugendweihe! Do you want to know?' Before I could reply, his wife, sitting across the table, teasingly interfered: 'Come on, you don't remember anything about your Jugendweihe – it's ages ago!' He, however, asserted: 'I recall everything – very detailed!' Not just for my benefit but by way of entertaining his now actively listening audience around the garden table, he continued: 'I especially remember one thing and that is how my mum showed me up in front of the entire assembled gang! She told everyone!' With a high-pitched voice, he mimicked his mother: "'We thought if our boy continues like that, we will be grandparents by the time he has his Jugendweihe!'" He laughed out loud, drily adding: "That was the moment when I just said "Cheerio!", and headed off to meet up with my friends. And that was that – yeah, that was *my* Jugendweihe, Grit!

Although Michael thrived on being the life and soul of a party so that any of his narratives had to be taken with a pinch of salt, less than a decade after his Jugendweihe he had become both a husband and a father. He neatly matched the profile of the 'average East German', who had children and married at a young age. His story also fits a broader trend in which parents and grandparents tended to recall their own poignant anecdotes from GDR Jugendweihe celebrations, perhaps perfected and idealized over the years, often for entertainment value. These stories had been imprinted on people's minds because of their emotional and social significance, which seemed almost always to be associated with the re-negotiation of their familial relations due to their coming-of-age (see also Chapter 4). References to sexual maturity were one way in which initiands' coming-of-age was manifested – crucially, in respect to their future role as parents. Michael recalled this story so clearly because of the embarrassment caused by his mother, who openly and 'in front of everyone' commented on him having become sexually active. At the same time, she publicly recognized that her son was no longer simply her child but able to have children of his own; and thus, that he would not only have greater responsibilities himself, but also to others in continuing the family line.

Of course, this is not to suggest that confirmands do not similarly reach sexual maturity during this phase of their lives, but rather that it is acknowledged to a much lesser extent – if at all. Unlike the confirmations I attended, which focused on divine and brotherly

love (*agape*) and never on romantic desire (*eros*), teenagers' increasing interest in sexuality was referenced frequently during the Jugendweihe ceremony. For example, the satirical song 'Puberty' – performed a capella during most of the ceremonies I observed – was received with particular good humour and laughter from young and old alike, especially during these two explicit passages:

Tanja has polished her finger nails pink.  
Fat Bodo scribbled stuff above the toilet sink.  
'Fuck' it reads, and Bodo turns red.  
But no one has yet done 'it', apart from Annett.

[...]

Kai has a driving license and Bodo has not.  
Instead he is a specialist in smutty jokes.  
On school trips he always sits at the back of the bus.  
He plays 'nut catching' till the teacher stops all the fuss.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the guest speakers acknowledged more or less ambiguously the new things teenagers might be starting to feel, assuring them that it was alright to 'blush a little about the thought of love, especially when one was thinking not only about love for parents and grandparents', and that the 'butterflies in one's stomach during the first dates and kisses' would remain unforgettable. Others were more direct. For example, one popular guest speaker, a short middle-aged TV presenter, explained that his own son, at nursery age, asked for advice on who to marry after his little girlfriend's family had moved away: "My nursery teacher or rather mum?" He continued to explain that teenagers no longer asked their parents for advice regarding matters of the heart, but:

Today they read [the teenage magazine] BRAVO, the popular rubric "Dr Sommer", where they ask questions such as: "When I have sex for the first time in my life, will I stop growing?" – Interesting, isn't it? It throws an entirely new light on short men. It just crossed my mind, my father is also not particularly tall. But that's just how it is, it's in our nature. Sex, I mean. I know, especially during a Jugendweihe speech, one is looked at a little strangely when you say yes to sex. But I take the risk and confess: people at my age also have sex; even though with a bad conscience. – We live in times of global warming. Nowadays everything is sounded out for sustainability. And sex too is put to the test. – After all, a lot of warmth is produced in the process...

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<sup>16</sup> The phrase '*Eierketschen*' (nut catching) is used in reference to boys fondling their or other boys' testicles. The singer symbolically touches his groin area while singing these lyrics.

These references entertained the audience, of course, but they also seemed to serve as a kind of assurance to young people that love and sexuality were fundamental parts of life, that they had been for their parents too, and thus that they were nothing to be ashamed of. The chapter of the keepsake book received by initiands entitled ‘Love, Partnership, Sexuality: 1000 Questions’ covers, in question and answer style, a wide range of possible sexual and emotional concerns that teenagers at this age may face. As one mother recalled, it was this part of the book that caused controversy when it was passed around the guests at her daughter’s Jugendweihe. The mother’s western German friends, who were raised as Catholics, felt the book was ‘inappropriate’. What may have offended their sensibilities was that the chapter tackled in a liberal manner questions that might not have been raised at all within a Christian context – or that would have been answered very differently, such as ‘Who is responsible for contraception?’ (Both); ‘Is masturbation harmful?’ (No); or ‘Is it pathological or immoral to be gay or lesbian?’ (No). But while this chapter appeared educational and aimed to dispel some – still prevalent – old myths, what was more surprising to me was the way the questions of adolescent sexuality was covered under the following blurb:

14 years old. Roughly half of the youth is in love. Several already have their first kiss behind them. Others still wait for “Mr Right” or “Mrs Right”. Because love is not arbitrary neither is kissing. Some do not even think about love or at least not about a steady relationship. They do not want to be tied, they want to be free; they want experiences without having to consider a relationship. They want to concentrate on learning and achievement. They do not want to spoil professional opportunities or they want to have material security first, before they found a family. And perhaps they will find themselves years later sadly alone (Starke 2013: 44).

This excerpt seems to suggest that at the age of fourteen it was not only appropriate or ‘natural’ to become sexually active – it is, after all, the age of (sexual) consent in Germany – but that all the fairly reasonable excuses for not having a relationship or a family while still young might lead one to being sad and alone in the future. Indeed, there was a sense that guest speakers and the Jugendweihe Association were somewhat promoting not only sexuality but also family planning at a young age. At the same time, sexual innuendoes within the family were fairly common in the past, as Michael’s anecdote suggests, as well as during my fieldwork. After one such ceremony I talked to a male initiand in front of

the Gera theatre, while his family was waiting nearby. After I had asked him whether he would be willing to have a chat with me a few weeks after his celebration, I handed him my business card before leaving. At this point, his maternal grandmother complimented him, loudly enough for everyone to hear: 'Well, there you go, you already got your first telephone number!'

While it was a playful remark, perhaps intended to embarrass both of us, this sort of playful innuendo was not simply a matter of teasing or acknowledging change in children or grandchildren. It was not uncommon for initiands to have their boyfriends or girlfriends at their Jugendweihe family celebration – and girls in particular often had (somewhat older) boyfriends in attendance. In cases where such a boyfriend or girlfriend was absent, extended kin or family friends would often inquire whether there was 'someone special' in the initiand's life. At times, a parent would come to their child's aid by pointing out that he or she 'still had time'. Quite a few of the adolescents whose Jugendweihe I had observed were in a 'steady' relationship within a year or so, by the age of fifteen or sixteen. What surprised me was their parents' acceptance of such a young relationship to the extent that, for instance, girlfriends or boyfriends joined family holidays away. These first sexual attractions were often commented on by parents, who compared them with their own youth, when they had started going to the disco at the age of fourteen, and had their own first sexual experiences.

But a clear tension was also palpable: on the one hand, parents were happy that their children were not alone, that they had found someone special for the present – or indeed, even someone for the long-run, who marked the possibility the parents might become grandparents. On the other hand, there was the bittersweet sense that there was not much time left before the child would eventually 'fledge' the family nest and leave the parental home. The acceptance of an adolescent child's new friend as part of the family was not simply a matter of open-mindedness and inclusion, but also seemed to serve two strategic purposes. First, parents could examine what the new 'significant other' in their son's or daughter's life was like, in the hope they could protect their child from emotional harm by assessing whether this person was trustworthy and 'good enough' for their child. Secondly, it enabled them to come across as liberal while still maintaining some control over their child. Parents were still able to spend quality time with their children – thus prolonging the time until their offspring would eventually leave the parental home.

Parents' seemingly liberal acceptance thus mitigated the imminent risk of loss, though it was inevitable that their child would 'get wings'. The way parents dealt with their teenage child's changing priorities regarding emotional investment also required sustenance so that the emotional ties between parents and children were not entirely broken. Showing trust in their child to make the right decision, and extending that trust to their friend, also meant giving their children the confidence that family meant roots – if something went wrong in the future, they could rely on their family to be there for them. Jugendweihe, then, marked not simply a coming-of-age for an adolescent, but it also signalled quite forcefully to parents that they had to prepare for the letting go of their offspring. That this process could lead to familial tension was quite openly acknowledged during the public ceremony but also in conversations with parents. Yet celebrating such a ritual also appeared to strengthen family ties, in particular by providing a public opportunity for parents and grandparents to acknowledge that their children mattered most to them.

I suggest that Jugendweihe's continued popularity reflects a desire to re-strengthen family ties in a time period when such family ties are in danger of being severed. Given that the ritual served to connect individual, families, and the state, it also raises the question of what it means in contemporary Germany where the previous state no longer exists – an issue I return to throughout this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

In 2015, the media marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German re-unification by assessing the current state of affairs in various publications – frequently noting that eastern and western Germans were closing ranks on many social and economic issues. Yet it was also always highlighted that differences persisted, many of which pertained specifically to family structures (see, for example, Harmsen and Lenz 2015; Mönch 2015). Thus, in the territory of the former East Germany, the majority of children are born outside marriage, most mothers work, and there is a greater availability and use of childcare facilities compared to its western counterpart. In this chapter, I have illustrated various interdependencies between politics and kinship, and the ways these differences between eastern and western Germany are in part due to a history of different state policies in the GDR and FRG respectively. The GDR's political elite aimed to achieve a communist utopia through

moulding its young citizens into ‘socialist personalities’, and its families into the socialist family model, aimed at collapsing gender hierarchies that would eventually lead to an overall equal society. Alain Blum (2003) rightly argues that there is no such thing as ‘the socialist family’ because socialist states all implemented social policies differently, depending on their own specific histories and their peoples’ adoption, rejection or negotiation of these state attempts. He concludes that socialist states failed to have a lasting impact on rather resilient family structures. Yet – as I hope to have demonstrated – East German family structures appear to have – at least in part – changed due to efforts made by the GDR state.

Many pro-natal policies, especially in combination with a socialist feminism, had only limited and short-term successes (increase in birth rates) or unintended consequences (high divorce rates), while others seemed to have a lasting effect beyond 1989-90 (female workforce, births outside marriage, and early-age extra-familial child care). Today the eastern German family structure is more similar to the family structure of Scandinavian countries than to western Germany because historically the social policies of Scandinavian countries and East Germany encouraged a ‘universal breadwinner model’, while, for example, those of the UK and West Germany were geared toward a ‘male breadwinner model’ (Harsch 2007: 308-309; Kreyenfeld 2012).

Jugendweihe became an integral part of the East German lifecourse that marked the coming-of-age of a child, but simultaneously served the political elite to craft ‘socialist personalities’ and to intimately link family, state, and individual. The coming-of-age of an individual is – as in all societies – associated with sexual maturity and thus with reproduction, which is also of interest to the wider community or the nation-state. Because of its extensive social welfare provisions, the GDR has been referred to as a ‘welfare dictatorship’ (Jaraus 1999); but the political elite also created a prototype lifecourse, predetermining what socialist subjects had to do at certain periods in their lives. In this typical lifecourse more than 90% of East Germans followed the pattern of entering school at age six, celebrating their Jugendweihe at age fourteen, leaving school at age sixteen and starting their professional career at seventeen. East Germans – compared to West Germans of the same era – would reach financial independence from their parents earlier, often by around the age of nineteen. Women were regularly married by the age of twenty-one, and would have at least one child by twenty-two (Kolinsky 1998: 121). With

the political rupture of 1989-90, opportunities dramatically increased, including travel abroad and career choices; but previously generous social policies also changed, often unfavourably. The consequences were changes in lifestyle that were welcomed by many, but that were also associated with less-welcomed side effects such as a more individualistic way of living, the longer financial dependency of children, and a declining birth rate. These changes were commented upon by many of my interlocutors, who often appeared to stress their negative aspects over their positive ones. In one such conversation Lars, Nils's father, noted what he took to be two interrelated issues:

Nowadays people weigh up whether they can afford children and calculate how much they cost. How can one think this way? Children are important in themselves, and anyway if no one has children, we'll just die out. I don't know, most of the youth today just think about themselves, they are selfish and don't want to work. I mean you are yourself already in your forties, people like you and me, we are dying out and then what? One can only hope that at least some of the youth, some of our children, keep something of this "East mentality" alive.<sup>17</sup>

The concern of Germans 'dying out' is of course a long-standing pan-German anxiety, given that Germany has one of the lowest birth rates worldwide and an increasingly aging population, but Lars seemed to link this explicitly to eastern Germans, associating eastern Germans with a particular way of thinking or set of values. In the remainder of this thesis I explore what values are deemed to be part of this 'East German mentality', and which of them grandparental and parental generations wish to transmit to their offspring. Because lifecourses have become less rigid and increasingly diversified, today families across three generations share only two events associated with a particular age: school entry celebration and Jugendweihe. While a child's school entry is marked by a celebration throughout Germany, Jugendweihe remains a feature exclusive to the eastern German life cycle, and thus serves in this thesis as a lens to explore the changing relationships between individuals, families, and the state.

I seek to build on previous studies of Jugendweihe (Aechtner 2011; Gallinat 2002; Saunders 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003), which argue that this ritual is 'a symbol of an emerging eastern German identity' and a 'family tradition', by investigating what this identity involves, what family means, and how family is lived in contemporary eastern

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<sup>17</sup> He colloquially used *Ostmentalität* but also common *ostdeutsche Mentalität* (East German mentality).

Germany. Since the diverging popularity of socialist life cycle rituals across the states of the Soviet Union brought to the fore how the uptake or rejection of such rituals depended on pre-socialist traditions and religious affiliation, in the next chapter I examine Jugendweihe in historical perspective. I explore *how* the ritual became a popular part of the eastern German life cycle and the ways these processes of secularisation impacted family life.

## Chapter 2

### **Jugendweihe and Protestant Confirmation: From Minority to Majority and Back (to the Future)**

*And if we can no longer talk about ritual without history, we also should no longer talk about history without kinship.*

– David. E. Sutton (2004: 102)

The a cappella group *Die NotenDealer* were performing their popular satirical song, 'Puberty', when one of its members broke ranks and slowly moved centre stage. The others stopped singing and looked on. The soloist, now the centre of attention, continued a little longer until – acting embarrassed – he noticed that he was the only one still singing. He then nodded to the audience, raised his arms, and said jovially: 'Well, thank you!' The audience applauded. The other singers eyed him up suspiciously while he bowed to the spectators. At the same time, the lead singer positioned himself next to him to explain to the filled concert hall: 'This is Gábor. He is our bassist. And a bassist in a singing group is the lowest level in the food chain'. The word 'lowest' was accompanied by a movement of his right hand downwards. He continued: 'Gábor had confirmation.' There were some giggles and a fair amount of laughter. The lead singer reproachfully looked at Gábor, and then stepped away backwards, encouraging the audience, 'A little applause for Gábor!' The audience applauded again, and the group got ready to finish their song together. But instead, the band froze. I had stopped the DVD, a recording of the previous year's Jugendweihe ceremony in the Gera theatre. Sitting on an office chair, I turned to three young women who had participated in the ceremony and asked: 'How do you understand that joke? Is it a joke, or what is happening here?'

Fifteen-year-old Nele, who had celebrated not only her Jugendweihe but also her confirmation in the previous year, suggested carefully:

Well, that now... that perhaps, that was expressed... that perhaps, there is confirmation but that most [people] have Jugendweihe. That's just really... well, that is not completely something negative for the confirmation, but that really most do Jugendweihe and there is really hardly any confirmation anymore. Okay, perhaps that has also changed

people, but actually, I think, it results in the same principle. Confirmation is on a church basis and here [Jugendweihe] it's not. And I don't know, if... well, it's difficult to explain.

I prompted her: 'What do you mean by "results in the same principle"? That one also becomes an adult with confirmation or what do you mean by that?'

She continued: 'Yes that, well, not that there is not the same feeling as with Jugendweihe but yet there are many...'

Her friend, sixteen-year-old Sophie, who had celebrated only Jugendweihe, suggested helpfully: 'Parallels?'

Nele: 'Exactly, parallels... well, and that actually it's almost the same, apart from being also affiliated to the church. At least that's how I felt about it.'

Sophie appeared to be more daring and offered:

Why, I believe, in that scene they wanted to point out a little bit that there is also... well, that those who have confirmation that they, to a certain degree, that they also are ... outsiders, a little bit, I'd say. Because he also was so dismissed and the others looked at him so weirdly. For example, in my class only three people had confirmation. [...] and that these other three people, who did not take part, perhaps that then they can't really join in a conversation; and that they then are also a little bit excluded, well not really excluded, but just that they perhaps did not feel that they really belong (*dazugehörig fühlen*).

I inquired, 'And have they celebrated only confirmation or also Jugendweihe?'

Sophie: 'Only confirmation.'

Since the three girls were friends but had only been classmates since the ninth grade, after the restructuring of their cohort into different classes, I asked the other two girls who were already classmates at the time of their Jugendweihe, 'And what about you?'

Sophie's age-mate Pia, who had also only celebrated Jugendweihe, replied: 'Well in our class there were only...,' she turned to Nele and asked: 'How many were there?'

Nele: 'Only me and Anna', and Pia continued:

Yes, there were two who had confirmation in our class. Well, Nele was the only one who also did Jugendweihe, well she could talk about it, [and turning to Sophie, she added], as you just said. And the other girl was, well she wasn't an outsider, but she gladly listened, because she just wanted to know how it was and we also wanted to know how things proceeded with them. And yes... But you can just see that Jugendweihe is just more popular, well yeah, has increased more than the church version.

When Gábor breaks ranks during the performance, the lead singer reprimands him by ranking him at ‘the lowest level in the food chain’, and noting that the bassist celebrated confirmation. While there is no direct link expressed, the implication is clear, even to the adolescents in the audience: Gábor, by celebrating confirmation, is somewhat of an outsider and ranked below everyone else, or as the lead singer noted during other performances, ‘belongs to a *Randgruppe*’ (marginal group) – because the majority of East Thuringians (and eastern Germans) celebrate Jugendweihe.

Indeed, based on data I collated from the Thuringian Statistical Office and the Thuringian Ministry of Education, among the 16,560 Thuringian pupils in grade eight in 2013 (TMBWK 2014), 3,000 teenagers celebrated Protestant confirmation (TLS 2015: 34) and 6,765 celebrated Jugendweihe.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that about 18% of eighth graders celebrated the Protestant confirmation and 41% participated in Jugendweihe. In addition, less than 1% celebrated the Catholic substitute ritual for non-denominational youths, the *Lebenswende*, and approximately 6% celebrated the Catholic confirmation. The Catholic confirmation (*Firmung*) is not straightforwardly comparable because it is not as tightly connected to the age of fourteen as the Protestant confirmation is (*Konfirmation*). In Gera, for example, 37 teenagers celebrated the Catholic confirmation in 2013; but because of the low number of Catholic Church members, they united several age cohorts, ranging from fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds (Schmidtke 2013). Put differently, most Thuringians mark their coming-of-age with a public ceremony, while approximately a third do not.<sup>19</sup> Some of the latter teenagers, however, may still celebrate their coming-of-age only within the family, and hence remain unrecorded. More importantly, in Gera 483 of the 690 eighth graders in 2013 celebrated Jugendweihe, that is, 70%.

The former East Germany is considered to be one of the most areligious regions worldwide (Froese and Pfaff 2005; Pickel 2010), which is in stark contrast to West Germany’s ‘culture of church affiliation’ (Pickel 2011). The reasons for this fact have often been reduced to the GDR state’s secularisation efforts, in which Jugendweihe played a crucial role (Meulemann 2004; Thompson 2012); but increasingly, that explanation has

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<sup>18</sup> Comparable participation figures for Jugendweihe and confirmation are not easily procured, and the divergence in administrative units complicates matters.

<sup>19</sup> There may also be some teenagers who celebrate both Jugendweihe and Protestant confirmation but – compared to the times of state socialism – such ‘double-celebrations’ are rare.

been qualified by factors emanating from the time prior to state socialism (Hölscher 2001; Schmidt-Lux 2010; Wohlrab-Sahr 2011). Given that Jugendweihe participation rates in Thuringia sit at around 40%, and at almost 50% for the former East Germany (Weyel 2011), Gera's participation rate stands out; and such regional differences suggest that factors other than an 'enforced secularisation' (Meulemann 2004) under state socialism may play a role. While I have argued in the previous chapter that Jugendweihe became an integral part of the East German lifecourse, in this chapter I explore the conditions under which, and the strategies by which, this integration was accomplished. I trace the relationship between the Christian confirmation and Jugendweihe as its substitute in a historical perspective, in which Jugendweihe served to challenge the authority of the church, and increasingly also the Christian worldview.

First, I illustrate how the historically oppositional character of these two rituals resonates with contemporary teenagers' explanations about their reasons to celebrate Jugendweihe, before I briefly sketch Jugendweihe's emergence in Thuringia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its adoption by various movements that overlapped in their stance against the church. I then show that both the region's predominant Protestant working population, as well as Thuringia's 'cultural socialism' (Klenke 1995 in Kachel 2011: 174), fostered the uptake of Jugendweihe in East Thuringia prior to state socialism. I then turn my attention to tensions between church and state during GDR times, and the ways the ritual reflected these conflicting relations. This diachronic approach to Jugendweihe brings to the fore how the oscillation between Jugendweihe and confirmation resonates with the political context of different eras. It aims to show the reasons that the ritual continued through various historical eras and caesurae, and will also provide an insight into why Jugendweihe is celebrated at age fourteen. I argue that the Jugendweihe's coming-of-age dimension – which historically links to initiands leaving school at approximately fourteen years of age – evolved already in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as part of the Protestant confirmation. This feature ensured the ritual's continuity, yet its aspect of initiation into a particular community also made it controversial – and renders the ritual a site of contestation over the past. By focusing in particular on the pledge of allegiance – which served to commit adolescents not only to a particular community but also a particular worldview – I argue that the ritual became an instrument capable of being

used by various movements that vied with one another for adolescents to sustain their particular social group and to shape a particular future.

Based on this historical backdrop, in the second part of this chapter I explore how these church-state relations played out within the family, and how the GDR Jugendweihe successfully altered the mainly Protestant lifecourse to a *konfessionslose* – non-denominational or unchurched – lifecourse.<sup>20</sup> I argue that the ritual's role as a force for social change became reversed under the GDR regime, where it served to maintain the social order which went hand in hand with a reversal from a minority to a majority that celebrated the ritual. More importantly, within the families of Jugendweihe participants, the ideological role that the ritual played under the GDR – which was manifested in the preparation lessons and the pledge of allegiance (*Jugendweihe Gelöbnis*) – is not transmitted to the younger generation today. This silencing of certain features of the GDR Jugendweihe is also facilitated by the fact that today's Jugendweihe no longer features a pledge of allegiance. I suggest that the lack of a pledge in today's ceremony also represents a critique of contemporary state-church relations. As such, Jugendweihe has returned to its origins as an oppositional force to today's social order, celebrated by a minority in present-day Germany.

### ***Jugendweihe and Being 'Konfessionslos'***

When I asked teenagers from Gera and its surroundings why they wanted to celebrate Jugendweihe, they expressed their reasons in relation to others – mainly their parents or their family. Teenagers also emphasised what they were not, before describing their decision to celebrate Jugendweihe as a matter of their own choice or desire. In conversation with fourteen-year-old Sarah, a few weeks prior to her Jugendweihe, she noted: 'It was clear that I would celebrate Jugendweihe, we just aren't that religious.' Her smooth transition from 'I' – denoting herself as a seemingly autonomous person – to her description of 'we' – she as a member of her family – and what they as a unit were not,

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<sup>20</sup> The term *konfessionslos* (non-denominational or unchurched) developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is frequently used to state that one is not a member of the Protestant or Catholic Churches. In the Weimar Republic, these two churches became recognised by the state as corporations under public law (*Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts*). The term often overlaps with atheist views, but should not be seen as necessarily a statement of non-belief (see Aechtner 2011: 202-206).

was reasonably common. She continued to explain that once in a while her family would go to church, perhaps at Christmas or Easter, because of tradition, but not because they actually believed. Her age-mate Lennart, from another Gera village, described what he was not, instead of what he was, in similar terms – setting out with the fact that he took Ethics classes from the start instead of Religion:

... and in my family now it is only my mother who – well on the birth certificate there is just ‘Protestant’ on it, ‘Protestant church’, and on my father’s just not, and also not on mine. And that’s why I didn’t do confirmation or anything else; that’s why Jugendweihe was actually, say, the only thing left. Well, but not that you just have it like that, but also yes, because yeah, it simply – yes: it was the most obvious for me and my family.

When I asked whether his mother would not have wanted him to celebrate confirmation, he declared: ‘No!’ Lennart then explained that his mother did not want it at all, having told him that although her birth certificate stated that she was ‘Protestant’, she only ever went to church for Easter and Christmas. On these occasions he would join her, ‘because in principle they belong to it, they are church festivals in principle.’ While, according to Lennart, his mother was still a nominal church member, his father was not; he added: ‘They [his parents] just told me: “We would like you to do Jugendweihe, but if there is something to be said against it, if you want to do confirmation – very urgently, for example – then we [can] also do confirmation”, but I opted for Jugendweihe.’ Somewhat surprised by this explanation, I inquired: ‘So you are actually baptised?’ Lennart denied it, which led me to suggest that he could not have celebrated confirmation in that case. ‘Yes...,’ he agreed, adding, ‘but it was along the lines that... that in principle they had offered me a choice. Given that, I said: “Yes, I want to do Jugendweihe!”’

What struck me in these conversations was that, while I had asked these teenagers why they had wanted to celebrate Jugendweihe, their responses included the church and/or contrasted Jugendweihe with confirmation – neither of which factors I had mentioned at this point. Gera had no Christian schools,<sup>21</sup> and because the city has an extremely high non-denominational population even for East Germany – at 85% (see Table 8) – I had expected adolescents to self-identify more positively as *konfessionslos* or atheist. Instead, they framed their decision around what they were not – contrasting themselves to a very

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<sup>21</sup> The first Christian school opened after my fieldwork in September 2014 in Gera.

small minority of Christians. More importantly, although teenagers always explained that their decision to celebrate Jugendweihe was closely related to their parents, siblings or cousins, or their family more generally, they tended to stress that it was their *own* decision, and that they had been given a *choice*. Two girls, Celine and Leoni, told me in two independent conversations that when they were much younger they had thought that ‘one *had to* celebrate Jugendweihe’, and only learnt later that it was voluntary, but could not describe to me why they had imagined so.

I would suggest that the teenagers’ explanations – focussing on the contrast with confirmation and on negotiations between their own decisions and their family’s wishes as matter of choice – stem from the fact that celebrating Jugendweihe is only intelligible historically in relation to, and specifically in opposition against, confirmation. Even today a contrast is drawn by adolescents – who may not be aware that such a conflictual relationship between the two rituals harks back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Jugendweihe emerged as a substitute to confirmation. This opposition was made most forcefully during the socialist era – which partly shaped the lifecourse of today’s parental and grandparental generations – with the state’s adoption of Jugendweihe. While a comprehensive history of Jugendweihe is beyond the scope of this thesis, in the next section I sketch the historical background that led to the ritual’s emergence and uptake in Thuringia prior to state socialism.

*Table 8: Germany’s Religious Membership as per 2011 Census*

<b>Religious membership (in detail)</b>	<b>Gera, city</b>	<b>in %</b>	<b>Thuringia</b>	<b>in %</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>in %</b>
Roman Catholic Church	2,500	3	174,280	8	24,869,380	31
Protestant Church (Lutheran)	9,420	10	529,010	24	24,552,110	31
Evangelical Free Churches	860	1	14,620	1	714,360	1
Orthodox churches	/	./.	6,630	0	1,050,740	1
Jewish communities	/	./.	790	0	83,430	0
Others	910	1	14,030	1	2,116,460	3
Not a member of a public-law religious society	80,850	85	1,433,690	66	26,265,880	33

*Source:* <https://ergebnisse.zensus2011.de> [Accessed 19/10/2014]

## **The Emergence and Spread of the Jugendweihe Ritual**

In order to understand the appearance of Jugendweihe and its link to confirmation, it is useful to begin with the German Protestant Reformation (1517-1648). The theological debates during this era were concerned, among other things, with the relationship between infant baptism and confirmation. Confirmation is one of the seven sacraments in the Catholic Church, but reformers like Martin Luther viewed it as ‘merely a human invention’, noting that ‘God has said nothing about it’ – and as such, they desacralized it (Behrens 1996 in Aechtner 2011: 56; Vischer 1958: 58). Luther’s emphasis was on religious instruction for baptised Christians who, he held, should receive the sacrament of communion only once they have a basic understanding of Christian doctrine (Vischer 1958: 61). The introduction – or reinvention – of the Protestant confirmation is commonly ascribed to Martin Bucer’s 1539 ‘Ziegenhainer Church Order’, which struck a compromise with the Anabaptist movement, which aimed at the discontinuation of infant baptism (EKD 2014). Protestant confirmation evolved over the next two centuries into a ritual in which adolescents professed their Christian faith and consciously confirmed their infant baptism, and as a precondition for communion. It also marked the end of their religious instruction, at which point they were examined on their understanding of the pillars of Protestantism – Luther’s ‘Little Catechism’ – and became full members of their congregation.

The theologian Lukas Vischer holds that, due to increased struggle for dominance between the Catholic and the Protestant churches in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, confirmation began to include a pledge to the Protestant church as a means of preventing Protestants from converting to the Catholic church (Vischer 1958: 80-81). At the same time, the significance of confirmation was already beginning to spread well beyond the question of church recruitment. Because of the emphasis on the confirmands’ *Urteilsfähigkeit* (ability to make informed judgement) after the successful completion of their religious instruction, confirmation increasingly made people members not only of their congregation, but of civic society at large (ibid: 83-84). This development was fostered by connecting confirmation with school-leaving when Prussia introduced compulsory schooling (*Schulpflicht*) in 1763 – and as eight years’ school attendance gradually became the norm in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, the age of fourteen came to be formalised as the appropriate moment for celebrating confirmation, leaving school and

entering the workforce, thereby reshaping the ritual and emphasising the confirmands' coming-of-age within wider society.

Bo Hallberg, the first scholar to trace Jugendweihe's historical development, situates its origin within Enlightenment thought in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Hallberg 1979: 5-21). The first record of the term 'Jugendweihe' can be dated back to 1852, when Eduard Baltzer – pastor of the free-religious congregation of Nordhausen<sup>22</sup> formed in 1847 – is believed to have conducted the first Jugendweihe (Chowanski and Dreier 2000: 12-19; Gandow 1994: 11). Such free-religious congregations were part of either the 'Friends of the Light' (the Protestant *Lichtfreunde*) or the German Catholics (the Catholic *Deutschkatholiken*), which united in 1859 in the rationalist *Freireligiöse Bewegung* (Free-religious or non-denominational movement). They aimed toward a Christianity based on the word of God rather than church dogma. In 1851, Gustav Adolf Wislicenus, a theologian and influential preacher among the *Lichtfreunde*, criticised the practice of celebrating the Protestant confirmation because its profession of faith (*Glaubensbekenntnis*) not only committed confirmands to the Christian belief but also established their full church membership (Hallberg 1979: 50, 77). Protestant confirmations continued nevertheless, but were altered over time in response to this criticism, and were described as either 'Jugendweihe' or 'confirmation' interchangeably until the term 'Jugendweihe' prevailed in the 1880s (Isemeyer 1989: 13; Meier 1998: 126). It appears that some of these ceremonies originally included a form of avowal while others did not, but avowals gradually disappeared (see Meier 1998: 131).<sup>23</sup> During the same period, two other movements developed in Germany – the freethinkers and the labour movement – and their overlapping anti-church views and attitudes toward the education of the young led to their collaboration with the free-religious movement and the eventual adoption of Jugendweihe.

The freethinker's agenda differed from the free-religious movement in that freethinkers sought not to be 'free *in* religion', but rather entirely 'free *of* religion' (DFV 2016; Meier 1998: 97). When the Anti-Socialist Law (*Sozialistengesetz*) of 1878 prohibited all socialist and social-democratic organisations in the German Reich (formed seven years earlier), many socialists sought sanctuary in freethinker organisations, which were deemed

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<sup>22</sup> Nordhausen is in North Thuringia, and belonged at the time to the Prussian state of Saxony.

<sup>23</sup> Within the limited literature on these movements, there is no detailed description of their ritual practices.

apolitical by the state (Isemeyer 1989: 14). Hallberg argues that the freethinker movement had two currents: the bourgeois element focused on a natural-scientific worldview; and the working class element, focused on a social-revolutionary worldview based on Marx's dialectical materialism (1979: 83). This divergence led to the formation of separate proletarian freethinker organisations. These proletarian freethinkers were particularly active in labour movement strongholds, and organized Jugendweihe ceremonies in which socialists and communists alike participated (Isemeyer 1989: 26).

With the foundation of the Weimar Republic in 1919, the state church was constitutionally rejected; but the legal status of churches as public law corporations – a precedent established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was retained (Barker 2004: 168). Churches thus had state-like rights to levy taxes and to provide religious instruction in school, both of which remain contested issues. At the same time, in the strongholds of the labour movement – such as Thuringia, Saxony and Berlin – there developed what Dietmar Klenke defines as *Kultursozialismus* ('cultural socialism') (in Kachel 2011: 174). 'Cultural socialism' is perhaps best understood as a combination of social-democratic local politics that were supported through social and cultural infrastructures, and geared toward socialist hegemony (ibid). Under this umbrella fall proletarian singer and sports clubs, the socialist youth organisation, and the *Kirchenaustrittsbewegung* (church exit movement) and they comprised a wide variety of activities, including socialist education and Jugendweihe ceremonies, all of which gained particular momentum in East Thuringia (in Kachel 2011: 174-177). Unsurprisingly, in 1925 records show a proportion of *Konfessionslose* (non-denominational people) in the East Thuringian cities of Jena at 10.9% and Gera at 15.3% – in contrast to Thuringia broadly at 4.4% and the German Reich as a whole at 2.5% (Klenke in Kachel 2011: 174).

My archival research suggests that in Gera, the first Jugendweihe within the proletarian freethinker tradition was held in 1914 (SAG 11). Collaborations between the Socialist Party of Germany (SPD) and the proletarian freethinkers in promoting Jugendweihe is evidenced by a proletarian freethinker's Jugendweihe appeal, published in February 1923 in the local newspaper and SPD organ, *Ostthüringer Tribüne* (SAG 10).

Manfred Isemeyer ascribes the success of the proletarian freethinker Jugendweihe to the fact that the ceremony and the preparatory course were not aligned to party politics (1989:

31). Both confirmation and Jugendweihe required that participants complete a preparatory course. Potential Jugendweihe participants prepared for their new societal roles – as workers conscious of the class struggle – by attending instructive lectures and musical performances, recitations and walking tours. These activities, like the speech during the Jugendweihe ceremony, were designed to foster the aims of the labour movement.

In a speech delivered at a proletarian freethinker Jugendweihe in 1927, Minna Specht – an influential socialist and educator – refers to the lip service that many pupils pay during their confirmation after they have undergone confirmation instructions (*Konfirmandenunterricht*):

There was talk about sin, salvation, death and God. Perhaps there are some among them who believe in particular doctrines on these questions. Most believe nothing. They take part [in confirmation] because it is conventional and because otherwise it is more difficult to get an apprenticeship (Specht 1929: 8).

In this excerpt there are two interesting points. Specht criticises participation in confirmation based on convention or habit instead of one's belief or conviction. She also points to a link between not celebrating confirmation and the possibility of one's future education and work prospects being hampered. Both issues – as we will see below – apply equally to Jugendweihe under the GDR regime, once the relationship between confirmation and Jugendweihe as celebrations conducted by the majority and minority respectively were reversed. Yet this Jugendweihe speech is also noteworthy as it was given in Göttingen, Lower Saxony, which would become part of West Germany in 1949. Indeed, Jugendweihe ceremonies were held in smaller numbers right across Germany, including in Hamburg, North-Rhine Westphalia, and Lower Saxony; but during the Cold War, Jugendweihe became gradually associated with a communist ritual and the GDR regime, and thus disreputable in West Germany (Isemeyer 1989: 37-38; Mohrmann 1999: 135, 137).

Unlike social democratic Jugendweihe ceremonies in other SPD strongholds, such as Berlin or Saxony, the proletarian freethinker ceremony appears not to have included a pledge to a particular cause (Isemeyer 1989: 36). It seems likely that Communist Party

(KPD) followers' preference for 'political instruction' and the inclusion of a commitment to political aims as part of the ceremony underpinned a decision to split from the freethinkers in 1929, in order to conduct their own more politicised Jugendweihe celebrations (ibid: 28).

In May 1932, the government of Reich President Brüning decreed the prohibition of 'godless' communist organisations with immediate effect. The SPD condemned this decree, whilst admitting that the proletarian freethinkers and the communists had been embroiled in harsh competition (SAG 12). Shortly after Hitler came to power in early 1933, the SPD and its aforementioned organ were also banned. Although Jugendweihe, in the proletarian freethinker tradition, was therefore prohibited under the Nazi regime, the role of Jugendweihe during the Nazi era remains a controversial matter among scholars and the public alike (see Aechtner 2011: 91-94; Gallinat 2002: 35; 40-44; Meier 1998: 160-186). In the 1920s, *völkische* movements that are perhaps best described as populist and 'ethno-racialist' – aiming toward a 'pure' German nation – evolved both within and outwith the church. The *völkische Deutsche Christen* (German Christian) were particularly strong in the Thuringian Protestant church (Seidel 2011: 212), and continued practising confirmation (Meier 1998: 170). However, the *Deutsche Glaubensgemeinschaft* (German Faith Movement) included adherents from the free-religious movement, and they conducted Jugendweihe ceremonies. This movement, headed by Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, propagated an 'authentic German Christianity' embedded within a mixture of Christian and Germanic symbols – anti-church and *völkisch* in character (Meier 2001: 25-26; Hallberg 1979: 106-112). For their part, the Nazis certainly attempted to streamline an abundance of festivities in relation to adolescents' school leaving at age fourteen – variously described as 'Commitment of the Youth', 'Referral Celebration', 'Life's Turning Point' and Jugendweihe (Gandow 1994: 19; Meier 1998: 180). From 1941 onward, these celebrations were to be called only 'Commitment of the Youth', and from 1943 they were to be organized solely under the auspices of the Hitler Youth (Meier 1998: 180-184). The theologian Andreas Meier describes these ceremonies as 'Nazi Jugendweihe' (ibid). In contrast, Gallinat disagrees with his assessment because, she holds, these ceremonies were not necessarily called Jugendweihe (Gallinat 2002: 35). Aechtner similarly views the Nazi label as problematic as the Jugendweihe of the German Faith movement was not

performed by the NSDAP party itself (Aechtner 2011: 94). I concur with both scholars.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the Nazi regime certainly drew on a longer continuity of practice associated with marking the coming-of-age at fourteen.

This brief historical overview shows that Jugendweihe emerged and evolved in a way that renders the ritual ‘a microcosm [of]... a strongly contested political landscape’ (Gallinat 2002: 23). Protestant confirmation, usually celebrated between Palm Sunday and Pentecost, became held at age fourteen universally across Germany, and was gradually associated with adolescents’ school leaving. It not only marked the adolescents’ coming-of-age within the Christian congregation but, as they entered the workforce, a coming-of-age in society at large. Over time, Jugendweihe emerged as an alternative to confirmation, and was adopted by various movements. These movements were united in their anti-church stance, but divided in their worldviews, especially regarding how the future should be shaped. They also had in common a desire to sustain their own existence into the future – often through educating the future generation about their worldview and aims. Thus what is conveniently referred to as ‘Jugendweihe’ meant different things to different people, at different points in time. Jugendweihe has – like confirmation – two features: it marks a coming-of-age, and an initiation into a particular community, not simply that of the working population, but one that subscribed to a certain value-system. This latter aspect – initiation into a particular community – made it a controversial ritual. Moreover, Jugendweihe always served as a means of critiquing the social order of the time. The ritual’s critique, however, became less distinct when celebrated in the German Faith Movement during the Nazi period. When the GDR state adopted the ritual for its own aims, Jugendweihe turned into a full-fledged conservative force that maintained the social order – a development I will explore in the next section.

### ***Jugendweihe as a GDR State Tool of Secularization***

Following the end of World War II, roughly 17 million people resided in the Soviet Occupation Zone (*Sowjetische Besatzungszone*, SBZ). 15 million were nominally Protestants, 1 million Catholics, and only five percent declared themselves *konfessionslos* (non-

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<sup>24</sup> Arguably, Meier’s eagerness to connect Jugendweihe and National Socialists is somewhat short-sighted as he does not argue that the confirmation under the Nazi regime was a Nazi confirmation – not even the confirmation by the *völkische* Deutsche Christen.

denominational) (Betts 2010: 55). Yet, at the time of the GDR's demise in 1989, the role of majority/minority between the Protestants and the non-denominational populace had long been reversed. As in other socialist countries, the GDR state pursued the elimination of religion as the 'poison of the masses', and sought to substitute it with a secular worldview in line with Marxism-Leninism. Yet unlike in other socialist countries, such as Poland or Czechoslovakia, there was little direct persecution of Church leaders or Christians. Instead, church-state relations in the GDR were marked by alternating strategies of toleration and confrontation, closely embedded in the wider context of Cold War politics. Both the state and the church vied for the young generation to strengthen the future of each institution respectively, but there were also regional differences in strategies and in their success rates. Here it is noteworthy that minority religious groups – such as the Catholic enclave of the Eichsfeld in West Thuringia, or Jehova's Witnesses – remained largely resistant to these secularisation efforts (see Berdahl 1999a; Rajtar 2010; Wappler 2010). As I will illustrate below, the GDR Jugendweihe was fairly quickly and widely taken up in East Thuringia. This reasonably quick uptake was due to the combined conditions stemming from the interwar years – as discussed in the previous section – and what has been described as the 'Thuringian way' taken by the regional Protestant church, that is, a path characterized by compromise and cooperation with the GDR state (Seidel 2011: 216).

In 1945, the Protestant Church of Germany (*Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands*, EKD) was founded and united the diverse regional Protestant churches.<sup>25</sup> There was no open ideological clash between communists and the church in the immediate post-war years. The Soviet authorities were guided by Lenin's view that religion should be tolerated as a private matter unrelated to life in socialism, and had no intention of further diminishing their very fragile support among Germans by offending local religious beliefs (Allinson 2000: 87; Betts 2010: 55). The Soviet Union did not confiscate church property, unlike in

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<sup>25</sup> The *Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands* (EKD) is commonly translated as Evangelical Church of Germany, and consists of Lutheran and Reformed denominations for which the state collects church tax. Throughout this thesis I refer to it as the 'Protestant church' in order to avoid confusion with Evangelical movements. In German the distinction is usually made between '*evangelisch*', which has increasingly become synonymous with church affiliation in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, and the term '*evangelikal*', which corresponds more closely to 'evangelical' in English. Pentecostals, Baptists, and Methodists are not part of the church tax-paying members of the EKD.

other Eastern bloc countries, but instead aimed at stability and peace in this period (Betts 2010: 55). Freethinkers and free-religious communities again conducted Jugendweihe rituals in all four occupied zones of the former German Reich. In Thuringia alone, 2,200 girls and boys celebrated the ceremony in 1948 (Chowanski and Dreier 2000: 48; Mohrmann 1999: 135). In 1950, the state's ruling SED party surprisingly prohibited Jugendweihe celebrations, arguing that it did not have 'a militant approach towards the church' (Chowanski and Dreier: 51-52). Therefore Jugendweihe was to be rejected, and the focus was to be channelled to school graduation celebrations, organised by the Free German Youth (FDJ). Arguably, this move can be interpreted as a demonstration of the SED's willingness to sustain amicable relations with the church by abstaining from competition over the same time-space in the ritual calendar, while also reining in anti-church movements. However, Jugendweihe was still being arranged by a variety of organisations, while the school graduation celebrations were organised only by the FDJ, the youth organisation of the SED (ibid: 50-53). The prohibition of Jugendweihe was a strategy for the state to claim its sole leadership role (*Führungsanspruch*), and an attempt to gain control over its adolescents by having all aspects of social life administered by organisations under the SED's command – not unlike the 1943 streamlining of ceremonies under the Nazi regime.

Although the 1949 Constitution of the GDR guaranteed religious freedom, the SED seemed to change its respectful attitude toward the churches and a period of anti-church hostilities ensued in the early 1950s. Most of these activities were geared toward weakening the church's influence on the young, exemplified by the dissolving of *Junge Gemeinden* (Young Parishes) – the youth organisation of the Protestant Church – between April and June 1953 (Mawick 2013). While the Soviets had already passed a law in 1946 establishing that school education was the prerogative of the state and religious education that of the church, extra-curricular religious education sessions were still held in schools; but even these sessions were banned in 1953.

Two events of political import in the same year were closely related to the GDR state's decision to re-introduce Jugendweihe. Following Stalin's death in March, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) pursued a new course and demanded the SED follow suit with a less-confrontational strategy. Such a change appeared already too late, since

increasing discontent of East German civil society culminated in the workers' uprising of 17 June 1953, which could only be suppressed through the intervention of Soviet forces. Protocol 15/54 of a governmental meeting in March 1954 reveals the extent to which the state believed its authority was threatened by Christians, who did not recognise it as the highest authority (reprinted in Meyer 1998: 264-269). The pan-German organisational structure of the Protestant Church of Germany was seen by the GDR state as enabling the West's 'bourgeois forces' to easily infiltrate GDR society via the church. The SED saw in both – the insurrection in 1953 and the sway of the churches – the influence of the 'class enemy', materialised in West Germany. It was believed that West German media propaganda had fuelled the uprising, and that the GDR churches – through their cooperation with the FRG churches – were compromised by 'reactionary/imperialist elements' within. The continued popularity of ecclesiastical coming-of-age rituals was of particular concern, and prompted an attempt to counter this trend through the reintroduction of the Jugendweihe ceremony as an alternative, including the introduction of preparatory lectures to 'strengthen civic education' (ibid). Thus, when faced with crisis, the juvenile state turned to Jugendweihe as medium of control (see Kertzner 1988: 2).

An appeal, signed by prominent public figures, explained a public demand for the celebration of an important stage in adolescents' lives – that of leaving school (Chowanski and Dreier 2000: 54-58). Young people, regardless of their worldview, were invited to celebrate Jugendweihe, and their parents were encouraged to enrol them at their local committees (ibid). The Central Committee for Jugendweihe in the GDR (*Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der DDR*, hereafter 'Central Committee') was hastily established, and in November 1954 it was made responsible for the ceremony's organisation and structure, the design of the youth lessons (*Jugendstunden*), and the content of the keepsake book. Its directives were spread to smaller committees at lower levels, covering the entire country. The Christian churches were taken aback by the re-introduction of Jugendweihe, and pursued an either/or approach, insisting that Jugendweihe and confirmation were incompatible because – often citing Matthew 6:24, 'No one can serve two masters' (Betts 2010: 62; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009: 328).<sup>26</sup> The issue was not simply a question of ritual

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<sup>26</sup> No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and the mammon (Matthew 6:24).

participation but – as was the case with Wislicenus’s critique of confirmation in 1851 – of public commitment. Confirmation committed its participants to God, the Christian community, and the Christian church, while Jugendweihe committed its participants to socialism, the socialist community, and the state. The churches decided not to allow Jugendweihe participants to be confirmed, because the pledge represented a rejection of the church. This situation posed a *Zwiespalt* (an inner conflict), for many families at the time, regarding whether to align with the church or the state as doing both became untenable. They had to weigh up the strength of their convictions, and decide whether those convictions were stronger than the possible disadvantages associated with denying allegiance to either institution (see Betts 2010: 70; Wohlrab-Sahr et al. 2009).

