

"Done the right thing?" Biographical risks of young graduates in post-socialist Eastern Germany.

German National Report

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"Insecurity' is a word used increasingly in the press to describe the absence of the 'feel good factor'"
(Quote from: Sigma - The Bulletin of European Statistics)

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I Background: the Situation of Young Graduates in Eastern Germany.

In the absence of data which break down unemployment rates by region, age gender and educational level, we have to assess these factors separately in order to outline a picture of the labour market chances and risks of graduates in East-Germany.

According to the statistical office of the European Union, 8.8% of the active population under 25 years of age were unemployed in 1995.¹ Unemployment has increased steadily in Germany over the past years. Of all categories listed in the statistics of the Federal Employment Office, however, the 'youth under 20 years of age' category shows by far the smallest increase of the unemployment rate (Soz.Pol.Umschau, 5/97: 4). Youth-unemployment has increased by more than 3% on average between January 1996 and January 1997 in all of Germany. It is revealing, however, of the persisting social and economic differences within Germany, that youth unemployment has in fact decreased in the western part by more than 1% in this period of time (1.2) and increased by almost 20% (19.9) in East Germany. Still, even such a pronounced increase is comparatively lower than the rise in unemployment experienced by other statistically listed risk-groups.² In short: contrasting with the situation in other European countries, belonging to the youngest age group is not a high risk position as far as the labour market is concerned. Rather, the risk is being East German and living in East Germany.

It is also noteworthy, that this risk of labour market exclusion directly linked to the fact of living in East Germany is not, as might be expected, decreasing. On the contrary, the gap is widening: by September 1997, the growth rate of youth unemployment has risen by more than 12% for Germany - from 3.1% to 15.7% - and by over 30% for the eastern part - from 19.9% to 50.7% (see Table 1.)

¹ See: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (1997b).

² The other listed 'risk groups' are: persons aged 55 and above, handicapped people, ethnic Germans and foreigners.

Table 1: Recent Development of Youth Unemployment in Germany

Youth unemployment as percentage of total unemployment:	East	West	Total
Jan. 1997*	1.8%	2.5%	2.3%
Sept. 1997	3.6%	3.0%	3.2%
Increase between Jan. and Sept. 97	1.8%	0.5%	0.9%
Increase over past 12 months:			
Jan. 97	19.9%	-1.2	3.1%
Sept. 97	50.7%	2.7%	15.7%
Acceleration (Difference of rate of increase e between Jan. and Sept. 97	30.8%	3.9%	12.6%

Source: SOSTRIS calculation, based on data from the German Federal Statistical Office, quoted in: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (1997a, c).

These figures show, firstly, that young people are - as of now - much less affected by unemployment than other risk groups. Secondly, they exemplify the fact that labour market dynamics still differ considerably between the two parts of Germany, to the disadvantage of the eastern part. Economic and social policy measures so far have failed to establish comparable labour market opportunities for the young in both parts of Germany.

A variety of specific factors - the peculiarities of the educational system and the high labour market incidence of early retirement schemes in Eastern Germany among others - have contributed to keep youth unemployment in Germany at very low levels in comparison with other EU member states. The most recent figures indicate however that the incidence is growing rapidly in the eastern part of Germany.

German graduates are usually at least 25 years old when they finish their education. Technically speaking, the above figures do not apply to them as they refer to young people aged less than 20. Contrary to what might be expected, however, the risk of unemployment is even higher for the young adult age group of 20 to 25, where East German graduates (younger than their western counterparts, most of whom have finished their studies by that age) are to be found. In absolute numbers, unemployment is more than three times as high for young people between the ages of 20 and 25 than for youth aged less than 20.

Despite this, university graduates are, by virtue of their formal qualification, the fraction of the younger population best suited to enter the labour market successfully. They too risk the experience of (recurrent) phases of transitional unemployment before finding stable employment: while the overall unemployment rate in Eastern Germany amounted to 16,6% in April 1995, the rate was 23.8% for the unqualified and 7.5% for university graduates. That is, one out of every 13 university graduates on the East-German labour market was unemployed at the time (See Table 2.)