The population of the County Gera, the administrative unit established in 1952 comprising the territory now referred to as East Thuringia, was largely Protestant. These Protestants affiliated with the Protestant-Lutheran Church of Thuringia, based in Eisenach, and one of the member churches of the Protestant Church of Germany (*EKD*). The *EKD*’s churches had the power to determine their own affairs, and pursued different strategies in their relations with the GDR state based on divergent theological rationales. The Thuringian church’s bishop, Moritz Mitzenheim, interpreted the Lutheran ‘Two Kingdoms Doctrine’ in a way that suggested secular authority was to be respected as the source of a worldly order (Allinson 2000: 87; Besier 1999: 529-530; Seidel 2011: 216). While he resisted the state in the first decade of his term, from 1945-55, Mitzenheim increasingly followed what came to be known as the ‘Thuringian way’: opting for compromise and cooperation in the church’s relationship with the socialist state (*ibid.*). His non-confrontational stance, perhaps intended to provide the church’s authority with a greater lease of life and to take the pressure off of religious families, led him to become renowned as the ‘red bishop’. Mitzenheim called upon religious parents in January 1955 not to send their children to partake in Jugendweihe, as this ‘was a matter of conscience and not politics and therefore protected by the GDR constitution’ (cited in Allinson 2000: 101). However, in practice Protestant churches (unlike Catholic churches) gradually took a more relaxed stance, and allowed youths to celebrate both rituals – provided they only paid lip service to the state’s pledge. Often adolescents also decided to celebrate confirmation before Jugendweihe, in order to avoid the renunciation of their ecclesiastical rights – such as partaking of the Eucharist, becoming a godparent, or participating in

future ecclesiastical life cycle rituals. Sometimes such church rights were taken away in hindsight; but increasingly, the Protestant church allowed their adolescents to regain them by demonstrating an active Christian lifestyle. Although Thuringian pastors largely followed bishop Mitzenheim's stance, there were local differences in the extent to which the clergy fought a 'war of attrition at parish level' (Allinson 2000: 102), and as such – to continue Allinson's metaphor – families were caught in the crossfire of both institutions.

The uptake of the GDR Jugendweihe was initially slow – with less than 20% of fourteen-year-olds participating in the first ceremonies in 1955. Perhaps some of these adolescents belonged to families that participated in Jugendweihe prior to the GDR's initial prohibition, and/or subscribed to the GDR's proclaimed all-encompassing values. As the 1956 annual report of the *Bezirksausschuss* (County Committee) for Jugendweihe in Gera described it, participation was not only an open commitment to Jugendweihe, but 'simultaneously a commitment to peace, unity, democracy and progress' (SAG 01: 1). The annual reports of the County Committee Gera illustrate that County Gera's participation rate was always above the GDR's average (see Table 9). In the 1950s, participation in both confirmation and Jugendweihe was – wherever possible – painstakingly recorded. Reports provided detailed information on numbers of participants and compared them with the total number of fourteen-year-olds. Unlike the official portrayal of Jugendweihe as all-inclusive event, the reports reveal quite clearly the state's actual aim: undermining the church's influence. For the city of Gera, 87 of 635 participants (13%) were noted as having celebrated both rituals in 1956 (SAG 01: 10), though this duplicity was clearly higher in rural areas because the county's rate of double celebration levelled out at around 40% in the 1950s (SAG 05: 10). Celebrating both the religious and the socialist ceremony was seen as a failure of the County Committee's *Aufklärungsarbeit* (literally: enlightenment work, here political awareness work), and as a 1960 report recalls, the party was required to lead the way in collaboration with the worker collectives to 'improve the effectiveness of socialist education' and to 'eliminate the ideological brake blocks' (SAG 05: 10; see also Chapter 3).

Table 9: GDR Jugendweihe Participation, 1955-60.

School Year	County Gera			Total GDR	
	Number of participants	Total 14-year-olds	in %	Number of participants	in %
1954/55	2,379	11,934	19.9	52,322	17.7
1955/56	2,912	10,869	26.8	64,343	23.7
1956/57	2,857	9,750	29.3	64,666	26.4
1957/58	4,397	9,914	44.4	107,186	44.1
1958/59	7,254	8,203	88.4	139,830	80.4
1959/60	5,913	6,205	95.3	113,275	87.8

*Source:* Annual reports of the *Bezirksausschuss für Jugendweihe in Gera* (*Stadtarchiv Gera*: III A06-12388; III A06-12381; III A06-12384; III A06-12382; III A06-12380; III A06-12379),  
 Figures on GDR totals from Chowanski & Dreier (2000)

In spite of an initial reluctance in the uptake of Jugendweihe, there was a tremendous increase in the Jugendweihe participation rate – in particular from 1958 to 1959 (see Table 9, highlighted). This increase should not, however, be interpreted as solely due to the Thuringian Protestant church’s more lenient position on the issue. Rather, in this period the state intensified its secularisation efforts in multiple ways. Archival data shows that the Central Committee increased its decentralisation efforts, in which all parts of society were to be involved in the organisation and execution of Jugendweihe ceremonies (see also Chapter 6), but the SED party also increased their promotion of socialist values. Although a conference entitled ‘New Life – New People’ was held in 1957 to familiarize the public with the ‘theoretical and practical problems of socialist morale’ (Hanke 1976 in Brock 2005: 45), 1958 was the year when ‘questions of ideology, morale and personality finally took centre stage’ for the SED’s policies regarding the creation of the ‘socialist personality’ (Brock 2005: 45). The same year, the head of state – Walter Ulbricht – promulgated the ‘Ten Commandments for the New Socialist Human Being’. Their promotion was geared to providing a moral framework that underlined the moral superiority of the socialist project, but also functioned as a surrogate for the Christian doctrine. In 1959, a new school system geared towards ‘scientific atheism’ and ‘socialist morale’ was introduced in the GDR (see Chapter 3). While extra-curricular religious education had been permitted in schools again, the Lange Decree of 1958 further hampered attendance by demanding that pupils have a compulsory two hour break

between the end of the school and the beginning of extra-curricular activities. Religious instruction was gradually moved away from schools to church premises.

East Germans increasingly left the church, and what had been referred to as the 'people's church' (*Volkskirche*) had largely lost its people by the late 1960s (Betts 2010: 73; Goeckel 1988: 212). County Gera already had a Jugendweihe participation rate well over 90% in 1960, a percentage that was only achieved a decade later for the entire GDR. In contrast, the Catholic Eichsfeld in West Thuringia remained devout throughout the GDR's existence, and Jugendweihe participation rates remained very low (Allinson 2000; Berdahl 1999b; Wappler 2010). After the new GDR constitution of 1968 came into force, rendering the EKD leadership illegal because it included West German representatives, the East German churches separated from the Protestant Church of Germany and founded the Federation of Protestant Churches in the GDR (*Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen der DDR*) in 1969 (Besier 1999: 532). Following the East German Federation of Protestant Churches' proclamation during the 1971 synod that their intention was to be 'a church not alongside or against socialism, but a church *within* socialism' (see Besier 1999: 534; Zademach 1985), church-state relations entered into a phase of relaxation.

In the 1970s, the GDR state was safe in the knowledge that its citizens, at least overtly, had acquiesced to it. County Committee reports from Gera paid only scant attention to participation rates from 1972 onward, because they remained consistently well over 95%. Instead, such reports refocused on winning over 'hearts and minds' by improving the content and organisation of both the youth lessons and the ceremonies, in particular their emotive force for all participants. This refocusing suggests that the political elite did not misinterpret adolescents' participation in Jugendweihe as a straightforward demonstration of identification with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. At the same time, the new 'church within socialism' also found new confidence with its autonomy from its West German counterpart, and a new role. It increasingly became an advocate of socially peripheral groups, and provided a space and a platform for peace and environmental movements – not least the dissident movement in the late 1980s (see Goeckel 1988; Hadjar 2003; Seidel 2011). Because this decisive battle over the young had been won by the state, church-state relations remained relaxed until its demise. Yet since the church provided the only space supposedly outwith the purview of the state, it remained a potential site for disloyalty and

opposition. Only after the fall of the Wall did the extent to which the churches had been infiltrated by the Stasi come to light (see Besier 1999).

The state's sustained mistrust of its citizens is also evidenced in Jugendweihe participation reports that recorded and reported any potential future dissidents – that is, Jugendweihe abstainers. Jugendweihe County Committee records of the 1980s show that adolescents rarely refused participation, and those who rejected the GDR Jugendweihe did so largely on religious grounds. These abstainers generally belonged to either Protestant or Catholic denominations (often the father would be a pastor in such cases), or were Jehovah's Witnesses, and also included pupils whose parents had an ongoing exit permit application to West Germany (SAG 08). Teachers and school principals often engaged such students in 'heart-to-hearts' and arranged discussions with their parents and parents' employers in order to encourage their participation. Such persuasion tactics were often reported to the Central Committee in order to demonstrate that schools had done their utmost to achieve a 100% participation rate.

This *longue durée* view of Jugendweihe shows that the ritual continued to feature an anti-church stance, even though at times ambiguously so. Yet, unlike the time period prior to the foundation of the German nation-state, or during the Weimar Republic – where Jugendweihe served various movements to criticise the social order of the time – under the GDR regime, the ritual's function gradually reversed, and it was deployed to maintain the status quo. As such, the ritual cannot easily be categorised as either challenging the social order (Cohen 1993; Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Kertzer 1988) or maintaining it (Bloch 1992; Durkheim 1964; Rappaport 1999), given that it served both functions at various points in time.

While initiation into a particular community varied, what remained throughout the metamorphosis of Jugendweihe is the coming-of-age aspect at age fourteen. I suggest that this continuity regarding personhood was produced through the family. And in the remaining part of this chapter I explore how the continued church-state tensions under state socialism played out in Franka's maternal family. I argue that evident generational differences in their perception of these church-state relations, and their own religious attitudes, are due to varying pressures and experiences under the GDR in different time periods. Nevertheless, participating in Jugendweihe was based on family ties.

## **‘Freiwilliger Zwang’ (Voluntary Coercion): Negotiating Agency and Authority**

The first time I met Frau Becker, Franka’s sixty-one-year-old mother, she told me about her own Jugendweihe, which she celebrated in 1966. ‘But I had luck, you could say,’ she noted with candour, ‘that in my times I did both: I am confirmed and I had Jugendweihe. That was a little difficult back then during GDR times, if you wanted to participate in confirmation, but... Back then I said that I would only take part in confirmation, because at first we were told that you are only allowed to do one.’ I inquired: ‘By whom?’ ‘Why’, she replied, ‘from school or from the state, I would say.’ She continued:

And I said back then, very well, I’ll just do confirmation and won’t take part in Jugendweihe. But it wasn’t as simple as that either; to simply say, one doesn’t take part in Jugendweihe. In addition, I was attending such an R class, where anyway everything was so political...

Franka interrupted, simultaneously providing a different ending to the statement: ‘where everyone was a swot!’ R classes were special language classes with a focus on Russian (hence the R), which were supposed to consist of pupils with high foreign language competency, but more often included pupils whose parents were politically aspiring and active SED members. Franka’s mother continued, adamant and unfazed:

Everything was political and linked up a little bit higher. And ... they more or less... well, I don’t want now to say that they coerced me, but I was advised that I must partake in Jugendweihe. And I agreed to it, but at the Jugendweihe I did not sound out the pledge in unison. But I only took part and I also got my certificate like everyone else. And then I also did extra confirmation.

Frau Becker explained to me that she also took part in all the youth lessons, since ‘everything was tied to the school class’, but had found them to be educational and ‘of no harm’. She had been baptized as a baby and later attended Sunday school, and also confirmation classes, elaborating that once you were baptized, it was hoped you would also be confirmed; ‘this was, more or less, the course of time’. However, she recalled no demands on the part of the church to choose between Jugendweihe or confirmation, but only those from the school. Indeed, she suggested that the reason for the school pressuring her to celebrate Jugendweihe was perhaps only due to the special class she

attended, because ‘they wanted the complete school class to take part in Jugendweihe, and well, then I said, “Okay, I’ll just do both.”’

Later in the conversation, her daughter Franka admitted that – although she was not baptized and ‘did not give a hoot about the church’ – she was aware of an ongoing conflict between church and state, mirrored in the two life cycle rituals, when she had her Jugendweihe in 1984. She attended an ordinary secondary school (POS), but recalled that one of her classmates, whose family was strictly religious, ‘got into trouble’ because she only wanted to celebrate confirmation. In the end, the girl and/or her parents prevailed, and she did not partake in Jugendweihe. Franka claimed that she was only excused because she was a ‘very, very good pupil’. When I further asked whether the trouble was caused because she wanted to celebrate *only* confirmation, Franka agreed, which led her mother to expand on her own Jugendweihe story. She emphasized that she also ‘wanted to celebrate only confirmation, but that the school or rather the state as such, didn’t play along with that’, and continued:

My mother was at the time *Genossin* (a female comrade, meaning an SED party member) and everything. The party summoned her a couple of times, because I had said, “I won’t do Jugendweihe and *bastal*!” But there was no way. And afterwards I just said, “Well okay, I’ll partake in it, but I just won’t say the pledge!” And that was afterwards the only compromise they were willing to make.

Surprised by her elaboration, I asked: ‘So they [the party] knew?’ She explained that this was the deal they had struck, she would partake in Jugendweihe because ‘they, more or less, compelled me to, but I wouldn’t say the pledge’. We discussed this deal further, and established two factors that played a role in the state’s representatives’ agreement. For one, everyone spoke the pledge out loud, that is, the response ‘Yes, this we pledge’ after each verse, so that one missing voice would not be noticeable. And secondly, when the pledge was read out, the initiands used to stand together in the front row facing the stage, their backs to the audience, so only the guest speaker would be able to see who would not respond. Franka declared: ‘The main thing was that you took part!’ And her mother responded: ‘exactly, they just wanted to tick the box: she has taken part in it. And that was that.’ To which her daughter mockingly added: ‘The socialist *Gemeinschaft* was together and that’s that. Yes.’

While I will discuss the issue of *Gemeinschaft*, or community, in Chapter 3, here it is worth noting Frau Becker's emphasis on the fact that she had changed her mind from not wanting to participate in Jugendweihe to participating in it. She variously described this process of decision-making as 'not coerced' and 'more or less compelled' by a greater authority, namely the state. This decision-making – which to a certain extent entails a conundrum present in all rituals – has been described during GDR times by the oxymoron *freiwilliger Zwang*: 'voluntary coercion'. It was 'voluntary' because it was still a choice made by an agent, but 'coerced' because the agent bowed down to a greater authority, the same authority that was present during and produced through the ritual act itself.

Notably, Frau Becker did not refer to her teacher, her headmaster or indeed her mother in describing her decision-making process, though they must all have influenced her quite directly. Instead, she described it as her decision that was negotiated with some kind of higher authority generically identified as 'die' (here, they), only admitting later that her mother was summoned by the party (SED). The fact that either a teacher or the headmaster of her school must have reported her to her mother's employer and/or the party in order to exert pressure on Frau Becker's mother, which in turn must have affected Frau Becker enough that she partly gave in, remains unacknowledged. The extent to which she may have intentionally concealed this aspect in our conversation is difficult to assess, because she might also have felt it undeserving of mention – the more so in that it was such a normalised course of action during GDR times. However, when I noted that she had been quite brave to openly refuse to pledge, she asserted: 'I am just not a *Mensch* (human being) who had to put up with everything!' This assertion, I believe, was not simply an avowal of who she was, but also seemed to imply that her mother was not such a *Mensch* either. Her mother had bowed down to party pressure, because party members had to follow SED cadre directives and play a role model function for socialist society at large. Indeed, on the matter of Jugendweihe, Frau Becker's mother had sided with the party when, ideally, she might have sided with her daughter. Yet Frau Becker emphasised her decision-making instead of explaining it as complying due to maternal pressures. Given her mother's party membership, this tactic could be construed as avoiding the discussion of a potential family conflict at the time, while simultaneously subtly contrasting her mother's stance with the upholding of her own convictions, albeit as part of a compromise. In Frau Becker's case, the question of whether, and to what extent,

political pressures or ideological differences between mother and daughter may have sparked a familial conflict remain unspoken.

However, for Franka, the dilemma of whether to abstain from Jugendweihe never even arose, having been precluded in her recollection from the outset by her insistence that she ‘did not give a hoot about the church’. Franka’s views diverged from her mother’s, a fact that was carefully negotiated during our conversations, sometimes more successfully than others. When Franka was born, five years after her mother’s Jugendweihe, Frau Becker wanted to have her baptized; but because her husband was not a church member, and they had not married in church, a baptism was not possible. Franka’s mother noted that the baptism would have been nice for Franka’s maternal grandparents, but that at that point, she herself no longer cared that much because of the difficulties the church had posed her, by not allowing her to have her child baptized. Nevertheless, Franka’s mother remained in the church, and only left much later; she was uncertain of the year, but thought it must have been during or after the Wende time. She explained that she had been made aware that she would also have to pay church tax for her husband, adding indignantly, ‘but money has nothing to do with belief! My husband wasn’t in the church so why should he or I pay for him?’ She felt it such an injustice that she decided to leave the church; and she recalled, ironically, that she had to pay 5 Marks in order to do so.

What is noteworthy here is that while Frau Becker’s personal break with the church came only later in life, her children and grandchildren were raised without any Christian religious instruction, and thus family life became increasingly more areligious.

### **‘Voluntary Coercion’ Revisited: Assessing the Past in the Present**

During my fieldwork, I hardly ever came across the expression ‘voluntary coercion’, though most people of my own or older generations would know the phrase. Yet East Thuringians have not forgotten this tension between agency and authority. One day, over breakfast with friends – all of whom are parents – we came to discuss my research. One father, whose daughter was not yet old enough for a coming-of-age celebration, inquired: ‘So what is Jugendweihe actually now, just another *Pflichtveranstaltung* (event that requires attendance)?’ Before I could answer, the two mothers – whose children had already celebrated either Jugendweihe or confirmation – responded in unison: ‘No, it’s totally

voluntary?' One of the mothers, Daniela, who had celebrated confirmation and Jugendweihe in the GDR, and whose son only celebrated confirmation in 2013, agreed that Jugendweihe today was voluntary. But she did not feel the same way about the GDR Jugendweihe. When I had asked her a few months earlier whether her son would also celebrate Jugendweihe, she answered in the negative, adding: 'This doesn't make any sense anymore!' She saw her own GDR Jugendweihe celebration as paying lip service in order not to stand out, and – since this was no longer necessary – celebrating the ritual today seemed superfluous to her.

However, views on whether the GDR Jugendweihe had a voluntary character varied even among people who had celebrated both Jugendweihe and confirmation in East Germany, especially regarding whether one should have or could have resisted participating in it. A forty-year-old local pastor told me of an incident in one of his meetings with the church elders of his devout parish, at which he asserted that he felt the Protestant church during GDR times should not have taken such a soft stance on Jugendweihe. Christians, he argued, should have resisted participating in Jugendweihe. But he was quickly put in his place: 'That's easy for you to say, you are from the West!', his parishioners responded. As he recounted how his parishioners had taken offence, he explained that he was well aware of what the situation was like in the GDR because his family had relatives there. He then admitted that 'of course I am aware that this is different from actually having lived and experienced the GDR, but I wasn't clueless either'. He emphasized his awareness to make the point that there was a difference between him and the majority of his western German contemporaries, who were quick to judge in spite of having no experience and little knowledge of everyday life in East Germany.

While the Christians of his parish celebrated both Jugendweihe and confirmation during socialist times, their dual celebration does not mean that they were not convinced believers; rather, they made a choice to tread the path of least resistance. This was not always the case, as the pastor recounted to me in another conversation. They had told him how, during GDR times, the village headmistress was 'deep red' and thus particularly horrible to Christian children. Since she was a music teacher and aware which children attended religious instruction in the parsonage – they had had to pass her house – she would ask them to sing 'the Internationale', perhaps the most famous battle song of the socialist labour movement. They would always refuse to sing it because the lyrics of the

second stanza state that ‘no supreme being will save us: no God, no Kaiser, no tribune’. Every time they refused, they received a fail from the teacher. But one day the parents decided to go to the school and ask her: ‘Do we have religious freedom in the GDR or not?’ This confrontation led her to erase the bad marks, and she never again picked on a Christian pupil to sing the song.

Participating in the GDR Jugendweihe appears to have been an act of giving in: to renounce publicly one’s actual beliefs (even if one was just paying lip service), while refusing to sing lyrics that contradict one’s beliefs and standing up to the headmistress seem to be acts of resistance. Both, however, were based on a pragmatic attitude to everyday life in East Germany. Non-participation in Jugendweihe, as much as bad marks, could have led to being denied a good place for further vocational or tertiary education, thus diminishing one’s job prospects. Indeed, the issue of future job opportunities becoming hampered is frequently mentioned in accounts of the GDR Jugendweihe, both in scholarly literature (see, for example, Besier 1999: 526; Betts 2010: 72; Meier 1998: 219; Plum 2015: 43) and in national media and church press releases about the ritual (see, for example, Bickelhaupt 2015; Kock 1999; Plesch 2012; Vorländer 2015). Unsurprisingly, even today associating Jugendweihe with GDR state repercussions is highly contested among easterners, partly because of East Germans’ divergent experiences under the GDR.

These differences in experience are due to the fact that tensions in church-state relations varied in different periods of the GDR, but they also depended on a specific person’s school environment and their teachers’ own convictions (see also Brock 2005: 78-83). Frau Uhlemann – a sixty-three-year-old grandmother who had celebrated both Jugendweihe and confirmation in 1964 – told me in conversation that, for her, celebrating confirmation was not so much a matter of conviction as a way to rebel against her parents, who did not approve of her decision. She explained that her family had moved to a new part of town, but that she continued to attend confirmation classes with two former school friends. The two friends, and her maternal grandmother, were present at her confirmation, but her parents did not attend. She noted that only three classmates celebrated confirmation, and added that ‘the ‘real’ [convinced/devout] Christians were ‘left alone’ [by the state]. ‘They definitely weren’t persecuted, as some of them claimed after the fall of the wall!’, she asserted. I agreed that ‘persecution’ was perhaps too strong

a term, and that it didn't match my experience of the GDR in the 1980s either; but I also recounted to her the way some teachers bullied religious pupils in my school. In response, Frau Uhlemann explained that she never experienced anything like that, and that her best friend – who was Christian and not a FDJ member – got a sought-after vocational training post with *Abitur*. Similarly, Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, has often been cited for not having partaken in Jugendweihe; but at the same time she was a FDJ secretary and had studied physics in the GDR (see, for example, Küsters 2016; Langguth 2011; Mayntz 2013). Her father was a pastor, and it is frequently claimed that children of pastors could have only ever studied theology during the socialist era. These memories of socialist experiences collapse the propagated portrayal of a clear dichotomy between Christian Jugendweihe abstainers, who suffered career disadvantages, and Jugendweihe participants with stellar careers.

The Jugendweihe County Committee's annual report from 1958 notes, among the main arguments the church made against the ritual, the contention that 'Whoever does not partake in Jugendweihe, will not receive a post or will not be allowed to enter high school,' adding parenthetically, '(oftentimes this slogan was released in order to disgruntle the populace)' (SAG 03: 4). Regardless of who actually introduced and spread such rumours, the fact remains that state representatives seemed unable or disinclined to dissolve them – perhaps because of their beneficial side-effects in increasing Jugendweihe participation. Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses – who not only refused to partake in Jugendweihe but also to become members of the Pioneers and Free German Youth organisations – were denied further education, and often proper vocational training posts as well (Rajtar 2010).<sup>27</sup> This connection between professional opportunities and membership in youth organizations seems much more plausible given that such memberships were always included in school leaving reports, with which one had to apply for posts, whereas (non-)participation in Jugendweihe was not stated. However, as Frau Uhlemann's example suggests, it appears that there was no clear state directive, but rather that responses to non-participation were down to the discretion and convictions of individuals. In other words, decisions about

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<sup>27</sup> Jehova's Witnesses were persecuted not only under the Nazi regime but also under the GDR. Their interpretation of the Bible denies any authority other than God, and they regard any state – whether democratic, totalitarian or authoritarian – as the work of Satan. They remained non-conformist under the GDR regime, that is, they refused to vote, or to do military service; and children and adolescents attended school but rarely participated in extra-curricular events or the Pioneers, and never became members of the FDJ (see Hacke 2000; Rajtar 2010).

the repercussions abstainers would face were left to the judgment of teachers and members of the local Jugendweihe committee – and most likely party functionaries. Nonetheless, the potential of future disadvantages in itself was what really led to the sense of ‘voluntary coercion’: the arbitrariness of the ways the state flexed its muscles rendered the risk incalculable. For many, the probability that abstaining from Jugendweihe could lead to repercussions was sufficient reason to participate in the ritual.

The ways in which the character of the GDR Jugendweihe is portrayed nowadays by Thuringians – as either voluntary, coercive, or something in between – depends partly on how they experienced it at the time, but also opens up a space in which they can re-narrate their life stories in accordance with their present-day affiliations. Christians tend to emphasise the coercive character of the state in their explanations of why they also celebrated Jugendweihe, by commonly claiming that they ‘*had to*’. Non-religious people, on the other hand, focus on a choice they made, whether they liked it at the time or not. Many in the latter category, particularly in the parental generation, would also admit that they were simply ‘*Mitläufer*’ – a blind follower or conformist – participating because ‘everyone did it’, without thinking about it at all, viewing Jugendweihe as part of the ‘natural order’ of things (see also Sandra’s statement in Chapter 3). The possibility of abstaining from Jugendweihe – a possibility Franka’s mother dismissed by saying: ‘But there was no way!’ – is often downplayed in hindsight. But for many teenagers in Gera, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, such a possibility of choice may not even have occurred to them. The reasons for not recognising choice have to do with the fact that many may not have had any contact with divergent views on the matter – whether Christian or otherwise. The ritual had also become a kinship event by the 1980s, regardless of the political elite’s intentions – but also, as it happens, in line with them (Borneman 1992: 165), so that many teenagers were keen to celebrate Jugendweihe. Indeed archival records of the time prove that many of the school classes had a 100% Jugendweihe participation rate (SAG 08).

There are also generational difference in people’s perception of the issue of refusing Jugendweihe participation. Franka appears to have less of a problem recounting her classmate’s refusal to partake in Jugendweihe than her mother had in recounting her own struggle. By the time of Franka’s Jugendweihe in the 1980s, Christians were already – as they are today – an exception in Gera. At that time, very few people would still have faced

a dilemma in choosing between one ritual and the other, or would have considered abstaining from Jugendweihe. Today, perhaps, for some, there is also an element of shame involved in admitting that they never considered not participating in Jugendweihe. For others the tendency to brush over the question of dilemmas – and to assert that one ‘had to’ celebrate Jugendweihe – is easier than to admit that the option of refusing to participate existed, which would require admitting a lack of courage to refuse.

Yet the possibility of celebrating both confirmation and Jugendweihe also led to a kind of unawareness or blurring of the state’s actual aims, which I only realised when I went out one night with some former school friends. Both were mothers of children who had celebrated or were about to celebrate Jugendweihe, and one of them asked me what I thought of the contemporary ceremony. I responded that I had enjoyed it, actually, and that it was much more entertaining than our own had been. She agreed, but because she knew that the other friend and I had also celebrated confirmation during GDR times, carefully inquired: ‘Well, I mean I don’t know whether Jugendweihe was intended to be in opposition to confirmation back then ...’ My other friend quickly asserted: ‘No!’ in contrast to my response: ‘Well, it was!’ But just as I wanted to explain, my friend cut in: ‘Why? After all, we did celebrate both, Jugendweihe *and* confirmation!’

### ***The Jugendweihe Pledge and its Disappearance***

In the introductory vignette to this chapter, female adolescents watched a scene from their public Jugendweihe ceremony, in which the bassist of an a cappella group was singled out as being ‘the lowest level in the food chain’, and as having celebrated confirmation. The girls rather carefully negotiated their responses to this excerpt, perhaps partly because they did not want to make each other feel uncomfortable. Nele, who was brought up in a Christian family, but also participated in Jugendweihe, played down the scene, while Sophia raised the issue of confirmands feeling like outsiders. Pia, being at first a reconciliatory force, then proudly blurted out an assertion of Jugendweihe’s greater popularity. Other teenagers, to whom I had played the equivalent excerpt from their own Jugendweihe ceremonies, similarly noted that one could perhaps describe it as *mobbing* (bullying), that there was a sense of *Schadenfreude* and something like *Gruppenzwang* (peer pressure). However, they only associated these issues with the contemporary relationship

between Jugendweihe and confirmation; and as such, they could not really make sense of the sketch, which did not correlate with their experience. Therefore, they did not ascribe much significance to the scene, though it must have felt rather different to members of parental and grandparental generations. The scene is ambiguous, and thus allows multifaceted interpretations— like Jugendweihe itself. The members of the group appear to single out Gábor as a peripheral person, but in the end demand of the audience to applaud him; and as such members of the older generation can chose whether they want to see it as a sign of ‘backwardness’ or ‘courage’ that he celebrated confirmation.

Yet the Jugendweihe vow – which was the crux of the tension between the two rituals, in particular for religious people, who were pressured by both the state and the church to align exclusively with one institution or the other – is almost never discussed today. While very few people refused to partake in the GDR Jugendweihe from the 1960s onward, many who took part paid only lip service. As a friend reminded me, the pledging of vows was so much part of the socialist life – as a Pioneer, as an FDJ member and so on – that one more pledge was not seen as particularly unusual or worthy of consideration. But for some people it was. Some, as in the case of Franka’s mother, did not pledge allegiance during the ceremony at all; others did, but crossed their fingers by way of excluding conviction in what was said out loud (as I did during my ceremony). This is not to suggest that there were no people who happily and solemnly pledged allegiance to the socialist state and future – as I learned, somewhat perplexed, from a local member of The Left party in 2010. When I asked him how he felt about his GDR Jugendweihe, he responded: ‘Why, it felt like an incredible historic moment for me!’ But he was the only one that I came across who admitted this reaction more than twenty years later.

In autumn 1989, the GDR Jugendweihe committee proposed to substitute the vow with a promise that could well be applied today, if the ‘socialist German Democratic Republic’ were crossed out:

In this celebratory hour we promise before our mothers and fathers to live honestly and genuinely and to approach other people with tolerance and dignity.

We can only fulfil our dreams and life-wishes in peace: We will protect it and advocate for a blossoming earth and a healthy environment.

With knowledge and good work we want to make our socialist German Democratic Republic comfortable for all people.

We want to learn from the rich history and culture of our people and to continue its humanist, anti-fascist and progressive traditions.  
We keep our consciences alert for solidarity and a humane living-together of nations.

Illona, the chairwoman of the Erfurt Jugendweihe Association, rummaging through her own archival material on Jugendweihe, handed me a photocopy of its wording that had been printed in the regional daily *Das Volk* at the time (see also Chowanski & Dreier 2000: 116-7). Underneath the piece, in her neat teacher-like handwriting, she had noted: 'With the end of the GDR these considerations took care of themselves!' From an outsider perspective this may raise the question: why? Could the ritual not have been employed to pledge allegiance to the unified German nation-state? But such a suggestion would puzzle contemporary members of the Jugendweihe Association, and many Thuringians too.

When I conducted fieldwork in 2010, none of the teenagers had been aware that the GDR Jugendweihe included a pledge of allegiance to the state – nor that this pledge had caused some people inner conflicts. This lack of awareness was no different in 2013. Partly because the contemporary ritual neither has such a pledge, nor a substitute, and the pledge's past existence goes unremarked in the contemporary ceremony. The only exception I encountered was a rather generic aside – made by only one of six guest speakers, in four of the 16 Jugendweihe ceremonies I observed – that '...in the past one had to pledge something...'. However, teenagers' ignorance regarding the pledge also demonstrates that parental and grandparental generations do not talk about this aspect of Jugendweihe with their offspring. During our conversation with Franka, his mother, and Frau Becker, his maternal grandmother, Daniel listened to what was said; but he did not show any particular interest, perhaps because what we talked about seemed set in such a distant – and for him, irrelevant – past. But when Daniel's older sister and her boyfriend, twenty-one-year old Ronny, joined us half-way through Frau Becker's recollections of her experiences with the pledge, they listened attentively. Ronny, who appeared not to have celebrated Jugendweihe himself, suddenly inquired: 'So how is it actually nowadays with Jugendweihe? Do you have to pledge anything?' Franka and her mother quickly exclaimed 'No!', and explained that one can do as one pleases. Unexpectedly, Ronny offered his thoughts on the issue: 'Well, I don't know, but I have to say that I actually think that's good with the pledge.' Franka responded with a counter question: 'But what do you want to pledge to here?' And her mother added assertively: 'Yes, it doesn't make sense now.'

Franka affirmed: ‘Exactly, at the moment this doesn’t make sense.’ But Ronny only half-agreed, explaining: ‘Yes, but, if it was now and here a decent state, I’d say, if you still had that, I’d find that good.’

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored Jugendweihe in historical perspective in order to tackle its emergence and its survival through various historical periods and political caesurae. This approach has demonstrated that the advent of Jugendweihe was closely associated with challenges to church authority – both by the public and the state, and that Jugendweihe served as a substitute to Protestant confirmation. Both Protestant confirmation and Jugendweihe became increasingly linked with adolescents’ school-leaving and entering the workforce, and thus with coming-of-age at fourteen. This coming-of-age aspect allowed the ritual to continue through diverse historico-political periods, and to be adopted by various movements as a means of initiating adolescents into their respective communities, associated with particular worldviews. These movements shared an anti-church stance, and the initially secular ritual became increasingly anti-religious. I argued that a diachronic view of Jugendweihe shows that the ritual served different functions at different times – either of challenging the social order, such as prior to and during the Weimar Republic, or maintaining it, such as under the GDR. The oscillation between Jugendweihe and confirmation resonates with the political contexts of different eras, but it is Jugendweihe’s initiation aspect that renders the ritual a site of contestation over the past.

In the second part of the chapter I explored more closely how the struggle over authority between the GDR state and the church – reflected in the relation between Jugendweihe and Confirmation – played out within one particular family. Both state and church asked that adolescents commit themselves exclusively to one institution or the other, because the commitments – that is, the pledge of allegiance to the state or the profession of faith in the church – were seen as incompatible. For many religious families, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, this insistence produced dilemmas over whether to follow their religious convictions and risk potential repercussions, or to publicly commit to the state in order to avoid such risks. While they had to decide as a family unit to publicly align to either

church or state, this decision also led to familial tensions between parents and adolescents, tensions that were not always openly acknowledged. Yet the GDR Jugendweihe's political-ideological role in fostering socialist personalities, and as tool in the struggle over authority with the church, was not actively transmitted by the older generations. Although teenager's explanations resonate with the historical opposition of Jugendweihe and confirmation, they usually viewed Jugendweihe as a ritual that was like confirmation, just without the church. Today's teenagers' decision to celebrate Jugendweihe were always made – as they were during state socialism – in relation to their family's preferences; but their explanations, in which they set themselves apart from the church in an environment that is largely unchurched, appear peculiar. I would suggest that this distinction is understandable within the context of the German nation-state: celebrating Jugendweihe today is also a signifier of being non-denominational, in contrast to West Germany's 'culture of church affiliation' (Pickel 2011). A secular world view is thus what has become the basis for family values to be passed on to the next generation. In the following chapters, I look more closely at what these family values are.

At the same time, the pledge that set church and state apart, and that caused such dilemmas for religious people, has not been part of Jugendweihe ceremonies since 1990. I do not want to suggest that all families whose offspring celebrated Jugendweihe in 2013 shared exactly the same view as Franka's family in regards to the reasons why the contemporary Jugendweihe does not include a pledge to the state. Nevertheless, I believe that their mistrust of the state is indicative of the ritual's role reversal: Jugendweihe no longer maintains the social structure – as it did under the GDR – but represents a critique of the current social order, and more specifically, of both the church and the state. This view cannot be reduced to either the distant or the GDR past, but must also be understood in the context of the changes that were brought about with the *Wende*. In eastern Germany, there was no religious revival after the fall of the Wall, as was the case in other post-socialist countries. This areligiosity remains partly because the church, which was a key player in the 1989 revolution, lost its oppositional force to the state – and although the state is separated officially from the church, this separation is no longer as clear-cut as it was under state socialism. Frau Becker's comments about the church tax collection reflect a greater change in church-state relations – underpinned by West Germany's Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), which retains the privileges granted to churches as public law corporations by the Weimar constitution (see Barker 2004). Thus the state, for

example, collects church taxes on their behalf through automatic deductions from church members' payrolls. In 1991, the system of church tax collection was made applicable to the territory of the former GDR (see Spiegel 1990) – and thus the state and the church became entangled in a way they had never been under state socialism. The church, which for many easterners was also a refuge from the state during state socialism, has lost its oppositional role in post-Wende eastern Germany. This new state-near role of the church played a role in eastern Germans' decision to leave the church *after* the demise of the GDR.

The parallels between the avowals in the Protestant confirmation and the GDR Jugendweihe are striking: the former's profession of faith is not simply a commitment to God but also to the Christian community, and the Christian church; and the GDR pledge of allegiance was not only a profession to the Marxist-Leninist worldview, but also to the socialist community, and the GDR state. Since the contemporary version of Jugendweihe defers neither to the Marxist-Leninist worldview, nor to the state, what is the purpose of the public ceremony and to whom is deference paid? In the following chapter I shall further explore avenues that help us better understand the ritual's social role in present day Germany.



## Chapter 3

### **Inculcating Collectivity: Jugendweihe and School**

*[Durkheim's] genius lies in having recognized that ritual builds solidarity without requiring the sharing of beliefs. Solidarity is produced by people acting together, not by people thinking together.*

– David Kertzer (1988: 76)

It was an April morning at the office of the Jugendweihe Association. Dagmar called all of us into her large office, because she wanted to show us ‘something off-putting’ on her laptop. Sonja, Nicole, Jutta and I gathered around Dagmar’s desk, and she declared, in anticipation of what we were about to see, that over the weekend she had come across a few Jugendweihe ceremony clips on YouTube which she felt she needed to share with us. The first thought that sprung to my mind was the possibility of a new competitor in the region that she would find worrisome, but it quickly became evident that the ceremony in the clip was from 2010, and held in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.<sup>28</sup> Dagmar was appalled about the quality of the ceremony, which had been held in a sports hall; everyone quickly concurred that it was an inappropriate venue because it could not create a solemn atmosphere. They also commented on how the adolescents were entering the hall in pairs, walking down an aisle formed by the arrangement of chairs, with the audience standing up. For Dagmar and Jutta, this procedure was too reminiscent of the way Jugendweihe was celebrated in the GDR. The ‘*Einmarschieren*’ (‘marching in’ – though no one actually marches but enters a venue either in single file or pairs) had long been discarded by the local Jugendweihe Association, though it was still an essential element at other Jugendweihe ceremonies, for example, of the Jugendweihe Association in Erfurt.

The various programme excerpts, edited together in the clip, received a great deal of ridicule. Sonja, Jutta and Dagmar unanimously deemed the compere ‘too old’ for the task of leading the ceremony. Toward the end of the clip, another elderly man appeared on stage, only half-visible behind a lot of technical equipment, announcing that the official part was over, and the time had come to party. When he then started singing rap-like into

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKRSPkpiNk>

his microphone to music that blasted out of loudspeakers, a feeling of *fremdschämen* (vicarious embarrassment) was clearly visible on the faces of the participating teens, and among the watching Association members in the office as well. Everyone was both amused and taken aback: they denounced the ceremony as ‘*niveaulos*’ (mediocre), and were shocked to find that the responsible association belonged to the national Jugendweihe Germany Association, recognizable through the blue Jugendweihe keepsake books that the adolescents in the clip all held.

However, Dagmar demanded our attention anew, and played another video clip.<sup>29</sup> This time it was of a *Jugendfeier* (youth celebration), the Humanist Association’s equivalent of Jugendweihe, held in the *Friedrichstadt-Palast* in Berlin, also in 2010. Here the adolescents entered in a fairly relaxed manner, in single file, and had to walk toward the stage. Although it took a long time, because the venue was of a considerable size and designed for a large ceremony, the Association members agreed that this entrance was better than the previous one we’d seen. Dagmar pointed out how spartan the stage was, decorated with only four small pillars that marked off a passage way for the adolescents, and judged it ‘dull’. But what caught everyone’s attention was the fact that the Humanist Association had the adolescents take to the stage individually: they were queuing in single file, an adolescent’s name was read out, the adolescent walked between the pillars to be congratulated, to receive a flower, and then a volunteer guided them to the back of the stage. The others were quick to agree that this practice lacked a sense of togetherness (*Zusammengehörigkeit*), and they felt that their way of organizing the ceremony – where a whole group, usually of classmates, went on stage together – was ‘much nicer’ (*viel schöner*).

Although the Association members never referred to themselves as ‘ritual experts’, their critical discussion of the content and the form of these ceremonies revealed that they understood themselves as such. Their comments about the first clip underline what a challenge it is to cater to the different tastes of the three generations usually present at the Jugendweihe ceremony, involving both thoughtful consideration and an up-to-date awareness of popular culture in order to sensibly combine old and new. They judged the association in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to have failed in achieving the appropriate atmosphere not only because of the chosen venue, but because the ceremony

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIxtAfej0fM>

fell short in its task of uniting the different generations. Dagmar and her colleagues were taken aback that this association was a member of the national Jugendweihe Germany Association and felt that there should be some ‘quality control’ across the (national association) board. By viewing these clips, and dismissing the way these ceremonies were organized, the women also implicitly praised their own work and made it explicit to themselves – but perhaps also to me – that they had achieved a *niveaunvoll* (high-class) standard, which was worth maintaining.

While I will discuss the work of the Jugendweihe Association and its members further in Chapter 6, my focus here is on their assessment of the adolescents’ taking to the stage in the second clip. This ritual element had been somewhat taken-for-granted because of the ceremony’s GDR legacy, and it only caught their – and my – attention through a direct comparison with the *Jugendfeier* of the Berlin Humanist Association. What had been self-evident as the ‘right way’ was suddenly made explicit in the Association members’ juxtaposition between the Humanists’ focus on the individual and their own focus on the social group or collective – and the latter way of conducting the ceremony was clearly favoured. Jugendweihe ceremonies focus to a lesser extent on an individual initiand, and differ in this aspect from the Humanists’ *Jugendfeier* and the Protestant confirmation. As described in the Intermezzo, during the Jugendweihe ceremony, adolescents take to the stage in a group. They are usually from the same school class, and thus the stage group can comprise up to 13 girls and boys. Although their names are read out individually, they stand collectively on stage and are then congratulated and presented with a book and a certificate each, before each being given a flower. Unlike at a Protestant confirmation, where each individual receives or has chosen their own biblical verse, a proverb, such as ‘Don’t dream your life, live your dream!’, is read out for the group. Then a photographer takes several group pictures of them before indicating with a nod that they can leave the stage in single file, in reverse order of the way they took it. Since all Jugendweihe ceremonies I have ever attended were organized this way, I only realized through discussion of the YouTube clip that the stage could be taken and left differently.

This emphasis on the stage group is grounded in the strong association between Jugendweihe and the school class, which stretches back to GDR times, when the preparation for and the celebration of the Jugendweihe ceremony was closely intertwined with the socialist school system. The GDR education system was strongly influenced by

the Soviet pedagogues Nadezhda K. Krupskaya and Anton S. Makarenko, who held that socialist education was in essence socialist collective education (*Kollektiverziehung*) – at its core was the upbringing of the individual within and through the collective (Neuner 1975a: 1282).<sup>30</sup> The tension between individuals' self-interests and the interest of the collective was to be resolved through the moulding of socialist personalities, who were to develop interdependently with the collective. Crucially, where personal self-interest would be in conflict with the collective, the socialist personality would subordinate those interests for the greater good of the collective (see Farkas 1977; Neuner 1975b). How this goal was to be achieved exactly remained unclear, and was a question frequently debated among pedagogues and philosophers. As such, Endre Farkas (1977) explains that the 'collective' unites members in a community based on mutual interests. Collectives can be categorized into micro and macro, depending on their size and whether their members have face-to-face contact or not. For example, the school collective is a micro collective, whereas a macro collective mirrors social strata, but in a broader sense also refers to 'the social homogenous socialist society as a whole which gradually evolves under the conditions of a developed socialism – the socialist nation' (Farkas 1977: 960).

The slogan '*Vom Ich zum Wir*' (From I to We), which the GDR state promoted in the 1950s to encourage the rural population to join agricultural collectives (LPGs), nicely condenses the attitude the state – throughout its existence – sought to foster in its permeation of all aspects of everyday life. People generally organise themselves into various social groups throughout their lifecourse, but the different collectives in the GDR – with the exception of the churches – were all created under the aegis of the state. Not only the party or the military, the Pioneer and FDJ collectives, or any other mass organisations were state-organised – but also the kindergarten group, the school class, the work collective, and the house community of a tenement block (*Hausgemeinschaft*). The state's desire to collectivize people's lives was thus also a crucial feature of the ways life-cycle rituals were conducted: secular name-giving ceremonies (instead of baptisms) and Jugendweihe (instead of confirmation) were celebrated as part of a wider collective, and not just for one individual and their family. Indeed, this emphasis on the collective over the

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<sup>30</sup> Nadyesha K. Krupskaya actively designed the Soviet Union's education system after the October Revolution. She was also Deputy Commissar of Education (1929-1939) and Lenin's wife (1898-1924).

individual was designed even to transcend death – through the state’s promotion of collective, anonymous urn burials.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, despite the intended ideological purpose of such collectives – which were eventually to dissolve into a utopian communist society – many East Germans enjoyed the sociality they entailed: that is, collectivity. Farkas differentiates the sociological term ‘collective’ from the axiological term ‘collectivity’, noting that the latter, as a value category, expresses the inner state and togetherness of the collective. Collectivity combines objective and subjective moments – the degree of togetherness of the collective, and the experiencing and becoming conscious of togetherness by its members respectively (Farkas 1977: 960). When most of these collectives began to crumble with the demise of the GDR state, the common trope of a lost ‘sense of togetherness’ began to emerge – and was still frequently mentioned by members of grandparental and parental generations during my fieldwork. Indeed, the historian Lutz Niethammer notes that ‘the collective experience of the GDR appears in hindsight the actual core of “*Ostalgie*”: the ensemble of positive *Gemeinschafts*-experiences in a “workerly society”’ (Niethammer 2009: 208).

In this chapter, I trace changes in the school system which are closely associated with changes in organizing and preparing for Jugendweihe. Under the GDR the school system and Jugendweihe aimed not only to transmit factual and ideological knowledge, but to foster particular moral attributes – in particular, collectivity. This fostering of collectivity among pupils also aimed at moving ties subtly away from the family – as the smallest collective – to larger collectives in order to inspire adolescents to work for the greater good of socialist society. The GDR education system was part of a larger ideological battle over moral superiority between the East and the West, where each condemned the dark features of the other’s social order: ‘the dog-eat-dog characteristics of unrestrained capitalism’ and ‘the sacrifice of individuality to the state and the collective’ under state socialism (Fenemore 2007: 2). In regard to Jugendweihe, Gallinat holds that ‘the collective atmosphere is no longer propagated. Collectivity does not seem to be apparent anymore’ (Gallinat 2002: 166). In contrast, I argue that today collectivity is actively sought by the

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<sup>31</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, collective weddings never took off, and collective naming ceremonies were also rare. Urn burials had been already fairly popular in the 1920s in East Thuringia for similar reasons discussed in relation to Jugendweihe (see Happe, Jetschke, and Schulmann 2011). Under the GDR, urn burials took on a new collective aspect, but a discussion of funerary practices is beyond the scope of this thesis.

parental and grandparental generations in two ways: in a collective that spans generations in both the family and wider eastern German society; and in the collective of the school class. In this chapter, I focus my attention on the latter. First, I explain the GDR education system, before I turn to the post-Wende changes associated with collectivity and Jugendweihe preparation and celebration, and the ways they are embedded in a broader moral discourse echoing the tension between individual and collective.

## **The GDR School System**

One of the major tasks for the East German political elite after the Second World War was to re-educate a population infused with Nazi ideology, and to raise a new untainted generation in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. The denazification of schools as part of this ‘anti-fascist-democratic school reform’ included employing new teachers (*Neulehrer*) and the introduction of an eight-year integrated school (*Einheitsschule*) in 1946 (Brock 2005: 41-42; Fenemore 2007: 54-55; Fulbrook 2005: 120-121). Besides anti-fascism, these schools were based on the principles of secularity and unity, emphasising scientific subjects and facilitating equal education opportunities regardless of class or gender (*ibid.*). Only in the latter half of the 1950s did the political elite begin to focus more forcefully on moral values and the fostering of the socialist personality. As noted in the previous chapter, the ‘Ten Commandments for the New Socialist Human Being’ were promulgated in 1958, and made explicit the state’s competition with the church. They also underlined that individual and societal aims and values were congruent in socialism; thus, for example, ‘*Thou* shalt accomplish good deeds for Socialism, for Socialism leads to a better life for *all* workers’ (my emphasis). In 1959, the ‘Socialist Development of the School System in the German Democratic Republic Act’ replaced eight years’ compulsory schooling in an *Einheitsschule* with compulsory ten-year attendance at a *Polytechnische Oberschule*, ‘polytechnic secondary school’ or POS. This step, the law argued, was necessary because:

With the construction of socialism began a new stage of societal development. The creation of the fundamentals of socialist society also required the socialist education of the young generation. This can only come about through the school, which is closely connected to social life,

especially to socialist production. Notably the gap between mental and physical work and between theory and praxis will be thereby overcome.<sup>32</sup>

The POS thus drew strongly on historical materialism, and aimed to raise the young generation ‘to love work and working people’, and to become part of the skilled workforce of a modern society. Only approximately 10% of pupils attended an EOS, the extended secondary school – 12 years of schooling that led to an *Abitur* (similar to A-levels), which qualified pupils for university entrance. Although all schooling was free of charge, as were all forms of tertiary education, places in EOS and for university were scarce. They were given only to teenagers who performed well academically, who themselves, as well as their parents, toed the SED party line, and who preferably came from a peasant or worker background (Brock 2005: 76-78; Fulbrook 2005: 121). While many of the educational changes made by the GDR state were laudable on paper, in reality they were heavily circumscribed both by lack of resources and by ‘the huge pressure for ideological conformity’ (Fulbrook 2005: 122). The POS remained the main educational institution for all GDR citizens until the state’s demise. More importantly, as the act stated in paragraph 2 (1), ‘[t]he academic *Erziehung* and *Bildung* of the youth is exclusively a matter of the state.’

Notably, the English term ‘education’ is distinguished in German by two closely related notions: *Erziehung* refers to the instilling of particular moral norms and values, a process perhaps best described as socialisation; while *Bildung* refers to the more formal aspects of education, that is, acquiring factual knowledge and developing intellectual capabilities (see Brock 2005: 10-11). In Germany, compulsory schooling has been legally enshrined (*Schulpflicht*) since 1919 – though in some parts of Prussia it has been mandatory since the 18<sup>th</sup> century; and thus formal education, or *Bildung*, can be easily understood as the task of the school – and thus the state. However, *Erziehung* is somewhat more controversial, because the transmission of values to children was traditionally shared by three parties: the parental home, the church, and the school. The explicit objective of ‘the GDR education system ...to convey knowledge not only of facts, but also – and especially – of values’ (Brock 2005: 10) underscored the extent to which the state aimed at gaining a monopoly on education, redirecting it not only away from the church (see Chapter 2) but

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<sup>32</sup> 1959 School Act – *Gesetz über die sozialistische Entwicklung des Schulwesens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, <http://www.verfassungen.de/de/ddr/schulgesetz59.htm>

also away from the parental home. This redirection was not necessarily viewed negatively by all East Germans, but was rather understood as a provision of support to parents when such values were shared. Indeed, for many, the role of the school in *Erziehung* became entirely taken-for-granted. Jutta, for example, recalled to me how shocked she was when she and other parents had been told at the first parents' evening after the Wende that 'We [the school] are no longer here to *erziehen* (raise) your children!' She explained to me that this attitude was quite ridiculous, given that the time children spend in school is usually more time than they spend with their parents; and she insisted that the bringing up of children ought to be done by both school and *Elternhaus* (the parental home).

Indeed, this intended cooperation between the education system and the family, with both working together to mould socialist personalities, was made explicit in the 1965 'Integrated Socialist Education System Act', which stated in paragraph 1 (1):

The aim of the integrated socialist education system is a good education for the entire people, the education and upbringing of all-round and harmoniously developed socialist personalities, who consciously create societal life, change nature and lead a fulfilled, happy and humane life.<sup>33</sup>

The law also asserted in paragraph 7 (4) that, 'in the socialist state there exists congruence between the societal aims of education and upbringing and the interests of parents'. In reality, of course, this congruence did not hold for the majority of families. However, one also needs to bear in mind that many of the virtues that the state promoted and that parents sought for their children did overlap, without necessarily intending the same end goal – that is, communism. One of the main characteristics of the socialist personality was to be 'thoroughly imbued with collective thoughts and deeds and [to] actively, consciously and creatively contribute to the shaping of socialism' (Fullbrook 2005: 115). This value was enthusiastically fostered in kindergarten, prior to school, and through the extra-curricular Pioneer and FDJ collectives; but it was also an important dimension of schooling – for example, built in weekly rotas for pupils to wipe the blackboard (*Tafeldienst*) or to get milk bottles for breakfast (*Michldienst*). Although pupils' services undoubtedly presented an economic benefit to the state, they also taught responsibility as

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<sup>33</sup> 1965 School Act – *Gesetz über das einheitliche sozialistische Bildungssystem*, <http://www.verfassungen.de/de/ddr/schulgesetz65.htm>.

part of the collective, and respect for the work of cleaners and caretakers at the school (Brock 2005: 182). Such practices fostered values which many parents sought to teach their children as well.

Jugendweihe was strongly embedded within the school, and continued – despite the prolonged education of ten years – to be celebrated at grade eight, to mark adolescents’ coming-of-age. But it also had ‘the aim, alongside the school and together with the socialist youth organisation, to educate *staatsbewusste* (state-conscious) young citizens of the German Democratic Republic’ (ZAJ 1986: 11). After the GDR’s demise in 1991, this long-standing connection changed: after receiving ‘repeated inquiries’, the Thuringian Cultural Ministry informed all state school offices that participating in Jugendweihe was an adolescent’s and their parents’ personal choice, and that any promotion on the part of the school or of teachers was prohibited (letter dated 6 February 1991 shown to me by the Association). West Germany and the Catholic and Protestant Churches presumed that after German unification the ritual would disappear; but by 1993, the numbers of Jugendweihe participants had started to increase (Meier 1998: 7-8). In an attempt to eradicate old power structures, the Cultural Ministry re-asserted its stance in another letter in 1993, explaining that Jugendweihe was not a school event. Schools were prohibited from promoting the ritual through the school, as were individual teachers, and the cooperation of schools with ritual organisers was also banned (fax dated July 1993 shown to me by the Association).

Yet, as I illustrate below, this connection between Jugendweihe and school was still actively sought through informal means, both by the Jugendweihe Association and by parents and grandparents. The Association and parents alike stressed their desire for pupils to celebrate Jugendweihe together, while teachers – as was demanded of them – remained largely silent on this issue, or at least remained in the background (as we saw in the headmaster’s reaction to my inquiry about Jugendweihe in the Introduction).

### **Enrolment for Jugendweihe**

Members of the Jugendweihe Association invested a lot of work in organizing stage groups using the school class as primary reference point. Whenever a parent – usually a mother – rang up the office to inquire about Jugendweihe ceremonies, almost always the

answering Association member could be heard responding with these two questions first: ‘Which school does your child attend? And which school class (a, b, c)?’ As such, stage groups almost always consisted solely of classmates – as they had during GDR times. In some instances, there might be a teenager or two who do not belong to the class, because they and their parents might have returned for the Jugendweihe celebration from a western federal state to their place of origin – as was the case for 34 adolescents in East Thuringia during the 2013 ceremonies. Such cases appear to be less a matter of the unavailability or lesser popularity of Jugendweihe in these regions per se, than a matter of where grandparents are; many commonly remain in East Thuringia, and their presence is integral to the family celebration. While the role of the family and the ways that personhood is constituted through place will be explored further in Chapter 4, here it is noteworthy that it was often grandmothers, whose grandchildren lived in a western federal state, who enrolled them for Jugendweihe. On one occasion, I witnessed the female neighbour of a potential initiand’s grandmother picking up the enrolment form and information leaflets. She explained to us that her neighbour’s children and grandchildren lived in the ‘old’ federal states, where they do not have Jugendweihe. Since the grandmother worked long hours, she helped her out by picking up the forms for her from the Association’s office.

As a rule, however, it was mothers who called the Association to inquire about the enrolment process, who collected the forms, sent them in or handed them back, and who paid the registration fee. It was not uncommon for the Association to send a pack of leaflets and registration forms for an entire school class, upon request, to an *Elternsprecher* (parent representative, usually female) who would then distribute them during a parents’ evening to interested parents. In cases where such information was not appropriately disseminated to the relevant parents, some would complain; but others were aware that they had failed to get informed and/or enrol their children for the ceremony. For example, during the ‘Day of Jugendweihe’ fair in Jena, a mother rushed to the Jugendweihe Association’s stall and admitted, embarrassed: ‘Oh I am such a bad mother, I forgot to enrol my child! Is there anything I can still do now?’ The connection between Jugendweihe and the school was desired by parents, partly out of convenience, and partly because it was what they were used to from their own celebration under the GDR. As such, the Association members did not create this link between Jugendweihe and school, but they worked to sustain it – reminiscent of GDR times.

More often than not, parents were somewhat puzzled that Jugendweihe and school were separate matters. One Tuesday morning, on a *Sprechtage* (open consultation day) at the Jugendweihe Association, I overheard two women – perhaps in their late thirties or early forties – discussing the issue in front of the Association’s building. The mother who wanted to register her daughter for Jugendweihe was about to finish her cigarette, while her friend looked at the Association plaque listing opening times and, seemingly perplexed, asked: ‘So, what, the school doesn’t do anything at all [related to Jugendweihe] anymore?’ The mother shook her head and explained, ‘No, the school doesn’t do anything, it’s all via this Jugendweihe Association now.’ Her usage of ‘now’ (*jetzt*) was not narrowly defined as in ‘at the present moment’ but referred to a time-span, that is, the post-Wende period of twenty-odd years, set in contrast to ‘früher’ (former, earlier, or former times), which referred to socialist times under the GDR. Many of my interlocutors would employ these terms in a similar fashion, or would draw the same distinction by a ‘vor’ and/or ‘nach der Wende’ (before and after the turn), where the political caesura of 1989-90 denoted the separation of two time periods (Feuchtwang 2005: 180). Because grandparents and parents celebrated their Jugendweihe and attended school under the GDR, they frequently compared their school system with that of their children, which I explore further below.

### ***The GDR Youth Lessons and Preparing for Jugendweihe Today***

Frau Krause, the female manager of a clothes shop located in the Gera Arcaden shopping centre, and part of an international chain of retail clothing stores, received me one April afternoon at her work. Dagmar put us in touch after telling me that it had been due to the shop manager that that year’s Jugendweihe fashion show in Gera came into being. Frau Krause was an attractive woman in her early forties, who explained to me – even before we sat down in a back-room office – that she had allocated half an hour for our conversation. In a charming but business-like manner, she informed me that the clothes chain she worked for used to have a Jugendweihe collection, but had discontinued it in 2005 because it was no longer lucrative. She quickly added that the reason for this decline in celebrating Jugendweihe was due to low birth rates after the fall of the wall, but that things had changed around the time her son – who was due to celebrate Jugendweihe in 2013 – was born: birth rates had been on a slow but steady rise since the late 1990s. Since

she wanted to get informed for her son's Jugendweihe, she looked through the Jugendweihe Association's leaflet, and noticed that the *Goethegalerie* – a shopping mall in Jena, Thuringia's second-largest city – organized an annual 'Day of Jugendweihe' that was already in its 15<sup>th</sup> year. Wondering why such an event did not exist in Gera, she decided to speak to the western German centre manager, Herr Schmidt. She suggested to him that they had to do something in Gera as well, because: 'We must keep the customers in Gera rather than lose them to Jena!' While this seemed a sound commercial argument, Frau Krause elaborated that the problem was that all *Wessis* ('Westies', colloquial for western Germans) associated Jugendweihe with the GDR, and were thus apprehensive. When I added, 'Well, they associate it not just with the GDR but also with communism', her lips curled into a smile and she asserted, 'Yeah, but we just celebrated it because we were not church members'. She claimed to have convinced the centre manager by insisting: 'We must do it!', and he had agreed to run a trial test in 2013. If it should succeed, he agreed to consider developing a professionally planned, annual event.

While her initiative was apparent, and may have been partly out of self-interest and an attempt to secure her role as store manager, there seemed to be more to Frau Krause's motivations. She continued by telling me that it was her son's classmates who she had recruited to model in the three fashion shows. She appeared a little disappointed that her son did not participate, despite the incentive of receiving a voucher worth €50 each. Through pupils' participation as models, the school class also topped up their class kitty (*Klassenkasse*) with an additional €250. Frau Krause then volunteered to me that she was the parent representative and, as is often the case, she had contacted the Association about Jugendweihe enrolment and handed out the forms to interested parents during one parents' evening. She also suggested to parents that it would be lovely for the entire class to take part in at least one youth work event – echoing the youth lessons run under the GDR – offered by the Association. Many had been interested in the trip to the MDR<sup>34</sup> in Leipzig, but since it was during the Easter holiday it was inconvenient for most. She then proposed the *Knigge* etiquette course, which was a popular idea among many parents and, in a reflective mode, she added:

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<sup>34</sup> *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk* – the public broadcaster for the federal states of Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt; i.e. 'Central Germany'.

I think it's just great that they do stuff together. I already think ahead to when they'll have their graduation party, and I imagine it'll be just lovely for them to show what they have been doing together over the past years. But maybe that's just me... Actually they've done quite a bit; they [as a class] also went to the *Bundestag* in Berlin, and they really liked it.

What struck me was that she was not simply concerned about her own son, but rather about her son as part of what was formerly called the *Klassenkollektiv* (class collective), the school class. During GDR times, the so called Jugendweihe-year – the academic year of the eighth grade – would be officially heralded with an opening event that was attended not only by the teenagers but also by their teachers and parents. There would be other representatives present, such as their future guest speaker and someone from their school class's *Patenbrigade* (literally: godparent-brigade), a work collective of a peoples'-owned enterprise (VEB) that would accompany a school class through their entire schooling in a spirit of support. This opening event was followed by ten 'youth lessons' (*Jugendstunden*) over a period of several months running up until the ceremony. The vow and the youth lessons were seen as forming a unity, and although they changed over the lifespan of the GDR according to wider Cold War politics, their aim – to enhance ideological education at a crucial stage in a pupil's life – persisted:

The youth lesson is a specific form of deliberate, determined, methodical, and organized work of education and upbringing (*Bildungs- und Erziehungsarbeit*). Its task consists of helping to educate and to rear the adolescents in this particularly important phase of life for the development of the socialist consciousness, so that they embrace the scientific worldview and the morals of the working class and learn to act as young revolutionaries of our time (ZAJ 1974: 60).

This 'important phase of life', commonly perceived as a phase in which teens challenged authority, granted adolescents greater rights and responsibilities than those afforded to children. This status change was also manifested in a change in the curriculum at grade seven (twelve/thirteen-year-olds) with the introduction of the subject 'Civics' (*Staatsbürgerkunde*). Furthermore, POS education – which included subjects such as 'School Garden' (*Schulgarten*) and 'Handicrafts' (*Werken*) in the lower stage (*Unterstufe*) – continued its emphasis on productive work from the seventh grade onward, with the change to theoretical subjects like 'Introduction to Socialist Production' and 'Technical Drawing' and the hands-on subject 'Productive Work', where adolescents either worked in a company or were given production-like tasks in a training centre. The eighth grade

– the school year during which pupils would celebrate Jugendweihe – was also the year where adolescents would leave the Thälmann Pioneers, recognizable through their red neckerchiefs, to become a member of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth; FDJ), who wore dark-blue shirts. While these memberships were also always granted and celebrated as part of the school class, at the age of fourteen, adolescents received their ID cards individually (*Personalausweis*). This document was the most important one held by GDR citizens, and adults were required to carry it at all times and to show it upon request.

The GDR youth lessons were run purposefully as extra-curricular events, but nevertheless for a given class with the class teacher often also taking on the role of ‘youth lesson leader’ (*Jugendstundenleiter*). While some of these youth lessons entailed ideological group debates, many also involved fieldtrips in order to convey a real-life and ‘emotionally effective’ experience for the adolescents that never could have been achieved in a classroom setting (ZAJ 1986: 75-78). The youth lesson entitled ‘Your work is needed’ might have been held in a regional VEB, where adolescents could talk directly to workers and observe production processes.<sup>35</sup> The youth lesson ‘Culture and art make our life richer and more beautiful’ was intended to involve either watching a theatre production or ballet performance, or visiting an art gallery; a trip to the observatory in Jena was a possible option for youth lessons entitled ‘We change our world’ or ‘Scientific-technical progress – Your challenge’. One main concern was to use regional memorial sites in youth lessons, and in East Thuringia this aim commonly entailed an excursion to the former Buchenwald concentration camp and its memorial site near Weimar. Such a trip could either be conducted as part of the ‘We fulfil our revolutionary legacy’, ‘Peace is not a gift’ or ‘Our socialist fatherland’ lessons, to stress that the GDR was continuing the anti-fascist legacy and was thus morally superior to West Germany – a topic I return to in Chapter 7 (ZAJ 1986: 103-108; see also Wegner 1996). But while these lessons arguably aimed to transmit particular content, they were also in and of themselves viewed as educative tools that simultaneously fostered class collectivity and parental independence as the Jugendweihe handbook notes:

A particularity of the excursion lies in the fact that the adolescents are for a longer period of time – at least for a day – together as a collective. In addition, the trip and the stay at the destination put greater demands on

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<sup>35</sup> Youth lesson titles varied slightly over the years; here I use the ones as agreed by the ZAJ in 1982, and referred to in its last Jugendweihe Handbook (see ZAJ 1986: 55).

order and discipline of the individuals [...] this provides a good opportunity to develop the self-education of youths. (ZAJ 1974: 97-98).

This emphasis on the class collective is also visible in the photographs of GDR Jugendweihe ceremonies, where not only the stage group – which often only comprised a part of the school class – was photographed, but also the entire school class after the ceremony. In contrast, today such class photographs are not automatically taken by the professional photographer, though some parents organize school class portraits. For example, Andrea asked me prior to Lukas's Jugendweihe whether I would mind standing in for the photographer, who had cancelled, to take photos of the school class after the ceremony.

Such collectives do not entirely cease to exist once school is finished, either – as is evidenced by the fairly popular class reunions that parental and grandparental generations regularly hold, and to which class teachers are also always invited. When I returned in 2014 for my school class's fifth reunion,<sup>36</sup> we had a guided tour through our former school – which still had utensils and equipment from GDR times, as well as Pioneer and FDJ memorabilia that made us reminisce about both the political-ideological dimensions of our schooling, and our group experience during our school years. In the evening and after dinner, we also paged through our red *Gruppenbuch* – a book that every class owned, and where class members documented the class collective's activities throughout its ten years of schooling, from visits to the theatre and fieldtrips to *Ernteeinsätze* (harvest support), or our donations in 'solidarity' with Nicaragua and elsewhere. These activities attracted much discussion, such as whether our many donations actually ever reached their destinations, or whether they went straight back into SED functionaries' pockets. Regular social gatherings with former GDR work collectives are also common among the grandparental generation. This intense involvement with the school class during GDR times, including being members of the young and Thälmann Pioneers and the Free German Youth, and later part of the work collective, were almost seen as 'natural' progressions in one's lifecourse, and were rarely challenged – except, very occasionally, by religious East Germans. Celine's mother, Sandra, noted in one of our conversations on her reasons for celebrating Jugendweihe: 'Because everything was so determined during East times [GDR times], you just ran along everywhere, anyway – whatever, you had your FDJ shirt, and

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<sup>36</sup> We decided upon graduating in 1989 to hold reunions every five years.

you had your Pioneer neckerchief around, you know, everything was so predetermined, you actually didn't have to think.'

Yet while this sentiment would be similarly expressed by many of my interlocutors, it does not mean that all adolescents during GDR times behaved like stellar socialist personalities. Rather, 'just running along' and 'not having to think' were features of a way of life for people who experienced the social order of the time as unchangeable (see Yurchak 1997). As with the Jugendweihe vow, that may have meant frequently dancing to the tune of the political elite as required, but it did not translate to loving their music. 'Rebellious behaviour' existed, but was often limited in scope in order to avoid drawing attention – and hence potential repercussions – to oneself, and by extension to one's family. Tanja, Jan's mother, described herself as a rather rebellious teenager, and recounted her own story of defiance as a thirteen-year-old. Her best friend's father was a big shot in the FDJ, and therefore had several 'blue shirts' in his wardrobe, which the girls 'borrowed' one evening. They wore them in order to stay out beyond their curfew during the festivities marking Gera's 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1987 – an event not to be missed by anyone in the region, which lasted several days, usually into the small hours. Tanja smirked, noting: 'No one bothered us – wearing an FDJ shirt meant you were at least fourteen, certainly no longer a child.' But many might also have presumed that the girls had valid reasons to be there because it was unlikely that anyone would have worn a FDJ shirt voluntarily for socialising in the evening. Of course, Tanja's rebellion was directed against her parents, who had prohibited her from staying out late; but it was also an effective use of the state's collectivizing means for one's own individual ends.

Today there is no requirement to attend preparatory courses in order to participate in the Jugendweihe ceremony. However, the Jugendweihe Association offers a wide range of 'youth work events' that echo youth lessons of the GDR past but are also adapted to the new conditions. Some of these events could be categorized as recreational, including trips to 'Tropical Island', a large tropical theme park, and the Babelsberg film studios, both located in Brandenburg. They also promote short trips to the Hanseatic city of Hamburg, to diverse European capitals, and usually fortnight-long summer holiday camps in Hungary and Spain. Then there are offers that are more future-oriented, aiming to teach the adolescents adult skills, such as the etiquette course, or to provide ideas for future employment opportunities, such as trips to either the BMW automobile manufacturer or

the MDR, the regional public broadcaster (TV and radio), both located in Leipzig. The Association also provides a day excursion to the memorial site of the Buchenwald concentration camp. All of these offers can be taken up by anyone, regardless of whether they celebrate Jugendweihe; but, since they are not free, attendance is limited to adolescents who are interested in these events, and whose parents can also afford to pay for them. The Association's leaflet advertises some free events too, such as the 'Day of Jugendweihe' in Jena, where teenagers can – among other things – get ideas on how to favourably present themselves through watching fashion shows and receiving advice on cosmetics and hairstyles from professional stylists.

Today's youth work events are relatively poorly attended compared to youth lessons in GDR times. This lower attendance besides the financial aspect is also due to significant other factors. Naturally, teenagers quite often have other priorities, and a trip to a different city is no longer something special. In contrast, during socialist times any trip would have been highly coveted, given limitations on mobility tied to travel restrictions (abroad) or a lack of cars. Today teenagers almost always prefer to partake in such events not by themselves, but with a friend or a group of friends. Since the school and preparation for Jugendweihe are no longer interwoven, as was the case during state socialism, it was often up to a committed teacher or to a parent – such as Frau Krause – to suggest something from the leaflet of youth work events, and to organise it as a fieldtrip for the entire school class, regardless of whether the teens celebrated Jugendweihe or not. Visits to the *Deutscher Bundestag* (Lower house of the German Parliament) in Berlin or the *Thüringer Landtag* (Thuringian state parliament) in Erfurt were particularly popular and well-suited as school fieldtrips, since they were both free of charge and educative. Such free trips were, however, only possible because members of either the regional or the federal parliament, who tended to be party members of The Left, paid for them from their visitor budget.

While nowadays, Association members and members of the Left party may also have ideological reasons for maintaining and supporting the celebration of Jugendweihe, parents seem to be largely concerned about the collective character of preparing for and celebrating Jugendweihe. Frau Krause's concern about her son's school class 'doing things together' thus stemmed from how she herself had experienced her Jugendweihe preparation: as part of her school class, something that she – like most parents – wanted

their children to experience as well. Notably, this experience of collectivity was important to teenagers, too.

### ***Celebrating as a School Class: Friends and the ‘Klassenverband’***

Although in 2013 – unlike in the 1950s – there were only a few teenagers who celebrated Jugendweihe *and* confirmation (see Chapter 2), such instances brought to the fore what an important role friendship and being part of the school class played in families’ decision-making processes around both rituals. While the school class was frequently referenced by all generations, what seemed central for the parental and grandparental generation was what they generally called *im Klassenverband* (as part of the school class; *Verband* can be translated as union or collective) – a word that hinges on togetherness among classmates. When Tanja wanted to invite me to her son’s coming-of-age celebration, she sent me an email half a year ahead of time to find out whether I would be in Germany and able to attend. She explained that Jan’s confirmation would be in May the following year, but noted: ‘...we [she and her husband] have decided, that he can also experience the Jugendweihe ceremony with his class.’ I was rather intrigued by their decision, and she later explained to me that she felt he would have missed out if he had not celebrated in the *Klassenverband* – since almost everyone in his class celebrated Jugendweihe. However, more than a year after Jan’s Jugendweihe celebration I had a conversation with her husband about my research. I explained to him that I was interested in finding out why people celebrate Jugendweihe or confirmation and, by way of example, noted that his wife had explained to me that Jan’s Jugendweihe celebration had given him the opportunity to celebrate as part of his school class. Tanja’s husband, however, subtly corrected me before reinforcing the importance of friendship:

Well, I mean the confirmation we did because of her [his wife]. And we went along to the church services and all in preparation for it. And I did really like it in there, in church, but I don’t believe in it. [...] To be honest, Jan also wasn’t that close to his peers from confirmation classes. They had the opportunity to continue after confirmation – that was the plan, you know – but that didn’t happen, although the pastor is really okay and liberal. For me, it was important that he also celebrated Jugendweihe. I mean, we asked him and he said ‘yes’, because almost everyone in his class did it, but if he had not wanted it, then I would not have forced him to do it. But it’s nice he did it.

As I learned later, Jan's three closest friends – all of whom only celebrated Jugendweihe – were also in his school class. Although Jan celebrated confirmation in grand style, partly because it was almost a month before his Jugendweihe, the Jugendweihe family celebration was kept small in scope. While in such cases the family also celebrated twice, it only properly marked the initiand's coming-of-age celebration once, that is, by including extended family and friends. Jan's age-mate Nele explained her reason for celebrating Jugendweihe in addition to confirmation in a similar vein:

Well, I, for example, had confirmation first, because my parents are *kirchlich* (churchly) and so... and because my friends and everyone celebrated Jugendweihe, then I just thought, because actually my entire class was there [in the theatre], that I will just do it too. So it really depended on the class, on my friends, who also had Jugendweihe.

And when I later inquired about her family celebration, she made clear what her priority was:

Well, I celebrated just the confirmation really big, because it was also more important to me. Since I only did Jugendweihe because of my friends, and that's why I didn't celebrate Jugendweihe again in big style. I just went to eat out with my family, and, yes, we just had a bigger celebration for confirmation.

It seemed that confirmation was more meaningful for Nele and her family, but as with Jan, Jugendweihe mattered because of school friends. Nele wanted to celebrate Jugendweihe in order to share the experience with her peers. In neither case was this desire denied, but rather encouraged by their parents, despite the extra cost. This acquiescence, I believe, was not simply a matter of bowing to peer pressure, but was partly because Jan's parents had only celebrated Jugendweihe, while Nele's father had celebrated both Jugendweihe and Confirmation. They too viewed the sharing of this experience with one's classmates as crucial, since this was the way they had experienced their own coming-of-age celebrations.

Under the GDR, pupils had a form of stability and *Geborgenheit* (sense of security) because the majority spent ten years in class with largely the same classmates, often already acquainted with them from kindergarten. This continued togetherness of classmates, however, was drastically disrupted by the school reform undertaken after the Wende, which – as with the previous political caesura, after World War II – was intended to mark a break with the former regime's political indoctrination at school. While this reform was

deemed necessary and welcomed by most easterners, the GDR's schooling principles of secularism and unity – which translated into a scientific curriculum without religious instruction, and the integrated POS system for ten years – were also abolished.

Since the West German federal system grants cultural sovereignty to the German federal states, the states' school laws vary. In the 1990s, most of the western federal states had a three-track system, which meant that pupils were commonly separated after years four and eight to attend different schools according to their academic abilities. *Abitur* was attainable in East Germany after 12 years of schooling, whereas in West Germany it took 13. A popular joke in the 1990s – often cited still today – was: Why do they need 13 years for their *Abitur* in the West, while we in the East only need 12? – In the West they have a year of acting classes. The joke played on the fact that westerners were quickly perceived by easterners as experts in self-representation, as self-interested 'smooth talkers', who could not only sell anything they wanted but were also able to sell themselves in the changed economic conditions that required such a skill. In contrast, easterners never had to learn how to compete on the job market, because work was a legally enshrined right. They also had no practice of putting themselves in the limelight, as such behaviour ran entirely against the principles of collectivity. As the historian Angela Brock argues, a 'sense of community' (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*) was to be instilled as the first step toward collectivity, and was to 'manifest itself in virtues such as helpfulness, consideration, a sense of duty, discipline, and modesty' (Brock 2005: 181).

Thuringia did not entirely adopt the West German model, but kept a 12-year *Abitur* and decided to create a new, hybrid, two-track school structure (*Gemeinschaftsschule*) where pupils are only separated once after eight years of schooling (Pritchard 2002: 52; Waterkamp 2010: 12). Nevertheless, many members of the older generations felt that the West German school system had been foisted on them (see also Pritchard 2002). This feeling emerged because, in addition to the *Gemeinschaftsschule*, there were now three other and more commonly available secondary school types – in Thuringia these are *Regelschule*, *Gesamtschule* and *Gymnasium* (TMBJS 2016). Most pupils have to decide after four years of primary school, and depending on their academic achievements, which secondary school they want to attend. This separation of pupils into different schools has become associated increasingly with status, an issue I return to in Chapter 5. Here, it is notable that in these schools another separation follows after the eighth or ninth grade, and often

another merger or reshuffle of a class could occur thereafter – depending on class size and dearth of teaching personnel, as many teenagers reported to me had happened to them. Whereas adolescents did not particularly enjoy this process, because it might lead to a separation from their school friends, mothers judged such changes more harshly. There were a few occasions where mothers commented on it in a ‘divide and rule’-like fashion: ‘Today it is not in their interest for the adolescents to stick together, so they separate them as often as they can.’ Here ‘their’ and the latter ‘they’ (*die*) refer to an indeterminate authority, at whose mercy the interlocutors feel themselves to be. This usage of ‘they’ was commonly used to refer to the Stasi or party big shots under the GDR, but continues to be used to refer to past and present authorities (see also Chapter 2). It reflected in this instance a feeling of having had no say in these school restructuring processes, which is also understandable – especially given that, according to a 1995 survey by the Institute for Research in School Development, only 20% of easterners favoured this change in the school structure, and 58% would have preferred the GDR’s school structure ‘to be retained but divested of its party-political ideological pedagogy’ (Pritchard 2002: 52).

In short, celebrating Jugendweihe as part of the school class was not only desired by parents and grandparents because they had celebrated it this way during GDR times. Rather, an experience of collectivity was sought because many of them viewed the separation of school children not as a matter of greater educational opportunities per se, but as a sign of a political system that had no interest in actively fostering solidarity. But it was not simply the school structure that frequently attracted disapproval; contemporary school teachers, as I show below, were also the focus of the older generations’ assessment and criticism.

### ***The Defunct Role of Teachers as Moral Guides***

When I phoned forty-eight-year-old Sandra to arrange a meeting, she immediately warned me about her teenaged daughter Celine’s rebellious attitude and behaviour, so typical of this ‘difficult age’. She then moved on to complain about Celine’s teachers: according to Sandra, they could not fulfil their responsibilities as role models, because – amongst other flaws – they smoked in front of the school. She then suggested that, unlike during GDR

times, teachers were no longer their friends, and that they no longer cared. Sandra believed that the reason for this change was that ‘back then’, teachers and pupils could develop a *real* relationship, because they would spend ten years together and teachers would have motivated their pupils – which was no longer the case. Today, she felt, there was only pressure for children to perform at a high level, and parents – not teachers – had to step in to help their kids. Admittedly, she added, she didn’t feel equipped to do so, because most of the school curriculum she did not understand herself. More importantly, she noted her dislike of how self-confident the youth of today are (including her daughter):

Surely, their self-confidence shouldn’t be undermined, but at the same time too much of it isn’t good at all. Honestly, I will never forget how Celine came home from her first day at school and, imagine, the first thing she said to me was: “Mom, you no longer call the shots, I am a person myself and I can decide for myself!” And I mean, if that’s what they teach them in school, you know everything is so fast-moving... Seriously, this entire school system today, you can just scrap it (*kannst du in die Tonne klopfen!*)!

Such complaints about the current school system, in which the GDR schooling always served as comparative yardstick for parents and grandparents alike, came up frequently during my fieldwork and were wide-ranging. These criticisms varied from an increased pressure for pupils to perform well in order to have better job prospects, to generational clashes around a perceived general lack of respect for the older generations and for parental or grandparental authority more specifically. These are, of course, not unfamiliar sentiments, and already existed in the GDR – as well as in many other countries today, post-socialist or otherwise. However, the older generations’ negative view on separating classes in the course of their children’s schooling is specific to eastern Germany. They also frequently made derogatory remarks about the subjects ‘Religion’ and ‘Ethics’, and wished their offspring’s teaching would focus more on ‘scientific’ subjects. Despite having anticipated many of these complaints, I was surprised that Sandra’s judgement of contemporary teachers – and the comparisons she made to a somewhat idealised version of how GDR teachers used to be – echoed that of many other parents and grandparents to whom I spoke. As I will illustrate below, this disgruntlement emerges because changes in the post-Wende school system are not only reflective of a change in the relationship between individual and collective, but they are associated with a change in the relationship between the school and parents, in which teachers fulfil no longer an additional role as moral guides.

A couple of months earlier, I had been put in touch with Franka by a mutual friend. She insisted straight away on using the informal ‘you’, noting that she was no friend of formalities. Chatting away, she assured me in her deep voice that she ‘wanted to be of help’ but that she worked a three-shift system, which made it more difficult to arrange a convenient time. Franka would let me know the following week what days would suit her best. Toward the end of our conversation she mentioned that she had to pick up her son, Daniel, from football training. When I remarked that this was a good hobby for a teenager, she agreed, adding: ‘Yeah, it is a sensible activity because he learns how to behave in the *Gemeinschaft* (community), and he is also off the street and can make no nonsense!’

A couple of weeks later, I visited Franka at her home and together with her son and her mother we talked about their Jugendweihe celebrations. Pondering over any changes after her own Jugendweihe, Franka explained that her school class had not insisted that their teachers should address them with the formal ‘you’ (*Sie*) after their Jugendweihe. Addressing initiands with ‘*Sie*’ had been a common practice during GDR times, to signal their change in status and underscore that they were no longer regarded as children. Many teenagers made ample use of this newly gained privilege as a way of conveying which people in positions of authority they liked or disliked – requiring those they disliked to use *Sie*, and allowing those they liked to continue to address them with *du*. While Franka wanted to stress that her class got on well with most teachers, her mother interrupted her to draw a difference between past and present teachers: ‘Well, in former times, the teacher was still your friend. These times are long over.’ And while Daniel smilingly nodded in agreement, she stated: ‘Sadly, that’s the way it is!’ Somewhat puzzled by this comment I inquired: ‘How “friend”?’’, and Franka’s mother elaborated:

Well, the relationship between teacher and pupil, if you will, that has strikingly changed in recent times. I mean to say, when I now think back to my teachers – those were teachers out of conviction, not because they haven’t learned another job or because they perhaps will be *verbeamtet* (appointed as a tenured German civil servant) or because they earn a pile of dosh, but those were teachers because they gladly wanted to be teachers. They wanted to teach children and so on and so forth: the teacher was your friend. – If you had a problem, and you didn’t catch on to something, you could just go to your teacher and you would say: “I haven’t understood that!” The responses you’d receive from a teacher today when you tell him after a lesson that you didn’t understand something, they are very different from back then in our times. Back then the teacher sat down with you and explained it to you again. Today you receive the response: “You should have paid attention during the lesson”

and that's the teacher already finished with you. The relationship between teacher and pupil as it prevails today is, sadly, catastrophic!

This assessment baffled me, especially because Franka's mother had explained to me earlier that 'the school' had talked her into doing Jugendweihe, although she had wanted to celebrate only confirmation (see Chapter 2). I suggested carefully: 'But nowadays teachers have less of a say than they used to, haven't they?' My inquiry, however, led her to suddenly direct her blame for this 'catastrophic relationship' in the opposite direction:

This is a very big reason, which also really makes matters worse... that teachers nowadays have no longer any *Handbabe* (basis, usually refers to a kind of legal basis). Now, if a – well, okay of course there was less of that back then – well, but if someone in my age ran riot as a pupil, then the teacher had a chance to punish them. That's not like today, that if the teacher gives you an entry (for misbehaviour noted in the class book, which usually leads to a lower mark), or a fail and the pupil comes home, the next morning father and mother are in school – at the break of dawn, to tear a strip off the teacher! This is just not a relationship. And that's also, I always say that, it's a surprise that there are still people who want to be teachers and to try to teach such a gang of little rascals! Because the youth of today what they do to people, and the many teachers who [...] what else are they supposed to put up with in school? They have to say "thank you" when a pupil spits at them!

Daniel's maternal grandmother's first assessment seemed to blame teachers entirely for the worsening of their relationships with their pupils, which she suggested was based on teacher's carelessness and self-interest instead of their dedication. This difference in motivation was succinctly described by Franka in the same conversation as a matter of *Beruf oder Berufung* (profession or calling). The second complaint – which followed the first by only a few seconds – posed an opposite argument, finding fault with the young generation. This contradiction, which Franka's mother did not appear to perceive as such, puzzled me. I later realised that she was not describing a simple pupil versus teacher conundrum to solve, but a tripartite relationship that also included the parental home. Her use of the word '*Handbabe*', and her remark regarding parents taking the side of their children instead of the teacher's, marks a change in authority that is not explicitly expressed. In fact, as I suggested in Chapter 2, it may be that she was unwilling to clearly spell this out as it would mean portraying her own mother in an unfavourable light – given that her mother did not side with her on the issue of abstaining from Jugendweihe, but bowed to both the party and the school, and in essence the authority of the SED state.

Although GDR teachers varied in their personal political stances, as did the environments of particular schools, in principle the teacher was the long arm of the state. Regardless of whether they were SED party members or not, teachers had to undergo ongoing political instruction, known as the *Parteilernjahr*, where they were also brought up to speed with the latest SED directives on education (Plum 2015: 159). Thus, their role as teachers went far beyond transmitting knowledge – *Bildung*; they often spent time with pupils in extra-curricular activities, among them *Jugendweihe*, fostering the moral attributes that a socialist personality was to exhibit – thus playing a crucial role in the *Erziehung* of their pupils. Some teachers carefully negotiated their role, and to an extent protected children or teenagers who were not ‘state-loyal’ from potential repercussion; Franka distinguished her former teachers of ‘such [ideological] ilk and others’. With re-unification came a greater freedom for pupils, but also less authority for teachers. As such, teenagers are not necessarily more badly behaved than previous generations; rather they have a greater opportunity to play parents and teachers off against each other to their advantage, because the former role of teachers as moral guides has changed, and the relationship between parents and teachers is no longer perceived to be in harmonic unison – even if this unison often was just simulated.

Even today, class teachers are often present at their class’ *Jugendweihe* ceremony, and the Association supported their attendance through the provision of free tickets for teachers upon request. The Association’s endorsement stemmed from the intertwining facts that *Jugendweihe* had been celebrated with teachers during GDR times, but also that some of the Association members had been pedagogues themselves in the past. It was also quite common for Association members to critically assess how the diverse trips on offer went, which were always accompanied by at least one Association member. This assessment was partly based on reflecting on adolescents’ behaviour, but also by reflecting on the class teacher’s relationship with the accompanying Association member and with her or his pupils. Often these reflections involved harsh criticism of a lack of manners or interest on behalf of either pupils or teachers, or indeed both. Teachers were frequently judged as not being dedicated enough and as ‘just doing their job’, resonating with Franka’s mother’s assessment. But for Sonja and Dagmar, who had both been pedagogues in the GDR, there were also occasions where they asserted that a particular teacher was really engaged and, they suggested that this reminded them of how teachers used to be during GDR times.

Whether teenagers today would invite their class teacher to their Jugendweihe very much depended on the closeness or amicability of their relationship. Some seemed to be rather keen for their teachers to be present, while others did not care about their attendance at all. It also appeared to depend on parents' commitment regarding school matters, and their perception of whether the class teacher was 'good' or 'bad'. This assessment itself was sometimes curiously expressed as a kind of mutual respect based on 'getting on with pupils', rather than, as one might expect, on a teacher's capability in imparting their knowledge of the curriculum. In another conversation after Daniel's Jugendweihe, Franka told me that she had accompanied Daniel's school class on a (non-Jugendweihe related) fieldtrip, and recalled her positive surprise about how well the pupils got on with their deputy class teacher. Since he was soon due to retire, the pupils had given him presents and threw a kind of farewell party for him during the excursion, and she added: 'Actually, he is so popular, but, as I said before: older generation.' She further explained that Daniel's older sister had already told her that he was a really well-liked teacher, and then explained his popularity by saying: 'You know, he makes jam at home, and then he brings it in [to school] and lets everyone [in class] try it. He gave me homemade elderflower liquor [by way of thanking her for her support] and you know, he's one of those, who stands there in the evening and makes herb butter and then he brings bread and they all eat herb butter first [before they start the lesson].' And her mother agreeably asserted: 'Yeah, that's precisely because he is an old teacher!'

While both of these references to the teacher as an 'old teacher' and from the 'older generation' appear to be a commentary on his age, they also implied something else: he was from the (old) generation of teachers who were trained during GDR times, as Franka's mother had ascertained in our first conversation. Because Jugendweihe was part of a GDR teacher's job, while today it is entirely a matter of the parental home and the Jugendweihe Association, it also became the locus of assessment of teachers' 'dedication'. Today teachers' attendance at the ceremony would have to be in their own spare time. Nevertheless, many teachers took pride in their class's invitation to the Jugendweihe ceremony, and their attendance also demonstrated that they cared about their pupils beyond their job description. Quite often, teachers could be seen not only congratulating their pupils on their Jugendweihe the day after the ceremony, but also presenting them with a flower, a card or a small gift. Such gift-giving was not a particularly easy logistical task in terms of both preparing and presenting a little something for about 20 teenagers,

but it underlined the importance of the occasion and the teachers' professional dedication, while demonstrating that they maintained an amicable teacher-pupil relationship. That this gesture truly mattered to some teachers sank in when a female *Gymnasium* teacher told me about her troubles with the regional school authorities. It had been relayed through her headmaster that they had decided to transfer her to a different school (a *Regelschule*), news that came to her as a bit of shock. However, instead of arguing that such a change during a rather crucial period for her pupils might badly affect their academic results, she exclaimed: 'But they can't do this *now*, my class has Jugendweihe this year!'

Her exclamation, however, was a reflection of involvement that many parental and grandparental generations felt was lacking among today's teachers, and which they sometimes assessed in terms of a teacher's dedication and efforts regarding extra-curricular events – and curiously commensality. All of these expectations and gestures of dedication have in common, I believe, that they were – like the togetherness of the school class – aimed toward creating *Geborgenheit* for the pupils. This word entails a rather complex German concept, commonly translated as a 'sense of security' 'but [which] actually evokes an immediately positive sense of sheltered-ness, nested-ness and well-being' (Hutta 2009: 252). *Geborgenheit* is a sentiment of life (*Lebensgefühl*) that can be variously expressed but that is generally believed to be essential in particular for raising children, and thus often connected with the family home. But the *Geborgenheit* that many members of the socialist generations seemed to seek was that of a harmonious being together in the collective – not instead of the family as the GDR state intended, but in addition to it.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have illustrated the ways in which preparing for and celebrating the GDR Jugendweihe were closely intertwined with the socialist school system, and thus had a pronounced collective character. The GDR regime promoted various collectives that were supposed to be united by and working towards a common goal, and that were hoped to eventually resolve into one utopian communist society. While many of these state-sanctioned collectives crumbled after re-unification, the school class is one case where a broader moral discourse of the ideal relation between individual and collective re-emerges. The GDR's political elite intended the moral education of pupils to move the young

generation's bonds subtly away from the family, as 'the smallest cell of society', to larger collectives, such as the school class, and to thereby motivate people to contribute to the shaping of socialist society without being limited by kin bonds. Although the school reform in the early 1990s was perceived by most easterners as necessary to purge the socialist education system of its ideological indoctrination, many members of the socialist generations dislike the current school system, which they commonly compared with their school experience and Jugendweihe celebration under the GDR. This discontent about the school system was linked to the changes in moral education.

There were two issues that stood out particularly, and that were frequently criticised: the change of the school structure, and the change of the role of teachers. Although both of these changes were closely interwoven with the ideological nature of the GDR school system, they were also framed by parents and grandparents in moral terms. The change in school structure led to a separation of pupils at least twice during their years of schooling, which was contrasted with the unity of the school class maintained for ten years under state socialism, and the sense of togetherness it fostered. In the post-Wende context, the defunct role of teachers in inculcating specific moral attributes was in various ways assessed as having had a negative impact on pupils' moral personhood. What these various criticisms have in common, I suggest, was that they aimed to recuperate the older generations' positive sense of togetherness and security, perhaps best encapsulated in the German term *Geborgenheit*. The continued celebration of Jugendweihe as part of the school class, parents' desire for their offspring to participate in preparation events as part of the class, and Jugendweihe class photos are all manifestations of the older generations' attempts to inculcate collectivity in their offspring, and simultaneously to recuperate what they felt had been lost after the *Wende*. However, I would also suggest that this longing for collectivity was not – as the GDR state intended – a move away from the family unit, but rather an addition to it. Collectivity, then, needs to be understood in contrast to the capitalist 'elbow society' (*Ellenbogengesellschaft*, in reference to the use of elbows in queue-jumping or in sports competition to get ahead of others) in which the individual is characterized by egoism, competitive self-interest or ruthlessness – a general inconsiderateness towards others felt to be prevalent in contemporary life. The essence of the 'elbow society' is the opposite of what the Association members deemed a 'much nicer' way of celebrating Jugendweihe in the introductory vignette: togetherness.

This togetherness, however, was based on *doing* things together rather than *thinking* together – not unlike the dynamics of ritual itself – in order to create harmony both among pupils but also compliance with the state. Although GDR school education frequently stressed critical engagement – these thought processes had to be in line with the state’s ideology because as one song by the SED went ‘The Party, the Party is always right!’. This oppressive aspect of the collective is partly downplayed today, but was often also not recognized at the time.

Of course, it was in particular prudent to move adolescents’ ties away from their family where the family was not in line with the state’s aim. In the next chapter, I look more closely at the Jugendweihe family celebration and what it attempts to accomplish, but also what it can tell us about the relation between the family and the state.



## Chapter 4

### On Roots and Wings: The Jugendweihe Family Celebration

*There are two things that children should get from their parents: roots and wings.*

– Proverb ascribed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

*Thuringia!*

*Goethe especially moved here from the west.*

*Thuringia!*

*David Bowie...once flew over it – at best.*

*[...]*

*But why do they reduce our magnitude*

*To sausages and dumplings – in short, food?*

*Because here the mums are so super,*

*Because here the mums are so super!*

*Once they start grating potatoes,<sup>37</sup> I believe,*

*You want to be under their skirt and never leave...*

– Excerpt from the ‘unofficial hymn of Thuringia’ by comedian Rainald Grebe (2004)

A few weeks following Celine’s Jugendweihe celebration in June, I sat with her family in the large dining room/open kitchen of her parents’ impeccable but cosy house. Frau Schubert, the seventy-four-year-old mother of Sandra, who lived next door, had just assured us again that her own Jugendweihe celebration had been ‘very simple’. When I asked her more about it, it became clear that she was talking about her school leaving celebration, and that she had actually never undergone a Jugendweihe. She had left school at fourteen in 1953, two years before the first GDR Jugendweihe was held; and when Jugendweihe ceremonies had been prohibited by the state; but since her father had run a small firm, her participation in a proletarian Jugendweihe would have been highly unlikely regardless (see Chapter 2). Perhaps because she could not contribute much to our current

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<sup>37</sup> Thuringian dumplings, often called ‘green dumplings’, are made with 1/3 boiled potatoes and 2/3 raw potatoes that are finely grated.

conversation, she suddenly turned to another life cycle event that every person present shared with her:

There was not much happening [at the school leaving celebration] and I have to say that's what it was like at the *Schuleinführung* (school entry celebration). Although I can recall that I had such a *Zuckertüte* (a large, colourful cone filled with sweets and toys received on the first school day)... but it was straight after the war and there were just bread rolls in it – white bread rolls – they were very rare then. Back then there were only dark ones [available].

Slightly surprised about this present, I asked: 'In your *Zuckertüte*?' Frau Schubert responded, 'Yes!' Peter, Celine's fifty-year-old father, asked further: 'Nothing else?' She continued:

Of course, white bread rolls and I don't know what else... well, very few sweets, a few pencils and a little bit of what one needs for school. There was the introduction to school when everything was explained and that was that, and then we just went back again to play on the street.

Sandra, Celine's mother, exclaimed: 'So those were actually really lovely times – one got excited about white bread rolls!' Her mother elaborated:

Yes, white bread rolls and cocoa. After all, that was a rarity! And that was only possible because my father was a plumber and when he worked at the baker's he would receive in addition a bag of bread rolls – and they were white!

Her entire face lit up as she continued: 'And my mother made hot cocoa and we had buttered bread rolls and hot cocoa. It was delicious! It was a really great meal.'

While she first used the German word *Brötchen* for 'bread rolls', when Frau Schubert described her mother preparing hot cocoa to drink with their buttered bread rolls, she switched to the more regional term *Semmeln* – rendering the scene of commensality more tangible and palatable to us. The grandmother's memory was one that – despite its outmoded glorification of bread rolls and cocoa as rarities – united the three generations through their shared experience of the family's practices of commensality, conviviality, and gift-giving. These practices obviously also feature in the *Jugendweihe* family celebration, which is the focus of this chapter.

East Thuringians of all three generations referred to *Jugendweihe* as a 'family tradition', and scholars have noted that eastern German parents foreground the familial aspect in

recollections of their own GDR Jugendweihe (Aechtner 2011; Gallinat 2002, 2005; Saunders 2002; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003). Yet scholars have either neglected this aspect in their investigation of the ritual's continuity (see, for example, Wolbert 1998; 2011), or acknowledged it but paid only limited attention to the actual family celebration (see, for example, Aechtner 2011; Gallinat 2002, 2005; Gandow 1994; Schmidt-Wellenburg 2003; Saunders 2002). This chapter seeks to close this gap by focussing on what is accomplished through the family celebration of Jugendweihe.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the GDR state attempted to foster different types of collectives, which were designed to move ties away from the family and ultimately to alter kinship itself. In this chapter, I suggest that most families under the GDR celebrated the Jugendweihe family celebration, despite and against the grain of the state's ideological aims (see Borneman 1992: 165) – and indeed, these celebrations served to re-strengthen family ties. I illustrate how through the use of emotional attachments – both familial and local/regional – Jugendweihe not only became part of individuals' biographies, but also of their family histories, thus securing its continuity after the state's demise. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the public change of status that fourteen-year-olds underwent in past ceremonies – in the last century, indicated by entering the workforce or receiving an ID card, or through being addressed with the formal *Sie* instead of the informal *du* (you) – has become less visible nowadays. By contrast, the family celebration – through the consumption of particular foods and alcohol, the giving of a thank-you-speech, the accumulation of money through gift-giving, and the intentional creation of 'lovely memories' – remains important, not only marking the end of the adolescent's childhood and socially transforming them into an adult person, but re-creating kin ties as well.

### **The Consumption of 'Coffee & Cake'**

I arrived just after four o'clock on that Saturday in May, a little late for Lukas's family celebration. I had stayed behind to help the Association members wrap up for the day after the last Jugendweihe ceremony, before heading over to Lukas' parents' place. Lukas's ceremony had been held that morning, and he had gone on to have lunch with his parents, siblings and grandparents in a restaurant before returning home to kick off the family party with *Kaffee & Kuchen* ('coffee and cake'). The living room was full of guests, most of

whom were sitting around the festively decorated *Kaffeetafel* (dining table for ‘coffee and cake’). Although they seemed to have already finished their coffee, the table was still not cleared because they were waiting for me. Andrea, Lukas’s mother, introduced me to everyone present – Lukas’s grandparents, aunts, cousins, family friends and his best friend – as her ‘friend who also researches Jugendweihe, and thus will write about Lukas in her PhD thesis.’ There was a little stir as some guests made teasing comments about Lukas’s ‘imminent fame’, and we both felt slightly embarrassed. As soon as I sat down, Andrea and her guests encouraged me to tuck into the cakes – but I struggled to do so, because I was trying simultaneously to answer their countless questions about my life in Scotland. In between these questions, the guests recommended which cakes I should try because they were particularly delicious. Even after I finished, there was still plenty of cake left.

In Germany, cakes are usually reserved as a treat for weekend afternoons or for special occasions. Although families have rather more time on weekends than they did in the past, Sundays are still very much seen as a ‘family day’ in East Thuringia. Compared to other European countries, the freeing-up of the weekend for the family occurred fairly late in East Germany: East Germans worked half a day on Saturdays until the introduction of the five-day working week in 1967, and children went to school on Saturdays until 1989. Since shops are commonly closed on Sundays, Sunday afternoons between three and four remain special occasions when coffee and cake are consumed in the company of family or friends – an event quite literally referred to as *Kaffee & Kuchen* (coffee and cake).

Indeed, on the first Sunday after my arrival ‘in the field’, my mother announced that she would bake a white buttercream torte. It is neither my favourite cake, nor had she actually ever made this cake before – and as such her choice perplexed me. However, I quickly ascribed her choice to the fact that November was not the right season for baking one of my favourites – an apple or a plum cake – as she would not be able to use fresh fruit from the trees in our garden. She presented the cake to my father and me in the afternoon, and he critically analysed every bit of it: the texture of the buttercream, the amount of strawberry jam used, the consistency of the sponge. The cake did not look quite as perfect, but I immediately recognized it as the same type of cake my late grandmother’s baker was famous for, far beyond his village. Tasting this special combination – the richness of the buttercream, the sweetness of my mum’s homemade strawberry jam, the fluffiness of the

sponge layers – immediately brought back all the warm feel-good moments of my childhood, when my extended family would sit around my grandmother’s living room table on some festive occasion. It was this very Proustian moment of involuntary memory, which – despite including many absent family members – was so pleasant, that made me realize that my mother expressed her love through home-made food, and that my being with them for a year was a kind of special – almost unimaginable – family reunion.

This special afternoon treat also plays a significant role in all major life cycle rituals, and most of my interlocutors mentioned it as part of their coming-of-age celebration. For all major family celebrations – from secular name-giving ceremonies or baptisms, Jugendweihe or confirmation celebrations, to big birthday parties, weddings, wedding anniversaries, or funerals – to provide appropriate *Kaffee & Kuchen* is seen as essential to their success. These *Kaffee & Kuchen* are set off from the ones provided on a Sunday in various ways. Regardless of whether the festivity takes place at home, in a restaurant, or in a hired venue where one would self-cater, the centrepiece would be a large table covered with a table cloth – usually white – and laid with a porcelain coffee service, cutlery and paper or cloth serviettes. There could be decorations in the form of little flower arrangements, but there are always at least two candles (depending on the size of the *Kaffeetafel*) to create a festive atmosphere (see Figure 7). Hosts were expected to offer non-coffee drinkers a substitute, such as a variety of herbal teas, so that the occasional tea-drinkers could choose according to their preferences. For children there was usually a hot beverage such as cocoa provided, in case they did not like to drink herbal or fruit tea. Of course coffee (never instant coffee) had to be freshly brewed.



*Figure 7: Kaffeetafel*

While coffee has become a daily commodity, under state socialism, coffee beans and ground coffee were not always easy to attain – and even when available, they were very expensive.<sup>38</sup> During one festivity I attended, a group of pensioners had begun complaining about today's cost of living and reminiscing about the 'good old days', when one grandmother in her sixties remarked that during GDR times, she always drank a coffee substitute during the week, and would only indulge in a cup of real coffee – as a special treat – on a Sunday. Another grandmother in her seventies responded to this comment, by way of acknowledging that they perhaps had been a bit too nostalgic: 'Yes, don't we have it good now! These days we can drink real coffee every day as we please, whenever we like to!' But after a brief moment of silence – and perhaps reflection – most continued to lament the current prices of bread and butter, and some commented that if you were to convert these from East Mark to Deutsche Mark and from there to Euro, the increase

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<sup>38</sup> There was a coffee crisis in the late 1970s that led to the introduction of a coffee mixture, which included roasted chicory.

was outrageous! But even during socialist times – when good coffee was scarce – on such festive occasions guests expected to be offered proper coffee.

However, the most striking thing about these afternoon festivities was the assortment of cakes that would be offered. There seemed to be an unspoken rule that one had to serve a minimum of ten different types. This wide range of cakes set the occasion apart from regular Sunday *Kaffee & Kuchen*, because even if it was a ‘special’ Sunday such as Easter, one would usually have only one or perhaps two types of cakes. There was no main or ‘festive’ torte at a Jugendweihe (nor confirmation), as is customary at wedding or name-giving ceremonies – where such a torte is almost always decorated with the name of the newly-wed couple or the name of the child respectively (see Figures 8 and 9). Sometimes there are two additional torte-like round cakes of either a buttercream or a fruit variety, sliced into eight or twelve triangular pieces on the table, but they are not held to be an essential element of a Jugendweihe family celebration. Indeed, Frau Lorenz, Nils’s paternal grandmother, explained to me that she and her husband did not even have a cake at their wedding in the 1960s – tortes, she insisted, were not at all common in the past. Rather, pride of place went to the approximately ten or more different cakes or tarts that fall under the category of *Blechkekchen* (tray cakes), cakes baked in a large rectangular tray instead of a round baking tin. The term does not indicate any specific type of cake, as there are countless variations on the theme – usually involving a solid dough base, either *Hefekuchen* (yeast cake) or *Mürbeteig* (short pastry), or a sponge cake-like base. These types of cakes are presented on platters, with five to ten types on one plate, cut in small, easy-to-eat, rectangular pieces of often only one or two mouthfuls (see Figure 10).



*Figure 8: Cake at a Name-giving Family Celebration*



*Figure 9: Wedding Cake*



*Figure 10: Presentation of Thuringian Blechkuchen Assortment 1*



*Figure 11: Presentation of Thuringian Blechkuchen Assortment 2*

Of course, as a Thuringian, for me these cakes did not stand out at all – but I certainly would have noticed their absence. I only realized that the way these cakes were served was a more regional custom when a non-Thuringian, present at one of these celebrations,

disapprovingly commented on it. When I inquired what was ‘wrong’ with it, it emerged that she deemed both the size and shape of the servings ‘inappropriate’: a piece of cake had to be triangular and of a size that you could not eat more than two without feeling ill. For Thuringians, on the contrary, it was essential to present their guests with a great selection of cakes. The wealth of selection was believed to create an appropriate atmosphere, and underlined the significance of the event; as one grandmother poignantly remarked: ‘Well obviously the more types of cakes, the more festive the occasion’. As such, there seemed to be no upper limit, other than cost considerations. In one of the family celebrations I attended, I counted twenty-four different types of homemade cakes plus one sweet pastry filled with fresh cream – the *Schillerlocken* – which had been bought in a bakery shop. This pastry was named in reference to the curls of the German poet Schiller who – like Goethe – is often claimed by Thuringians as ‘their poet’. But there are other reasons why there has to be such a great variety of cakes, too.

The great selection assured that there was something suited to everyone’s tastes. Thuringians differentiate between dry (*trocken*) and wet (*nassen*) *Kuchen* and the variety of cakes could comprise, for example, white or brown *Streuselkuchen* (streusel or crumble cake) and nut cakes, for those who prefer dry cakes, and cherry, tangerine or a combination of tropical fruit cakes for those who like wet cakes. There are also rhubarb, gooseberry or red current tarts available for the more sour/tart taste buds and different types of buttercream as well as *Mohnkuchen* (poppy seed cake) for those who prefer heavier options. Almost always, there would be a version of *Papageikuchen* (‘parrot cake’, consisting of at least three differently coloured parts) that was favoured by children and adults alike. Other popular variations were *Eierlikörkuchen* (German eggnog cake), “*Eiskrem*”-*Kuchen* (ice cream cake), *LPG-Kuchen* and often several types of *Quarkkuchen* (a lighter version of a baked cheese cake). This great variety also assured that the presentation of cakes was colourful since, as the German saying goes, ‘*das Auge isst mit*’ – it should also be a feast for the eyes. But perhaps more importantly, such a varied, well-presented selection guaranteed that people ate together. This commensality – like that I described above, sharing buttercream torte with my parents – allowed them to imagine that they had more in common with their commensals: they shared not only food, but a family history punctuated by such family celebrations (Gillis 1997: 93). But because there is such a great variety of cakes that guests might be disappointed about being unable to try them all, the

small size of the pieces was a thoughtful measure: as everyone I asked explained to me, it enabled guests to taste all types of cakes, if they wished.

For virtually all life-cycle rituals, buying cakes in a supermarket is frowned upon. At one occasion where a mother also served two bought cakes, she pointed it out immediately before any potential complaints could be raised. She explained that the cakes were of a particular well-established brand, and had been tested by her and her family beforehand, and found to be of an acceptable standard – that is, homemade-like. The usage of the term ‘bought cakes’ was somewhat misleading, because it enabled the distinction from cakes that were in fact also bought but nevertheless ‘homemade’ – just not in one’s own home. Most hosts, usually full-time working mothers or wives, are not skilled enough to bake such a great variety of cakes, and do not have the time to do so. As one friend, when I asked her whether she had baked all the cakes herself, ironically replied: ‘Sure, Grit – the whole of last week, because I had nothing else to do!’

Instead of buying a selection of cakes from a supermarket, it was customary either to arrange with a local bakery or a *Backfrau* (baking woman) to bake a selection of cakes that could be picked up on the day of the celebration or the previous afternoon/evening. Such arrangements had to be made in good time prior to the party in order to decide on the selection and – in the case of a ‘baking woman’ whose services one had not previously used – also in order to taste some of her products to be certain of her baking skills. ‘Baking women’ commonly acquired their skills through practice rather than through professional training leading to qualification as a baker or pastry chef. They tend to run small (official) baking businesses, or to be friends or acquaintances who would bake specially for such big occasions by way of earning an extra (usually unreported/untaxed) income. Nevertheless, both types of baking women rely largely on word of mouth spread through contented customers. Their baking skills are paramount; and while they tend to offer 20-30 different types of cakes, they are unlikely to share their recipes as is otherwise common among friends and family members.

The Thuringian *Blech Kuchen* or *Festtagskuchen* (festive day cakes) are rather simple compared to, for example, the elaborate or intricately decorated three-tiered wedding cakes at British and American weddings. In the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of what may be the most popular Thuringian baking recipe book, the Thuringian *Backfrau* Gudrun Dietze explains that ‘our cakes do without expensive ingredients. We have already learned from our mothers to respect the

simple things.’ (Dietze 2013: 8). Baking Thuringian *Festtagskuchen* requires the skill to create variety with fairly few and basic ingredients, as well as precision, because – despite different textures and elements – the cakes should all be about the same height, and should never be higher than two centimetres. But to bake a great variety takes a lot of time and effort; and, as Dietze adds, for a successful outcome, ‘[t]he most important ingredients are patience and love’ (ibid.).

While forgoing *Kaffee & Kuchen* was unheard of in socialist times, and especially in rural areas, today it is not part of every Jugendweihe family celebration. Celine only had ‘coffee and cake’ with eight people before the party of 27 continued in a restaurant; her mother explained that it was simply too expensive and required too much effort for her to provide it for everyone.<sup>39</sup> The celebration of Franka’s son, Daniel, did not include coffee and cake at all, because it was attended by a lot of children and dinner had to be served very early; proper *Kaffee & Kuchen* was seen as superfluous if not wasteful, besides (or because of) the associated costs. Nils’ party started at 5 pm, which was too late to provide coffee and cake; but his parents decided to offer it after dinner, because, as Beate remarked: ‘It’s not a proper celebration without cakes!’ (Figure 11). While thrift seemed to be the main reason to forgo *Kaffee & Kuchen*, there also appeared to be a difference between urban and rural areas: Celine’s and Daniel’s celebrations, which downplayed the cakes, both took place in the city centre of Gera. But when I asked Andrea about ‘coffee and cake’, she asserted: ‘You can’t get away with not having cakes in a village!’

For Andrea’s family, not having cakes would have been unimaginable for another reason: Lukas was a cake lover who regularly baked himself and who, at the time, was toying with the idea of becoming a pastry chef. Andrea explained to me that every member of their nuclear family had been allowed to choose two types of their favourite cakes from the selection of the local *Backfrau*. This ‘baking woman’ baked all the traditional Thuringian cakes, and her services had been used previously for the Jugendweihe celebrations of Lukas’s older siblings. Yet her emphasis on village life suggested that they had to abide by some village norms, and provide a great variety of cakes. Indeed, it was custom to also give a *Kuchenteller* or *Kuchenpaket* (a plate or package with a selection of cakes) to neighbours

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<sup>39</sup> Costs for ‘coffee and cake’ vary depending on the number of guests, and whether one self-caters or has it in a restaurant. For Jugendweihe celebrations I estimated the cost to range between €35 and €200.

and acquaintances who brought a gift but did not attend the party. The use of cakes as thank you gifts also required a sufficient selection of cakes, as to return only one or two types could earn one a reputation for being a *Geizhals* (cheapskate; literally greed throat). This custom of giving neighbours cakes had also been pointed out by Daniel's mother and grandmother, who then noted: 'Well, back then [in GDR times], this street was a *Gemeinschaft*, just like a village.'

Unlike the practice of expressing gratitude through cakes that his mother and grandmother remembered, Daniel just called everyone by phone to thank them. Celine, too, thanked her gift-givers by sending them a thank you card instead of cakes. While this practice appeared acceptable in urban spaces, it was frowned upon by members of the grandparental generations in the Gera villages in particular. Some gift recipients used a *Piccolo* (a small bottle of sparkling wine) or a small box of chocolates as a sign of gratitude instead, which was generally appreciated. Yet neither gift was held to be the appropriate way of reciprocating by members of the grandparental generation, who expected cakes from the celebration. Frau Lorenz reminisced about how she would enjoy 'badmouthing people's cakes if they weren't that great or not enough different types' in the past. I asked whether the critique was really about the cakes, or whether it had more to do with whether one liked the people who had given the cakes. Abashedly, she replied: 'The cakes, of course – you wouldn't get them in the first place, if you didn't like the people!' Later she explained that she and her husband had also given '5 Euros to the boy who does the paper round in the village on his Jugendweihe' the other year. She noted: 'I mean we aren't really obligated to this family, if you will, but he's a busy boy. He, and also his family, thanked us.' There was, however, no complaint about not having received any cakes from them. The cakes were not purely for consumption within the extended family, but a means to expand the house, including other households in a network of mutual obligations. I will return to this issue of how different households related to each in the next chapter.

Most crucially, at the Jugendweihe family celebration, the initiand eats this kind of cake selection for the first time in their own honour, with their family. At children's birthday parties, such cake selections do not feature; and, though rarely celebrated, at a baptism or a secular name-giving ceremony the main protagonist does not eat these cakes. These cakes then mark the adolescents' coming-of-age in culinary terms. The consumption of these cakes re-incorporates them into the family with a different status: the next time such

cakes will be consumed in their honour would be at their wedding. Although Daniel's celebration formed an exception to the rule by not including *Kaffee & Kuchen*, there are four other signifiers of such change in status that I will discuss in the rest of this chapter.

### **Toasting and Dining**

In conversation with Daniel's family a few weeks after his Jugendweihe, I asked him what the best thing about his celebration was. With a big smile, he burst out: 'Why! I was allowed to drink!' Accompanied by much merriment by his grandmother and mother, he admitted that it had not been his first time to drink alcohol, but it was the first time in an 'official manner': in the presence of his parents and guests. When I asked what he drank, suggesting: 'Sparkling wine, wine or beer?', his mother laughingly interrupted: 'All of it – and in that order!' Similarly, Celine recalled her family celebration as follows:

Well, first of all I was shocked that so many [guests] had come [to the restaurant]. Then I was happy about the money [gifts]. Then we sat there and the waitresses were coming with two trayfuls of *Sekt* (sparkling wine) and I thought: "Huh, will I now get *Sekt*, too?" And then she just gave me one glass and – to just drink it, made me somehow feel awkward.

Her dad cut in: 'Mmh right, so [that's why] you just sat down somewhere else and drank another glass!' I offered: 'But you were allowed to drink...?' when her mother contributed, 'I too got my first glass of *Sekt* at my Jugendweihe! But that you straight away ordered another one, [I didn't realize]!' There was much amusement and I tried again: 'But that wasn't the first time that you drank alcohol, was it?' Celine quickly and briefly shook her head, covered her lips with her hand to hide from her parents what she was whispering to me: 'No, not all, but don't say it out loud!'

Neither during socialist times nor today is a fourteen-year-old legally permitted to purchase and/or consume alcohol; but in both eras, this part of the family celebration was perceived to be a crucial element of Jugendweihe. Regardless of whether it was celebrated at home or in a restaurant, a teenager is supposed to drink their first glass of alcohol publicly, without any repercussions from their parents. Although today, most youths would have tried alcohol by this age, the fact that parents allow their child for the first time to drink alcohol in public signals an important change in their relationship. Though he or she is not yet endowed with the same rights and responsibilities as an adult, a greater sense of trust in the initiand is conveyed symbolically: the first public drink

acknowledges a gradually increasing ability to take on board responsibilities (to know one's limits) that go hand in hand with such rights (to be allowed to drink alcohol like an adult).

It was quite common that the drinking of the first glass of alcohol at one's *Jugendweihe*, the opening of the festive dinner/buffet, and the adolescent's thank you speech coincided in a short toast that made it at least appear that the adolescent was the host – though in reality their parents were. Toasting was conventionally done with a glass of *Sekt*, German sparkling wine, equivalent to the Spanish *Cava* or French *Champagne* that in most European countries is fundamental for any special festivity; in a predominately beer-drinking country, it again underlines the extraordinariness of the event. The classic semi-dry version of the East German brand *Rotkäppchen* was most often used on such occasions in Thuringia – it was a winery whose growing region is mostly in neighbouring Saxony-Anhalt but also partly in Thuringia along the rivers Saale and Unstrut. For the toast, the initiand – who was commonly seated at the head of the table – stood up in order to thank their guests, sipped on the *Sekt*, and declared the buffet to be open. From then on, adolescents would be able to drink alcohol during family celebrations. Not all adolescents were keen on alcohol, but the act of thanking one's guests and opening the buffet even without alcohol was common, and this act itself signified a clear transformation: children would never give such a formal thank you speech. For the first time, the initiand was not simply a gift recipient – such as at a children's birthday party – but also took on obligations to his or her guests.

The evening feast consisted of a variety of different types of meats, cold and warm, often in combination with Thuringian dumplings. It frequently also included cheese and fish platters, as well as fruits and salads. Most important, however, was the variety of servings of warm meats with sauce. Thuringian cuisine is fairly heavy, consisting of carbohydrates and meats – a diet believed to emanate from the region's traditional employment in agriculture, forestry, and mining, which required the type of food that would sustain one through a hard day of physical work. But while Germany's meat consumption is generally high, eastern federal states consume more meat than western federal states, and Thuringia is the front-runner for meat consumption among men (BUND 2013). This high meat consumption, as a study conducted in 2013 by the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (BUND) argues, is due partly to a pan-European

increase in meat eating, as the Sunday roast (*Sonntagsbraten*) has become an everyday roast (*Alltagsbraten*). Nevertheless, these formerly-Sunday-roast-style meats are still central to family festivities. Thuringia's high meat consumption is also due in part to the regular consumption of *Thüringer Rostbratwurst*, and Thuringians pride themselves on having the best German sausages. These are popular throughout Germany, and fairly regularly consumed – barbecues in the spring and summer are unthinkable without them. Notably, these sausages are *not* offered at important celebrations, as they would undermine the exceptionality of the event. Where barbecue-style meats were served, it was more likely to find the regional speciality Thuringian *Mutzbraten*: a 250 g piece of pork neck marinated in salt, pepper and marjoram for several hours, and then roasted over birch wood for two hours, before being served with *Sauerkraut* (German style cabbage). These particular foods and drinks served during the family celebration also recreated a link to the regional home – the *Heimat* of Thuringia. Thuringians would frequently comment on the quantity and quality of food as well as the type. Usually during the feast the atmosphere became gregarious – partly because people tried as much of the food as possible, and exchanged their evaluations of food with others. At Nils's celebration, his father's aunt loudly appraised the food by stating: 'I would never refuse an invitation from him, because I know there is always plenty of tasty food!'



Figure 12: Section of a Buffet at Jugendweihe Family Celebration

The consumption of particular foods and alcohol, as well as the thank you speech, were markers of the adolescent's symbolically performed status change. Yet bearing in mind that 'commensality can be thought of (1) as confirming kinship or even (2) as constituting kinship in a real sense' (Robertson Smith 1927: 347; Bloch 2005; Carsten 1995b), we should also note a difference in closeness between people that was created through the consumption of different foods. The feast, that is, meats and boiled foods, were shared among kin and close friends who were invited to the party – leftovers would not be shared with everyone, but usually only with kin, thus creating a family boundary. In contrast, cakes and alcohol appeared to function as a social conductor that created and maintained egalitarian solidarity within the wider community (see Bloch 2005: 47). The cutting of a tray cake into small pieces allowed commensality among many people – rendering them a sort of whole – and this consumption also incorporated the initiand into the wider community as equally obligated to each other. The consumption of specific drinks and foods – preferably traditional Thuringian cuisine, locally sourced and produced – served to reconfirm social ties and the initiand's status change, but also to reinforce the initiands' ties to their family home and their *Heimat*: the regional home of Thuringia, which provided them with a strong sense of roots.

### **Gift-giving**

Lukas, who had already slipped into more comfortable clothes before my arrival, was grinning like a Cheshire cat when I gave him his present: an envelope including a card, money and a voucher, but also a small gift-wrapped book. From his parents, who hosted the entire celebration, he had received a smartphone and an Xbox game. He seemed satisfied about all of his presents as he carefully arranged the envelopes, some flowers and a plant on top of the sideboard, smiling to himself. Above it, in the air, a big transparent balloon floated conspicuously, with three smaller balloons attached to the same string dangling underneath it. Besides helium, it contained another blue balloon, on which best wishes were penned, and in which money was visible.

Indeed, the most frequently given gift – and the one most sought after by teenagers – was money. Most teenagers were well aware that, by celebrating Jugendweihe, they would receive a substantial amount of it from their relatives, family friends and acquaintances –

on average, approximately €1,200.<sup>40</sup> They either had observed the accumulation of money during the Jugendweihe of an older sibling or cousin, or heard about it from friends; but they also heard about it from their parents themselves. When I had asked Lukas five months earlier about why he wanted to celebrate Jugendweihe the following year, he was not entirely sure, and explained that both his sister and brother had celebrated it too, recalling it as a pleasant memory. Andrea then pointed out that of course, all teenagers also knew that they would make money with this celebration. Lukas, rather drily but with a cheeky smile, insisted: 'But we don't have to celebrate it, you can give me the money just like this [without having to go through all this fuss]'. At which point she turned to me and almost apologetically explained: 'Of course they don't really understand it [now], but afterwards they'll be happy to have celebrated it'.

Andrea was not an exception. Many adults referred to the gift-giving aspect of the ritual as one of the main motivators for their children or grandchildren to undergo the ritual in the first place. However, while teenagers tended to acknowledge that money played a role in their decision-making, they almost always denied that it was the principal reason, describing it as more of a welcome by-product. When I spoke with teenagers, they hardly ever raised the issue of gifts or money themselves. Despite it being a customary part of the ritual, they rarely included it in explaining what the ritual was about, and I had to prompt them directly to tell me about their Jugendweihe presents. Instead, they emphasised the atmosphere of the one-off-event in which they were the main protagonists, and they almost always stated that it was 'simply lovely to celebrate with the entire family'. What was 'lovely' then, as illustrated in the first part of the chapter, was that the adolescent was the centre of attention for one day: the extended family gathered for her or him – the first drink of alcohol, the festive ambience, the special food and its consumption in commensality that created the image of an ideal family home.

However, this ideal family image was not always met. Sandra recalled how, at her own Jugendweihe, she sat at the head of a large dining table which stood empty except for her father and mother. Her parents had just recently announced their imminent divorce, which led the family to show their disapproval of her parents' decision by staying away from what should have been Sandra's party. She seemed to have been punished by her relatives for her parents' decision. And her parents were shown that there was no family

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<sup>40</sup> Based on my survey data of 50 teenagers who celebrated Jugendweihe in 2013; see next chapter.

celebration without family – an essential ingredient to make their daughter happy. I was taken aback by what seemed to me a rather cruel thing to do to a fourteen-year-old, but Sandra played the incident down as something that did not matter much to her – perhaps because of her mother’s presence during this conversation. Later, she emphasised that her failed Jugendweihe celebration was the main reason that she had insisted her daughter should have a great family celebration. Celine’s older sister had also celebrated Jugendweihe, and the fact that siblings should be treated equally also featured as a rationale – a concern that was expressed by all families, in particular with regards to gifts, which ought to be of equal value for all children.

Money gifts were usually – but not always – given in an envelope that also included a Jugendweihe card with best wishes for the future, presented to the adolescent either on their Jugendweihe day after the ceremony, or anytime thereafter (commonly up to a month or two). People of older generations often disapprovingly explained to me that teenagers nowadays requested only money. However, in the same conversations they then admitted that they did not know what their grandchildren, nephews or nieces really wanted or needed; to give money was also an easy option for them, which meanwhile allowed the teenagers to save up to make a larger purchase in the future. Frau Becker, Daniel’s grandmother, emphasised the change in gift-giving practices when recounting that she, like her daughter, had received items for her *Ausststeuer* (trousseau), before adding:

My most expensive present though, I got from my grandmother. It was an umbrella for 80 Marks, I still know this like it was today! This was an umbrella that cost 80 East-Marks! – I still know it like today. We had an umbrella shop here in the street and she said: “On your Jugendweihe you’ll get an umbrella from me!” And then we went there and I know this like it happened yesterday! I still know [how] she then said: “I would like to have an umbrella for the girl on her Jugendweihe and, ach this is a pretty one, show us this dark-grey one!” And then the shop assistant said: “She is a young girl, would we not like to have something prettier, here I have one with flowers, a dark-blue one.” This is the one I got and it came to 80 Marks, I know this like [it was] today – yes, from my grandmother.

Her recollection was animated, and she could not stop telling us over and over again how clearly she remembered. In fact, in all such recollections people very rarely used *erinnern* (to remember/recollect) but more often *noch wissen* (to still know), which seemed to emphasise the vividness and factuality of their memory. But because the umbrella was such an expensive item at the time (in 1966), she also stopped and laughed between her

recollections, with her daughter, grandson and myself joining in – it seemed ridiculous today to spend so much money on an umbrella, and indeed to hold an ordinary umbrella itself to be a special gift.

Gift-giving has been central to all Jugendweihe celebrations, regardless of the time period, but the type of presents has changed as well as the value of the gifts. Parents often joined in with grandparent's laments about today's excess of gifts, and thus played down the amount of money and presents they received at their own Jugendweihe celebrations in the 1970s or 1980s. The headline of an article published in March 1978 in the Erfurt newspaper *Das Volk* (The People) asked: 'How do we celebrate Jugendweihe?'. Addressing the issue of gifts, it stated that indeed 'Jugendweihe is sometimes mixed up with a medium village wedding', quoting a female teenager who expressed her disappointment about the many towels she received. A male teenager explained that it was best that he could decide himself what to buy so that 'there was no trouble with shirt sizes and so forth', and adds that he received 1,500 Marks – at the time well above twice the average monthly salary. Another female teenager, however, stated that 'money is quite nice', before continuing, 'but I am against giving only money. It is so anonymous. A present should always remind us of this exceptionally beautiful day in life' (Müller 1978).

One concern of the GDR state was for the family celebration to facilitate the creation of such an exceptional day, in which the teenager was the centre of attention without encouraging the main protagonist to become a consumer-driven, egoistic individual. Both editions of the Central Committee's Jugendweihe Handbook from 1974 and 1986 cautiously explain that 'with gifts one could *erziehen* (to educate), but also *verziehen* (to spoil)' the recipient (ZAJ 1974: 163, 1986: 161). The reader is then reminded of what is deemed an appropriate gift in line with the ideals of socialist society:

Theatre visits, short trips and other collective forms of experience enjoy as much popularity as durable consumer goods. It is also to be encouraged when youths earn means through their own productive and socially valuable activity and [can] fulfil a special wish for themselves with the help of relatives, at their Jugendweihe or later. Yet every gift-giver must know: it is not the monetary value of Jugendweihe presents that is an expression of appreciation for the adolescent, but the consideration in how far their needs are met or developed, or rather how the interests and inclinations of the gift-recipient are responded to (ZAJ 1986: 161).

Despite these guidelines, initiands conventionally received not only money, but also special commodities, because the latter were not easily attainable and thus particularly coveted. Such gifts included more individualised items such as jewellery, clothes, or cosmetics. By far one of the most popular gifts in the 1980s was a portable stereo of the *VEB RFT Stern*, such as an R160 or SKR700, the price of which amounted to approximately 1,500 GDR Marks. Teenagers often saved up for such a product from their *Jugendweihe* money, or received it as present on the day of their coming-of-age celebration. Girls would commonly also receive gifts of a more social nature, that is, trousseau items – a fact recounted by all mothers. Such tea towels, towels, bed linen, tablecloths, and so on were stored for future use, when the initiands would set up their own household. The most expensive goods that are held to belong to a household, such as a car, white goods, or TVs, were never part of *Jugendweihe* gift-giving; but arguably, *Jugendweihe* money, which was commonly saved, would be used for such major future expenditures. Money and special gifts were thus also a symbolic marker of the initiand's status change – they were given money and special items for their future to help their transition to becoming financially independent and as a prelude to marriage.

While cosmetic products and jewellery for girls are as prevalent today as they were in the past, computer games for boys and vouchers and books for both genders are also common today. As with the portable stereos of socialist times, nowadays it is not uncommon for teenagers to receive a computer or laptop from their parents, or as a collective present from their family. Often this was explained as a necessity for school and in general a requirement of contemporary life. At first glance, this shift from portable stereo to computer seems like a shift from entertainment to work; but the use of both of these products is in reality not that different. During socialist times, to have a good portable stereo also meant receiving West German radio stations, such as BAYERN 3 or RIAS 2, which were popular among youth for the music they broadcasted. More importantly, one was not only able to keep up with the pop culture of the West but to record one's favourite songs on tape, most of which music was not available for purchase in the GDR. As the computer today enables the teenagers to enter a new, unknown world – a source of more and different knowledge – the portable stereo performed this function

in the past: it enabled young people to see the world from a different perspective, much to the dismay of the GDR state.<sup>41</sup>

Under state socialism, money always would have been received in an envelope. But kin and close family friends would present their money gifts in conjunction with a hard-to-get-hold-of commodity, such as a trousseau item. Today, to receive an envelope and card including a €10 note was an acceptable gift from a neighbour, but not deemed an appropriate gift from close family members. As sixteen-year-old Sophie explained her anticipation of the cards with well-wishes and money inside, she pointed out with some embarrassed giggles: ‘well, depending on the degree of bond/relationship (*Bindung*) to the one [person], more or less [money]’. But this giving of monetary gifts according to the closeness of the relation was not only different in terms of *what* (or how much) was given, but often also *how* it was presented. Because many consumer products are bought much more easily now than under state socialism, when such purchases required connections (known as *Vitamin B*) to gain access to such products, they did not represent enough effort and time spent for the recipient, and thus lost value in expressing a close relationship (see Carrier 1990; Cheal 1987). Money presents were thus often extravagantly wrapped or individualized – such as in Lukas’s aforementioned balloon gift, or Nils’s money gift, which referred to his favourite hobby: model trains – in the hopes of achieving such a memorable effect (see Figure 13).

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<sup>41</sup> Arguably, this conclusion may not hold true for the 1980s: indeed, some scholars have argued to the contrary, that West TV had a stabilizing effect on the GDR. Youth with access to West TV tended to be in greater support of the GDR regime than those without – presumably because of their better access to entertainment (see Kern and Hainmueller 2009). Similar conclusions may apply to West radio broadcasts.



Figure 13: Making Commodities into Presents.

Frequently, teenagers received not simply money or ‘things’, but ‘experiences’, such as tickets to a show of their favourite music group or to a football match of the team they support. For many parents, it mattered more to give an experience rather than a product or money – even when their offspring wished for products or money. One divorced father eloquently elaborated the reasons for his choice of gifts. His eldest daughter, according to him, owned too much: she had all the latest and most expensive gadgets that teenagers today perceive to be necessary, but which are also quite clearly treasured as status symbols. For him, his daughter already showed signs of not really appreciating the value of what she had been given by her parents and others. He blamed this attitude largely on her mother, his ex-wife, who herself – he said – exhibited extravagant shopping habits. Recalling his daughter’s celebration the previous year, he noted that it was much more important to him to do something special with her in order to create *eine schöne Erinnerung* (a lovely memory). He organized a short trip to another city where just the two of them stayed at a hotel, ate in a fancy restaurant and went to see a musical together. This gesture cannot be hastily interpreted as competition with his ex-wife for their children’s love, or as an attempt to make up for missed time spent together – the two parents have shared custody, and their two children stayed regularly at their father’s house. Rather, besides the greater importance of memories over material things, he also saw the trip – very much like the events parents choose in preparing their offspring for the life ahead discussed in

the previous chapter – as an appropriate way to ‘teach’ her how to behave as an educated, well-mannered grown-up in unfamiliar surroundings.

Money and special gifts, then, served both in socialist and contemporary times as symbolic markers of the adolescent’s status change – a sign of greater autonomy from their parents. But they also communicated what was not necessarily verbally addressed, that is, the emotional bond between kin, especially parents and children. Because commodities have lost their extraordinary appeal as rarities, today they are no longer deemed appropriate gifts by parents and grandparents – unlike under state socialism, when they were coveted presents and contradicted the GDR state’s intention. While I return to the issue of changing gift-giving practices in regards to commodities in the next chapter, here I want to point out that their contemporary inappropriateness as gifts was related to both the little labour involved in acquiring them, and to the fact that they were not extraordinary and thus not memorable – unlike Frau Schubert’s bread rolls or Frau Becker’s umbrella. In both instances, the grandmothers recalled not just the product, but also its giver – rendering the giver and their affection immortal in the women’s memories.

The presentation of gifts also played a crucial part in the conviviality of the family celebration, for what gift-giving attempts to effect on the adolescent, and for the way family is re-created and represents itself to others, which I discuss below.

## **Conviviality**

Because Nils’s Jugendweihe ceremony was in the afternoon, his family party started later than Lukas’s; but it was also bigger, and held in a refurbished former barn that his parents had hired for the occasion in a neighbouring village, instead of at home. Finn, Nils’s younger brother, took orders from guests, returned to the bar where his father poured the drinks, and brought them to the guests’ tables. Music played in the background, and the festively decorated venue had gained an air of boozy jollity during the feast. It was about 9.30 pm when a family friend delivered a beam of wood, and Lars called upon his son: ‘Nils, come up here now, you have to (hammer in a) nail!’ Since the German word *nageln* has the same sexual connotations as the English ‘to nail’, a man in his seventies snorted with laughter, shouting: ‘It’s never too early to learn how to nail properly!’ This remark led to quite a bit of laughter, and while the man’s wife chuckled she simultaneously

scolded him for his inappropriateness. Nils – an ordinary tack hammer in hand – had to compete in turns against his father, his older cousin, and a family friend. The latter had not only delivered the beam, but brought along a large sledgehammer, and with one hit he drove the nail into the wood like it was butter – Nils had no chance.

It was often such experiences on their Jugendweihe day that were recounted most frequently by adolescents. While they usually occurred during the family celebration, in some instances the initiands were surprised by their families immediately after the Jugendweihe ceremony. On the questionnaire I gave her prior to our conversation, fourteen-year-old Leoni claimed that the best part of her Jugendweihe was ‘the surprise after the ceremony when she was picked up from the theatre in a rally car’. I observed quite a few such surprises in front of the theatre, and witnessed at least three occasions when girls were picked up in black or white stretch limousines (see Figure 14). When I pointed this out to other female observers or to teenagers in conversations, they seemed to agree that it was an overindulgent or excessive display; their reactions echoed fourteen-year-old Sarah’s: ‘This really mustn’t be! It’s just a bit too much. I mean, what do they want to do for their ‘Prom’ (*Abiball*)?’<sup>42</sup>



Figure 14: A Stretch Limousine Waiting for a Female Initiand at the Gera Theatre.

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<sup>42</sup> In Germany graduation celebrations are common but the *Abiball* is a recent development and similar to the Prom in the USA. It is celebrated by *Gymnasium* graduates only.

On one occasion, a girl was greeted outside the theatre after her Jugendweihe ceremony by an amateur fanfare orchestra, of which presumably she herself or one of her family members was a member (see Figure 15). Such scenes always drew attention to the teenager concerned, and not only underlined the importance of the event but were a guarantee of making the teenager feel special, creating an unforgettable experience – ‘a lovely memory’. Although aimed at making the main protagonist feel special, the use of a limousine and the performance of an orchestra were not simply for the initiand. Fourteen-year-old Lena, who celebrated confirmation but attended her classmates’ Jugendweihe, recalled how exciting it was to be in the stretch limousine of her friend with other classmates. Similarly, the fact that the fanfare orchestra played in front of the theatre rendered it a public performance that any passer-by could enjoy for free. These surprises benefited not only the initiand but were often enjoyed by others as well.



*Figure 15: Amateur Fanfare Orchestra Playing in front of the Gera Theatre.*

As discussed in Chapter 3, the focus on the collective played a pivotal role for the GDR state. From the 1970s onward, the state increasingly promoted collective family celebrations, where the families of an entire school class were encouraged to celebrate together after the Jugendweihe ceremony (ZAJ 1986: 159-160). Daniel’s grandmother pointed out this difference in celebrating styles by comparing her daughter’s with her own

and her grandson's Jugendweihe. Although all three Jugendweihe celebrations were limited to their own extended family and friends, Franka left her Jugendweihe family celebration to 'prowl the streets with her friends'. These friends celebrated together with other classmates in the same restaurant on the other side of town. Today such collective celebrations are extremely rare, and when they occur they usually consist of only two families – as was the case with Leoni's celebration. Leoni recounted to me that she celebrated with her 'best pal's family', but that the best present she received was from her parents: tickets to a gig of her favourite singer. However, it was not simply the ticket itself that mattered, but as Leoni put it: 'It came across as so cool!' She explained that her parents, her best friend's parents, and some other family members put together a set list of her favourite songs from this singer and imitated him in a performance. Her father then presented her with tickets at the end. Two friends who were present at her celebration and part of this conversation smiled and nodded in agreement about this great surprise, which had entertained all the guests.

Large family celebrations frequently included gag-like performances meant to enhance the initiand's feeling of being special by putting them into the limelight. Similar to the money gifts that some relatives had arranged and personalized creatively, these performances not only had entertainment value, but were usually organized by parents and close kin as an expression of intimacy. A voucher or tickets bought online or in a shop would not suffice to show the level of closeness the relation had: a performances showed that family knew the person's preferences, and took the time to create something that could not simply be bought. During weddings, anniversaries and big birthday parties the recitals of jokey poems, often especially written in rhyme to tell something about the *Jubilar* (person who is being celebrated) and their lifecourse, were a fairly common practice. Often such performances were prepared long in advance by family members and close friends, who may have met beforehand to rehearse or to make props. At a friend's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, her partner, her siblings, and her daughter with partner had organised several such sketches that re-enacted – often in costumes and with props – the funniest incidents in the *Jubilar's* life, such as how she came to her nickname. Although she knew that her family had prepared something, she did not know what – and part of the surprise was that she had to participate in these sketches. She was prompted by family members after each sketch to explain its significance to the guests who were uninitiated to these stories, which formed part of the family history. Because she often explained embarrassing moments

out of breath and with much laughter, it became the most amusing element of the celebration for her and everyone present. I witnessed similar sketches at other birthday celebrations as well as weddings and wedding anniversaries.<sup>43</sup>

At fourteen, the recounting of tales from across the lifecourse is not yet feasible – though sometimes teenagers received a framed photo collage or a photo book of their stages of life so far: from being a baby to becoming a pupil to the present. Where such gifts are presented, they were usually handed around to everyone, as (in some cases) were photos of their parents' and grandparents' Jugendweihe celebrations – offering many topics for conversation and reminiscence about the past. Besides the entertainment value such performances and gifts provided, they also expressed a sentiment that partly harks back to socialist times. As I have shown above, in contemporary eastern Germany, the purchase of things is not limited by state supply or private connections but by one's available funds, there was also a sense of that being 'too easy' – it was impersonal because no labour was required (see Cheal 1987). To buy a gift for someone was certainly appreciated, but it was appreciated much more when it was well thought-through, and presented in a way that not only entertained the recipient but also all the guests. The families I spent most time with were obviously close-knit units, and their social interactions were both critically intimate and affectionate, but not once during my entire fieldwork did I hear the term 'love' verbalized between parents and children. Adolescents' faces often lit up when they recounted their Jugendweihe experience, and while the event quite clearly had an emotional impact on them, they did not express explicitly what was written all over their faces. The only exception was a female survey respondent, who, when asked what besides money she had received on her Jugendweihe, wrote: 'a bag, and lots of love from my family'.

These sketches, performances and photographs thus displayed a much greater appreciation of the person being celebrated, and communicated what money or the wrapping of a gift could not convey: that a great deal of thought and time had been invested in preparing and executing these shows, all for the main protagonist (see Cheal 1987). Yet these attempts by family members to make the main protagonist feel special

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43 Such performances were given in addition to the 'standard' customs of a wedding, such as the couple's sawing of a beam of wood, welcoming the newly-weds with bread and salt, the first dance, the decorating/spoiling of their wedding suite and the wedding 'newspaper' – though these also required a great deal of preparation.

and to communicate their love also displayed this intimacy to others. They showed to extra-family members – at times by letting them in a little on family stories – that the family was ‘really close’, as another friend present at the aforementioned birthday party somewhat enviously commented.

### **Gift-giving and Conviviality: Money & Work**

Sometimes the way money was presented also entertained all the guests – but simultaneously fulfilled an educative role in which the adolescent became the target of mockery because he or she received money without having worked for it. When Daniel told me that he received a computer from his parents, like his sister had five years earlier, and could otherwise only recall money and some sweets, his grandmother prompted him to tell me what he had received from one of his aunts. He remembered and chuckled: ‘Alright, yeah! – I got coals!’ He continued to explain that when she had asked him what he wanted for his Jugendweihe, he colloquially replied: *Koble!* (‘dosh’, literally: coal). While he thought it funny that his aunt took his request literally, and played a joke on him, his grandmother mischievously grinned and pointed out to me: ‘She had a real sack of charcoal briquettes and amongst them all there was a box with money. But he had to get his hands dirty first in order to take it out!’

Similarly, sixteen-year-old Mia told me with a mixture of embarrassment and joy, and with much struggle to find the appropriate words, that her family had organized a porcelain toilet bowl. This toilet had been painted pink by them and was filled with *brauner Pudding* – a kind of thick chocolate custard. She was given rubber gloves and was supposed to extract the money – approximately thirty coins worth €1 each – from the artificial excrement, seemingly cleaning the toilet in front of the gathered crowd of guests. Mia laughed when she recounted this episode; when I asked her whether it had been embarrassing, she concurred and added: ‘And the photos they took, even more!’ While these gags, like the aforementioned sketches, have great entertainment value for everyone present, they also show the teenagers up. Adolescents played along, but they were ridiculed, because ideally money should be earned rather than simply received. These stories are recounted with enjoyment, but it was also the uncomfortable sensation of embarrassment that made these episodes memorable; and it is very likely that these are

the scenes they will remember for longer and perhaps retell to their own children one day – perhaps showing the photos that captured these moments. But the embarrassment factor in all of these is also an expression of intimacy and love: you only dare to show someone up or to make a fool of yourself in front of those to whom you are close, and who you trust. By enacting such sketches, strong family ties were made visible, but also re-strengthened at a time when the adolescent increasingly sought autonomy. At the same time, these sketches indicated that kin fostered an appropriate work ethic and the financial independence of the initiand.

From his female cousin, who had had her own *Jugendweihe* only three years earlier, Nils received a blue bucket filled with sand and a small sieve (see Figure 16). He sat for a good part of the evening surrounded and carefully watched by three younger boys, sieving through the sand to find the coins hidden in it. He could not finish the task, and continued the following day – partly because he was asked to hammer in nails to prove his manliness. These gifts and tasks appear to be gendered. Like the fact that the earlier mentioned stretch limousines seemed to be hired only for girls, the boys' tasks mimicked those of miners, carpenters or builders – stereotypically associated with men; whereas the girl had to clean a (pink!) toilet, a task often associated with the female domestic sphere. Yet at the same time this gender division was somewhat blurred. When I asked Nils's cousin where she got the bucket idea from, she explained to me that she herself had had to undergo the sand-sieving task. In a similar blurring, Nils's mother, Beate, made Nils compete again after his hammering competition. This time he had to compete against his paternal grandmother in peeling a carrot – a game he lost at terribly. When I asked Beate afterwards why she did this, she explained to me that it was high time for Nils to help in the household. She compared his reluctance – he always had to be asked for help, and only grudgingly provided it – with that of his much younger brother, who voluntarily and willingly helped his parents in household chores.



*Figure 16: Nils's Bucket of Sand Money Present*

Regardless of their dubiously gendered nature, these money gifts – where the initiand had to sieve through sand, mine through coal, or clean up excrement at the family celebration – appear to be post-unification innovations, as do the hammering in of a nail or the peeling of carrots. Not a single parent or grandparent had mentioned such gifts or practices to me as part of their own GDR Jugendweihe.<sup>44</sup> Yet because the value of physical work has decreased in terms of both status and money in the post-Wende era, and because adolescents remain in education longer, the moral message appears to be clear. Maya Mayblin (2010) argues that while parents in Northeast Brazil welcomed the prohibition of labour for children under the age of fourteen, they also became concerned that their children would not develop any ‘courage to work’. Parents thus actively accustomed their children to work not simply out of financial necessity, but to cultivate *coragem* – a feature of moral personhood that enables them to perform physically challenging and monotonous labour (Mayblin 2010). I would suggest that East Thuringian parents and grandparents were troubled similarly by the fact that their children no longer learn what physical labour means. Some of the older grandparents left school and started work aged fourteen. Most of the grandparents and parents – as I demonstrated in Chapter 3 – participated in physical labour through both formal schooling and extra-curricular activities, in agricultural collectives and manufacturing companies. Primary school

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<sup>44</sup> These are also not mentioned in the scholarship on Jugendweihe, though their absence could also be due to the limited interest in the family celebration.

teachers too had frequently encouraged children to help their working mothers in the household.

With the vanishing of the GDR and the introduction of a new school system, contemporary adolescents not only stay longer than ever in education; they are no longer taught about physical work as part of the school curriculum. Unlike in Northeast Brazil, however, the concern focused less on the adolescents' failure to gain stamina for their future role as workers. Rather, I suggest, the socialist generations sought to stress that work is valuable in itself and to be respected. Because 'work' is no longer just hard physical labour to the same extent as it was in the past, the older generation feared that adolescents might not appreciate how hard their parents and grandparents worked. Especially because the socialist generations' work was so sharply devalued in the post-Wende era, they sought to recuperate respect for their own lives' work from their offspring, and to teach them not to dismiss people today who are doing menial jobs (see also Chapter 5). At the same time, these 'work activities' at the celebration show adolescents that one needs to earn one's own living through work and to become financially independent. The popular phrase that one ought not to receive money, but to actually earn (*verdienen*) it, is commonly evoked among Thuringians. In German '*verdienen*' has a double meaning and is used both for 'to earn' (money or otherwise) and for 'to deserve' (something), stressing the greater moral import of making money is through work – not investment, speculation, or inheritance.

Money, special gifts and the way they were presented communicated what often remained unsaid – affection among kin. At the same time, money symbolized the initiand's changed status, and took on an educative role (transmitted variously through gags) about the value of work. Instead of relying on their family's financial support, these gestures communicated the importance of adolescents working for themselves and ideally earning money – they were given 'wings'.

## **Conclusion**

In German, the saying 'Schnapps is schnapps and work is work' propagates the notion that celebrating and working are two different domains that should not intermingle: what makes a celebration ('Schnapps') extraordinary is that it is set off in various ways from

everyday life (work). While both the public ceremony and the family celebration reify this distinction, in reality these two domains are interrelated: how we celebrate depends on how we work, and what we can afford to spend on celebrating depends on our earnings from work.

In this chapter, I have illustrated that the Jugendweihe family celebration had two aims. On the one hand, it recreated familial ties among extended kin – but especially between the initiands as the main protagonists and their family members, during a time where adolescents sought greater autonomy from their parents. On the other hand, the family celebration symbolically marked the initiands' change of status through various means: the consumption of particular foods; the initiand's drinking of his or her first glass of alcohol in public with parental permission; the toast or thank you speech; receiving money and special gifts; and entertaining gags related to work. (While not all of these practices necessarily applied to all families, certainly variable combinations of at least three of the five symbolic acts did.) Of course, references to sexual maturity, as discussed in Chapter 1, and as described in Nils's case above, are an additional sixth feature of adolescents' departure from their childhood. Unlike other family celebrations, then, in family celebrations of Jugendweihe, the adolescent was at its centre and symbolically transformed into an adult person.

Notably, the family celebration united family members across the generations – a feat achieved not only through the above-mentioned practices, but partly because it appeared that they shared an event that has always been celebrated in their family. During the family celebration, such familial continuity was created through very sensory experiences for the adolescents, (re)creating bonds to the family and also the region of Thuringia, in ways that will very likely be recalled as positive memories of home later in life. As Celine's grandmother's story in the introductory vignette proves, of course, Jugendweihe was not always shared across all three generations. When Frau Schubert's attempts to recount her Jugendweihe failed, she shifted to the school entry celebration as a feature that all family members shared – recreating a familial continuity. As Celine's grandmother remembered out of the blue that in 1946 it was delicious to eat buttered white bread rolls, she also recalled that it was her parents who had enabled her to have this rare food. Consuming them with the comfort and the sweetness of cocoa was for her also intrinsically linked with the pleasant memory of her mother, who made the hot cocoa, and her father, who

got hold of the rare goods. Similarly, the eating of such rare foods later in life evokes memories of close kin and comfort, as I experienced with the home-made torte. This special comfort food then becomes tantamount to the comfort a family provides. Thus eating and drinking regional foods and drinks together at the family celebration also entailed processes of (re)making home, in both senses of the German words: *zu Hause* (home) and *Heimat* (regional home or ‘homeland’). Since *Heimat* is an important German concept that not only relates to identity but can form the link between local, regional, and national belonging, I will return to it in Chapter 7.

There were certain features of the GDR family celebration that were clearly not in line with what the GDR state had intended – such as gift-giving practices and the limited use of collective family celebrations – highlighting the limits of state influence on families. Nevertheless, the *Jugendweihe* family celebration itself contributed to the state’s aim to some extent. Through the use of the emotional attachments – both familial and local/regional – *Jugendweihe* not only became part of individuals’ biographies, but also of their family histories, thus securing its continuity after the state’s demise. Simultaneously, the post-socialist innovation of inculcating a work ethic into the adolescent through entertaining gags appears to recall the GDR state’s aim of educating workers. As such, adolescents’ attachments to the familial home and to *Heimat* were strengthened, but they also ought to be hard-working, earn money, and be able to look after themselves – they were given roots and wings.

Arguably the *Jugendweihe* family celebration could be celebrated as just that – a private function. But we saw in Chapter 3 that the class collective played a significant role in the continuity of the public *Jugendweihe* ceremony. In the next two chapters, I further explore reasons, effects, and legacies for the continued celebration of the *Jugendweihe* public ceremony. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to relations between households – returning to the socialist state’s work ideology and changes in gift-giving practices; and in Chapter 6, I will look more closely at the role the Association played in *Jugendweihe*’s continuation.

## Chapter 5

### **‘Frugal Inequalities’: Jugendweihe as a Site of Distinction-making**

*Thou shalt always strive for improvement of your performance, to be frugal, and to strengthen the socialist work discipline.*

– Seventh Commandment of the ‘Ten Commandments for the New Socialist Person’

It was early evening on an unpleasantly cold Friday in December, and I was sitting with three adolescent boys at the large wooden table in the parsonage’s cosy kitchen. The kitchen’s homely atmosphere conjured up pleasant sensations of extended family meals and long conversations. Fourteen-year-olds Moritz and Timo and thirteen-year-old Jakob all went to different schools, but had been attending confirmation classes together for over a year, and were due to celebrate their confirmation on the following Whitsunday. The rest of the confirmand group were in the spacious living room next door, rehearsing a small sequence with the pastor that was to be performed at the Fourth Advent church service in one of the villages under his pastoral aegis. Moritz had just finished explaining that his family was Christian, in response to my question about why they had decided to celebrate confirmation next year. It was Timo’s turn to explain his reasoning, but the conversation developed in an unexpected and uneasy direction.

‘In any case,’ Timo said, ‘I’ve always thought that those who do Jugendweihe – that they are... well, that they attend a *Regelschule* (state secondary school) ...and they [would] always have their peaked caps put on half-properly ...and the like. And that they – well, that Jugendweihe is only done by those who later...well, how can I put this?’

Jakob whispered a suggestion: ‘*Assis* (White trash)!’ Everyone started to chuckle, suggesting a sort of agreement, but also an awareness that the use of the word was not politically correct. But Timo objected: ‘No, no!’ He still could not find the right words, and so I suggested, ‘Who will later receive Hartz IV benefits?’ Hartz IV is the colloquial term for the *ALGII*, an unemployment and social welfare (*Sozialhilfe*) benefit, introduced with the social reforms of Agenda 2010, which came into effect in 2005. Timo again objected, ‘No, not Hartz IV, like...,’ and trailed off. Moritz filled in the sentence,

asserting, ‘*Regelschüler*,’<sup>45</sup> and reiterating the connection Timo had made previously to *Regelschule*, the common state school that leads to a school leaving certificate after ten years, as opposed to the *Gymnasium* (similar to a grammar school) – which is usually also a state school, but which leads to an *Abitur* that would allow pupils to go on to university (see Chapter 3).

But still Timo was not satisfied. ‘Mmmh...I don’t know how I should say this,’ he continued. Jakob whispered another suggestion that Timo could not understand, and then, clearly amused, repeated it louder: ‘*Penner* (Hobo)!’ Chuckling, Timo still protested, ‘No, no ...,’ before repeating, ‘How shall I say this...?’ Moritz returned to Jakob’s earlier suggestion, asking, ‘*Assis* (White trash)?’, but Jakob was becoming impatient: ‘Do just say it!’, he insisted. ‘Well,’ said Timo, like those who don’t have a proper job, well they swing back and forth.’ Attempting to help him clarify what he was trying to convey, I began, ‘So if I understood you correctly, you had the impression that...’ – but he cut me off, blurting out: ‘Well those who don’t have a well-ordered life – they don’t lead a well-ordered life!’ Referring back to Moritz’ earlier interjection, which Timo had seemed to agree with, I asked, ‘So in your opinion, no one at a *Gymnasium* would celebrate *Jugendweihe*?’ ‘Well, not if they lead a relatively ordered life, I would think,’ he responded, having finally found the explanation that suited him. ‘And I always thought, well I am not that kind of a guy... and I’ll just do this [confirmation].’

Timo’s perception of a ‘well-ordered life’ was based on his own family, who seemed to provide him with a greater sense of security than the families of his peers whose parents had never married, or whose parents had divorced. It also reflected what he had been taught in both school and church, through the Christian *Gymnasium* and the confirmation classes he attended – which emphasised a heteronormative lifestyle supported through the father’s regular employment. All of the three boys’ families belonged to a parish that stood out in the region because of its active Christian lifestyle. I was told by many independently that the pastor was held to be particularly pious and the strictest in the area. Thus, the parents’ choice to send their children to confirmation classes with him, rather than to another more liberal pastor, was not only based on proximity, but also on their

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<sup>45</sup> *Regelschüler* is a student who attends a *Regelschule*. A *Gymnasiast* attends a *Gymnasium*.

own convictions: the extent to which they adhered to and engaged with a Christian lifestyle.

However, what struck me in this conversation was the fact that Timo did not describe the decision of whether to celebrate confirmation or Jugendweihe in terms of a simple religion/atheism binary, as one might expect, and as Moritz before him had done. The three boys all seemed to agree in their association of the Jugendweihe celebration with a lower social stratum compared to their own. Timo's struggle to articulate his thoughts appeared to be based on discomfort about using offensive language, but judging from Jakob's and Moritz's repeated suggestions and the way he laughed about them, it was likely that he agreed with their assessments. These derogatory terms imply that teenagers who celebrate Jugendweihe belong to families of the lowest strata within society, or even to families who are excluded from such a society. Teenagers may not be very familiar with terms such as 'social class' or 'social stratum', but the absence of such terminology was total during my fieldwork, and noticeably so, in the language of all generations. Socio-economic differences that are often articulated in terms of 'class' in the UK or the USA are not expressed in this way in Germany. Rather, such categorisations are commonly described either according to their location as *soziale Brennpunkte* ('social focal points') that refer to socially-deprived areas of a town (as synonym for *Problemviertel* – problem area/troubled suburbs); or by identifying people as *Sozialschwache* ('the socially weak' referring to the socially deprived/disadvantaged – though the German equivalent '*benachteiligt*' is hardly ever used, perhaps because it would suggest that there was some form of structural injustice at play).

Yet the way Timo described the particular manner of wearing a cap, his references to education and employment, are all signifiers of exactly what remained unsaid – distinctions based on judgment of taste and socio-economic background (Bourdieu 1984). Pierre Bourdieu argues that social distinctions are not only based on economic capital, such as money and property, but also on social and cultural capital. Social capital refers to 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986: 29). In contrast, cultural capital is accumulated through socialisation and institutional education, and marks a person's ability to know how to behave in different social environments – for example, how to dress or speak in certain

circles. All of these forms of capital are necessary for upward social mobility, and in certain conditions both social and cultural capital can be converted to economic capital. It is through cultural capital in particular that distinctions are articulated.

My focus in this chapter is on the interdependencies of economics and ritual, and on the ways the change from a socialist command to a capitalist market economy is reflected in socio-economic changes around the celebration of Jugendweihe. I view the ritual ‘in terms of notions of house economy and human sociality’ (Gudeman and Hann 2015: 6) and illustrate that the celebration of Jugendweihe not only reflects the increasing socio-economic stratification of eastern German society, but also serves as a site of distinction-making itself. In order to render these changes visible, I first briefly discuss the social structure of the GDR, before I show how distinctions are made today by adolescents and members of the parental and grandparental generations – through references to education and occupation respectively. I then turn to the example of Celine’s family, and their attempts to set themselves apart from other East Thuringians by drawing distinctions through clothes, photos, and through references to taste. In the second part of the chapter, I note that despite these processes of distinction-making and greater social stratification – especially in the actual value of monetary gifts compared to 1970s and 1980s – families seem to share a moral discourse on work and frugality. This discourse on frugality plays out in two ways. On the one hand, families attempted to keep the cost of the family celebration low; on the other, adolescents were taught to be frugal and to save money gifts for their future. I suggest that parents’ and grandparents’ concerns that adolescents viewed the celebration of Jugendweihe as a money-making venture reflects a change in gift giving practice from consumer products to money gifts. Money gifts today are often larger, but confined to a smaller social group than they were under the GDR. I argue that this change in gift-giving practice reflects a change in social relations, with a concurrent shift in distinction-making. Under state socialism, status was acquired through the emphasis on social capital, which in the post-socialist context has shifted to a greater focus on economic and cultural capital.

### ***The GDR’s Social Structure***

The boys’ references to distinctions recounted in the introductory vignette to this chapter made me feel uncomfortable. It was only after some reflection about the reasons why that

I recalled a conversation I had had with an eastern German woman earlier in the summer. Urte and I had been introduced through a mutual friend, who thought it would be useful for us to meet because we shared not only the experience of a GDR childhood and the Wende, but an interest in eastern Germany, and time spent studying social sciences in the UK. Urte was just a little younger than me, and said that she had enjoyed her courses at a reputable British university in the mid-1990s, having got on well with many of the students in her cohort, who had similar views and were politically active. But then she added:

But you know I never quite understood why we didn't really hit it off. We hung out a lot and stuff, but there was something missing that back then I couldn't put my finger on. I only realised much later what it was: they were all from really well-off backgrounds. [She shook her head and admitted, smiling:] But I guess as an East German you just didn't think about class, did you?

I realised that I had actually never considered the issue of 'class' before I lived in the UK, where there was constant talk about it and where I grew increasingly aware of the existence of greater socio-economic differences. Naturally, I knew about 'class' from history lessons, and as a crucial aspect of Marxist ideology; but it was part of the past, and never part of my life in East Germany. Although state socialism aimed at eliminating inequalities, they never entirely disappeared; but socio-economic differences under the GDR, and even in the 1990s in eastern German society, had been comparatively small. Since East Germany described itself as a worker-and-peasant-state, with the working class (*Arbeiterklasse*) ruling, like other socialist countries it attached the greatest status to 'the worker', who was glorified in state ideology (Fullbrook 2005; Kideckel 2002; Satjukow and Gries 2002). Work was an essential aspect of the socialist personality and, as explained in Chapter 3, inculcated in school – explicitly from grade seven (twelve/thirteen-year-olds) onward through both theoretical school subjects ('Introduction to the Socialist Production', 'Technical Drawing') and practical ones (like 'Productive Work', where adolescents worked one school day per fortnight either in a company or in a training centre). As we have seen, *Jugendweihe*, too, played a significant role in fostering the socialist work ethic (*Arbeitsmoral*) – especially through its preparatory programme, which included a youth lesson entitled 'Your work is needed' (commonly involving a visit to a people's-owned enterprise in order to observe the production of goods first hand and to talk to workers, the 'socialist heroes'; see ZAJ 1974: 60-62; ZAJ 1986: 98-103). This

emphasis on work was also reflected in the GDR Jugendweihe ceremonies, as this excerpt from a 1986 Jugendweihe speech demonstrates:

In our time the invincible force of the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin, its world-changing revolutionary worldview, have particularly conspicuously come to the fore. *Bei uns* [in our place] social security and *Geborgenheit* [feeling of safety and belonging] are a matter of course, in stark contrast to the unemployment, new poverty, homelessness, and hardship faced by many elderly, and millions of young people's *Zukunftsangst* [worry about the future] under capitalism. In our country the socialist reality warrants everyone to prove and to develop their strengths. [...]

Before you – the future experts of a modern socialist large-scale production, the future masters of microelectronics, robotics, electronic and fully-automatic conveyer belt lines, the skilled workers in all sectors of the economy – are plenty of opportunities to stand the test of time! Enable yourself already in school to be at all times a match for the rapid development of science and technology. Take on your responsibility today, but also tomorrow!<sup>46</sup>

In the 1980s, most East Germans no longer bought into the discourse of socialist superiority over capitalism, because they had experienced first-hand economic shortages. They also constantly saw the wide and colourful product ranges of capitalism on West German TV, or sampled such consumer goods through parcels received from West German kin (*Westpakete*) and purchases made in the chain *Intershops* – a GDR state shop opened in 1974 that sold western products for hard currency, i.e. West Marks (see also Veenis 2012). And while the legally prescribed right to work provided social security, it also meant that there was no need for competitiveness over or in a work place, which also led to inefficiency that fuelled such shortages (see Engler 2009; Fulbrook 2005).

Nevertheless, regardless of whether or not East Germans subscribed to official state ideology, many identified with the value of work. As Olivia Harris illustrates, work itself can be a value and thus a fundamental part of one's personhood (Harris 2007) – an observation which holds true for many members of the generations who were socialised in the GDR. This link between work and personhood was perhaps best illustrated by a conversation I had with a fifty-year-old man at Lukas's Jugendweihe family celebration. Rolf, a family friend, and I stood on the patio enjoying the formidable May sun, and – as he sipped from time to time on his bottle of beer – he was volunteering his life-story to

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<sup>46</sup> Excerpt from a Jugendweihe speech 27 April 1986 at the Ho Chi Minh POS in Erfurt; tape recording from the archive of the Jugendweihe Association Erfurt.

me, in an attempt, as he later put it, ‘to make up for having pestered you with so many questions about your life in Scotland’. But his narrative did not include, as one would suspect, the happy stories of how he met his wife, their wedding, their two sons’ births or graduations, nor any recalling of holidays and hobbies. It consisted exclusively of his struggles that had come with the Wende. It was a narrative sequence of having lost his job, seeking work further afield, commuting to the West and being ridiculed and exploited, re-training for additional qualifications, and seeking a new job closer to home, punctuated by technical language (which I found incomprehensible) describing his programming tasks, to evidence his expert knowledge. His life, and who he was, seemed to be solely defined through work. Indeed, the processes associated with the Wende – the devaluation of East German labour and products, the closing down of companies in which people had worked for their entire lives, and widespread unemployment – were experienced not only by Rolf, but by many East Germans as profoundly undermining their ‘sense of self and identity’ (Berdahl 1999b: 199). These experiences are engrained in the East German psyche; and while people commonly recognized that the GDR’s economy was beyond ailing, they simultaneously asserted that ‘we worked so hard’, almost always while sneering about the *Treuhand* (Trust Agency) – which many hold responsible for the unjustified liquidation of the companies in which they used to work (see also Chapter 6). Unemployment was thus a traumatic experience for many, not because of a decrease in available funds, but because they could not work, rendering them morally questionable as persons.

Yet one also needs to bear in mind that during socialist times, different types of ‘work’ were almost equally valued, as long as they served the greater good of socialist society. A *Facharbeiter* (skilled worker) was seen as equally worthy of praise and remuneration as a medical doctor or a university professor (i.e. members of the ‘intelligentsia’). Because wages did not vary greatly and private property was very limited, distinction-making focussed less on economic than on social capital. In an ‘economy of shortages’, one could not simply buy products, but required *Vitamin B – B* for *Beziehungen*, or connections, in order to have access to certain goods and services. This access to resources was available on the one hand through *Westbeziehungen* (connections to the West), which not everyone had, and which enabled distinction-making by the display of simple but coveted western products in the home, or by wearing western clothes. On the other hand, resources were available through local connections, that is, the [n]etwork of friendships, acquaintances,

and associates [that] were created and maintained through gift exchange, bribes, and barter trade' (Berdahl 1999a: 118). Shop assistants who could save some 'under the counter' products (*Bückwaren*), or plumbers who could fix something in the house, depended on each other as much as the manager of a company (usually a SED functionary) who was able to 'redirect' materials or a doctor who could make an urgent home visit. This social network of interdependencies similarly affected the East German habitus. Herr Schmidt, a westerner who had moved to Thuringia with his family straight after the Wende, described to me somewhat nostalgically how different social life in the early 1990s in the East was compared to the *Ruhrpott* – a heavy industry region in North-Rhine Westphalia – they had come from. He noticed this difference through the ways villagers celebrated events such as *Maibaumsetzen* (the erection of a maypole before or on May Day). What appeared to have puzzled and fascinated him most was that East Germans, regardless of their occupations, celebrated together. A lawyer and a company manager, he had observed, would be sitting with ordinary workers on a bench and drinking beer together or singing along to the same songs. However, he added, these kinds of social interaction had long since changed or indeed vanished.

In the GDR, party functionaries and managers self-defined as part of the 'ruling working class', and over the years the state stretched its definition of 'working class' further and further in order to include as many citizens as possible (see also Niethammer 1991). But as the historian Mary Fulbrook argues, the characteristics of a class – such as collective consciousness, common interest in opposition to other classes, inequalities, and so on – simultaneously dissolved, which led to the emerging of a new kind of collective identity: the 'ordinary' East German (Fulbrook 2005: 214). Similarly, Engler (2009) holds that over time, the GDR had become an increasingly uniform society, in which diverse social milieus and their associated value conceptions disappeared, so that:

Techniques of distinction and of aloofness such as nimbus, aura, and prestige provoked alienation. Eccentrics led a delicate, always contested, existence. The worker demeanour did not suffer 'follies'. In a society of almost equals no one was entitled to symbolically distinguish oneself from the others. Who asserted such an entitlement sinned against the *Gemeinsinn* (public spirit) (Engler 2009: 180).

As such, distinction-making was much more subtle under the GDR. As Daphne Berdahl argues, '[c]onnections replaced property as an indicator of social status' (Berdahl 1999a: 122).

In what follows, I demonstrate that a reverse process is now under way. I argued in Chapter 3 that the preparation for, and celebration of, the GDR Jugendweihe was aimed at focusing on the collective over the individual – a value that is still promoted by the Jugendweihe Association today, to a certain degree, and upheld by the grandparental and parental generations. However, the contemporary Jugendweihe celebration also mirrors the increasing social stratification of eastern German society, and simultaneously serves as a site where such distinction-making is played out and rendered visible. Because consumption and production are intrinsically linked, distinction-making manifests itself in the ways people celebrate and what gifts adolescent receive; but it is also embedded in a moral discourse that draws on the ideals of the socialist worker's identity: work and frugality.

### ***Demarcating Confirmation from Jugendweihe Participants***

References to socio-economic distinctions, such as those in the introductory vignette, were not only clumsily articulated by teenagers. In a conversation I had with Dagmar (the sixty-year-old vice-chairwoman of the Jugendweihe Association) about the different life cycle rituals, she mentioned that she had heard that getting married in a church, or having a baptism or a confirmation, was somehow more solemn. 'Well what do I know', she said,

Maybe it is for them. But I think that after the Wende lawyers and doctors and suchlike wanted to stand out from the crowd; you know what I mean? That's why they celebrate confirmation. I mean here everyone does Jugendweihe – it's nothing special.

Similarly, Celine's grandmother claimed that although her parents did not baptise her, they would have preferred if she had celebrated confirmation at the age of fourteen, because her father owned a small business during GDR times. While private businesses were frowned upon by the state as reactionary and hindering further development towards communism, Celine's grandmother, Frau Schubert, did not describe it as a matter of either religion and/or state opposition that led her parents to prefer confirmation. As discussed in Chapter 2, Christians (by conviction rather than convention) tended to emphasise that the celebration of confirmation during GDR times was primarily an affirmation of their

belief in God – as it is today – and that they only celebrated the GDR Jugendweihe under coercion from the socialist state. While Christians formed a minority within a largely secular/atheist society, neither Dagmar nor Frau Schubert – whose own life-worlds do not include religion – expressed such connections. Instead they pointed to a difference between the majority of ‘ordinary’ people and the minority of ‘special’ people, which in both accounts was expressed through a juxtaposition translatable to working class (in GDR terminology) versus other (intelligentsia and private business owner respectively). Furthermore, Celine’s grandmother’s assertion that her father owned a business – like her daughter today – implicitly, without a need to directly verbalise it, set her family apart from the majority of society, since most people (past and present) are employees rather than employers. In both instances the grandparental generations’ view of confirmation and Jugendweihe – associating the latter with a large majority that did not want to stand out – expressed subtle differences in socio-economic standing.

The confirmands’ use of derogatory language in the introductory vignette, and their more directly-voiced assumption that Jugendweihe participants would have a lower education than themselves, is also revealing. Not attending a *Gymnasium*, a school that teaches an advanced secondary school curriculum leading to an *Abitur*, suggests one cannot belong to the potential high-achievers of society. Since it is unlikely for a *Regelschüler* to attend a university, it precludes them from future well-paid job opportunities. As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of East Germans attended a POS, and since attending an EOS or university was associated with state loyalty, this attendance was a rather flimsy status symbol. However, today the school type has become a marker of not only intellectual capabilities, but increasingly also one of status and a sign of upward social mobility. Pupils from *Gymnasiums* – regardless of whether they celebrated Jugendweihe or confirmation – liked to point out which school they attended, just as Lennart, Daniel’s school friend, did when I discussed future aspirations with him, Daniel, and Lukas:

Well, yes, you have set yourself a goal; well a kind of dream that you will not be a Hartz IV recipient or something like that. Because one has, well I am, for example, – or both of us – are at the *Gymnasium* and then we’ll have an appropriate school certificate, I would think, and with an *Abitur*, for example, to become a Hartz IV recipient you wouldn’t dream of that or wish for it.

Aware that Lukas attended a *Regelschule*, I asked, ‘But I believe that someone with a *Regelschule* certificate would not wish for that either, would they?’ Lennart responded, ‘Sure, one would *never* wish for that! But especially not with an *Abitur*, because, for example, one is already more highly qualified than with a *Realschulabschluss* and yes...’.

Although Lennart did not distinguish between confirmation and Jugendweihe participants based on school type, he clearly expressed that he viewed himself less in danger of becoming unemployed due to attending a school that would qualify him to attend university. This association also illustrates that in reality, the distinction between education and the type of coming-of-age ritual one celebrates – of the sort drawn by the confirmands at the beginning of the chapter – is not (yet) evident. Indeed, in the same conversation, Moritz, Timo and Jacob told me that most of their classmates at the *Gymnasium* had celebrated Jugendweihe. This assertion contradicted their earlier statements somewhat, but because all three of them attended a *Gymnasium*, such a distinction was easily acceptable; they knew no one present would oppose such a demarcation.

Both Jugendweihe and confirmation participants consisted of a mix of pupils who attended either *Regelschule* or *Gymnasium*. In fact, it was more likely for pupils from a *Gymnasium* than from a *Regelschule* to participate in Jugendweihe. Germany has extremely high inequality in educational opportunities compared internationally, and attendance at a *Gymnasium* is particularly dependent on one’s (parents’) socio-economic background (Becker 2012). Unsurprisingly, then, in cases where teenagers did not mark their coming-of-age through a celebration, they were more likely to be found in a *Regelschule*. Not celebrating Jugendweihe was most often due to unaffordability, and thus families and teenagers from lower socio-economic backgrounds were disproportionately affected. In the next section, I look more closely at the costs attached to celebrating Jugendweihe in order to unearth convergences and divergences across families and between the socialist past and the present.

### ***The Cost of Celebrating the Jugendweihe Ceremony***

When I asked Celine during our family conversation how many pupils in her class had celebrated Jugendweihe, she told me that not everyone had participated. Her mother, Sandra, asserted that in fact not very many of Celine’s classmates had celebrated

Jugendweihe, only ten or eleven; and her father, Peter, added that ‘they didn’t have enough money’ to do so. This comment triggered Celine’s grandmother to exclaim: ‘Many have not got that much money! It costs a lot of money. The celebration alone you have to pay for – in the theatre, that’s really...! Well, I thought the school would take care of it or the city would do it, that they...’. Celine’s father interrupted: ‘Everything that was for free back then [during GDR times], today you have to pay for yourself!’

They then took turns complaining about the cost of the tickets for the public ceremony in the Gera Theatre, for which they claimed to have spent €200. When I carefully suggested that the cost was actually €95 and that it seemed to be a reasonable price – given that it included not only the teenager’s participation but also six tickets for guests – they admitted that they were unsure of how much they had actually paid and perhaps exaggerated. Nevertheless, Celine’s mother forcefully continued: ‘Well, all the same, what do you think what the *Hartzler* here... for them even €100 [is a lot] – for someone who receives €350 [per month] *Hartz IV*.’ And Celine’s father added: ‘It is a lot all right, but it’s not that that’s expensive – it’s everything that’s added – the ‘*Drumberum*’ (everything else).’ And Celine’s mother drove her point home: ‘Her friend, for example, she wasn’t part of it [Jugendweihe] – when you have to calculate with €350, you just cannot spend €100!’ Now Celine cut in: ‘But they can make something like an application so that they can get it paid by someone, can’t they?’ And while both her mother and her grandmother’s partner confirmed that this was the case, she herself further considered: ‘Yeah, but when you then also have to buy a dress and everything else...’.

Such complaints about unfair changes in state provisions after the shift from a socialist to a capitalist social order are a fairly common phenomenon among people in post-socialist societies (Mandel and Humphrey 2002: 3). However, while Celine’s parents and grandparents criticised the fact that one now has to pay a ceremony fee – which marks the greatest difference from the GDR Jugendweihe, which was state-sponsored and thus free – they also acknowledged that it was not the fee but the associated cost of the celebration that hindered other teenagers from partaking. Indeed, all these associated costs already existed in the GDR era, including expenses for hospitality, clothes, and gifts. But the act of pointing out these socio-economic issues cuts both ways. On the one hand, it was a criticism of the current social order, which exacerbated social stratification and thus excluded people; on the other, it was a re-assertion that one personally was not

affected by these changes, but rather belonged to a higher stratum. In fact, Celine later told me that her best friend, Lexi, had desperately wanted to celebrate Jugendweihe, which caused an argument with her mother. She did not explicitly mention that Lexi's mother could not afford to cater to her daughter's wishes, but – given Sandra's indication that Lexi's mother was a Hartz IV recipient – it was likely a matter of affordability. Lexi's case was not an exception: I was told of other people who, despite employment, claimed to be unable to afford their child's Jugendweihe celebration because of their low income.

Yet Celine's own family led a comfortable lifestyle, which not only included regular holidays abroad but was also mirrored in their new German car, an Audi, in their fashionable clothes, and in their impeccable and stylish house. Sandra and Peter both divorced their first partners and decided not to get married again. They met during the Wende-time, and Peter once admitted to me that when he had first set eyes on Sandra some twenty-odd years ago he thought her to be conceited because of the way she always put so much effort into her appearance. His friends expressed similar fears to him; but he added, 'you quickly figure out that she is not like that all. Once you get to talk to her you realize she is totally down to earth and doesn't mince matters.' Like their two daughters, Sandra was always well-dressed and – unlike most eastern German women of her generation – I have never seen her without make-up. She runs a small successful catering business with eight employees, whereas Peter has worked as a mechanic at the same dealership garage his entire life. He bemoaned that he could no longer make money 'on the side' by repairing cars of friends or acquaintances, which was a useful income generator in the GDR's second economy, and was still worthwhile in the early 1990s. Nowadays, such work was no longer profitable, and most of his 'spare time' was spent helping out in his wife's business by running diverse errands. Indeed, Celine's parents pointed out to me several times that they worked hard and long hours. When they showed me around their lovely, big garden, which looked immaculate to me, they claimed they no longer took things very seriously, but went on to point out every nook and cranny of imperfections. According to them, it was in a 'terrible state' because, due to their work commitments, they hadn't had enough time to tend to the gardening properly.

Although Celine knew about Jugendweihe already from her older sister, she was not at all certain whether to celebrate her own – and her uncertainty was augmented by her best friend's situation. Sandra insisted that her daughter should mark her coming-of-age, which

was partly based on treating their two daughters equally. But she was even more insistent, as explained in Chapter 4, because Sandra herself had been denied a happy family celebration by her relatives, who demonstrated their disapproval of her parents' imminent divorce by refusing to attend her party. Although she had initially played the incident down, perhaps because of her mother's presence, after Celine's maternal grandparents had left, Sandra elaborated that her bad experience had been the main motivation behind her insistence on celebrating Celine's Jugendweihe. She noted: 'It's like if you now say no, then this phase is over, and you didn't experience it and that is just a shame. I just didn't want that [for her]. She had to celebrate it come hell or high water!'. This concern may explain why Celine's mother invested so much energy, effort and money in celebrating the family celebration in a restaurant, catering for a total of 27 people. However, it does not account for why she also insisted on attendance at the Jugendweihe ceremony. In fact, her husband had played along with what seemed to be largely her decisions. While he thought that the ceremony had been entertaining, he admitted he instead would have preferred a party with Celine's classmates' families in the garden or a hired venue, or perhaps, just a low-key family celebration. This difference in attitude was, I believe, not simply based on gender and their varying experience of their own GDR Jugendweihe, but also intersected with their families' differing socio-economic backgrounds.

After Celine and her grandparents had left, Sandra brought out the photographs of Celine's Jugendweihe. Peter proudly commented that the professional photographer had been taken by their daughter's looks, and had said that she could even pursue a career as model. Celine was indeed a strikingly beautiful girl, and on the day of her Jugendweihe she looked like she had just stepped off the catwalk on Heidi Klum's popular TV show *Germany's Next Top Model*. She seemed to be closer to eighteen than her actual age, in part because of the way she presented herself. She sported a knee-length silky dress with a small décolleté that was not too revealing but nevertheless highlighted her slim feminine physique, enhanced by high heels. Her long brownish-red hair was stylishly pinned to one side, where it fell in bouncy curls down over her left shoulder. The soft rose colour of her dress harmonized with her face's porcelain skin and make-up had been skilfully applied to accentuate her blue eyes. The day of her Jugendweihe was her big day, and she was dressed to impress – a fact which had been well-captured by the photographer.

Unlike most parents who buy their teenager's Jugendweihe outfit in one of the clothing stores at the shopping mall or by mail order, Sandra selected a few dresses from a boutique in town not frequented by adolescents. As we were flicking through the photos, Peter and Sandra both assessed the other teenagers' attire, and recalled others from the ceremony those participants who were not in the photographs they had bought. They both took issue with some male adolescents who had worn trainers, and some girls who wore too short a skirt, both of which were judged to be under-dressed or inappropriate for the festivity. But they also disliked the fact that some female adolescents 'entirely overdid it', and they mocked those who were 'wearing a crown': a couple of girls wore debutante-like outfits including a tiara in their hair. When we were looking at the photographs taken of the group of adolescents on stage after being congratulated on their Jugendweihe, Sandra pointed out that the girl standing next to Celine on stage was the daughter of one of her employees. She shook her head and remarked: 'What are the chances for that to happen, that they of all people would stand next to each other? It was kind of awkward.' The fact that her daughter and her employee's daughter stood next to each other on the stage seemed to cause her some discomfort.

Admittedly, I was a little stunned by her comment, especially as it appeared to contradict the empathy she had expressed earlier for Lexi's situation. However, their earlier comments about people who could not afford to celebrate Jugendweihe – which I had initially interpreted as complaints directed against the state for not offering more support – also entailed something else: it was their way of subtly expressing that they could afford it, and did not have to rely on outside help for providing their daughter with the 'big bash' she deserved. The public ceremony then provided an extra opportunity to show off the fact that they could afford for their daughter to go to the hairdresser's in the morning for a special hairdo, and to buy a special dress that no one else would have. The remarks about the inappropriate clothes of others also established that their own offspring was dressed appropriately for the occasion. Moreover, the fact that Celine's parents had purchased not only selected photographs of the ceremony, as the majority of parents did, but had also gone to an appointment with the photographer to take portraits of their daughter was another way of distinguishing themselves from others. Most families were not able or willing to spend extra money on professional photographs, let alone purchase thank you cards with the initiand's portrait from a photographer. While Daniel called most

people he could not thank in person for his presents, Lukas's and Nils' parents made thank you cards at a photo machine in a drug store from a portrait I had taken of each on their Jugendweihe.

During conversations I had with Peter and Sandra independently, they both had said that it was hard to find the 'right employees', that is, people willing to work hard. However, I later learned that Sandra paid her employees less than the aspired minimum wage – which seemed out of tune with her concern about people not having enough money to celebrate Jugendweihe. Sandra's and Peter's work ethic was not simply a matter of 'if you work hard enough, you can afford certain things'. But through their commentary on their own hard work, they also implied that others were not working hard. Indeed, the recounting of Sandra's difficulties in finding appropriate staff made explicit the fact that they subscribed to the idea of 'if you work harder than others, you can get ahead of them' – a possibility that was very restricted under the GDR.

For Celine's family, the public ceremony was an additional opportunity for distinction-making: a hybrid of the old cultural capital of the GDR (Jugendweihe itself) and the new cultural capital (the appropriate way of presenting oneself by standing out in a fashionable, tasteful manner). Sandra knew how to present herself: she did not adhere to the 'natural woman' look that was propagated under the GDR, but at the same time she did not overuse make up. Family members' clothes were selected in a manner that was deemed to fit within the new social order, and other people's failure to do the same was pointed out in various ways. While work outside the home remained important as source of income, it was used increasingly as a way to distinguish oneself from others. In short, Celine's parents were able to combine the old and the new as successfully as the Jugendweihe Association in its adaptation of the ritual: celebrating Jugendweihe meant not denying one's own past and sharing it with other Thuringians. Yet it also meant illustrating to a larger audience that they were people who had 'made it' in the new social order.

While the ceremony fee, the special clothes and photographs represented costs incurred for the public ceremony, the greatest cost of celebrating Jugendweihe was attached to the family celebration and gifts, which I discuss next.

## ***The Cost of the Family Celebration: Hospitality and Gifts***

Grandparents in particular often commented negatively on the excess of expenditure for both Jugendweihe celebrations and gifts. When I spoke to Herr Lorenz, Nils's paternal grandfather, about Nils's upcoming Jugendweihe celebration, he exclaimed in reference to Nils's parents: 'They are crazy – [They invited] thirty people! What that all cost!' Jugendweihe family celebrations usually didn't appear particularly lavish. On the contrary, parents liked to point out to me their strategies for having kept costs low. For families to spend between €2,000 and €2,500 on their child's Jugendweihe, when they catered for more than twenty guests and celebrated at a restaurant, was not unheard of – but it was also not the rule. Sandra claimed to have spent an estimated total of €2,000, including not only the restaurant bill and the ceremony fee but also Celine's outfit, presents, and photographs. Both Lukas's and Daniel's families only had lunch at a restaurant and then celebrated with their extended family and friends at home or at a hired venue nearby respectively. Nils's family had no lunch at all, and celebrated at a hired venue as well. Andrea, Franka, and Beate had explained to me that it was more economical not to celebrate in a restaurant: in all three families, dinner was provided through a catering service and supplemented with some home-made foods. But while avoiding restaurants was a way of keeping costs low, so was the decision of how many people to invite. Lukas's party consisted of 18 people who managed to fit in the living room, though furniture had been moved out and rearranged, and the sunny weather helped people to spread outside onto the patio. Franka, Daniel's mother, decided to hire an inexpensive venue located in the same street as their home because her partner came from a large family that made it impossible to celebrate in her living room; she added: 'And to have a celebration for 45 people at a restaurant, well that really goes beyond the scope of it...that would already be a wedding!'

But while both *Kaffee & Kuchen* and dinner used to be must-have elements at any major life-cycle event, not providing the former seemed also to be a way of saving money. Sandra claimed that it was 'too much' and 'too stressful' to provide *Kaffee & Kuchen* for everyone as well as. However, Franka was certainly also interested in keeping the cost of the celebration low, since she – as she told me some months later – had been made redundant from her job as a lathe operator around the same time. Prior to her unemployment, she had not been paid by her company for a few months, despite working

double-shifts to fulfil customer contracts. Money in Daniel's family was certainly tight – unlike in the case of Celine's. But while Franka explained that it would have been too stressful for her to also provide *Kaffee & Kuchen* since she catered herself, she added that she had recently been to a festivity where most of the dinner remained untouched because they had offered *Kaffee & Kuchen*. Since there was not much time between the two meals, and since she could not serve dinner late because of the many young children among her kin, it would have been wasteful to provide it.

As such, much thought went into the planning of hospitality – often by mothers, who were in charge of these family affairs – in particular, in order to avoid excessive expenditure. Yet their attempts to save costs cannot simply be reduced to a lack of financial resources, as the difference of funds between Celine's and Daniel's families indicates. In her study of quinceañeras celebrated to mark the coming-of-age of girls in Latin American communities in the United States, Julia Alvarez (2008) reports that despite parents' unemployment and/or struggles to make ends meet, families often spend vast amounts on lavish parties for their daughters. These parties were marked by conspicuous consumption on the part of the aspiring minority migrant families, who sought to demonstrate to others that they had succeeded in the USA. Alvarez estimated an average cost of \$15,000 for a quinceañera, and although such costs were often shared among the extended family and community, parents frequently incurred debts for the celebration (Alvarez 2008: 39; 78-79). In East Thuringia, incurring debts for Jugendweihe was unheard of; and I suggest that keeping costs low, and freely explaining how one had done so, both reflected the moral value of frugality. Modesty and frugality were values variously expressed by all generations, and conveyed to teenagers in regard to monetary gifts.

As already noted, grandparental and parental generations often pinpointed money as the main motivation for adolescents to celebrate Jugendweihe, while many adolescents only talked about their presents after having been asked about them directly (see Chapter 4). Generally, there was a sense of unease in speaking about such matters; and because many teenagers felt uncomfortable about stating how much money they were given, I included some questions regarding gift-giving practices in an anonymous survey, which made visible stark differences in the amounts of money teenagers received on their Jugendweihe. The survey collected information from 50 teenagers who celebrated Jugendweihe in 2013, and indicates that the average amount of money they were given

was slightly more than €1,200.<sup>47</sup> While most teenagers (15) received more than €500, almost as many received more than €1,500 (12) and more than €1,000 (10) (see Table 10). Money had already been an important Jugendweihe gift under state socialism, and I was somewhat baffled by parents' and grandparents' portrayal of today's Jugendweihe as consumer-driven. After my fieldwork I conducted a small survey of gift-giving practices at GDR Jugendweihe celebrations among the parental generation, which garnered 30 responses (see Table 11). Here too, substantial amounts of money were indicated, averaging a little more than 700 GDR Marks. While at first sight there appears to be an increase in the monetary value of gifts in the post-Wende context, these figures are not so easily comparable – in part due to differences in spending power in each time period, but also because consumer goods were given as well (an issue I return to later).

*Table 10: Monetary Gifts received by Jugendweibe Participants 2013*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Amount of Money</b>	<b>in %</b>
6	> € 2,500	12
5	> € 2,000	10
12	> €1,500	24
10	> €1,000	20
15	> € 500	30
2	> € 200	4
<hr/> 50		<hr/> 100
<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>

*Table 11: Monetary Gifts received by Jugendweibe Participants 1975-1989*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Amount of Money</b>	<b>in %</b>
0	> M 2,500	0
0	> M 2,000	0
4	> M 1,500	13
6	> M 1,000	20
18	> M 500	60
2	> M 200	7
<hr/> 30		<hr/> 100
<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>

<sup>47</sup> A total of 55 teenagers took part in this survey, but only 50 of them made useable statements to the question of how much money they received.

However, what is certainly clear is an increase in stratification. While in the 1970s and 1980s, the difference between the largest amount a teenager received on their Jugendweihe (more than 1,500) and the lowest amount of money received (more than 200) was approximately 7.5 times, today this difference (between more than 200 and more than 2,500) has increased to 12.5 times. These big variances were surprising in themselves; but what this meant for teenagers was only brought home to me in group conversations, when such divergences were revealed among friends, generating awkward moments for the teenagers and me alike.

Such awkwardness emerged when I spoke with Amy, Jessica and Leoni, three female friends who attended the same school and had celebrated Jugendweihe about half a year prior to our conversation. Before we began, I asked them to fill in a brief questionnaire which also asked about their parents' occupations. Jessica boisterously exclaimed: 'My mum's occupation? What am I supposed to fill in here: cleaner? How embarrassing is that!' Later, when I questioned them about the details of their family celebration, Amy and Leoni had to think for some time about how many guests were at their Jugendweihe party, and both eventually settled on 'about 35 or 40' each. However, when it was Jessica's turn, she very quickly and precisely exclaimed: '11!', causing everyone to giggle. While such differences can easily be ascribed to divergent family sizes, it became apparent that there were also socio-economic factors at play when they elaborated upon what they had received for their Jugendweihe. While Amy's and Leoni's lists were long, with special gifts and substantial estimated amounts of money, Jessica – half disappointed and half embarrassed – explained that she did not receive very much money, and hence did not save any of it. These large variances mirror differences in each family's ability to build social networks, and the extent of those networks, but also the socio-economic status of both family and social network – which are essentially interdependent. Jessica's family not only struggled in socio-economic terms, it also lacked social capital.

As Jessica's case demonstrates, what teenagers do with their money, also depended greatly on the amount of money they received. Many adolescents made larger purchases, such as a laptop or a digital camera, or they spent part of the money on something they fancied, while the remaining (usually greater) amount was saved. Most commonly – if the amount was substantial – the money was put into a savings account. Of the above-mentioned survey sample, 36% claimed to have saved their entire Jugendweihe money, while 42%

claimed to have saved between 50 and 80%. Teenagers frequently mentioned the great costs attached to obtaining a driving licence, which at the same time was seen as an absolute ‘must have’. Predictably, many saved a significant part or even their entire Jugendweihe money for this venture, which was anticipated within approximately three to five years of the celebration. Saving money was often viewed as a matter-of-fact decision: if you wanted to ‘achieve’ something in life, such as owning a car or building a house, you would require a lot of cash, and you could not save up for this early enough. The importance of saving money was stressed by many adolescents, and while not all had a current account, I did not come across a single teenager who did not have a savings account. In Germany, saving money is also a moral act: to be a spendthrift would already preclude you from achieving anything in life, because you had to start accumulating money for the future.

The necessity of saving money came to the fore in particular when I asked teenagers in group conversations about their aspirations and dreams for the future. Sixteen-year-old Pia named three essential life aims: she wanted her own house, children, and for ‘my family to be happy – that is the alpha and omega!’ When I later asked her and her friends, Nele and Sophia, how they would deal with it, if things did not go according to their life plans, I referred back to what they had told me earlier, prompting: ‘For example, if you don’t get the university place or you don’t get the mortgage to build your house?’ I had somehow anticipated that they would refer to their family’s (at least moral) support, but Pia quickly and drily countered: ‘But one can already save money for one’s house!’ This attitude towards saving, I suggest, was perhaps even more pronounced in eastern Germany where offspring could not expect – unlike in West Germany – to receive valuable property or financial assets through inheritance or *inter vivos* transfer, since the accumulation of property and money were heavily circumscribed under state socialism (see Leopold and Schneider 2011: 600).

Saving Jugendweihe money was recognized for its potential to be useful later in life, yet this potential was limited. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the importance of work and the way it could make one independent was conveyed by the older generations, who seemed to encourage teenagers to be self-reliant at an early age. Although teenagers shared an immediate common goal of graduating, attending university was not something that was set in stone for all of them; as Pia explained:

Well, at the moment it is like this: we are at a *Regelschule* and we would have to do yet another three years [in order to be able to study at university] and when you then consider how long that is until you, until you finally earn money, this is already a long time! And then ...you can still study later. Well, nobody dictates that you have to do it now.

While the money that teens received on their Jugendweihe set them up reasonably well for their future lives, their own aspiration was to become truly independent – and this independence was only to be achieved through earning money oneself, as early as possible. When I asked him about his dreams for the future, Daniel straight away stated, ‘Well, that after the festivity (Jugendweihe) I am close to being independent, to be content with what I have done in life, so that I am then *fröhlich* (cheerful). Asked when he would be ‘cheerful’, he replied: ‘Well, when I’ve got a good job, I’m independent and... well, when I have managed a good start into my *Berufsleben* (working life/career) and that through it, like – yes, that I can live!’ When I asked him further what he meant by ‘independent’, he commented: ‘Well that I don’t have to necessarily rely on help.’

However, it is important not to overstate teenagers’ willingness to save money, or indeed to argue that they could fully decide for themselves how to make best use of their Jugendweihe money. Rather, the ritual’s monetary gifts served an educative function in the changing relationship between the adolescents and their parents. Teenagers seemed to be given more freedom of choice in what to do with their ‘own money’; but in reality, more often than not parents had the final say on financial matters. Because this contradiction was recognised by adolescents, it could also create – or add to – familial tensions, because parents and teenagers might disagree about what the money was to be spent on, or when. Such tensions emerged between Celine and her father, who had already claimed in our conversation that, for teenagers, the ritual was nothing but ‘an opportunity to make money’. He felt this fact confirmed when his daughter expressed that she was indeed the most pleased about ‘the dosh’. However, she then continued with a complaint made while looking reproachfully at her mother: ‘But it has all been paid into my savings account!’, to which her father countered: ‘As it should be!’

While the majority of adolescents saved at least part of their money, there were not only differences in terms of amounts, but also in terms of what it might be spent on. While Celine received more than €1,000, she explained to me that saving the money was not meant for a particular purpose; it just prevented her from spending it on ‘something

useless', as she described it. However, her mother added that Celine's older sister had used her Jugendweihe money for her first car, which – unlike under state socialism – has become essential for employment. Peter interjected that they will very likely pay for Celine's driving licence so that her Jugendweihe money need not be touched for this purpose.

Celine – through her parents' insistence – was already accruing funds for her future life. But this accrual was only possible because her family was in a more privileged socio-economic position than others, such as Jessica, or Celine's best friend, Lexi. Despite these increasing socio-economic differences, and some families' efforts to distinguish themselves through clothes and photographs, what families appeared to have in common was a practical attitude marked by frugality. In the last section, I want to illuminate what these changes in gift-giving practices can tell us about changed social relations.

### **Changes in Gift-giving**

I have argued that through sketches (Chapter 4) and the saving of money, Jugendweihe served to convey to the younger generation quite practically that one ought to work for money and ought to save it for future use. This process of making a moral person starts long before Jugendweihe, and certainly does not stop with its conclusion. Often being frugal as a moral practice was simply verbally reinforced between older and younger generations, as I witnessed one May afternoon a few weeks after Lukas's Jugendweihe when I passed the ice cream parlour in the large shopping mall in town, and saw his sister Regina and his paternal grandmother, Frau Jahnke, sitting there. I stopped to say hello, but since Frau Jahnke is not only outgoing and chatty but also curious, I was very quickly drawn into a conversation about my life in Scotland. Frau Jahnke, who was in her seventies, inquired what I had been doing for nine years in Edinburgh, adding, 'surely not *just* studying?' She seemed to be relieved to hear that I had worked before, and to approve of the fact that I had been trained in a 'proper job' by telling me that she was a book-keeper herself. She continued to reminisce about how impossible it was now to imagine that 'back in the day' everything was 'calculated in our heads' and without the help of a computer. And since book-keepers tend to be good with money, this discussion led her to explain to me her reasons for being in town that day: to ask for a loan from a bank.

Frau Jahnke was surprised to hear that, despite her advanced age, she was eligible. The young bank clerk, she said, had then involved her in a conversation about what loaning practices were like during GDR times; but she confessed that she could not remember whether loans existed in the GDR, and exclaimed: 'Possibly not! I mean how can they give you a loan for a car or furniture when you had to wait for it for years?' Today, of course, she continued it was a different matter – there was too great a temptation and people could so easily take up loans. Yet she too held the view that money needed to be earned and saved before one could spend it. Regina, who was four years Lukas's senior, listened patiently and smiled knowingly the entire time in a way that led me to believe she had heard her granny's views on the matter many times before. But granny Jahnke paused, looked at her granddaughter and gently advised her: 'Take your two grandmothers as role models; we still know how to look after money, most people today do not know that any longer!' Regina bluntly replied: 'Granny, there is no money in my current account and I don't have an overdraft, so I cannot take any money out nor accrue any debt!' But her granny countered: 'So you say, I once heard that people took out a loan for a holiday. Imagine, a holiday! How could they?'

Although Frau Jahnke never volunteered what she required the loan for, throughout the conversation she made clear to me and to her granddaughter that it was a well-considered step, and something of a necessity. She also seemed to differentiate acceptable reasons to take out a loan: it had to be for something that was produced and durable, rather than a fleeting holiday. The fact that money properly should be spent on something practical and lasting, I would suggest, was also noticeable in the ways gift giving has changed around Jugendweihe. Such changes in gift-giving practices in rural post-socialist contexts have been noted, for example, by Monica Vasile (2015) in Transylvania and Frances Pine (2000) in the Polish Podhale for weddings. In both contexts, money given on the occasion of a wedding served as a 'means for redistribution from the community to the newly established family' (Vasile 2015: 159), but the value or type of gifts changed after the demise of the socialist command economy.

Vasile notes that while monetary gifts at weddings had already increased in the 1960s and 1970s due to the economic boom that led to employment in state factories and cash income, greater inflation occurred as part of the rapid economic post-socialist transformation. She estimates that an average wedding in 2009-10 would yield roughly

€14,000, that is, an increase in monetary gifts from the 1980s by approximately twelve times (Vasile 2015: 154-155). In contrast, Pine (2000) demonstrates that among the Gorale in the Polish Podhale, gift-giving practices at weddings did not necessarily change in terms of relative value; rather, where formerly the mandatory gift was a set amount of money, in the 1990s newlyweds were presented with 'household appliances, glass and china' (Pine 2000: 97-98). Pine argues that this shift from money to household goods is representative of commodification and a greater value ascribed to work outside the house than it was under state socialism. Both these examples demonstrate exceptional cases of abundance within each respective country, and of course coming-of-age rituals are not as lavish as weddings *per se* – as Franka pointed out earlier – in order to draw a distinction between them. Yet such life cycle rituals frequently mirror each other, and Jugendweihe – as noted in Chapter 4 – served in the 1970s and 1980s to contribute to the adolescent's future household, either through money or (in the case of girls) through trousseau items.

Jugendweihe always included a combination of monetary and non-monetary gifts, but contrary to the Gorale weddings, East Thuringians appear to have shifted from consumer goods to money. This shift is perhaps best illustrated by the two pictures of Jugendweihe gift displays below: one from my own Jugendweihe in 1987, the other from a contemporary Jugendweihe (see Figures 17 and 18). The gift display of the contemporary Jugendweihe is rather modest: a tiny table with some flowers, personalized monetary gifts and small wrapped gifts. The table in the 1980s displays not only personal gifts, such as a portable stereo and jewellery, but also trousseau items, such as bedlinen, towels, tea towels and table cloths – all visible, that is, unwrapped. The table had to be extended to fit all the items, as is noticeable by the hurriedly laid down, undersized table cloth; flowers are on a separate table, and the gifted travel bag is placed under the gift table.



*Figure 17: Jugendweihe Gift Display 1987*



*Figure 18: Jugendweihe Gift Display 2013*

Under state socialism, the convention in villages in particular was for girls to receive trousseau items for their future household on their Jugendweihe. I have never come across a female member of either the parental or grandparental generation who had not

received towels and/or tea towels on their Jugendweihe in the GDR. Often there would be additional household goods, such as bedlinen, table cloths, bath towels and handkerchiefs. Presents tended to be recorded by recipients, partly to thank the giver, but also to be able to reciprocate in future. One mother, who had kept her list of Jugendweihe presents from the late 1980s, received a total of 31 towels, 27 tea towels, 19 handkerchiefs and 3 bath towels, as well as a cook book, a sewing kit, and a set of tea spoons. In addition to these trousseau gifts she received personal gifts such as perfume, clothes, a pair of tights, a purse and a watch, as well as a total amount of 1,220 GDR Marks. Unsurprisingly, only four of these gifts came from close kin, while 67 were from other households. Boys sometimes also received trousseau items, but this was rare and usually limited to a few handkerchiefs and a towel. A father who showed me his Jugendweihe present list from the early 1980s had received a total of 1,485 Marks. He had also received a total of 103 Jugendweihe cards, of which 15 were cards only – usually from age mates – while 17 presented him with a gift, such as a bag, a watch, clothes, and handkerchiefs. He received money from 71 different households: 5 Marks each from 23, 10 Marks each from 26, and 20 Marks each from 9, with higher amounts between 50 and 100 Marks from relatives.

In the past Jugendweihe worked not unlike rural weddings: the greater community helped to set up a fund for the adolescent's future life – most money was saved, and trousseau gifts were stored away for future use. Given this combination of consumer items and money, it is difficult to establish with confidence that an actual increase in gift-giving occurred in the post-Wende years, as Vasile has indicated for Transylvanian weddings. But it does seem clear that a shift from consumer items to money has occurred. Despite this conspicuous consumption during GDR times, grandparental and parental generations seemed to insist with concern that Jugendweihe today is 'all about money'. Although today individual gifts are still given, not a single adolescent reported having received trousseau items – with the exception of Jessica, who remarked: 'I also got a towel from my mother. No clue what I am meant to do with that!' This discontinuity of trousseau items is unlikely to indicate that parents no longer hope their offspring will set up their own households. Rather, in the past, such consumer goods were less subject to fashion trends as is the case in contemporary capitalist society. Indeed, Andrea pointed out to me how she was still using the tea towels she had received on her Jugendweihe more than 30 years ago. Socialist consumer goods were durable and produced to last, and in turn were used with greater

care – unlike today, as I was painfully reminded toward the end of my fieldwork when my four-year-old laptop broke. My friend who came to assess the damage, commented: ‘Well, four years is a pretty good lifespan; laptops are not meant to last. This is how capitalism works. It’s not like socialism any more when things lasted forever.’ Today both the giving and displaying of such items, I suggest, is inappropriate because they are no longer lasting, useful assets for a future household.

More importantly, nowadays these items are easily available, and can be bought at the time of need – both according to fashion and to one’s personal taste. In contrast, and as stated in the first section of this chapter, under the GDR people not only required sufficient funds to buy products, but to get hold of such products required the social capital of *Vitamin B* (connections). The display of consumer products and the stack of cards visible in Figure 17 were not simply a display of the economic fecundity of the household. Rather these goods displayed the social capital of the household, that is, how well-connected it was to other households. These displays of portable stereos, travel bags, or towels and bedlinen that the initiand received – usually from close and extended kin – symbolized connections that enabled those kin to procure such coveted goods. The stacks of cards from various households are indicative of the wide network of relations of mutual obligations, and reproduced them into the future as well. Gifts from neighbours and family friends, who were not part of the family celebration, were often reciprocated with a plate of cakes, and with money gifts on the occasions of the other households’ Jugendweihe or wedding celebrations. Today, none of the initiands I talked to received gifts from more than 30 different givers – indicating that the money given per person has increased while the social network has shrunk.

Since nowadays *Vitamin B* is no longer required for the services of tradespeople or for purchasing consumer goods, status symbols are expressed differently. Gifts have shifted accordingly from a focus on social capital that was convertible to economic capital, to solely economic capital. This shift in turn explains why some families have eliminated or limited ‘coffee and cake’, since the cakes under socialism were also used to expand the household through commensality – acknowledging other households in a network of mutual obligations. While money provides a better option for attaining necessary services and items for the future, it also symbolizes what grandparents in particular complained

about with Jugendweihe, which was congruent with their complaints about capitalism at large: that it was all about money. Although money featured prominently in the GDR Jugendweihe, today a similar amount of money gifts would be spread among far fewer households. As such, the complaint, I believe, was not directed against money itself, but its change in symbolic value, which now de-emphasised the connections for which it had previously stood (as much as household goods had). Today, households have contracted in terms of the size of social networks on which they depend; and these connections required in a 'economics of shortages' (Kornai 1980) have disappeared with the disappearance of the GDR's second economy.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have illustrated that Jugendweihe mirrored the greater socioeconomic stratification of contemporary eastern German society. On the one hand, it excluded adolescents from celebrating the ritual due to economic reasons. On the other, some Thuringians perceived Jugendweihe to be associated with a lower social stratum, which is perhaps less surprising given the ritual's historical link to the labour movement (see Chapter 2). Neither of these two issues would have arisen as markers of difference under state socialism. I particularly focused on greater socio-economic differences among Jugendweihe participants, which was discernible, for example, in the divergences between the lowest and highest amounts of money gifts received. The ritual served in both socialist and contemporary times to support the adolescent through the gift-giving of money and consumer goods for their future life, and thus not only helped them to set up their own future households, but also reproduced cycles of consumption and mutual obligation with others (Bloch and Parry 1989). At the same time, it reified existent socio-economic differences and transmitted them into the future, where some adolescents would set out with a much lower fund than others.

I argued that a change in distinction-making has taken place in which signifiers of social class – such as occupation and education – are increasingly referenced, though they played a limited role as status symbols in the socialist past. People subtly distinguished themselves from each other through references in taste, such as in respect to clothes; and I suggested that the public ceremony also represented an opportunity for families to present

themselves in a way that showed that they had succeeded in the new social order. Both past and present Jugendweihe celebrations attracted considerable costs for the familial household, both in terms of hospitality and gifts. Yet while the families I discussed differed in terms of economic standing, they appeared to share a moral discourse on frugality – a value that they hoped their offspring would adopt. This emphasis on frugality, I suggest, needs to be also understood in light of the fact that due to state socialism the accumulation of money and property was very restricted, and as such eastern Germans inherit less compared to western Germans. Indeed, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs noted in its Fourth Poverty and Wealth Report that an average western German household owns 132,000 Euros in real estate and financial assets – in contrast to the average eastern German household at 55,000 Euros or only 42% of its western counterpart (BAMS 2013: 343).

The change in gift-giving practices from the socialist command economy to a capitalist free market economy, I suggested, was mirrored in the ritual as a microcosm of wider socioeconomic relations. I argued that this shift reflects a decline in social relations between households. As noted in Chapter 4, under state socialism the state's intention was to direct people away from material and monetary gift-giving on the occasion of their Jugendweihe. Yet because consumer goods became fetishized as valuable due to their rarity and as status symbol of social capital – and specifically, the ability to attain them through connections – they played a crucial role both in distinction-making and in creating and maintaining social relations. With the disappearance of the second economy in the free market economy, which only requires money to purchase goods and services, such social relations appear to have vanished as well. This contracting of social relations, I suggest, is similar to the changes in social togetherness discussed in Chapter 3, and is what older generations complain about when they point out that Jugendweihe is 'only about money'.

Nevertheless, I suggest that parental and grandparental generations successfully combined the old cultural capital – the habitus of celebrating Jugendweihe – with some of the new cultural capital of the contemporary social order. Since the Jugendweihe Association appears to be the proprietor for organizing and maintaining the celebration of Jugendweihe into the future, I turn my attention to its work and the Association's relation to wider society in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### **The Jugendweihe Association: Keeping it in the ‘Family’?**

It was November 2012, and the combined annual meeting and year-end celebration of the regional Jugendweihe Association was being held in the restaurant at Castle *Osterstein* – a location in the forest above the romantic old part of Gera, with views over the entire city. Dagmar, the vice chairwoman, explained how the Association had fared in the past year, thanked everyone for their hard work, and asked rhetorically: ‘who would have thought, we’d still be here today?’. The tone was congratulatory; but there were also challenges ahead in maintaining and raising the Association’s profile and participation numbers. And as such, despite the relaxed atmosphere, there was a sense of anxiety about the future of Jugendweihe, and the need for *Nachwuchs* (new blood or offspring) in the Association – a concern that echoed through Dagmar’s speech and the one given by Elke, the chairwoman, thereafter.

Meanwhile Sonja, one of the oldest members of the Association, was sitting next to me and whispering information on the organisation’s ‘who’s who’ in my ear. 27 members were present, out of their nominal membership base 35. She explained to me that many of them, and/or their parents, had been involved in Jugendweihe during GDR times. Sonja referred to some of them jokingly as ‘real pre-historic rock’ (*richtiges Urgestein*), not only because of their work for Jugendweihe in socialist times but also because they ‘had been faithful’, and had continued their work in a changed political landscape.

The convivial atmosphere of the meeting, followed by lunch, resembled a family gathering more than a board meeting. Members not only ate and drank together, they also gossiped about some former members – the ‘black sheep’ of the Association – and interrupted each other in ways only acceptable among close friends or family members. After lunch, members took turns in telling rude jokes, or engaged in more sincere conversations, depending on where they were sitting at the large U-shaped dining table. Once everyone had waved goodbye and parted, Jutta, an Association member in her mid-fifties, and I descended the hill together and continued chatting about the meeting and the Association.

When I remarked that there seemed to be quite a lot of members who had already been working for Jugendweihe in some capacity during GDR times, she agreed, smilingly adding: ‘They also all come from *dieser Richtung* (‘this [political] orientation’).

Because of the family-like character of the meeting, I was not surprised when some of the members explained to me that the way they related to each other was like a family: ‘We are actually just like a big family!’ While one can quickly discard such remarks as metaphors or even as pretence aimed at portraying an idyllic association world to me as an outsider/researcher, as fieldwork progressed, this notion of a family-like bond was frequently confirmed. The way members interacted with each other on a day-to-day basis (see Chapter 1), the way they celebrated each other’s life cycle events, such as Elke’s and Dagmar’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday parties, but also the ways they cared for each other were suggestive of family-like bonds that were beyond mere idiom.

This chapter focusses on the Jugendweihe Association and its members, and considers how they negotiated their new place within a unified Germany by moving from a former state Jugendweihe County Committee to a registered association. I argue that the forms of relatedness I observed among Association members were created through a shared experience of the socialist past, and the shared hardships of the Wende-years – but also a shared political perspective that affected these experiences in particular ways. In the first part of this chapter, I show that the older Association members continue to employ the socialist rhetoric of a ‘fight for the cause’, but have substituted ‘communism’ with ‘Jugendweihe’. While Association members not only referred to one another as family-like but incorporated first degree kin into the Association, I suggest that their sense of kinship was based on a shared moral project of sustaining Jugendweihe into the future. In the second part of the chapter, I argue that the extrapolation of the kinship idiom to the Association’s ‘clients’ depended on the same shared view of Jugendweihe among eastern Germans. Due to the changed socio-political environment and the perceived collective ownership of Jugendweihe, tensions over ritual authority arise that have political and economic dimensions.

### ***The Association Family: The Struggle for the Cause of Jugendweihe***

With the end of the GDR state, a time of great uncertainty began for its institutions and their employees, and the Central Committee for Jugendweihe in the GDR (ZAJ) was no

exception. Some of its members decided in 1990 to found a successor organisation in Berlin, the *Interessenvereinigung für Jugendweihe e.V.* (Interest Group for Jugendweihe, Registered Association) in order to secure the continuity of the ritual and also their own livelihoods. This organisation functioned as an umbrella Association for the six ('new') Federal State Associations that formed in the same year in the territory of the former GDR. These associations had smaller regional offices akin to the former GDR's Jugendweihe County Committees, but they were not legally independent. Although most of the contemporary Association members had not been members of the GDR's Central Committee for Jugendweihe, the ones who were recalled this period as a struggle. Illona, in her sixties and the vice chairwoman of the Erfurt Association, had been a German teacher, and due to voice problems was transferred to work for Jugendweihe in 1987. She explained to me that in 1989, when it looked as if Jugendweihe would not survive, state officials had offered her the opportunity to return to school; but she declined, adding, 'I thought it would be better to fight at the Jugendweihe front.'

This 'fight' was embedded in the larger societal processes of socio-economic transformation and transitional justice, which I will discuss in turn. The *Treuhandanstalt* (colloquially *Treuhand*, literally 'faithful hand', 'Trust Agency'), founded in June 1990, became responsible for privatizing GDR enterprises in order to transform publicly-owned property into free market-suitable ventures. However, in reality most of these enterprises were liquidated (*abgewickelt*; literally: to unwind). Many East Germans saw these liquidations as a somewhat triumphal procession on the part of West Germany, intended to destroy the already ailing economy by removing competition, gaining capital cheaply (some of these ventures were sold for a symbolic value of DM 1), or both. Eastern Germans' view of the Trust Agency is based on its responsibility for 'a massive transfer of [collective] property from East (national) to West (national and international), with 80 percent of all firms now in West German hands', also eliminating 'three-fourths of all East German industrial jobs' (Borneman 1997a: 34).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Borneman notes two main criticisms that continue to feature in contemporary discussions: inadequate consideration of the economic viability of bidders' restructuring plans, and emphasis on the creditworthiness and standing of the buyer rather than the value of GDR firms (Borneman 1997a: 34-35). The first president of the *Treuhand*, Detlev Rohwedder, was assassinated in April 1991 – allegedly by the terrorist group Red Army Faction. His murder remained unresolved and surrounded by speculation.

With unification in October 1990, the Trust Agency also took over the capital of the GDR's political parties and mass organisations. The GDR Central Committee for Jugendweihe had received substantial funding annually for the organisation and execution of the then free-of-charge ceremonies.<sup>49</sup> Because these funds were deemed SED party capital which required further investigation, they became subject to restrictions by the Trust Agency in 1991. While the agency's course of action seems understandable, Illona and Elke both criticized it (independently of each other), suggesting it was unjustified to freeze all funds, since they included fees that parents had paid in 1991 that were irrelevant to the SED legacy. Both Association members interpreted this as a sign that the Trust Agency had striven to eliminate the Association and Jugendweihe simultaneously – but they also proudly added that it had failed to achieve its aim. Indeed, a dispute over the funds ensued, lasting 16 months and only resolved in May 1993 through a compromise agreement – a series of events also portrayed as a struggle and a success story in the German Association's book *For the Youth, With the Youth*, a special edition on the occasion of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (see JWA 2010: 17).

The socio-economic transformations of the 1990s went hand in hand with mass unemployment, with rates soaring to roughly 20% (Destasis 2013). While job insecurity was a new experience for most eastern Germans (see Chapter 5), they also had to undergo a lustration process if they wanted to work (again) in civil service positions in the new democratic state bureaucracy. As in other post-socialist societies, this process entailed the vetting of former state officials in order to purge the public sector from those who were deemed unacceptable, mainly due to their collaboration with the former socialist state security apparatus. Such measures were considered necessary as part of the greater aim of transitional justice, in order to address and come to terms with the repressions of the socialist dictatorship, and also to establish citizens' trust in the new state institutions. The 1991 Stasi Records Act enabled access to some former state security files, and henceforth the media reported on one Stasi scandal after another. At the same time, many eastern Germans also made rather personal discoveries, learning that people they had considered kin had reported on them (see Lengsfeld 2011). In combination with the 'extraordinary right of termination law' that was part of the Unification Treaty (*Einigungsvertrag*), the same

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<sup>49</sup> In 1990 this totalled 19 million Marks for the running Jugendweihe year (Chowanski and Dreier 2000: 201).

Act also sought to cleanse the civil service of those that had been too close to the communist project, including teachers.

Because the ‘file fever’ (Verdery 2014: 3) was acute and arguably led to greater mistrust, I was not entirely surprised when a western German father explained to me how dubious he had found Jugendweihe. Herr Schmidt, as noted in Chapter 3, had moved with his family to Thuringia during the Wende years, and in 1994 he and his wife discussed their son’s wish to celebrate Jugendweihe. Describing their thought processes, he explained, ‘We were not really sure where this Jugendweihe Association came from, you know, what people they were.’ He smiled – seemingly more about his recollections than at me – and added, ‘For us they were all Stasi!’ While this mistrust was perhaps greater among western Germans, who lacked the cultural capacity of reading between the lines in order to assess people’s political or ideological leanings, eastern Germans often had similar sentiments. Indeed, when former classmates and I recounted stories from our school years, two of my male friends quickly steered the conversation towards speculating about which of our teachers might have been Stasi informants.

Although many of the older Association members had been pedagogues, they largely kept quiet about this issue, with the exception of one part-time member of the Erfurt Association. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Dagmar and Sonja had dedicated their GDR working lives to education. They also often reminisced about great events they had experienced together, such as the 1973 ‘World Festival of Youth and Students’ held in East Berlin. Indeed, Dagmar once volunteered to me that it was because of Sonja that she had become a Pioneer leader. Only once, when I had asked head-on about what happened to teachers after the Wende, did she explain to me that she no longer wanted to be part of the new school system and hence did not re-apply. At the same time, however, she volunteered that Sonja underwent the ‘entire process’ and – presumably because she was found ‘unsuitable’ – had a tremendously difficult time making ends meet as a seamstress.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, what interests me here is how their experience and treatment in the post-

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<sup>50</sup> On the dismissal of Thuringian teachers in the 1990s due to their Stasi involvement, see Kathrin Winkler’s judicial work. She argues that the Thuringian Cultural Ministry did not distinguish particularly well between the different degrees of Stasi involvement, leading to the unnecessary dismissal of some teachers – not entirely in line with the legal specification. Yet some teachers were able to continue their employment, despite a verifiably high degree of Stasi involvement. According to Winkler, there were very few teachers who had actually spied on colleagues or pupils (Winkler 2001).

socialist context – whether justified or otherwise – led them to care for each other. Dagmar had not forgotten her former mentor and friend Sonja, and enabled her to work for the Association. She herself had been hired by the Association because of a former GDR colleague, a decision that Elke commented on at Dagmar’s birthday: ‘I knew straight away when I saw you for the first time fifteen years ago, she fits in with us (*die passt zu uns*)!’.

While they seemed to be dedicated to each other because of their shared socialist past and the hardships of the post-socialist context, Elke’s first assessment of Dagmar suggests that shared histories alone were not enough to make one a ‘fitting member’ for the Association. Rather, I would suggest, one also had to be dedicated to the shared moral project of Jugendweihe. Such a shared moral project became more evident in Dagmar’s use of the ‘struggle’ trope in reference to the late 1990s and early 2000s, after she had started to work for the Thuringian Jugendweihe Association. In one conversation, she explained to me that they had realized with ample foresight that the low birth rates during the Wende-years would have a ripple effect on Jugendweihe ceremonies. They hoped that offering the *Namensgebung* (secular naming ceremony, see Chapter 1) as well as letting out the premises of a former youth holiday camp in the Thuringian forest would provide second sources of income. The latter’s purchase, however, proved to be a bad investment because the buildings required much more refurbishment than expected. Dagmar explained to me that the Association members and their husbands worked for several weekends fixing it up, for nothing more than ‘a lunch and a thank you in return’. They tried not to employ expensive tradespeople and did as much as they could themselves, including de-cluttering the large premises. She added, ‘Every Friday we left Gera, drove there, worked, on Sunday we returned, and Monday back at the office; for years we did that’. But despite all this work, the venture failed. As Dagmar put it, ‘They didn’t exactly beat a path to our door!’ While the location was ideal for providing accommodation to winter sport enthusiasts, the Association had miscalculated the new post-socialist conditions. People either lacked the financial means due to unemployment, or preferred to spend them on a summer holiday in Spain or Italy – destinations to which East Germans were not allowed to travel under the GDR. Dagmar conceded that mistakes had been made because everyone was new to these circumstances, but in her recollection she stressed the dedication of all to work toward a common goal: the survival of the Association and of Jugendweihe.

This ‘working together’ toward a common goal should not suggest that the ‘Association family’ never experienced internal conflicts. But Association members were carefully selected based on their shared socialist past because they were more likely to have a set of shared values. Where a member diverted from the moral code, this diversion could lead to exclusion – perhaps best evidenced by what Dagmar recounted to me several times as a ‘real little revolution’: the toppling of the female managing director (*Geschäftsführerin*) in 2002. Many Association members had been unhappy with her because they felt she was not working in the best interests of the Association and was too selfish. The managing director’s character was frequently cast in a negative light, and they insinuated that she had worked to fill her own pockets – though this misconduct was never clearly spelled out. In the run-up to the AGM in December 2002, when a new managing committee was supposed to be voted in, Association members had heard through the grapevine that the managing director intended to appoint a man she could ‘work well with’ – that is, as Dagmar explained, someone who would follow her instructions instead of the other way around, as prescribed by the Association’s articles. Members in other regional offices had secretly organized a substitute candidate, and brought along a busload of roughly forty people who registered on the day of the annual meeting to become members by signing a form and paying the monthly membership fee. These people had been instructed to vote for the alternative candidate, who in turn, as one of his first tasks upon being elected, put the managing director on leave.

This strategic move enabled the majority of members to rid themselves of a ‘black sheep’ who had endangered the existence of the Association and the continuity of the ritual because they felt she did not work in the interests of either. But this little coup also set in motion a variety of structural changes regarding the Thuringian Association, which eventually led to the establishment of the *Jugendweibe Ostthüringen e. V.* as a legally independent entity in 2005. Dagmar saw the formal establishment of the regional association as one based on logical business reasoning. The funds that the regional offices generated from either participation fees or sponsoring, she explained, were the result of their own hard work, and they wanted to decide how and on what to spend them in their own region. Instead, these funds had always been lodged in the account of the federal state organisation, and sustained a managing director, his office and an employee – all held to be superfluous for their lack of contribution to ‘the association pot’. Other regional associations followed suit, and together decided that they wanted to work under

the umbrella of a federal state organisation only when it was beneficial to all – such as in organizing cost-effective excursions. From then on, the regional associations were juridical persons in their own right, and thus in charge of themselves. Essentially, as Dagmar put it, these regional associations should have already formed in 1990, but instead they had been ‘ruled centralistically’.

As such, it was not only in moments of commensality during office lunches (as noted in Chapter 1), or in extended meetings and times of conviviality during work outings and life cycle celebrations that kinship-like bonds were created and maintained, but in these critical periods in the Association’s history that they had mastered together and bonded over. When I heard the story of the disgraced managing director for the first time, I had attributed Dagmar’s use of ‘revolution’ to the revolution of 1989; but I only realized later, when I combined her re-telling of the story, other comments made by her, and comments by other older Association members that the term resonated with the GDR’s Marxist-Leninist ideology of the (class) struggle and revolution. This ‘struggle’, which appeared to be ongoing, shared another socialist rhetoric of ‘fighting for the cause’. During GDR times, ‘the cause’ was an omnipresent phrase and shorthand for ‘the cause of the communist project’; but now it seemed to have been substituted with ‘the cause of Jugendweihe’. In other words, the older Association members appeared to be not simply co-workers (*Mitarbeiter*) and fellow campaigners (*Mitstreiter*) but also *Mitkämpfer* – fellow combatants, albeit without physical force, in their struggle for the continuity of the ritual. This ‘fighting for a cause’ also entailed the moral code of collective living propagated by the GDR: the setting aside of personal interests for those of the group (see Chapter 3). I do not want to suggest that all Association members subscribed equally to this moral code; but because almost all older members had held GDR civil service positions and had some sort of connection to Jugendweihe, they clearly had taken on board and continued the rhetoric of the struggle, and also perpetuated some of its content.

Martin Holbraad (2014) argues in the case of the Cuban Revolution that Cubans are not contradictory when they are both dedicated to the revolution and critical of it, but that ‘the revolution qua object of discontent and the revolution qua cause of self-sacrifice are just two different things’ (Holbraad 2014: 383). Particularly relevant for my material here is that the former is embedded in discourse, while the latter is an action: the commitment to self-sacrificial violence. A revolutionary commitment remains, despite the failure of the

revolution – and what we are left with, Holbraad suggests, are fighters ‘in the service of revolution as a total and totalising political universe’ (Holbraad 2014: 384). The older women of the Association use the terms ‘struggle’ and ‘the cause’ – the all-encompassing revolutionary language of the GDR. Yet the cause and struggle in the post-Wende context have changed, and have been subsumed in fighting for ‘the cause of Jugendweihe’ – to ensure Jugendweihe’s survival into the future. While there is a similar dynamic at play to the one Holbraad describes, I suggest these eastern German women diverge from his Cuban male interlocutors not in their commitment to the cause, but in its manifestation. They are not the violence-prone fighters that would sacrifice their lives; instead, their commitment is expressed through work for the greater good, in which the greater good is Jugendweihe itself.

Of course, not everyone shared this commitment, and therefore these difficult time periods necessitated – perhaps more than during socialist times – the separation of the wheat from the chaff. When Sonja referred to some people jovially as ‘real pre-historic rock’ in the introductory vignette of this chapter, it was an indication of their lengthy shared history of ups and downs, and the extent to which their bonds had become close and unbreakable. Like the ideal family, their relations had become solid as rock.

### ***The Family within the Family: A Matter of Trust***

The Association members’ family-like bonds were strengthened in another way: through the incorporation of other family members. Dagmar and Jutta frequently pointed out to me that they took pride in their work, and that it was not comparable to ‘ordinary’ work because of the irregular hours and their deep commitment to Jugendweihe. They explained on several occasions that their job demanded that they work during the Jugendweihe season on Saturdays – at a time that was held to belong to the family. Dagmar and Jutta agreed that you could only do such work if you had also an understanding partner. Indeed, both of them had their husbands on board whenever required, whether for fixing something damaged at the office or helping out at Jugendweihe ceremonies. This involving of one’s partners in the work of the Association was a fairly common practice beyond the Gera Association as well. In the Erfurt and Arnstadt Associations – whose work I observed as well – husbands, siblings and offspring

were all helping out at ceremonies or at youth work events, or were asked for advice and help on matters such as the Association's website. Although these relatives were neither employed nor remunerated, they were frequently invited to work outings or other celebrations. Noticeably, the local Association's membership base was roughly 70% women, and all of the crucial full-time staff positions were held by women. This greater female membership might be suggestive of the perceived appropriateness of women taking on roles associated with caring for the family. Though given that the GDR state pursued a pragmatic socialist feminist strategy that led to a large female proportion of the workforce already in the 1960s (see Chapter 1), the greater female membership is perhaps equally reflective of women's self-evident role as workers in eastern German society – while also being a trace of the fact that in the GDR, work itself had been framed as part of 'the struggle for the cause'. Here, however, I am interested in the ways the boundaries between first degree kin and the kin of the Association became blurred, especially in relation to the young generation.

Naturally, most of the Association members who had worked for the former GDR's central committee for Jugendweihe were already retired or about to retire, and the main concern for the Association was to secure Jugendweihe's existence into the future. There was an ongoing search for teenage volunteers who would help out with setting up, reciting poems or presenting the books and flowers to the initiands at Jugendweihe ceremonies. During GDR times, these tasks were performed by teenagers from the Pioneer and the Free German Youth organisations, which delegated appropriate members. Today, teenagers were chosen solely based on their looks and their talent, but always from among former Jugendweihe participants. These volunteers also had to be reliable in order to ensure the smooth-running of the ceremonies. They happily received a small remuneration, but also seemed to enjoy being part of making such ceremonies successful. While the financial benefit surely played a role in encouraging teenagers and twenty-somethings to participate, older members did not describe the young people's motivations so much in terms of money. Rather, they described it as loyalty – not to the Association but to Jugendweihe. Sonja, for example, once asked a group of volunteers off stage in Jena, 'And you, girls and boys, will you remain faithful to Jugendweihe?'

This question appears to suggest that at least the older Association members were seeking commitment from others, not to them or the Association, but to 'the cause' of

Jugendweihe. It also hints that such a reliance on others is fraught with risk: it requires trust. This issue of trust, I would suggest, was particularly pertinent in regards to the continuity of Jugendweihe into the future in the case of members who were full-time staff, and thus the decision-making core of the Association. It was common for Elke, Dagmar, and Sonja to express some sort of concern about the Association's future in terms of their need for a younger generation to follow in their footsteps. And yet – to my knowledge – they never advertised an opening in the Association. Instead, members almost always became involved through word of mouth and kin relations. Nicole had started working for the Association in spring 2013, in order to take over some of the tasks carried out by Sonja and Dagmar. As daughter of Jutta, originally it had been Nicole's older sister who was supposed to start work for Jugendweihe. However, she became pregnant unexpectedly, and Nicole, who was unemployed at the time, stepped in. At first it seemed the most convenient and mutually beneficial solution for all; but Dagmar explained to me that hiring her also met the organisation's need for young people who knew 'what it took to work for Jugendweihe' because of their mothers' work. This explanation again implied dedication and some sort of 'innate' knowledge, but the apparent 'handing down' of a job was to be carefully negotiated.

Unsurprisingly, there was an underlying concern about how the situation would be handled once Nicole's sister's maternity leave was over, as neither of the sisters wanted to 'steal' the job from the other. The sisters had hoped that both would be able to work for the Association. However, Dagmar explained to me that she had sat down with them and their mother, and while they had been upset, she made it clear that they were not running a family business but a proper registered association and thus had to adhere to the rules. Indeed, she associated this decision with the recently uncovered cases of nepotism among the Christian Social Union (CSU) party members in the Bavarian state parliament, who had employed relatives – their parents, children or wives – despite a law from 2000 that prohibited such work contracts (see Hengst 2013). By making such comparisons, she implied that neither she nor the dealings of the Association were anything like those of the corrupt Bavarian politicians. Although there seemed to be a concern that the Association could be charged with nepotism, Dagmar appeared to believe that it was only a problem if three family members were on the Association's payroll at once. Surprisingly, more than half a year later, I learned that Elke's daughter – who was already a nominal Association member – would start full-time work for the

Association. It was explained to me that this carefully considered decision had been made by Dagmar and Sonja, and was not a suggestion put forth by Elke herself. Dagmar praised Elke's daughter not only because she would be reliable new blood, but also because of her work experience in marketing, which would be beneficial for Jugendweihe. Jutta – who was a close friend of Elke's prior to her work for the Association, and indeed got her job because of Elke – also seemed happy with this decision, commenting: 'I've known her since she was little, to me she is like my own daughter!' In these instances, the German word *Nachwuchs* – which stands for both 'biological offspring' as well as 'new blood' within an Association or company – had become quite literally synonymous.

While this kind of recruitment of 'new blood' may seem peculiar, and perhaps not unlike the recruitment strategies of the impeached Bavarian politicians, I suggest it diverges from the latter in two fundamental ways. In the case of what came to be variously known as the 'relatives affair', 'salary affair' or 'family affair', the Bavarian state parliament came into disrepute because its MPs had – through the employment of their wives on high salaries as 'sham freelancers' – distributed public funds to the financial benefit of their own families. Although the employment of one's daughter in the (non-state) Association also meant ensuring funds for close relatives, this contract was based on both their work for the good of the Association and the ritual, in exchange for an ordinary salary. More importantly, this strategy was less about immediate financial gain than about securing one's work legacy, ensuring it would not be destroyed but cared for and carried into the future. Why else did the Association not employ outsiders – at least not in their inner circle – through a job application process but chose their own offspring to work for the Association? Familial loyalty and loyalty to the cause of Jugendweihe were here intertwined. In other words, for the older Association members who were about to take a back seat, their trust in their offspring went hand in hand with the trust that their offspring would care enough to continue their work in their spirit. The choosing of one's own offspring was not simply due to their closer relationship, or even for the benefit of their kin. Rather, because of the hardships experienced during the post-Wende times, they felt beleaguered by state institutions and individuals not well-disposed toward Jugendweihe, such as church representatives (see Chapter 2). They felt they could not risk employing an outside person because whether they would be *fully* dedicated to the cause of Jugendweihe could not be established in a job interview.

The lines between family members and Association members were blurred in one direction through the incorporation of kin, who helped out by volunteering for the Association or were employed in the hope that they would secure Jugendweihe into the future. Similarly, it was blurred in the other direction through the kinning of the Association: its members cared for and related to each other like kin because of their shared experience of critical time periods, which they had mastered together. Who was to be included or excluded as kin within the Association was based on their dedication to the cause of Jugendweihe. What kin are perceived to share here is not simply amity or loyalty, but a moral project to be perpetuated into the future. If such a moral project is not sustained, exclusion from the kin group is at least acceptable, if not necessary. In short, while such loyalty to the cause should ideally be congruent with one's loyalty to kin, here the former loyalty trumps the latter. At the same time, the use of the kinship idioms was not limited to the Association itself, but extended to ritual participants as well by way of negotiating 'one big family' of eastern Germans – which I discuss next.

### **Kinning Eastern German Society**

Because of Association members' generous use of kinship idioms, it became somewhat unclear to me what was actually meant by 'family'. As stated in the first part of this chapter, Association members made use of kinship idioms when referring to the ways they related among themselves; but kinship terms were applied to the Association itself as well as to the Association's clientele. In fact, during my entire fieldwork I never heard any Association member refer to what were essentially their customers or clients as such. Association members always used kin terminology when talking about – but also to – their clients. It was common that one member would ask another something along the lines of: 'I still have a *Mutti* (mum) in Jena, who needs five more tickets for the ceremony next Saturday! Any chance?' Regardless of whether Association members communicated with parents or grandparents on the phone or in person at the office, they would also frequently address them using kinship terminology instead of the customary formal address of Herr/Frau and family name. I also witnessed how they interacted with their clientele by asking questions like 'I see, so your children live in the old federal states, and you *die Oma* (the gran) would like to enrol your granddaughter for Jugendweihe next year?'

or ‘I take it you are the Dad, who wants to pick up the DVD of your child’s Jugendweihe? Your wife just called us this morning.’

Of course this usage of kin terms was a way to simplify matters, for example, when an Association member was not aware of a person’s name. However, even in instances when they knew the name, it would be followed up with ‘she is the mum of ...’. Arguably, one can also interpret this use of kinship idioms as Association members viewing ‘their paying clientele’ from the perspective of the initiand as ego. While it is common, for instance, among teachers to refer to their pupils’ mums and dads as such, unlike Association members, they would usually address them formally as Mrs and Mr Smith. As such, deliberately or otherwise, the Association members’ employment of kinship idioms also created a sense of familiarity with the people they interacted with, and occasionally led a mother or grandmother to remain a little longer than usual in the office in order to share stories of family conflicts or money troubles with an Association member. Often either Dagmar or Jutta would listen carefully, and although in most cases they could not provide tangible resolutions, they enabled a mother or grandmother to get their troubles off their chest, which provided some relief or comfort to them. While this aspect of their work was almost comparable to the duties of a caring social worker, it seems Association or staff viewed it as part of their job description. It reinforced the notion that family mattered most, and that the Association members took their work seriously – it was not simply a profession but a calling, like family itself. But the expanded usage of the kin idiom also evoked two other notions. On the one hand, there was something belittling about it that resonated with GDR paternalism. On the other, there was something equalizing about it, in which eastern Germans, who were in support of Jugendweihe, became ‘one big family’. But these two notions attached to the use of kinship idioms beyond the Association as well, as I argue below, mirror actual negotiations over ritual authority within the post-Wende context, which are embedded in economics and politics.

The reintroduction of Jugendweihe in 1954, as illustrated in Chapter 2, established the GDR state as sole authority over the preparation for and the conduct of Jugendweihe ceremonies. However, the demise of the GDR state meant that its monopoly over Jugendweihe vanished too, so that various associations – for example, *Roter Baum* (Red Tree) in Dresden or the Humanist Association of Germany (HVD) in Berlin – have been conducting ceremonies in eastern Germany. Secondly, as parental and grandparental

generations frequently commented, Jugendweihe also changed from a free (state-sponsored) to a fee-charging public ceremony (see Chapter 5). I explore these two significant changes further below, in order to make explicit how the extrapolation of the kinship idiom is similarly embedded within a moral project that simultaneously re-negotiates ritual authority as manifested in the Jugendweihe ceremony fee and the ritual design. By doing so I illustrate that only those who support Jugendweihe are considered kin.

### ***Tensions over Ritual Authority I: The Jugendweihe Ceremony Fee***

The Association, fully aware that their €95 charge would over-stretch at least some family budgets, introduced a discount scheme in the early 2000s. Parents who are unemployment benefit recipients or heads of low-income families can thus ask for a €35 discount, and can also arrange with the Association to pay the remaining €65 in instalments over several months. In 2013, 3% of all Jugendweihe participants (or 93 families) made use of the discounted rate. The Association usually required an official notification of parents' unemployment benefit (*Arbeitslosengeld-Bescheid*) or a payslip as proof of their limited income. However, Jutta told me that, 'Generally I ask for some sort of evidence, but sometimes you just know, it's so obvious. So I tell them that they can get a discounted rate because they might not be aware of it; and I don't even bother with the papers.' While Association members were helpful in supporting families overall, there was also a tension between their desire to support and the extent of support that they felt might slip into an encouragement for people not to take enough responsibility for their own lives. Because most parents were used to the Jugendweihe ceremony being organized by the school from GDR times – with some parents being flustered that this was no longer the case – sometimes they forgot to enrol their children, or did so only at the last minute (see Chapter 3). The Association members frequently expressed frustration about parents' lack of initiative in organising the enrolment of their children or informing themselves of the correct procedure or payment options. At the same time, they had a strong sense that parents' disorganisation should not disadvantage their children, as it was not the teenager's fault. And while they complained, they simultaneously always tried their hardest to make last-minute arrangements possible.

In addition, there was a clear recognition that it was not the Association's sole responsibility to support people who were disadvantaged, and they encouraged the public to follow suit. In all the ceremonies I observed – most of which were led by Dagmar, the vice chairwoman of the Association – she explained at the end to the filled venue that, 'since the foundation of our Association, it has always been our concern to enable children from 'socially-weak' families to participate in the Jugendweihe ceremony.' She continued to explain that thanks to public donations,

Since 2005 almost 600 adolescents have been able to celebrate Jugendweihe together with their classmates. In the coming year we would also like to ensure that nobody will be excluded from the ceremony for financial reasons. You can support our solidarity project with a donation, be it ever so small!

At the end of each ceremony, volunteers holding a sort of glass bowl were stationed at all possible exits, with the hopes that audience members would donate some money as they left. Thus, while the Association expressed solidarity, it also promoted and encouraged all Jugendweihe supporters to follow suit as a *Solidargemeinschaft*.<sup>51</sup> Public comment about the affordability of the ritual was also a moral commentary on what they held to be unfair in the post-Wende socio-political context. But the social responsibility that the Association promoted among and shared with eastern Germans was transferred back to the new state with the introduction of the *Bildungs-und Teilhabepaket* ('Education and Participation Package', hereafter education package) in 2011. Initiated by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the education package was aimed at providing 'better future prospects for 2.5 million deserving children from low-income families' (BMAS 2012) as a way of tackling increasing child poverty, held to be – at least partly – caused by the social reforms of Agenda 2010.

I first heard about this new scheme during the same AGM that I described in the introductory vignette, but when I read through its explanation on the Ministry's website, there was no explicit mention of its applicability to the Jugendweihe ceremony fee. Rather, this new law was to enable children – through a legal claim of *Mitmachen* (participating) – to participate in school and extra-curricular activities regardless of their families' income. Parents, who are recipients of either unemployment or social welfare benefits (*ALG II* or

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<sup>51</sup> *Solidargemeinschaft* – a community based on the principle of mutual solidarity.

*Sozialhilfe*), can apply for a certain amount of additional support for their children: for private lessons (*Nachhilfe*), school supplies (stationery), school meals, but also membership fees for sports clubs or music lessons, travel costs and school trips. Nonetheless, Association members had been insistent that people were eligible to make use of this scheme for the ceremony fee, and explained to me that some local social authorities, such as Altenburg, had granted a certain amount – usually €65 – toward the full cost. In contrast, Gera’s social authorities had been more reluctant; more than once during my fieldwork, I was told the story of a father who had applied for social benefits via the education package, but was denied any support toward the Jugendweihe ceremony of his child. He did not budge an inch, the story went, and marched into the social security office and insisted that his child deserved this support; if he – as parent – was not given it, he threatened to sue them. This threat, I was told, had worked: the social security office had authorized a contribution toward the ceremony fee.

The seemingly arbitrary dealings of various local Thuringian authorities in regards to the educational package posed a real challenge to the Association, since they could not confidently advise parents on payment relief. For example, in October 2013, after the new hand-outs with information for the 2014 Jugendweihe had been given out, Nicole received an email from the Greiz social authority with a request to remove the statement that ‘parents could make use of the possibility of subsidy through the education package’ for the ceremony fee. The female clerical assistant who wrote the email cited the same article of the German Social Security Code for her refusal to provide benefits toward the Jugendweihe ceremony fee that other social authorities – including Altenburg and Gera – used to justify their decision for granting such benefits. Such decision-making appeared to be at the discretion of the local clerical assistant (*Sachbearbeiter*), rather than based on a clear directive of the government agency or even interpretations of such directives at the regional level. This inconsistency was confirmed in a conversation with a female public servant in charge of the education package in Gera. She explained to me that the government had passed the law, but it had not been clear at the regional and local levels of administration how to implement it appropriately.

However, Association members viewed these regional differences in dealing with the education package less as a matter of the whims of clerical assistants (or their dispositions

to Jugendweihe) than as a matter of which political party ruled that particular constituency. Illona, the vice-chairwoman of the Erfurt Association, explained to me that they had had none of the difficulties Gera had, which she put down to two interdependent factors. First, Erfurt was run by an SPD/Left/Greens coalition government with a SPD mayor, and thus citizens had greater access to social welfare services. Indeed, in Erfurt there was a voucher system in place that did not require the social benefit recipient to make an extra request to the social security office. Instead, according to their unemployment/social benefit notification, the claimants received half a year's vouchers automatically, and they could spend these accordingly. 13.5% (129) of all participants used the education package for the Jugendweihe ceremony fee in the city of Erfurt, while in the far larger region of East Thuringia it was just about 1% (28) – despite the latter also having a slightly higher unemployment rate.<sup>52</sup>

During GDR times it had been taken for granted that the state would provide ceremonies for free, but today the payment of fees marked a struggle over ritual authority in which the new state no longer laid a claim on Jugendweihe. While the Jugendweihe Association claimed to be the proprietor of Jugendweihe, changed socio-economic conditions meant it could not provide the ceremony free. The Association distanced itself from these socio-economic conditions through public commentary and promotion of solidarity, and yet it was simultaneously held hostage by them. Many eastern Germans felt that the ritual ought to be free, or at least felt entitled to financial state support for it – an expectation that echoed the free provision of the GDR Jugendweihe, but also the ways eastern Germans related to the state more broadly. With the education package, the new state sought to facilitate the same professional chances for children and adolescents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds by enabling them to acquire the necessary cultural capital through participation in school and extracurricular events. Yet participating in Jugendweihe was not seen as cultural capital by the new state because it was not institutionalized – nor necessary for the job market. Many eastern Germans, however, felt entitled to funds from the education package based on its participation (*Teilhabe*) aspect. This participation aspect was to ensure that adolescents would not be excluded in their

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<sup>52</sup> According to the Thuringian Statistical Office, the average unemployment rate in 2013 was 8.6% for Erfurt, in contrast to Gera at 11.9% and the whole of East Thuringia at 8.8%; [www.statistik.thueringen.de](http://www.statistik.thueringen.de).

spare time from activities of sport, play, and culture: and Jugendweihe was viewed as part of eastern German culture, conferring cultural capital to adolescents.

### ***Tensions over Ritual Authority II: The Jugendweihe Design***

The local Association held a monopoly over conducting the ritual ceremonies in its catchment area.<sup>53</sup> This monopoly was not entirely unchallenged, however, because Thuringians did not view the Jugendweihe Association as having complete ritual authority. I first became aware of this perception at the beginning of July, after the busy ritual period was finished, when I scheduled a meeting with Dagmar about the Association's work. She asked for a list of questions so that she could prepare, and we agreed on a time the following week. But a few minutes later she came into my office with a little stack of twenty-odd printed-out thank you emails, which she handed to me with some pride, offering: 'Well, I wondered whether they are of interest to you. Perhaps they would also be useful for your thesis!' While Association members took pride in their work, receiving gratitude from parents also meant that their hard work had received recognition. They seldom failed to relay it to everyone when they had had a call, an email or a personal conversation in which parents, or sometimes grandparents, expressed gratitude and noted how much they had enjoyed the Jugendweihe ceremony. Almost all of the emails Dagmar gave me had been written by mothers acting as spokespeople for their entire families, and one was written by a parent representative of a school class. While some emails were also orders for Jugendweihe DVDs, others were simply thank you notes, praising the Association members for their good work and explaining to them how emotional the event had been. The emotional aspect and the positive feedback came as no surprise to me, as I had regularly witnessed parents looking for tissues and wiping their nose or drying their tears during the ceremonies; and I had never come across anyone – regardless from which generation – that did not enjoy the event. Yet what intrigued me about some of these thank you notes was the tone in which they had been written, casually combining gratitude with indications of room for improvement as, for example, this mother did:

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<sup>53</sup> The German Humanist Association (HVD), the second largest provider of Jugendweihe (Jugendfeier) ceremonies, and the German Jugendweihe Association have had a cooperation agreement since 2008. At the regional level, they declared that the Humanists would not compete over ritual participants in Thuringia.

Ceremonial, but well and truly [tailored] for the *Jugendweihlinge* (initiates). Suuuuper! We thought the best were *Die Notendealer* from Freiburg, but also the dancers were super. The only comment: the photos were at times very bad (too dark and in addition the name of the child was black... there were several pictures [concerned], this could still be improved!) Apart from that an all-around successful event. A big 'gold star' to the entire organisation team. Keep it up!

Another mother explained her gratitude as follows:

The Jugendweihe ceremony of our son was again so wonderful! I was already very touched three years ago at the ceremony of our daughter and again this time. There were moments of reflection, for shedding tears, and for laughing. That's why I felt I must sincerely thank you. Everything is always so well organised. The speeches, the *Zug des Lebens* story, the music, and dance performances are of high standard and hit precisely the point and speak to parents as well as adolescents. One can see that the team invested much thought for such a successful ceremony. One feels honoured. I wish you all much continued joy and gratification in your work!

These thank you emails demonstrate that the Association's work of creating ceremonies that appealed to both young and old was valued by parents; and both mothers also expressed their wish for the Association's work, and thus for Jugendweihe, to continue. But these expressions of gratitude appeared somewhat unique, because sending thank you emails to service providers who are paid directly for their services is rather rare. Usually, such gratitude is expressed only in cases that involve a certain level of intimacy – for example, for services related to healthcare and wellbeing, and/or where such services blur the supposedly clearly separated domains of kin and economy. The intimacy that Association members evoked through employing the kin idiom in addressing and referring to their 'customers' was not simply reciprocated by these mothers.

Both the above mothers' detailed assessments of the ritual, one's mother criticism, and the other mother's sense of feeling honoured through such a ceremony are also indicative of a shared sense among eastern Germans that the Jugendweihe Association had no authority over or expertise in Jugendweihe. Compared to the Lutheran Confirmation, which requires a Lutheran pastor as the ritual specialist, Jugendweihe was not perceived to have such an authority. Of course, pastors might be thanked for a particularly moving service or church ceremony, especially when it touched a parishioner, but they would

hardly be advised on what they could improve without having asked for such advice. In other words, within a legal instead of religious context, Jugendweihe had no ‘copyright’, and so any eastern German could organize and perform it. Although the Association had a monopoly on organizing Jugendweihe in East Thuringia, there were several concerted attempts made by parents over the years to conduct Jugendweihe ceremonies by themselves. For example, in 2013, one village in the Association’s catchment area organized a ceremony at the local village hall in order to have the ceremony closer to home, and in the hope of saving the €95 ceremony fee. The Association was never happy about such competition because it lost income, in this case from 23 participants. But because the parents’ venture resulted in an unsatisfactory ceremony, the next school cohort of the concerned village returned to the Association, and revalidated the association’s own quality of work. This tension between the Jugendweihe Association and some parents who tried to organize the ceremony by themselves is suggestive of a sense of collective ownership over the ritual, in which diverse parties contested the ritual authority that used to be held by the GDR state. I would suggest that this tension is also pertinent due to Jugendweihe’s fragile future, given that the state no longer promotes or financially supports the organization and celebration of the ritual.

Of course, Association members were also interested in improving the ceremony and in feedback from guests, in order to satisfy the needs and desires of their ‘customers’ and thus ensure future success. But both mothers’ ways of phrasing their criticism and praise – with particular GDR vernacular used for children – and their sense of being honoured also reflects, I would suggest, a level of intimacy that ‘links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective’ (Berlant 1998: 283). While I discuss this link further in the next chapter, here I am interested in this feeling of collective ownership of Jugendweihe. In what follows below, I argue that this sense of collective ownership emanates not only from having participated in Jugendweihe but from the GDR state’s active encouragement of participants’ involvement in the ritual’s organisation.

## ***The GDR Jugendweihe: Decentralising a Ritual in a Centrally Planned Economy***

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the GDR state not only promoted Jugendweihe, but also provided substantial funding for organizing and conducting the ceremonies. The Central Committee for Jugendweihe, with its headquarters in Berlin, spread the work that Jugendweihe involved among its 14 County Committees across East Germany. These County Committees were subdivided into districts, and the districts were subdivided into local committees. For example, the County Committee for Jugendweihe in Gera comprised 13 district committees, each with varying numbers of local committees over the years – in 1983, they totalled 207 (SAG 07). These local committees reported back to their districts, and the County Committees relayed total figures to the national Central Committee. While I had anticipated, based on my research in 2010, that the Jugendweihe committee in Gera kept meticulous statistics on the numbers of Jugendweihe participants (see Chapter 2), I was intrigued to find out about their decentralisation efforts. These efforts were recorded not only by keeping track of the numbers of Jugendweihe ceremonies conducted per year, but also by tracking the numbers of guests that attended them.

For instance, comparative tables of the Jugendweihe ceremonies in 1959 and 1960 highlighted that the average number of guests per participant had increased from nine to ten. This increase was achieved despite a significant drop in students by 25% in 1960. In one of the ‘commendable’ districts (Lobenstein) there were only 197 Jugendweihe participants in 1960 compared to 271 in 1959. Yet in 1960, four more ceremonies were held than in 1959. This increase from eight to twelve ceremonies also allowed an increase in the numbers of guests from 3,000 to 3,200, translating to an average number of guests per participant of 13 in 1959 compared to 17 in 1960 (SAG 05). To put this increase in context, the Jugendweihe handbook states that in the 1980s an average of ten guests per initiand attended a Jugendweihe (ZAJ 1986: 139). Although an increase in ceremonies incurred higher cost, decentralising such ceremonies was seen as essential, because it went hand in hand with an increase in guests – thus allowing Jugendweihe to be known and experienced first-hand by a larger part of the population.<sup>54</sup> It was particularly important

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<sup>54</sup> They also often recorded the praise of West German guests present at such ceremonies – often as self-congratulatory evidence of East Germany’s moral superiority.

to connect as many people as possible to Jugendweihe at a local level in rural areas, where strong local church communities still persisted, and where its direct emotional connection to home and *Heimat* (the regional home – see Chapter 4) made it most effective.

Due to a Politburo resolution, these decentralisation efforts were seen to be crucial, and hence ‘an important and necessary *Kampfaufgabe*’ (task of the struggle) – as the 1961 annual report of the Gera district committee explained (SAG 06: 3). However, the incorporation of greater parts of the populace as guests was not the sole reason for this approach. Rather, decentralising the ceremonies also led to the activation and formation of more local Jugendweihe committees. Such local committees in turn meant that more local residents and mass organisations could be involved in providing practical support to the organisation of the ceremonies on-site; but it was also hoped that they would enrich and animate both political-ideological and cultural work at the local level (SAG 06). These attempts to incorporate the population did not stop there but, taking a multi-pronged approach, also targeted people of all ages through the rallying of support in mass organisations and work collectives. For instance, members of the Pioneers became increasingly present at ceremonies in order to form guards of honours for the initiands’ procession into the venue, and/or to present them with flowers on stage. Their involvement also enabled Pioneers to gain a glimpse of their future initiation, and encouraged them to look forward to their own Jugendweihe day. Besides professional musicians, Free German Youth or company-associated choirs and orchestras also performed at Jugendweihe ceremonies, and it became the norm for Pioneers or FDJ members to recite poems. Similarly, women of the Democratic Women’s League of Germany (DFD) often helped in decorating the venue, while a *Patenbrigade* (godparent work collective) would often send at least one representative to the ceremony of the class they ‘sponsored’. Instead of having to pay freelance artists, the employment of members of mass organisations as part of the cultural programme of the Jugendweihe ceremony also saved costs.

Decentralisation was thus important and necessary for multifarious reasons, but its fundamental aim was the greater involvement of East German society in order to persuade everybody at both a rational and an emotional level that working toward communism was the right path to follow. In reality, decentralisation and cooperation were aimed at increasing people’s political consciousness and deepening their political

conviction. Such an aim was not achieved across the population. However, these efforts certainly ensured that all eastern Germans can *identify* Jugendweihe, and that – for many of the older generations – they can *identify with* it. The GDR Jugendweihe was undergone by more than seven million East German adolescents, but it was also organised by over 300,000 volunteers (Chowanski and Dreier 2000: 134), and was attended by almost all East Germans at least once in their lifetime, and very likely more often – whether as close or distant relative, family friend or colleague, or in their capacities as teacher, guest speaker, Pioneer or FDJ member, artist or photographer. In other words, almost all East Germans were complicit in Jugendweihe's success in the GDR; and indeed the great majority did not view the ritual first and foremost as state-led, but as a ritual they had themselves actively helped in shaping.

Many eastern Germans feel a sense of collective ownership of Jugendweihe, which was fostered under the GDR state. Today, this sharing of responsibility for Jugendweihe was highlighted in eastern Germans' negotiations over the payment of the ceremony fee and the ritual design. Kinship here was embedded in political and economic negotiations over Jugendweihe participation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that Association members' kin ties were based on a shared past, and specifically on the shared hardships of the post-Wende years. Older Association members' work was framed in the trope of the 'struggle for the cause' – reminiscent of the GDR state's ideological discourse. Their work, however, was no longer for the cause of communism, but toward a different shared moral project: the cause of sustaining Jugendweihe into the future. The Association's work in helping to maintain and reshape Jugendweihe in a new socio-political context not only gave older Association members meaning to their current life, it also justified their socialist biographies – like Jugendweihe, they had survived the political caesura, and they endured like the ritual.

The members of the Association related to each other 'like a family', as they expressed it themselves, and they also deliberately incorporated first-degree kin into the Association. I argued that this 'handing down' of jobs to offspring, however, should not be interpreted solely as a matter of economic interests. Rather, due to the changed political context, the

older Association members felt a sense of beleaguerment, and they trusted first degree kin to continue to work for the cause of Jugendweihe because their familial loyalty made them loyal to the moral project. It was essentially kin who shared the moral project of sustaining Jugendweihe into the future. And it was the moral project of sustaining Jugendweihe into the future that made kin: in cases where kin did not adhere to that moral project, it was acceptable to exclude them, as the Association members did with the managing director in 2002.

Association members also used kin idioms beyond the Association – in reference to and when addressing their ‘clientele’. I argued that this re-created the intimacy of a shared past, exemplified in Jugendweihe. Most eastern Germans of the parental and grandparental generations had not only participated in Jugendweihe as initiands, they had attended ceremonies as guests, and more importantly, had often helped in organizing and conducting these ceremonies. This active involvement of people under the GDR has been described by Fulbrook in the notion of ‘participatory dictatorship’ – ‘to underline the ways in which people themselves were at one and the same time both constrained and affected by, and yet also actively and often voluntarily carried, the ever changing social and political system of the GDR’ (Fulbrook 2005: 12). Having been part of shaping the Jugendweihe ceremonies under the GDR provided eastern Germans today with this sense of collective ownership over the ritual, but also led to tensions over ritual authority of both a political and economic nature in the context of the new state. These tensions emerged not least due to the fragility of the current situation in which Jugendweihe received no direct financial support from the new state and future funding could not be expected, rendering Jugendweihe’s future uncertain.

In the final chapter, I explore further tensions following the political caesura that stem from eastern Germans’ memories colliding with both the historiography of West Germany and western Germans’ memories of a past that eastern Germans did not share. In this context, Jugendweihe plays an important role in linking grandparental and parental generations to their past, but also seeks to produce a harmonious familial continuity with a generation of eastern Germans that does not share that past.



## Chapter 7

### Ghosts of Cold War Memories

*Man...who lives in three places – in the past, in the present, and in the future – can be unhappy, if one of these three is worthless.*

- Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), quoted in the Jugendweihe keepsake book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (1983: 208)

*In the decade after the unification, a significant emphasis was placed on telling, rather than asking, East Germans how life in the GDR had been. Being on the losing side in the Cold War meant giving up the right to define (or influence) how the history of their culture and society (with all its ambiguities and contradictions) should be written.*

- Mark Fenemore (2007: xiii)

The Jugendweihe ceremony had officially come to an end. Dagmar – in her role as commère – requested the adolescents to go outside for their group photos to be taken, while their parents, grandparents and guests were to remain seated. As the freshly initiated shuffled past the rows of seats to exit the theatre, *Die NotenDealer* re-entered the stage; and to the adolescents' dismay, the lead singer jovially remarked that now 'the adult programme' could finally begin. He chatted jokingly on stage until the initiated had left, and then announced to the audience: 'And now, let us remember the old times!'

Beatboxer Paul counted '*Odin, dwa, tri und vier*' (in Russian one, two, three, adding four in German) before the tenor of the group, very slowly and with emotion, broke into a Russian love song. Judging by the perplexed looks on many of the faces in the audience, I was not the only one who was surprised by this choice of song and the group's apparent proficiency in Russian. We all seemed to have expected something similar to their previous renditions of satirical German songs or popular English tunes like Adele's 'Rolling in the Deep'. However, as soon as the speed of the song increased and most of the audience recognised it as 'Katyusha', hesitation and bafflement were replaced by enthusiasm, and everyone clapped cheerfully along.

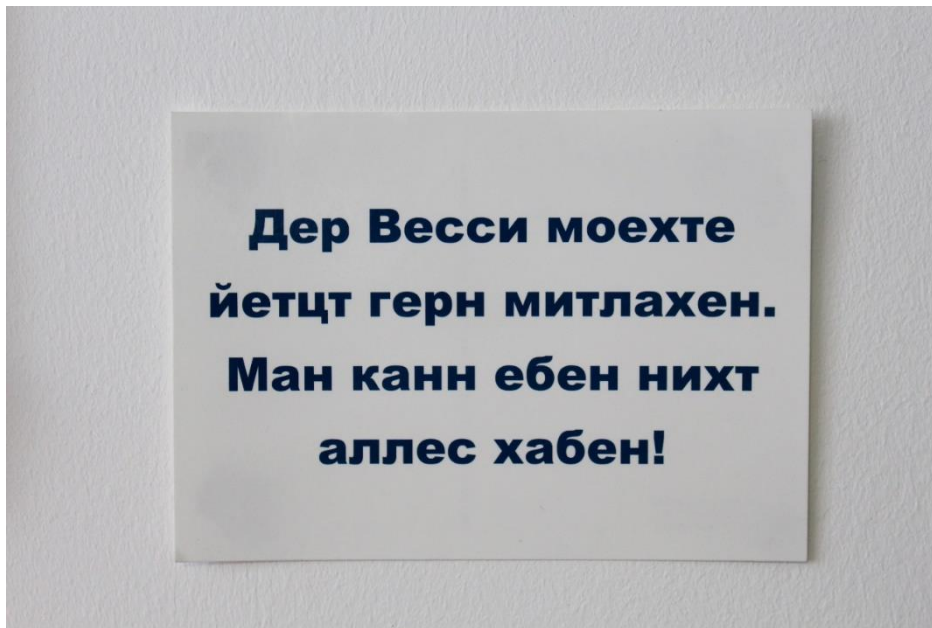
The song lyrics describe the yearning of the girl Katyusha for her love, a soldier, who – because he protects his native soil loyally – can rely on Katyusha’s love for him. Written in 1938, the song gained popularity after a Muscovite female choir sang it in 1941 for troops who were departing to fight Nazi Germany. Although the extent to which the audience was aware of the exact lyrics is questionable, the song seemed familiar to everyone. As with all the music and dance performances that day, this cover too had been selected by the performers themselves, and not by the Association, which only interfered in such choices when an act was not well-received by the audience. But this song was a new addition to the repertoire of the group, which had performed at Jugendweihe ceremonies since 2010, and so we found ourselves assessing it in the car on our way back home. Lisa, a seventeen-year-old volunteer, clearly had been flabbergasted by the song’s positive reception: ‘Well I thought, am I *supposed* to know this song?’ We laughed out loud, and Dagmar added that during this performance the guest speaker, a *Die Linke* politician, had whispered to her: “Imagine if they played this in Bavaria – chances are that tanks would roll in!”

Our laughter was contained in the car’s interior, but on later reflection, I was uncertain as to what exactly we had been laughing at, and I wondered why we had not discussed our divergent perceptions of the song in depth. Perhaps it was partly because some of the Association members had already discussed the song and Lisa’s reaction to the last performance with her. One of them, in her late forties, had volunteered their conclusion to me before our departure: ‘It’s clear as daylight, she is just too young – but for us it [the song] is a reference point.’ Of course, this common reference point was not just about the song itself, but about its origin in the Soviet Union and its performance in Russian; it was, of course, compulsory to learn Russian at school during socialist times – the language of our ‘socialist brother’, ‘role model’, and ‘our liberator from the Nazi regime’.

In this last chapter, I am concerned with divergent memories and their ghostly echoes of the Iron Curtain, which marked the physical, political, and ideological boundaries between East and West Germany for forty years. Such memories intertwine political, familial, generational and geographical articulations in the present in complex ways that redraw the symbolic boundaries of the Cold War, but also include rewritings of the past. As I have illustrated previously, the Wende was a caesura that cut deep into East Germans’ individual and familial biographies, which were framed by references to a ‘before and after

that inaugurate a present and demarcate a past' (Feuchtwang 2005: 180). Parental and grandparental generations often called this present 'now' – although it referred to a time span of 25 years – and it was frequently compared with a socialist past the interlocutors had themselves experienced, which served as a yardstick for criticisms of the present (see Chapter 3). The caesura disrupted family histories in such a way that the young post-Wende generation, growing up in unified Germany – like Lisa – do not share and cannot comprehend the memories of the grandparental and parental generations. As such, the socialist generations have to do special work to maintain familial continuity, attempts that Feuchtwang calls 'family repair' (Feuchtwang 2011: 11). I argue that such efforts of family repair comprise subtle rewritings of the past, in which Jugendweihe's origins in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are emphasised by way of deflecting from the time periods of the two dictatorships, while simultaneously stressing a pan-German tradition. Both the Jugendweihe Association and parental and grandparental generations refer not only to a longer pre-socialist tradition of Jugendweihe, but also portray family as an explicitly politically neutral social group.

Such efforts need to be understood in the context of a western German-led public discourse in which memories of the socialist past clash with those of western Germans due to an earlier caesura, emanating from the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship by the Allied Forces in 1945. Germany's occupation resulted in the foundation of West Germany (the American, British and French occupation zones) and East Germany (the Soviet occupation zone) in 1949. This separation led to divergent historiographies – both marking a clear break with the Nazi past – based on different foundation myths in each state. In this chapter, I illustrate how eastern Germans grapple with the burden of the past of two dictatorships. Given that memories are not simply created through experiences in the past, but also shape and are reshaped by our presents, such memories become 'intrinsically linked to identity' (Lambek and Antze 1996: xii; Assmann 2006: 7). In exploring these clashes between the cultural memory of the former East and West Germany respectively, I provide some insight into why it is important for families to celebrate the Jugendweihe ceremony publicly.



*Figure 19: Card in Cyrillic Letters*

*The card reads: "Der Wessi möchte jetzt gern mitlachen. Man kann eben nicht alles haben!"  
(The Westie would now like to join in the laughter. One just cannot have it all!)"*

Today the great majority of eastern Germans who grew up in the GDR are not fluent in Russian, but most recognize the language and can read the Cyrillic alphabet. In the 1990s, satirical postcards emerged that humorously exploited this fact, with sayings in German but written in Cyrillic letters (see Figure 19). As with this example, most of these cards displayed puns that played into the stereotypes of the *Besser-Wessi* ('know-it-all Westie') and the *Jammer-Ossi* ('whiny Eastie') that emerged after the fall of the wall (Berdahl 1999b; Boyer 2006). But eastern Germans of the socialist generations were the only ones capable of reading these cards; the Cyrillic letters with their German content excluded both western Germans and Russians from comprehension, since it had not been compulsory for either to learn Russian or German respectively. Thus these cards reversed the relation between eastern Germans and that of the former (Soviet Union) and the contemporary (West Germany) hegemony. The particular postcard above reclaimed a slogan that eastern Germans had faced in the aftermath of German unification from their western fellow-countrymen. Whenever eastern Germans complained that chancellor Helmut Kohl had not kept his promise of the 'blooming landscapes' that were to emerge soon after unification in the eastern states, or if they criticised a feature of the contemporary social order through direct comparison with the socialist system, they were quickly dismissed as 'whining' and reprimanded with the sentence: 'You just cannot have it all!' The satirical

recovery of this statement in a different context also retrieved for a second some of the cultural capital that had been lost with German reunification – in which, according to some estimates, approximately 50% of the knowledge that East Germans had acquired over their lives had suddenly become useless (Berdahl 1999b: 204). The true irony, however, lay in the fact that these postcards were a ‘what if’ proposition – an invitation to imagine what it would be like if western Germans had to put themselves ‘in our shoes’, or if the roles had been reversed. This proposition, in turn, implied the near-impossible question: what if socialism had triumphed over capitalism, instead of the other way around?

Although I have never come across an eastern German who openly posed such an idea, what the *Katyusha* performance and the postcards have in common is that they evoke the past, and allow it to be negotiated and dealt with in the present through irony – in ways that cannot be grasped by initiands, the younger generation of eastern Germans. What was even more exceptional about this final act of *Jugendweihe* was the explicit request to remember the past, and the fact that this encouragement to do so came from eastern Germans in their early twenties, who had not experienced GDR life themselves. Such a direct reference to the GDR past had been largely absent from the public ceremony, though there were other more implicit manifestations (as described in Chapters 2 and 3), and during the family celebration (see Chapter 4). Similarly, the dance group *Bewegungsküche* performed a sequence at several *Jugendweihe* ceremonies involving Italian songs from the 1980s and 1990s that were popular in both East and West Germany (not least because Italy has been a favourite holiday destination for Germans). However, this performance started off with the song ‘Bella Ciao’, an Italian partisan song composed in 1906, which became one of the most popular songs among the anti-fascist resistance movement in the 1940s. That this song featured among other rather apolitical Italian songs like ‘Felicita’ or ‘Mamma Mia’ may well be pure coincidence, but the dance group’s attire and their dance moves were noticeably modelled on traditional Russian Cossack dancers. More importantly, ‘Katyusha’ and ‘Bella Ciao’ had been staples in the anti-fascist song repertoire of the GDR; and, intriguingly, both groups had chosen these songs independently of each other (and the Association), although they had not been schooled during socialist times. While the performers’ call to remember ‘the old times’ was ambiguous because they did not explicitly state what old times were being remembered,

their choice of song brought to the fore the complex ways in which the socialist past and the past of national socialism are intertwined – which I discuss further in this chapter.

### ***Divergent Historiographies and Family Histories***

In her documentary *Zonenmädchen* (*Zone Girls*, Michel 2013), filmmaker Sabine Michel reunites with her female friends with whom she found herself at the end of their *Abitur* in 1990 ‘in a new social order they had not been educated for’. The group of friends grew up in Dresden (Saxony), which other East Germans had satirically nicknamed the ‘valley of the clueless’, because its inhabitants were thought to be less well-informed about the political situation due to the lack of reception for West German radio stations and TV channels in the region. She traces their friendship, which evolved prior to the caesura, and their differently-managed reorientations afterwards – in which, for example, one friend suffered from depression. Another friend became a French citizen, who teaches German in Paris but who still had not told any of her students that she grew up in the GDR – out of shame. While the film questions the extent to which their socialist upbringing has shaped them, there are also frequent glimpses into their complex relationships with their own parents. Sabine, as she herself explains, was brought up in ‘a well-sheltered socialist picture-book family’. Her parents were teachers and her father was true to SED party principles, which enabled the family to live in Guinea for three years, where her father taught natural sciences. Towards the end of the documentary, she explains that it was through preparing for the filming that – at the age of 41 – she learned from her mother that her maternal grandfather had been a Nazi and had died in a Soviet internment camp. The camera cuts to her and her mother, who sit around a table on which black and white family photos are scattered. Sabine reproachfully addresses her mother: ‘I grew up with the notion that everyone who lived in the GDR – they were the good guys, and we are the anti-fascists; and all the others had left for the West, all the war criminals. Yet we could have been a family with a Nazi criminal.’ Her mother responds, referring to herself: ‘One blocks this, one just doesn’t want it [to be true]’. But her daughter, visibly distraught, counters: ‘You never told me this!’ Her mother responds: ‘How would you just stand there, then? How’d you exist with this...’; but words fail her: ‘I just wouldn’t have known how to deal with it’.

After the Second World War and the foundation of the two German states, each interpreted the causes for the rise of fascism in Germany differently. West Germany limited fascism to the period of 1933-1945, which 'led to an internalisation of the Third Reich, meaning that Nazism had to be explained as a German problem' (Borneman 1997b: 103). East Germany identified the roots of fascism in capitalism after the First World War, and thus universalised the issue (ibid: 104). Each state partly projected the burden of the National Socialist past onto the other by portraying them as continuing the Nazi legacy: either in its authoritarian guise in East Germany, or in its imperialist guise in West Germany (Borneman 1997b; Boyer 2006). West Germany focussed on European integration and economic recovery and upturn, while East Germany declared itself to be an anti-fascist state that had been 'liberated' by the Soviet Union. The Berlin Wall – the most renowned symbol of the Cold War – was interpreted in the West as quintessence of German authoritarianism, in which a state oppressed its citizens by 'walling them in'; while East Germany claimed it to be an 'anti-fascist protection barrier'.

Yet official history with its clear black and white categories never goes entirely uncontested. Alternative accounts are offered by historical subjects who experienced particular pasts, and sought by inquiring younger generations who cannot find satisfactory answers in the official version of history-making. Such contestations inevitably raise the question of which fellow countrymen – in particular, which of one's own kin – may have enabled a dictatorship to emerge and persist, either through direct involvement in or conforming to the regime. In West Germany, a public process of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* / *bewältigung* (managing/ coming-to-terms with the past) was set in motion in the late 1960s by the student movement, which questioned their parental generations – though, as Fulbrook notes, not necessarily their own parents – about the Nazi past (Fulbrook 2015: 45). Although in East Germany Nazi elites were brought to trial and prosecuted to a greater degree than in West Germany (ibid), the GDR's political elite attempted to win over former 'nominal' NSDAP (Nazi party) members and sympathizers by absorbing them into socialist society through mass organisations such as the NDPD and DBD, and local heritage societies (*Heimatverbände*) under the Culture League (Allinson 2000: 25-27; Palmowski 2004: 370). Many of the GDR political elite were former anti-fascists who truly believed in building a new and better Germany; but GDR historiography also exonerated workers and peasants of complicity with the Nazis, and from its rigid Marxist-Leninist perspective treated 'virtually all events before the socialist era as a preparatory

run at the GDR' (Rodden 2002: 214). Unlike in West Germany, a public discourse that could have posed a challenge to GDR historiography was silenced, both by the political elite but also, conveniently, by many older East Germans; younger East Germans, as a result, had to deal with questions of shame about Nazism to a far lesser degree than West Germans (see Fulbrook 2000: 185-186).

The GDR state's anti-fascist origin myth was fostered and transmitted through its education system (Plum 2015; Rodden 2002). The historian Catherine Plum (2015) demonstrates that until the mid-1980s, school syllabi focused on stories of antifascist resistance, which emphasised the role and sacrifice of communist resistance fighters and victims, and marginalised those of other creeds. Similarly, the tales of Soviet heroes and 'liberators' – which were intended to strengthen a sense of 'friendship' with the Soviet Union – whitewashed the atrocities perpetrated under Stalin, and downplayed the contributions that the Western Allies made in defeating Hitler. This antifascist master narrative was transmitted not only in history lessons, but through anti-fascist literature and song repertoires as well as a wide range of extra-curricular events, rendering it inescapable for school-aged children and adolescents (Plum 2015: 24-77). Jugendweihe preparatory lessons were just one of many additional ways in which East Germans' 'anti-fascist descent' was reinforced, but they were often particularly effective because they were conducted outside the classroom and assumed special emotive force (Wegner 1996).

The Jugendweihe youth lesson, 'We fulfil our revolutionary legacy [of anti-fascism]' usually entailed a visit to the memorial site of the Buchenwald concentration camp. There adolescents would often hold a commemorative service next to the memorial plaque near the crematorium where Ernst Thälmann, the former Communist Party leader, was shot on the spot in 1944 (ZAJ 1974: 105-110; 1986: 103-108). The emphasis on Buchenwald, where most of the incarcerated were German and international communists, instead of Auschwitz – as the central site of the Holocaust, where most of the incarcerated were Jews – meant that 'Buchenwald usurped Auschwitz in the cultural memory of the GDR' (Emmerich 2009: 247). The visit to the concentration camp Buchenwald was almost always remembered in conversations I had with adults, perhaps because of its emotional impact at the time (see also Aechtner 2011: 132-134). One mother also recalled to me, that an anti-fascist had talked to her class during one youth lesson. However, she waved

it away with the comment: ‘Well that’s what they said back then, who knows whether he really was one?’<sup>55</sup> Her comment is representative of what most East Germans came to realize forcefully after the fall of the wall: historiography is ideologically tinted – or as Celine’s grandfather put it: ‘It’s all falsified – the history!’ (see Introduction).

While public discourses around the Nazi past clearly diverged in East and West Germany, it is much harder to assess the extent to which – and ways in which – families dealt with this past. Some studies suggest that despite West Germany’s public discourse and school education on the Nazi past,<sup>56</sup> family histories have played an important role in dissociating one’s own grandparents from the Nazis, casting them as victims of the hardships of deprivation and war (Welzer, Moller, and Tschugnall 2002). In the above-mentioned film, Sabine is clearly shocked by the revelations of her mother, and appears to have bought into the GDR state myth with which she was brought up. Given the state’s efforts in disseminating an anti-fascist master-narrative, her attitude is understandable to an extent because the GDR’s historiography was also never challenged within her family. Sabine’s mother explains that she was politically loyal [to the SED], but she also felt the need to reassert her loyalty by presenting an unquestionably ‘clean’ family history to state authorities, so that the family’s opportunity to go to Africa was not endangered. In unfinished sentences, Sabine’s mother explains that she ‘made a decision’ for ‘the sake of harmony’ and to provide her daughter with ‘a happy childhood’; that is, she erased her father’s Nazi past in any official documentation by using the ‘right phrases’, with the support of her husband. Sabine’s mother rewrote family history in order to match official historiography, for her own benefit and also for that of her family. At the same time, it was not only her management of this difficult past through denial, but also their family’s place of residence and their allegiance to the socialist regime that played a role in silencing this part of the family history. This set of factors suggests that not all East German families dealt with this past the same way, nor did they subscribe to the official historiography entirely.

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<sup>55</sup> The GDR dissident Jurek Becker ironically stated: ‘There were about 150,000 upright anti-fascists under the Nazi reign. Of these, only 17 million live on the soil of the GDR today’ (cited in Emmerich 2009: 246).

<sup>56</sup> School education after the mid-1960s – since West Germany’s historical texts until then downplayed or only sketchily addressed the Nazi regime (Rodden 2002: 217-18).

In Thuringia, there was a particular problem with historiography around the ‘Soviet liberation’, because older generations who lived through this time experienced it as defeat and recalled that American forces had taken over control. One father told me in conversation that he had argued with his history teacher, who proclaimed that the ‘Soviet forces had liberated Thuringia’, since he knew from his grandfather that the Americans had arrived first.

But some from the older generations also drew comparisons between the GDR and the Nazi dictatorship – in private. When I was a teenager, I still remember well the feeling of shock I had in response to my father commenting around the kitchen table that ‘the communists weren’t any better than the Nazis – these uniforms of the Pioneers and the Free German Youth were just like those of the Hitler Youth’. By then, I was used to the divergence between the official version of history and my parents’ views; but nevertheless, I was appalled by my father’s comparison, because my parents had never made any attempts to hinder my entry into these GDR children’s and youth organisations. I was even more appalled because I disagreed with his assessment on principle: for me, the communists and the fascists were total opposites; after all they had fought against each other. Of course, in hindsight, I realise my father had a point: there were parallels between the SED and the Nazi regimes, not only in their attempts to win over the youth – and thus secure the future of the respective regime – if necessary by means of state repression, but also in their projects, based on evolutionary theory, to create a particular type of new person for a new future. While these regimes also diverged on many issues, my focus here is on the difference in their stances on the role of women and on the ideal family model.

As discussed in Chapter 1, after the Second World War both German states emphasised different family models. West German policy makers viewed the family as a private matter, more of a concern to the church than the state, continuing – stripped of racial Nazi policies – to promote a patriarchal family model based on ‘housewife marriage’. In contrast, for East German legislators, the family was crucial to the political project; as a ‘basic collective’, it was believed to progress along evolutionary lines, hand in hand with society (Borneman 1992: 82-84). The family thus needed to be transformed into a non-patriarchal entity, which the state hoped to achieve by encouraging women to work outside the home (*ibid.*).

With the fall of the Wall, West German historiography took precedence. At its basis was the perception that West Germany had undergone a process of liberalisation and democratisation following the Nazi regime, and that therefore West Germans had come to terms with the Nazi past (Herbert 2002) – unlike East Germans. The post-Wall public discourse on the GDR past was thus reminiscent of West Germany's post-WWII working-through, which entailed two dominant narratives (Berdahl 1999b; Cooke 2005; Ten Dyke 2000). In the first, ordinary citizens are victims of perpetrators leading to a representation of the majority of East Germans as innocent but agency-free subjects. The second narrative questioned the extent to which East Germans had a 'cultural (German) predisposition to acquiesce to authority': while the majority did not actively support the GDR state, they sustained it by not resisting overtly, thus rendering them complicit (Boyer 2006; Ten Dyke 2000: 153).

What is acknowledged to a far lesser degree is that not only did East Germans as individuals come increasingly under attack in the post-Wende discourse, but also the East German family model. Laypeople and academics alike vilified East German working mothers in particular as *Rabenmütter* (literally 'raven mothers', uncaring mothers). *Rabenmutter* is a term of abuse with a long history in Germany. In West Germany it was increasingly used to target working mothers, whereas in East Germany – where the majority of women were employed – it was used more commonly for mothers who abused their offspring. Some academics have suggested that authoritarian and cold child-rearing practices – exemplified in the use of state institutions for early-age child care – led to the aggressive behaviour and lack of self-confidence which were supposedly more prevalent among eastern than western German adolescents (see, for example, Trommsdorff and Kornadt 1995). Similarly, the hypothesis of the western German criminologist Christian Pfeiffer that 'collective potty training' in GDR crèches in association with a lack of maternal attachment were the root causes for greater right-wing violence in eastern compared to western German federal states sparked heated controversy (see Pfeiffer 1999a; Pfeiffer 1999b). The epitome of the 'East German *Rabenmutter*' was reified in public discourse about higher rates of infanticide in eastern over western federal states, in which the reason were surmised to be an East German legacy (see analysis by Prickett 2010). In short, these discourses rarely paid attention to the effects of the caesura or contemporary social conditions, but were at pains to trace an

authoritarian ‘ethno-typical’ German character trait in familial relations which ‘othered’ eastern German women in particular.

The revelations of familial betrayal in the early 1990s – where spouses, parents, or children reported on the intimate details of other family members’ lives to GDR state authorities as unofficial Stasi collaborators – only fuelled the portrayals of East German family relations as cold and unloving, or simply dysfunctional. These representations added another layer to the humiliations that many eastern Germans had already suffered, and especially those of the contemporary grandparental generation. The western German-led public discourse considered East Germans not only as having failed to sufficiently resist the so called ‘second German dictatorship’, but they were also viewed as having failed fundamentally as workers, and as family members. Especially in the 1990s and 2000s – and, to a lesser extent, even today – this public discourse became engrained in many eastern Germans’ psyche. For example, whenever my mother receives some sort of good news from my brother or me, she expresses joy and pride – perhaps like any parent would. But even now, she almost always ends with a self-assessment – not to take away from her children’s achievements, but rather to redeem her own and her husband’s good parenting skills: ‘Well, I think we must have done something right – *after all!*’

It is not my aim to downplay the perfidious practices of the Stasi or right-wing violence in eastern Germany; both of these issues are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather I want to draw attention to what these discourses did to easterners, not only as individuals but as family members. After re-unification, easterners felt disoriented because they had to adapt to a new life in a new country, while also feeling under attack from westerners, who felt their own historiography had been reinforced – as the ‘winners’ of the Cold War, they continued to view easterners as ‘backward’ and ‘authoritarian’. Eastern Germans were thus viewed as simultaneously ‘too German’, being too authoritarian, and as not German enough, that is, not like western Germans. These discourses were indiscriminately applied to eastern Germans as a whole regardless of their political views, their familial relations or their relation to the former state – which inadvertently fostered a sense of community among easterners, an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (see Howard 1995). The majority of scholars of the GDR share the view that, ironically enough, it was only after the demise of the GDR that an eastern German identity developed – a group identity which the political elite during GDR times had aimed in vain to create. But the felt attack

on every aspect of easterners' lives led many of them to develop a defence mechanism without pausing and reflecting on the past in depth. Instead, many eastern Germans retreated to their families, and 'the family stepped up to play a key role in weathering the rough transition' (Betts 2010: 236). This desire for familial cohesion in turbulent times also meant that many of the younger generation did not dare to ask older generations questions about the past – to avoid further upset and conflict. Perhaps this reluctance is another reason that, in the film described above, Sabine finds out about her family history not immediately after the Wende, but only more than 20 years later.

Bearing the difficulties of the 1990s and these prominent discourses in mind, in what follows I argue that the Jugendweihe Association, grandparents and parents attempt to create a familial continuity and produce cohesion through either silencing or toning down the political aspect of the GDR Jugendweihe. This silencing is undertaken in two ways. First, elders and the Association deflect from both periods of dictatorship by emphasising the ritual's origin within the free-religious communities in the second half of the 19th century. Secondly, they portray both family and ritual as free from politics or ideology. These two intertwined strategies, I suggest, allow the ritual to appeal to family audiences across the generations, but they also demonstrate to others – including westerners – the importance of the eastern German family, and produce cohesion and continuity. The cohesion and continuity of the family, and of a particular eastern German community, is achieved by setting both apart from western Germany, but Jugendweihe – and eastern Germans by extension – here also claim to be recognized as an equal part of German cultural history and society.

### ***The Jugendweihe Tradition***

It was a March Saturday in 2013, and the fifteenth annual 'Day of Jugendweihe' was being held in the *Goethe Galerie*, a shopping mall in Jena, Thuringia's second largest city. The event revolved around the preparation and celebration of Jugendweihe, and was a business idea aimed at attracting adolescents and their parents to the shops by providing a little something beyond the ordinary shopping experience. Potential consumers could enjoy dance and music performances on a big stage that had been erected on the ground floor of the four level shopping centre. Two fashion shows, geared to the taste of the youth and to the significance of Jugendweihe as a life cycle event, were to inspire the

audience to buy things that would facilitate their festive appearance on this special day from the shops by which they were surrounded (see Figure 20). There were stalls where teenagers could receive practical advice on hairstyles and cosmetic tips, and naturally there was a stall run by the Jugendweihe Association, which provided information material on Jugendweihe ceremonies. The Association members had also placed their small, red popcorn machine on the table in the hope that the sweet smell it effused would draw teenagers, who were encouraged to participate in a quiz about Jugendweihe. Before the next fashion show started, Dagmar went on stage to talk to the presenter whose job it was to guide the audience through the afternoon's programme. He asked her in a flirtatious manner some general questions about Jugendweihe (see Figure 21). Dagmar, sporting a youthful outfit, used the opportunity to stress that the Association also offered youth work events besides the actual ceremony, and then pointed out: 'It is a family tradition. That is to say Jugendweihe is *keine Erfindung der DDR* (not an invention of the GDR) but has already existed for more than 160 years!' 'Did you know that?', she impishly asked him, adding, 'because most people don't!' The presenter shook his head like a little schoolboy that had been rebuked by his teacher. 'And there you go', Dagmar exclaimed, 'you learned something new today!'



Figure 20: Fashion Show at the 'Day of Jugendweihe' in Jena.



*Figure 21: Dagmar Talking to the Presenter at Jena's 'Day of Jugendweihe'*

This 'Day of Jugendweihe' – which the Association described in their 2012/13 flyer as 'the top event for the entire family and a 'must' for every Jugendweihe participant!!!' – was not the only kind of Jugendweihe fair I attended prior to the start of the ritual season in April. However, it was certainly the best-established and most visited of these events, all of which had in common the obvious aim of stimulating consumption around this festive occasion. For the Association, such occasions provided an opportunity to promote not only the Jugendweihe ceremony but also their youth work events. But here, I am interested in exploring another function of these events, in which they have come to serve as an educative tool to promote Jugendweihe as a 160-year-old 'family tradition'. While the ritual's history is explained on the websites of all Jugendweihe Associations, the annual flyer of the local Jugendweihe Association asserts this long tradition as well by greeting the teenagers with the words: 'Hello, dear girls and boys, great that you are interested in Jugendweihe. Jugendweihe, this 160-year-old tradition, is for you a symbolic step into the adult world.'

The fair-like events, however, diverged from these other promotions in that they allowed for direct public engagement in which the ritual's 160 year-long tradition was brought to the fore in various ways. This foregrounding was achieved either through direct interaction with Association members, as in the case with Dagmar described above, a presentation on Jugendweihe's history that would run continuously on a TV screen in the

background (see Figure 22); and/or a quiz that adolescents were encouraged to partake in. Such a quiz was also conducted on the ‘Day of Jugendweihe’, comprising four multiple choice questions that tested knowledge on the foundation of the shopping mall, the actual event, and Jugendweihe participation numbers for East Thuringia. But the first question asked, ‘Since when has there been Jugendweihe in Germany?’, providing three options: A for 80 years; B for 161 years; C for 55 years. Although it is unclear to me whether these dates had been randomly chosen by an Association member, it seems unlikely because of their historical significance. Out of the 50 teenagers that took part in the quiz, 22 answered correctly with (B) for 161 years – which dates the ritual to 1852, the year that the term ‘Jugendweihe’ was recorded for the first time by the free-religious pastor Eduard Baltzer. But almost as many participants (18) thought Jugendweihe had only existed since 1958. Although the GDR ritual was celebrated for the first time in 1955, 1958/59 was the period when the participation rate surged to over 80% from previously low participation rates of roughly 18 to 26% (see Chapter 2). More intriguingly, 10 teenagers chose option A – suggesting that the ritual had existed since 1933, the year that marked the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship.



*Figure 22: Jugendweihe Stall at the Wedding Fair in Erfurt; on the TV screen runs a presentation of the ritual's history*

Arguably, Jugendweihe's origins can be traced back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; but the fact that this period – during which the ritual was hardly known and was celebrated by only a tiny minority – is emphasised by the Association, I believe, suggests a strategy of deflecting from the ritual's more contested historical periods. By focusing on the ritual's emergence as a progressive force, that is, within the free-religious congregations that rebelled against the dogma of the church, a social demand for the ritual that grew organically, from the bottom up, is stressed. However, this emphasis stands in stark contrast to the top-down enforcement by a state authority that characterised the re-introduction of it as state ritual in the GDR, where it served to maintain the status quo (see Chapter 2). Indeed, asserting the 160-year-old tradition somewhat obscures the fact that Jugendweihe today would not be so popular if it had not been for its GDR phase, when it went from a ritual of the minority to a ritual of the majority. Yet, this raising of public awareness on the ritual's history at events and through promotion material marks a sea-change from the 1990s. During this time, the keepsake books provided by the national Jugendweihe Association neither discussed any moral values nor the Jugendweihe history, but instead tended to resemble atlases or travel guides. After the fall of the wall, Jugendweihe had been fiercely attacked within a western German-led public discourse, including by church representatives that viewed the ritual as representing eastern Germans' 'nostalgic longing for a vanished paternalistic state, that is retrospectively glorified' (Meier 1998: 40). Others had deemed the ritual without any substance or purpose because of its lack of a pledge and of an explicit intention to transmit a particular worldview or values during a preparatory period (see Wolbert 1998; Döhnert 2002).<sup>57</sup> These criticisms often went hand in hand with descriptions of the ritual's employment under the Nazi and the SED regimes, in an attempt to equate both dictatorships' sinister aims and coercive forces of youth indoctrination (Meier 1998, 2001).

While the German Humanist Association (HVD), which provides similar coming-of-age ceremonies, distanced itself from both the ritual's religious origin and also its GDR legacy by renaming the ceremony *Jugendfeier* (youth celebration) (Groschopp 2010), the German Jugendweihe Association could not as easily dissociate itself from the GDR past, given that it emanated from the former Central Committee for Jugendweihe in the GDR. As in

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<sup>57</sup> For an analysis of the public discourse on Jugendweihe, see Gallinat 2002: 36-66.

the raising of public awareness at events and in promotion materials, the last two keepsake books – *Jugendweihe Almanach* (2003) and *Worldview – Youth Changes the World* (2009) – therefore discuss not only humanist values but also the long ‘family tradition’ of Jugendweihe, its origin in the free-religious parishes and its later appropriation by the SED state, in great detail.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the hero of GDR children, Ernst Thälmann – after whom the Pioneer organisation was named – is not discussed in the contemporary keepsake book. During GDR times, he was frequently mentioned at events held to open the Jugendweihe year and at the Jugendweihe ceremony itself; and his impression of his own Jugendweihe in 1900 in Hamburg was often read out. By contrast, Clara Zetkin, Karl Liebknecht, and Wilhelm Pieck are mentioned – but solely as Jugendweihe festive speakers, without any further explanation of their political or ideological affiliation, despite their veneration as communists in the GDR (see 2009: 14). The GDR’s appropriation of the ritual is acknowledged, but the employment of Jugendweihe by the *Deutschgläubigen* (German Faith Movement) under the Nazi regime is denied: ‘The National Socialists introduced their own rites for the entry of adolescents into the circle of the ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’<sup>58</sup> which had nothing in common with the tradition of the Jugendweihe movement’ (2009: 15). As I argued in Chapter 2, the German Faith Movement conducted Jugendweihe ceremonies during the Nazi regime – a fact that is entirely ignored. Arguably the NSDAP created their own rituals, but these were clearly inspired by Jugendweihe – and demonstrated continuity both with its focus on coming-of-age at fourteen and its initiation aspect, which made the ritual mouldable to the interest of various movements. The assertion that the Nazi rituals ‘had nothing in common’ with Jugendweihe attempts to portray Jugendweihe as an explicitly progressive left force. This politically left force is emphasised by the argument that all communist and social-democratic Jugendweihe ceremonies were prohibited in February 1933 by ‘Order of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State’ (ibid.). This order – better known as the Reichstag Fire Decree, as it was issued in response to the Reichstag Fire on 27 February 1933, allegedly plotted and executed by communists – was directed against any ‘communist seditious acts of violence’. Indeed, while the decree

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<sup>58</sup> Literally, ethnic/national community but means a ‘pure’ ethnic community of Germans based on racial/national-socialist principles.

was the basis for Ernst Thälmann's arrest, it did not directly mention Jugendweihe but was left intentionally wide open to interpretation.

Although Jugendweihe was most popular among proletarian freethinkers prior to the foundation of the GDR, the denial of the *deutschgläubige* Jugendweihe under the Nazis appears intentionally to whitewash Jugendweihe's history, by creating a continuity of proletarian tradition that portrays the working class as explicitly left-wing. One day at the office, Sonja presented me with an old book on Jugendweihe. It was printed in *Sütterlin*, an old German style, and because it did not include a publishing date, I googled its author: Ernst Bergman. When I pointed out to Sonja that he had been a Nazi philosopher involved in the German Faith Movement, she was surprised: 'No, they [the Nazis] really did use Jugendweihe, too?' Sonja's surprise was genuine, and she later told Dagmar about this seemingly new revelation. Sonja and Dagmar had been taught during GDR times that Jugendweihe was not simply anti-church but also progressively left-wing, and that was what they believed themselves: a tradition that they could identify with.

Besides the emphasis on the ritual's origin, Association members also frequently pointed out to me that Jugendweihe was just a 'nice family tradition', and that it was parents and children who demanded its celebration. However, in these repeated remarks on and assertions of a 'family tradition', 'family' became synonymous with 'neutral' – that is, free of ideology or politics. Although the contemporary keepsake book clearly states that Jugendweihe in the GDR was a tool to win over the “‘hearts and minds of the young generation”, but also in the struggle between church and state' (Krause 2013: 17), the previous paragraph deceptively asserts that

Jugendweihe ceremonies were locally de-ideologized to a large extent, and met the expectations of the adolescents and their parents. Jugendweihe had developed into a family fest with many guests and presents, and to a societal highlight in the schools, cities and municipalities. This also explains why it was still in vogue in 1991 after the social change [the Wende]: the great majority of the current parental generation has positive memories of their own Jugendweihe (ibid.)

Indeed, the reason parents wished their children to celebrate Jugendweihe was because of their own participation under the GDR regime. Most parents identified the ritual either as a GDR institution or – more often – linked it to the labour movement, when the ritual became more widely popular. When I first met Andrea, she asked what had made me

choose this topic, and I explained to her that I had engaged with it rather by chance for my undergraduate dissertation and then became increasingly interested in it. She immediately commented, ‘I can imagine, the history of the labour movement alone must be very interesting!’, though I had not mentioned the labour movement to her. As discussed in Chapter 2, Jugendweihe was first celebrated in Gera 1914, that is, 35 years prior to the foundation of the GDR. However, Andrea’s identification of the ritual as labour movement tradition very likely harks back to the GDR’s historiography of the ritual, portraying it as a progressive event, continuously celebrated by proletarian freethinkers, socialists and communists. Andrea’s sixty-nine-year-old father was the only one who had celebrated Jugendweihe in 1958, though her mother, who was four years his senior, hadn’t, and nor had her husband’s parents. Indeed, because it was often age-dependent not all of the grandparents had celebrated Jugendweihe. Celine’s grandmother had not celebrated Jugendweihe, as shown in Chapter 4, but claimed to have done so in order to create a cohesion between her daughter and granddaughters. Families nonetheless viewed the ritual as a ‘family tradition’ in which adolescents evidenced this ‘tradition’ by referring to either siblings’ and/or their parents’ Jugendweihe celebrations, while parents and grandparents almost always added that Jugendweihe existed long before the GDR.

Certainly most of these parents had fond memories of their own GDR Jugendweihe celebrations, but the public ceremony during socialist times was never de-ideologized as the aforementioned excerpt claims. The constant features of the GDR Jugendweihe were always the national anthem, the national flag, the festive speech by a public – that is, state-loyal – personality, and the vow to the socialist country. Parents I interviewed in 2010 almost always acknowledged the ideological features of the GDR Jugendweihe only after I had directly asked about these aspects. Often by way of signalling that the ideological part did not matter to them, they commonly waved it away or remarked: ‘In one ear, and out the other!’ However, to argue that these aspects had been forgotten is an oversimplification. Rather, as Binns notes in regards to Soviet life cycle rituals, it was easy and often preferable to ignore these ideological aspects, even at the time (Binns 1980: 176-179). The same holds true for the GDR Jugendweihe, where audiences could pick and choose whether they preferred to see the ritual as ideological ceremony or simply a family celebration. For example, while Pioneers and FDJ members who attended

Jugendweihe as part of the ceremony would wear their organisational uniforms, the initiands and their guests would wear (civil) festive adult attire. Because ideology had been part and parcel of GDR life, for many 'it seemed to have rendered itself meaningless' (Gallinat 2005: 299; see also Yurchak 1997, 2006).

Even in the archival reports of the County Committee for Jugendweihe, a remarkable tension is palpable in attempts to strike the right balance between 'family fest' and 'ideological education'. The difficulties of this balancing act were especially evident in the form and content of the cultural programme and the festive speech. On the one hand, it was stressed that poems and songs were to be selected based on ideological relevance, and that the festive speech required ideological content. On the other, all these features also had to appeal to all guests, especially those who still needed convincing that communism was the right path to follow. For instance, the 1961 annual report chose the speech of a female party functionary of the VEB capacitor plant in Gera as a particularly bad example. She not only took the liberty to speak for over an hour, but her speech was also too much like 'a presentation, which could have been given at any residential district committee meeting of the National Front', that is, like a party meeting (SAG 06: 8).<sup>59</sup> The report argued that parents' complaints were justified; the speech was deemed inappropriate for Jugendweihe because it did not successfully connect reason and emotion. This explanation, however, brings to light the Central Committee's intention to draw explicitly on the emotional force of the family to foster identification with the ideological aims of the political elite and the GDR state itself.

While parents were given scope to influence ritual performances during the GDR period, and, as I have argued in Chapter 6, had helped in shaping Jugendweihe, this influence was limited and never eradicated the ritual's ideological features. Although the Association had a clear interest in dissociating or deflecting from the ritual's politically dubious histories, and benefitted from the continuation of the ritual ceremony, the frequent claims that Jugendweihe was a family tradition created a harmonious continuity within the family. However, if Jugendweihe was simply a family tradition, why is it today also celebrated in a public ceremony? I suggested in Chapter 5 that the public celebration provides an opportunity for some families to distinguish themselves from others in terms of social

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<sup>59</sup> The first Jugendweihe Handbook, published in 1974, clearly set out that the speech was not to exceed 20 minutes (ZAJ 1974: 148).

class. Families may all well be eastern German, but they have more or less successfully adapted to the new social order, and the public ceremony allows them to demonstrate their social standing to others. In the remaining part of this chapter, I explore further reasons for participating in a public ceremony by turning to political memories, and the eastern Germans' sense of not feeling at home.

### ***Political Affiliations & Not Feeling at Home***

Running alongside changes in dealing with Jugendweihe's history over the past decade was the local Jugendweihe Association's openness about their fruitful relationship with *Die Linke* (The Left). The Left – also called *Linkspartei* (Left Party) – was founded in 2007 through a merger of the western German WASG (Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative) and the eastern German PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). The latter party was the legal successor to East Germany's state party, SED (Socialist Unity Party). There were many parallels between the party and the Association in terms of their aims to survive and re-invent themselves in post-socialist eastern Germany. Yet, in the early post-Wall years, it was essential for the Jugendweihe Association to publicly dissociate from the then-PDS because of the socialist past. While the Association emphasised that it is 'a party-politically and ideologically independent Association which guarantees freedom of faith and conscience, tolerance and acceptance of diverse world views' (JWA 2013), it seemed to have changed its earlier cautious stance, towards guest speakers in particular. In the 1990s, the Association seemed to be more careful about providing a venue for diverse – often non-politically affiliated – guest speakers; but from the sixteen ceremonies I observed in 2013, only two included guest speakers who were not members of The Left.

During discussion of a new promotion clip about the Association, Nicole, the youngest staff member of the Association, raised doubts about whether depicting only The Left party members would put the Association in a 'particular corner'. Dagmar assertively asked: 'Who do you want to use then?'. She continued to argue that most guest speakers were chosen from The Left because 'they are reliable and give the best speeches'. Nicole countered that people may not know that other public figures do not want to speak at Jugendweihe ceremonies, and that all they will see is that the guest speakers are from The Left – and this might turn the entire clip into a promotion for this party. Dagmar asserted

that she did not care what the public thought, and that for her it was more important to be able to rely on guest speakers. Dagmar's sense of the reliability of The Left seemed to stem from her discontent about the fact – as she had explained to me in another conversation – that members of other parties had rejected invitations to speak at Jugendweihe ceremonies in the 1990s. Some eastern German politicians had also attempted to provide a non-religious alternative to Jugendweihe in the early 2000s, by founding an organisation called '*Maiglöckchen*' ('May Bell'; see also Fincke 2002; Wieland 2001). Although this venture failed, and members of other political parties have taken on roles as guest speakers at the Jugendweihe or Jugendfeier ceremonies of other providers since, Dagmar seemed to assess this move as an unforgivable betrayal – especially by members of the SPD.

The Association also made use of The Left for their excursion offers to the *Thuringian Landtag* (federal state parliament) and the *Bundestag* (German parliament), which were sponsored by Left parliamentarians, who would often show adolescents around and discuss with them how democratic institutions worked. But the relationship was beneficial to The Left too. Jugendweihe ceremonies were a popular venue for political party representatives to reach a large audience all at once, especially in an election year – like 2013 – when they needed their electorate to remember the candidate in a favourable light.

At the same time, Association members were also critical of The Left party's work. They often complained about its factional quarrels, which were seen as hindering a common goal, and they were wary that Left party members would fall into stereotypical traps of 'corrupt politicians'. Indeed, the Association's apparent scrutiny of The Left party politics needs to be understood in the context of The Left's populist stance, and its claims to represent the 'common man on the street', as well as campaigns run by its forerunner – the PDS – to represent the interests of the eastern German electorate in particular (Hough 2000; Hough and Koß 2009).

However, the party's effectiveness had increasingly come into doubt after its merger with the western German left, and with its aspiration to become a national party (*Volkspartei*). This doubt became clear during an Association outing to mark the end of the Jugendweihe year 2013, shortly after the general election in September. One Association member remarked that he had checked straight away whether 'our festive speakers are still in the *Bundestag*'. When I mentioned that they had lost their direct mandate, Dagmar confirmed

this, adding: 'But what can they do, anyway? It's always easier to talk big when one is in opposition, but to actually govern – that's a different thing! That's when you have to do the real work! In my opinion they should have a red-red-green coalition with Merkel as chancellor!<sup>60</sup> After all, she is also child of the East' (*ein Kind des Ostens*).<sup>60</sup> This ironic remark amused many around the dining table as it toyed with the portrayal of eastern and western Germans as homogenous along political lines. While Angela Merkel was raised in the GDR and had been a secretary of the Free German Youth, her father was a pastor and she did not celebrate Jugendweihe. Crucially, her political views were not compatible with the left-wing parties Dagmar wished would govern the country. Merkel may have been eastern German, but as leader of the Conservative party, she was certainly not left-wing.

Jutta had voiced similar criticism of The Left prior to the general election in a different conversation, in which she volunteered to me that she had not been satisfied with the party's work. She felt disappointed that The Left, for example, had not nominated their own candidate for the mayor's office. When I suggested that surely no one would be keen on being the mayor of a city that was so heavily in debt as Gera, she elaborated that it was just another manifestation of the party 's refusal of responsibility, preferring to remain in a 'cosy oppositional role'. She was at a loss and explained her difficulties in finding a party she could actually identify with and trust, and thus vote for, and she felt that Germany wasn't a *real* democracy. While this dissatisfaction with party politics is a rather widespread phenomenon in many democracies and not particular to the eastern German context, in her search to explain her views to me, Jutta suddenly continued: 'I don't feel at home in this state at all, it's somehow not my state. I don't have this patriotic feeling, it's not really *my* country. But, then again, I don't know, where else would it be?' Jutta, who was in her early thirties at the time of German reunification, was unable to express exactly what the issue was – reinforcing this inarticulacy by putting her right hand to her chest – because as a feeling it was elusive. But this sensation was not uncommon among eastern Germans of both grandparental and parental generations – though I have rarely heard it put into words as directly as by Jutta. At first sight, her feeling appears to stem from the change in the political landscape that had made previously fairly clear-cut political leanings after the caesura much more complex. Yet this obvious complexity was less because she had gained

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<sup>60</sup> Parties, like political views, are usually referred to in Germany by colour: A red-red-green coalition stands here for the SPD, The Left and Alliance '90/The Greens.

a right to vote with a real choice, than that she felt there was no one left she could trust to serve her interests.

Not feeling at home, as Jutta described it, seems peculiar at first – especially since she had never left Thuringia. Berdahl argues that the various nostalgic expressions and practises of easterners in the 1990s and 2000s were due to ‘feelings of profound displacement and disillusionment following reunification, reflected in the popular saying that we have “emigrated without leaving home”’ (Berdahl 2005: 165). Jutta’s assertion that it was ‘not a real democracy’ was her way of underscoring her sense of not being properly represented, a disgruntlement that stems in part – as I suggested in Chapter 6 – from the fact that the political system and the institutions she found herself in had not been shaped by East Germans. Ordinary eastern Germans were not part of the negotiations of Germany’s unity treaty, and thus unable to salvage parts of the past they did not want to leave behind. But eastern Germans also continue to be underrepresented in Germany’s decision-making positions today (see Helbig 2015). Indeed, many eastern Germans perceive themselves as second-class citizens in Germany, an issue that has multifarious causes, and to which I turn below.

### ***The Ossi and ‘Second-Class’ Citizenship***

Teenagers who participated in Jugendweihe in 2013 seemed largely oblivious of the fact that there was a link between the ritual and the GDR, although most of their parents had celebrated their own Jugendweihe during socialism. Adolescents generally acknowledged that one ‘celebrated the entry to adulthood’ with the ritual, but that one was not yet an adult. Of the twenty adolescents I had conversations with about Jugendweihe, only 16-year-old Sophie pointed out in her definition of Jugendweihe that it was ‘a festivity which is celebrated mainly in the East of Germany’. This disconnect among teenagers was partly due to the fact that, for them, the GDR was part of history and not their own biography. Teenagers were also at an age where they had not yet been exposed to the question ‘Where are you from?’ Such a query would only be raised either abroad or when one was in another federal state. This issue of ‘home’ or ‘origin’, however, could be a challenge for their parents and grandparents.

During my fieldwork, one story made its rounds in the village, concerning a local woman's daughter who had moved to Bavaria. She and her husband, who were in their thirties, had settled in Munich, largely for work purposes, and they had recently bought a property in one of the more rural suburbs of the city. One day, while they were busy renovating their newly acquired house, a neighbour came over to fetch his child's football, which had made its way over the fence. They got into a conversation during which the Bavarian neighbour inquired where they were from. Their answer, 'Gera', did not mean anything to him, so they broadened the geographical scope by listing more well-known cities within an hour's driving distance from Gera, 'Jena, Erfurt, Leipzig...'. The Bavarian was still perplexed, and remained so even after they had told him that they came from the federal state of Thuringia. The woman, who had grown increasingly impatient, then resorted to a greater geographical category, exclaiming: 'Well, we're from the East!' This remark, the story went, led the Bavarian neighbour to respond agreeably: 'Never mind at all! My wife is *also* from the Far East!'

The story was always accompanied with shaking of heads and sneers about the ignorance of 'the Bavarian' in particular, and western Germans in general. What made matters worse was that the incident occurred just a few years prior to my fieldwork, not in the 1990s. Whether this story was genuine in the first place, and to what extent it may have been coloured in due course of its retelling, is not so much of interest to me as the fact that it circulated at all. When I provocatively pointed out to my mother in a conversation about this anecdote that perhaps this particular Bavarian was just a 'bit provincial' not unlike the villagers of Gera themselves, she responded indignantly: 'But *we do know* cities and federal states in the West!' While the issue seemed to focus on western Germans' ignorance about anything related to eastern Germany, in spite of eastern Germans' knowledge of western Germany, what was not properly articulated in this instance, I believe, was what bothered the people who recounted it the most. For this grandparental generation of eastern Germans, who had felt German all their life, it seemed the greatest affront that after German unification they were repeatedly compared and equated to foreigners. Yet, this divergence between easterners and westerners in what appears to be simple geographical knowledge is a continuation of what had already evolved prior to 1989. Like West Germans of the same age, young East Germans had no memories of a united Germany (before 1945). However, while most young East Germans had never stopped looking westwards, kept up with its popular culture, and compared their quality of life with that

of West Germany rather than with other socialist countries, young West Germans had largely lost any real interest in East Germany; they no longer upheld a sense of belonging to two parts of a divided Germany (Fulbrook 1994: 221; 2000: 187-88).

Notably, the mother had made her daughter's incident public by retelling her family story at pensioners' gatherings and meetings of the women's sport group, where it was frequently remarked upon and retold. But it was because of these women in attendance that the story spread within and beyond the village, and travelled back to their own and other households. It was there, within the family, where it fell on the ears of all generations and cut across age differences. The parental generation often empathised and shared similar sentiments with their parents, not least because they had greater exposure to western Germans both through work and travel, and thus had comparable first-hand experiences. The younger generation, which had been born and brought up in unified Germany, were often uninterested in such stories, found them awkward or were merely bemused by their elders' resentment. Nevertheless, they were made aware of the existence of such a symbolic boundary and its effects on their grandparents and parents. More importantly, the older eastern Germans of the post-Wende generation grew, the more they became aware of the ongoing distinction-making between eastern and western Germany.

In a conversation I had with Kristin, a female volunteer with the Association, she asserted generational differences in attitude to national and regional sentiments. She had far greater exposure to non-Thuringian than most of the Thuringians I spent my time with, since she was a university student and also travelled regularly throughout Germany for team sports competitions. Fully aware of her circumstances, I carefully framed my question of whether, because she was 'meeting more people from other federal states' she 'actually felt more like a Thuringian or more like a German?' She quickly answered, 'German', before she elaborated,

Well, you meet Bavarians, and they speak Bavarian, and then there are others who *sächsln* (speak in a Saxon dialect, i.e. Upper Saxon) and that's okay. This is more the older generation that says: 'Oh no, the Bavarians sound impossible, and they always talk like 'East' and 'West'. I don't feel that way because I was born in 1990 – when Germany was already one. The only thing that I do think is really unfair, for example, is that the care personnel here earns less than in the old federal states. For instance, my mother works in the nursing services and she must lift as heavy stuff and

cares as much for people as a nurse in West Germany, that is, the old federal states. This is also not democratic.

Twenty-two-year-old Kristin denied any particularly strong regional attachments. Yet, despite my careful phrasing regarding her exposure to ‘people from other federal states’ in which she could have easily referred to, for example, more distinct northern federal states, she juxtaposed Bavarians and Saxons – the stereotypical epitomes of the Wessi and Ossi respectively. Bavarians are held to be particularly conservative, Catholic, and rich, even among western Germans. The Saxon dialect, on the other hand, has connotations of naivety, and many Germans also associate it with the Stasi, the former GDR state security. She herself had interpreted my regional versus national attachment question as one between eastern and western Germany, recreating the same demarcation in the beginning of her explanation that she subsequently ascribed to older generations. More importantly, in the end she conceded that there is some actual unequal treatment, which she framed in relation to her mother’s lower earnings compared to western Germans for the same work. She raised this as an issue of democracy, as Jutta did; but while Jutta seemed to relate this inequality to inadequate political representation, Kristin did so because all laws in a democracy should apply equally to all citizens.<sup>61</sup> While she sided with her mother, she did not deduce that the same could befall her in the future.

However, some members of the post-Wende generation also had direct experiences of the symbolic divisions between the former East and West Germany. In December 2013, the magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article by an anonymous 22-year-old female student from Brandenburg, who asked for the abandonment of the categories of Ossi and Wessi (see anonymous author 2013). She explained that, because she was born in 1991, she had never had anything directly to do with the GDR and always felt like a ‘normal German’. Yet since she and her boyfriend had moved to Bavaria for her studies, they had been treated – to her astonishment – as Ossis. She described experiences in which party

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<sup>61</sup> According to the Federal Statistical Office the hourly gross income averaged 72% in eastern Germany compared to the western federal states in 2012. Although salaries in the public sectors have been largely aligned, in the private sector eastern Germans often only earn 60% of the salaries in the western federal states. More importantly, in 2013, 25% of eastern Germans earned less than the minimum wage compared to 11% in the western federal states (Kaufmann 2013). The public discourse on the minimum wage was a main feature of the 2013 electoral campaigns, during which some argued that if a minimum wage were to be introduced at all, it should be €1 per hour lower in the eastern federal states – a suggestion that caused renewed upset in eastern Germany.

conversations suddenly came to a halt as soon as her western German interlocutors learned where she was from, and of frequent Ossi jokes and derogatory comments, and how they negatively affected her. Arguing that an ‘Ossi is not an Ossi’ because it does not denote a geographical region but emanates from a historical context, she finishes her plea,

Young people, like me, just want to live like any other young Germans as well – in the present, not in the past. And we do not want to be further humiliated for our parents’ suffered humiliations.

Both examples of young twenty-somethings illustrate how the young generation seems more confident in raising the discriminatory treatment of eastern Germans as an issue, perhaps partly because they are better educated than their parents and grandparents. Crucially, however, they can do so more easily because they cannot be criticised for any GDR state involvement.

There are not only dissonances in experiences, memories and identifications of the past between eastern and western Germans, but also generational ruptures between socialist generations and their offspring born into unified Germany. Memories of the past are here reproduced on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, in ways that continue to challenge eastern Germans’ sense of full acceptance as equal citizens in unified Germany because of and despite their different past.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown how the political caesura and the incorporation of eastern Germans into the Federal Republic of Germany brought to the fore differences in eastern and western understandings of the past, based on divergent memories and identifications with different historiographies, geographical belongings and political cultures, all of which have hindered the formation of a common identity. This lack of common identity as ‘simply Germans’, and of the ‘growing together’ that many had envisaged but which was ‘blocked’ by the frequently cited and infamous ‘wall in the heads’ (*die Mauer in den Köpfen*) is maintained on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Most Germans as well as international observers had underestimated that ‘[b]elonging is established more through a shared past than an anticipated common future’ (Borneman 1992: 307).

This common future continues to be haunted not only by the forty years of different pasts in East and West Germany, but also by the Nazi past. In her study of German identity, the anthropologist Diana Forsythe (1989) interviewed West Germans in the 1970s and 1980s, and argues that – despite the commonly held belief that a majority identity is strong and secure – West Germans experienced their identity as fragile and ambiguous. The reasons, she holds, are to be found in the fact that the history of the German nation is fairly recent, and that any conversations about *die Vergangenheit* (the past) refer almost always to the previous fifty years. The past is thus ‘frequently used as a euphemism for the Nazi era (1933-45)’ (Forsythe 1989: 138). Forsythe explores how Germanness manifests itself in drawing boundaries in two ways. The first is geographical, that is, where Germany is – a complicated matter for historical as well as political reasons. Secondly, dichotomies between who is German, or a *Deutscher*, and who is an *Ausländer* (a foreigner) appear. But both geographical and ethnic demarcations are expressed in gradations. The territory of the GDR was seen as unclear: an anomalous domestic *and* foreign territory. Likewise, GDR citizens were viewed as German but ambiguously so. After the fall of the wall, this ambiguity of the ‘other German(y)’ has continued. I have argued that eastern Germans in the first decade after unification were perceived to be a ‘too German’ – that is, ‘authoritarian’ because according to West German historiography they continued the Nazi past in its authoritarian guise; or similarly, not ‘German enough’, that is, not sufficiently like West Germans.

The West Germans whom Forsythe asked in the 1980s if they felt German would respond according to whether they had a nationalist or non-nationalist view of German identity. The former would identify as Germans, the latter more likely as European, or in terms of local and regional identifications. This dissociating as German was a way of dissociating with the Nazi past and its dangerous nationalism (Forsythe 1989: 151-154). Indeed, these ways of identifying are also common today, and also among eastern Germans. They are not simply about views on nationalism, but are often made along political lines; it is rare for a politically left-leaning person to consider themselves ‘German’, other than in linguistic terms. Here a common national identity is fraught along political lines and understandings of the Nazi past. Nevertheless, eastern Germans are still more likely considered to be *Ostdeutsche* (East Germans) than Germans by westerners.

In 2003, the journalist Toralf Staud offered an interesting argument about East Germans and unification in the German national paper *Die Zeit*, under the heading ‘Ossis are Turks’ (*Ossis sind Türken*) (Staud 2003). His article opens with a scene from the film *Good Bye Lenin!* – for the first time after the fall of the wall, the main protagonist, Alex, visits his father, who had fled to West Berlin. Alex’s half-siblings ask him his name and where he comes from. He answers: ‘I come from a different country.’ Staud points out that Alex does not say that he comes from the GDR or from ‘the zone’, nor does he refer to himself as ‘one of your poor brothers and sisters’ – as many West German politicians used to refer to East Germans. Alex also does not refer to himself as East German. Instead, Staud explains, he states the simple truth; and if this truth had been considered, the processes of German unification might have been differently managed – and perhaps more successfully. He argues that East Germans should have been viewed as immigrants – the only difference being that they did not leave their home, but that their new country came to them. East Germans – like other immigrants – had high hopes for their lives in the new country, but tensions quickly emerged as they were asked to *assimilate* when they only wanted to *integrate*. This desire to keep something of their own cultural heritage explains the wave of nostalgia for the East. Immigrants often feel rejected and bullied, while members of the receiving country tend to complain about the cost of migration – all of which sounds familiar to any German in post-Wende Germany. As is common among immigrants, eastern Germans had not only lost parts of their possessions, they also had not acquired the appropriate cultural capital – they had learnt the wrong foreign language, they had to learn how to deal with new laws and bureaucracy, their professional degrees were not recognized, and so on.

Gareth Dale (2007) argues that Staud’s thesis provides a useful lens through which to view *Ostalgie* in the 1990s and 2000s: to seek out East products, to watch East programmes and listen to East music are all ways to feel at home again. However, he rightly points out that equating East Germans and Turks downplays the considerably greater challenges non-German immigrants face in integrating into German society. Not only is their native language not German, they also ‘suffer institutional discrimination and other forms of racism to a far greater extent than do East Germans’ (Dale 2007: 172). He notes, too, that easterners’ ‘family networks have, so to speak, accompanied them on their journey’ (ibid: 172). I have argued that the family played a major role in the post-Wende

period in providing a refuge for eastern Germans. Not unlike during GDR times, Jugendweihe served to re-strengthen family ties – in a way that emphasised family over any potential conflicts arising from political differences. In 2013, where many of these eastern German families had offspring that had been born in the ‘new country’, there was also an increasing danger for this familial cohesion – both in the passing of time, which allowed people to address the past more critically, but also presented by a young generation that attempts to understand a past in a country they themselves have not lived in.

When the a capella band I described in the introductory vignette encouraged the audience to ‘remember the past’, it was somewhat unclear what past they referred to nor how this past was to be remembered. Their choice of song, a Russian song that belonged to the anti-fascist song repertoire of the Eastern Bloc, made clear that it was the socialist past parental and grandparental generations had experienced themselves – and a past that would not have existed without the Nazi past. The song was performed at a time when the adolescents, who do not share this song as a common reference point, were not present in the theatre. Yet it was chosen by twentysomethings who directly called upon the older generations to remember the past. As Maxim Leo’s excerpt, cited on page i illustrates, the GDR is still alive in families – like a ghost that can’t find peace. It is the younger generation that is also eager to understand this past, because the past cannot simply be shed but needs to be remembered, retold, managed, and worked through across the generations. This memory work is an ongoing process and Jugendweihe is part of this process of connecting the three generations. The Katyusha song is thus a reminder of the presence of a generation that has not experienced this past, which has not lived in the country their parents and grandparents grew up in. Yet they are connected through their kin to this country and this past – and through Jugendweihe; both are continued into the future.

## Conclusion

*What I have, I do not want to lose, but  
Where I am, I do not want to stay, but  
Those I love, I do not want to leave, but  
Those I know, I do not want to see any more, but  
Where I live, I do not want to die, but  
Where I die, I do not want to go to:  
I want to stay where I have never been.*

- Poem by GDR dissident Thomas Brasch, written after his coerced emigration from East to West Germany in 1976.

It was an autumnal September afternoon, and my mother and I were chatting in the family kitchen about nothing in particular when she made a comment about the ‘old’ and ‘new’ federal states. These were common enough terms, but her usage of ‘new’ federal states – that is, the five federal states of the former East Germany – irked me in this instance. Perhaps I was just in a grumpy mood. Perhaps fieldwork had taken its toll on me; having lived as an adult for such a prolonged time with my parents had made me feel like their teenage daughter again. Media reports had been frustrating me throughout my fieldwork too, because discriminatory tropes about eastern Germans were still so prevalent – not unlike those common in the 1990s. In the run-up to the general elections in September, for instance, the SPD candidate for chancellor alleged that Chancellor Angela Merkel ‘lacked passion for Europe’ because she was ‘socialized in the GDR’. The ongoing debate about the introduction of a legal minimum wage, which became a central issue in the electoral campaigns, led some western Germans to suggest that if it was to be implemented, it should be at least €1 per hour lower for eastern Germans because of their ‘lower productivity’.

I was uncomfortably aware of how words mattered in the shaping of social relations, and of how oblivious my mother seemed to that fact, which only fuelled my irritation. Most likely, though, it was the combination of all of these factors – being bad-tempered, a daughter, an eastern German, and an anthropologist – that made me snap at her: ‘I just can’t believe you are using these terms too. How are the western federal states in any way

older than the eastern? ‘New’ is just so belittling; like 1990 was a tabula rasa; like the ‘older brother’ helps his ‘younger sister’ because we are so in need of help. And that you use this ‘old’ and ‘new’ nonsense yourself just makes it all worse!’ My entirely perplexed mother tried to defend herself to me, and also to my father, who had just stepped into the quarrel: ‘I don’t understand what your problem is,’ she said, adding, ‘How else would you say it?’ In the hope of receiving support from her husband, she turned to him and asked, ‘Isn’t it right? – *Everyone* says old and new federal states?!’ Her assertion, in turn, struck a chord, and I indignantly countered: ‘Only because everyone does it, does *not* make it right!’ The tense situation was only half-heartedly defused by letting the matter rest at that.

Roughly a couple of weeks later, as I returned from work, I had hardly opened the door when my father cheerfully welcomed me with a confusing series of news bites. One was that Ranga Yogeshwar had won the *Goldene Henne* (Golden Hen) audience award – an annual media prize in memory of the East German entertainer Helga Hahnemann (1937-1991), whose nickname was ‘Hen’. I was puzzled by this piece of information. I was not sure how it was supposed to be of interest to me, nor indeed to my father, who was no fan of award ceremonies. I knew that the Luxembourger Yogeshwar was a popular presenter of scientific shows on German TV, and that the award was based on votes cast by readers of the TV magazine *SuperIllu* and viewers of MDR and RBB TV channels – in other words, a largely eastern German audience. Just as I was about to ask what he was actually trying to tell me, my father arrived at his point: the final comment of Yogeshwar’s thank you speech. The TV presenter referred to contemporary Germany in an allegory of a married couple. It was time, my father reported Yogeshwar to have said, to drop the ‘new’ from the ‘new federal states’. After all, no husband would introduce his wife of over twenty years to anyone as a ‘new wife’. My father repeatedly nodded and laughed with an apparent sense of vindication made by the award recipient on his, or indeed on my, and our, behalf. But I couldn’t help thinking how inappropriate the marriage metaphor was. Marriage, to me, was a union between two consenting equal partners; but the merger of the two German states in 1990 had not been a union of equals. The accelerated pace of unification was comparable to a marriage of convenience at best, based much more on economic reasoning than shared values or love. My father, on the other hand, seemed convinced – like Yogeshwar – that it was just a matter of the passing of time and more respect for each other that would turn the marriage into a happy one. I kept my doubts

to myself, bit my tongue, and smiled at my father, because I knew that his retelling of this story was his way of signalling to me that he understood what I had meant a fortnight earlier.

These two interrelated incidents brought back memories of the political caesura, the *Wende*, – not only because of their content, but also because they evoked all the heightened emotions of the time, alternating between fear, excitement, hope, joy, confusion, and disillusionment, and producing intense familial tensions. The *Wende* was not simply a one-off incision through all aspects of East German society, but – as I explained in the thesis introduction – a time period marked by two separate, complex events: the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989, and German unification on 3rd October 1990. The fall of the Wall was experienced differently by East Germans, but the great majority – and certainly my entire family – found it an unexpected, but moving and joyous moment. However, its aftermath also brought into sharp relief intra-and inter-generational clashes in political views, previously less obvious but now publicly displayed: in (West) German national flags, graffiti of Nazi symbols, the changing attire of contemporaries along political lines, and often heated debates – both in public and in family homes – on the best way forward. In the *Wende* period and the 1990s, the state apparatus in the territory of the former East Germany turned a blind eye to increasing right-wing extremism and focussed its attention on the political left. During this time, youths with extreme-left and -right political leanings made their views conspicuous through the way they presented themselves. Youths associated with right-wing extremist views imitated the English Skinhead scene with their hairdos and attire (bomber jackets, black boots with white shoelaces, particular clothing brands). The style of youths with left-wing extremist views could be characterised as ‘punk’ or ‘hippy’, though many had a similar style to the right-wing extremists, but would never use white shoelaces or Nazi symbols. Yet the ‘communication’ between these groups was less based on debate than marked by violent attacks and counter-attacks.

My parents, and especially my father, had been – like most East Germans, it seemed – in favour of speedy unification, and started to take to the streets just before I decided to stop participating in these protests. For me, for many of my generational peers, and for the GDR dissidents that had brought the citizens’ movement into being, the

demonstrations had been about reforms – to shake up an outmoded political elite that, despite *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, rejected any change. Our aspiration was a ‘humane socialism’ that, among other much-needed transformations, would first and foremost grant proper rights of freedom of speech and movement. Conversely, for the great majority, economic aspirations had increasingly taken centre stage after the fall of the Wall.

It was after one particular incident during a discussion in the Johannis Church, which served as a venue for open debate that always preceded the street protests, that I decided to cease participating. In the packed church, a young man, perhaps only a couple of years older than me, took to the microphone. He made a call to consider the issues of this turbulent time carefully and to ponder over what we, East Germans, had to offer in an attempt to caution his listeners ‘to not let us *BRDigen*’. The latter term was a wordplay that consisted of the FRG (West Germany) and the verb ‘to bury’.<sup>62</sup> To my shock and frustration, he was quickly booed and interrupted by the audience, including the pastor – presumably because their desire to become part of the ‘Golden West’ drowned any rational discussion on other options. Yet his concern, which so many dismissed at the time, was to become a sensation that many East Germans would feel after German unification, when – as I have illustrated in this thesis – their focus shifted onto the losses they had not anticipated.

Like me, most of these East Germans had pledged allegiance to the GDR state and its socialist future at the age of fourteen, in the secular coming-of-age ritual *Jugendweihe*. This ritual was a site where individuals, families and the state were intimately connected, and where the political elite fostered its aims of creating ‘socialist personalities’ and ‘socialist families’ for their greater goal of achieving communism. Many observers in the West, but also among the churches in East Germany, had anticipated that with the GDR state’s demise, the ritual would vanish as well. But this disappearance did not transpire. In this thesis, I have investigated how and why *Jugendweihe* – which was so closely associated with the GDR state – could survive the political caesura. I have explored how

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<sup>62</sup> *BRD* – FRG, *beerdigen* – to bury – A group of his friends later carried a banner with this slogan during the protest.

the ritual's continuity and adaptation in a new socio-political environment reflects the processes of reordering the relations between the individual, family, and the (new) state in unified Germany.

The Wende not only created the temporal designations of a 'before' and an 'after' (see Feuchtwang 2005; 2011); it also produced generational differences in which a younger generation born in post-Wende eastern Germany cannot share the same reference points with their parental and grandparental generations, who have individual, familial, social, geographical, and political memories of the past, imbricated in complex ways. It also unearthed differences between the parental and grandparental generations, as is evident in the clash of opinions between me and my parents. My parents were born under the Nazi regime and grew up in the 1940s, experiencing the separation of Germany and the socialist regime that followed – political situations that were in many ways foisted upon them from outside. They also had memories of the workers' uprising in 1953, and the building of the Wall in 1961 – episodes which informed their attitudes and sustained their suspicion toward the GDR state. I was raised to be wary of the state too, but I also grew up during a time that was marked by détente. In my family it was clear that we were not simply supportive of the state, and this perspective aligned us. Yet with the Wende and the possibility of reunification, our political views shifted out of alignment. I only knew the GDR. I did not agree with its political elite, but nevertheless the GDR was *my* country. Unlike my parents, I never felt any desire to reunify with the other German state. At the same time, after reunification, my parents – and their generation – suffered far more from the devaluation of their lives and struggled much more to adapt to the new country than I did.

I have argued that the continued celebration of Jugendweihe is an attempt to recuperate the losses experienced after reunification, and to transmit a particular set of values to the generation of eastern Germans that has no experience of the country their parents and grandparents came from. It serves to connect family members across generational divides and dissonances, while simultaneously attempting to foster a post-socialist subjectivity with a shared set of familial values.

Chapter 1 set out the interdependency of politics and kinship. Jugendweihe became an integral part of the East German lifecourse and served as a site where individuals, families, and the state were intimately connected. Today Jugendweihe connects three living generations of eastern Germans but also sets them apart from western Germans. I argued that the ritual holds special potential for reproducing the family and also eastern German society. In Chapter 2 I demonstrated that Jugendweihe played a significant role in the secularization process and facilitated families' move away from the church. Today the celebration of Jugendweihe within the context of the German nation-state is also a signifier of being non-denominational, in contrast to western Germans' 'culture of church affiliation'. A secular world view has thus become the basis for family values to be passed on to the next generation. In the following three chapters I brought to the fore particular moral values parents and grandparents sought to transmit to the adolescent generation, and I explored the changes of particular institutions (school, family, economy) due to transformations from state socialism to parliamentary democracy. Chapter 3 explored the connections between Jugendweihe and the socialist school system and highlighted how parents and grandparents sought to imbue collectivity as value to the adolescent generation. Chapter 4 focused on the family celebration and illustrated how ties to both the familial home and the regional home (Heimat) were strengthened, while parental and grandparental generations in various ways also inculcated the importance of work and earning one's own money to the adolescents. Chapter 5 examined how Jugendweihe reflected the increasing socio-economic stratification of eastern German society, while also serving as site of distinction-making itself. I argued that the shift from consumer products to monetary gifts was indicative of a change in socio-economic relations that was mediated by the parental and grandparental generations' moral discourse and emphasis on frugality as basis for adolescents' ability to found their own future household. The Jugendweihe Association's role in sustaining Jugendweihe in post-unification Germany was explored in Chapter 6. It highlighted that Association members' survival was inextricably linked to the survival of Jugendweihe and that many eastern Germans perceived Jugendweihe not to be a state-designed ritual but one they had actively helped shaping, and thus identified with it. Finally, in Chapter 7 I showed how the endurance of Jugendweihe is illustrative of the divergent memories of eastern and western Germans that symbolically redraw Cold War boundaries. I argued that grandparental and parental generations attempted to create familial continuity and cohesion by portraying both the

ritual and family as free from politics or ideology. At the same time older generations still felt ‘not at home’ in unified Germany.

As I have shown in this thesis, this sense of being ‘not at home’, or a second-class citizen, stems from two interrelated issues regarding the socialist past and the way German unification was realized. East Germans, like most people around the world, perceived many of their social characteristics and relations as ‘natural’ and taken-for-granted. Yet, these social relations had been fostered by the GDR state’s social policies, and were promoted and created in a mutual relationship between state and society as part of the greater ideological project of historical materialism – aimed at reaching the final stage on the evolutionary ladder: communism. When East Germans became citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany overnight, many such social relations crumbled; social policies and institutions were challenged, altered or vanished, which most – and certainly the East Germans featured in this thesis – felt to be profoundly disorientating, and to mark a loss of the positive aspects of their lives under socialism.

Secondly, the discourse on the East German dictatorship was not only reminiscent of the discourse on the Nazi dictatorship, but in such comparisons both dictatorships were frequently equated in a manner that most East Germans felt to be imbalanced – not least because their own biographies were not only called into doubt but devalued. Despite the GDR dictatorship’s aim to create uniform ‘socialist personalities’, East Germans experienced life under the GDR differently (see also Vaizey 2014). While some truly believed in the communist project, others opposed it, or opposed solely the means by which it was to be achieved, or opposed the distorted form of ‘actually existing socialism’. The great majority of East Germans do not fit neatly into the categories of victim (*Opfer*) or perpetrator (*Täter*), since they made do with the socialist life they were born into, without necessarily questioning it; or they refrained from public opposition and made compromises, not least because they wanted to keep their ties to both kin and Heimat.

The continuation and adaptation of Jugendweihe after German unification needs to be understood in the context of the incorporation or accession of East Germany into West Germany, in which much of the GDR past was either eradicated or upheld as a warning reminder of the evil of ‘the second German dictatorship’. Western Germans expected

eastern Germans to assimilate into West German society, but eastern Germans only wanted to integrate. They did not want to deny or forget where they came from, including the positive memories of their past lives, and they also did not want to become like West Germans. Jugendweihe, then, is part of their cultural heritage, creating a continuity with the GDR past amidst turbulent times of change – a way of making them feel at home again. Unification was based on the premise that East and West Germans belonged to one German nation. Yet Borneman eloquently describes that states make such nations, which

...involves the (re)creation of belonging patterns that form the basis for feeling *zu Hause*, at home, in one place and not another. Being at home is essentially being among kin, experiencing a particular set of lifecourse meanings that enable the individual to belong to a group demarcated from other groups. The state is successful in its nation-building only when it can legitimize itself as having (re)created this unique group, whose members will, in turn, reciprocate by retelling their histories in terms – categories and periods – congruent with those that the state uses in its accounts (Borneman 1992: 287).

Because Jugendweihe was part of the lifecourse of almost all East Germans, it became and continues to be both a ritual that unites them, and a ritual that sets them apart from their western German counterparts. It is kinship, then, that (re)produces the state after its demise, through ritual – which is the reason it is crucial to include an investigation of family in studies of ritual. However, grandparental and parental generations here do not reproduce the socialist state as it actually was; rather, they have reshaped Jugendweihe in a way that reflects what they had hoped their socialist life would have been like, retaining the positive aspect that had been worthwhile but which were perceived to have been lost in the process of unification.

Jugendweihe, then, creates familial continuity through time by marking the coming-of-age of adolescents, but it also initiates adolescents into a particular moral community. The processes by which grandparental and parental generations attempted to imbue the younger (post-socialist) generation with certain moral attributes – such as the focus on having children, being secular or atheist, stressing the collective over the individual, being hard-working, and frugal – are also a way to create a post-socialist subjectivity by salvaging parts of the socialist past that they deemed positive. Jugendweihe thus links the present with the past, and reproduces familial continuity into the future, while fulfilling a broader

social purpose too: the production and reproduction of a distinct eastern German society, weaving both a pan-German tradition and a socialist history into the future.

It is difficult to predict whether Jugendweihe will persist in the distant future. We can assume that in time socio-economic differences between easterners and westerners will further subside, which could render the ritual somewhat unnecessary, and its continuation unlikely. However, people are drawn to ritual not least because of its capacity to recreate social ties. It is common for generations that have no direct experience of their grandparents' and parents' country of origin to seek and reassert their roots, which – in the case of eastern Germans – may very likely be through Jugendweihe. Many adolescents I spoke to after their own Jugendweihe expressed that they wished their future children to have such a celebration too. Given Jugendweihe's adaptability, it may well continue in other guises beyond the lifecourses of the current adolescent generation.



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## **Archival Material from the City Archive Gera – Stadtarchiv Gera (SAG)**

(Authors' names were either undocumented or unavailable for protection of their anonymity.)

SAG 01 Abschlussbericht der Jugendweihe 1956 im Bezirk Gera [report in paper format]. Abschlussberichte des Bezirksausschuss Jugendweihe 1956-60 (III A06-12388).

SAG 02 Abschlussbericht der Jugendweihe für das Arbeitsjahr 1956/57 im Bezirk Gera [report in paper format]. Abschlussberichte des Bezirksausschuss Jugendweihe 1956-60 (III A06-12388).

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SAG 09 Erste sozialistische Namensgebung in Gera. 27 March 1958; *Volkswacht* newspaper 73 [Zeitungschronik paper] (Z-26084).

SAG 10 Aufruf zur Jugendweihe. 06 February 1923; *Ostthüringer Tribüne* newspaper 34 (30) [microform].

SAG 11 Jugendweihe. 28 March 1923; *Ostthüringer Tribüne* newspaper 34 (73) [microform].

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