Table 2: Unemployment according to qualification in Germany (April 1995)

Percentage of unemployment among:	West	Ost	Difference
unqualified workers	14.2	23.8	9.6
qualified workers	7.2	18.7	11.5
university graduates.	4.9	7.5	2.6
Total average unemployment rate	8.4	16.6	8.2

Source: Institut fuer Weltwirtschaft, Kiel. Quoted from „Presse- u. Informationsamt (1997d)

The above figures also confirm, that whatever an individual's qualification, she is much more at risk in Eastern Germany than in the western part: for all of the above categories, the incidence of unemployment in East Germany is roughly twice as high as in West Germany. Though we lack the data to confirm this directly, it is reasonable to assume that the incidence of unemployment is much higher in the youngest categories of graduates, the most inexperienced ones and the last to arrive in the competitive race for (adequate) employment, than in the older age groups. On the other side empirical research has shown, that graduate unemployment - youth unemployment in general - is transitional to a high degree.³ The interesting question, however, as to what factors determine which graduates will become - or stay - unemployed, and which ones will be successful (in terms of their labour market insertion) remains open. Apart from general conjectures concerning the different employment prospects linked to gender, age, type of career or qualification, geographical region and the like, knowledge of the intricate selection mechanisms and the social and personal features influencing them is rather limited. We see our detailed interview material as one privileged approach in the endeavour to shed some light on these mechanisms - and on the different ways in which young graduates look at their situation and deal with it.

II Case Story: Mrs. Heike Frenzel

Mrs. Heike Frenzel, born in 1965, is part of a generation of young East-German women who were finishing higher education or already getting settled in the professional sphere when the 'great transformation' came about. Following the usual GDR pattern, many of them had already formed a family at that time but were nevertheless fully integrated into the work sphere or finishing the last steps of their professional formation.

To select one single interview for detailed analysis out of a many other interesting ones is a risky business in itself. But maybe more than in other social and historical situations, there can be no pretension of exemplarity linked to the presentation of this young women's biography here. Her case stands, however, for a type of biography that could hardly be found elsewhere within the confines of the European Union at the present time. She represents, in her own way, a category the public has baptised 'Wendeverliererinnen' - female transformation losers.

The Interview Situation.

A colleague of Mrs Frenzel, working with her at the city library, called on behalf of both of them and offered to do an interview, leaving an office phone number on my answering machine. I decided first to interview Mrs. Frenzel, whose contract was due to end within five months.

³ See: Bundesanstalt für Arbeit (1996).

The interview took place in her apartment in the 8th floor of an eleven story housing block at the far end of Halle-Neustadt. Neustadt, accounting for more than one third of Halle's total population of approximately 250.000, is a huge GDR housing scheme comprising hundreds of similar, rectangular, five to eighteen story buildings, made integrally of prefabricated modules (generally known as 'Plattenbauten'). While Neustadt, with a few other similar East-German neighbourhoods, has come to symbolise a popular West-German prejudice the ghetto-like living conditions that were forced upon the 'East German cousins', these flats were in fact much appreciated for their comparatively high standard of comfort and equipment before the breakdown of the Berlin Wall. Today, those who can afford it tend to leave these apartments in exchange for remodelled (and normally much more expensive) old inner city flats or newly built houses in the outskirts of Halle.

During the two hours that we had been talking her six year old daughter peeked through the door only once and then continued playing. Towards the end of the interview, her husband returned home, looking a little puzzled when he became aware that his wife had a visitor. While he prepared their daughter for bed we finished the interview.

Stages in a 'good girl's' life

Both her parents were born in the last years of World War 2. Her mother in Vogtland, an economically weak region in the eastern part of Germany, close to the borders of the Czech Republic and Poland, her father in Silesia (Poland). At the end of the Second World War most Germans previously inhabiting this area fled or were expelled. In such a forced migration Mrs. Frenzel's grandparents and her father settled in Vogtland, where her parents eventually met.

Her mother, a German language teacher, and her father, a teacher of history, both joined the S.E.D., the 'unitary socialist party of Germany', East Germany's ruling party. At the time Heike was six years old, her father was sent to the party's cadre university in Berlin, where he studied for three years, visiting his family at weekends. After getting his doctoral degree, he was posted to the regional party headquarters in Karl-Marx-Stadt, now again named Chemnitz, where his family would follow him some month later.

The same year - 1975 - Heike's only sister was born, and we find ten year old Miss Frenzel heading the local party youth organisation. At the age of thirteen she finishes her regular piano classes with a degree - and stops playing the piano. Instead, she starts to play electric guitar with a group (made up of friends) and in the High School Jazz Band. At the same time, her political involvement continues: she is now in charge of the youth organisation at her school, and a little later takes on the role of 'agitator' - the most prominent political function in the party youth organisation at school. At some time during high school she goes on a trip to Moscow with this organisation. She also becomes involved in the production of a local youth journal.

When she is 16, she is offered the opportunity to study in Moscow, after finishing high school. Although she applies for it, she steps back later, not wanting to stay five years abroad, as she states in the interview. At some time in the two remaining years before she graduates from high school, she was approached by the East-German secret service the 'Stasi', but she refuses to collaborate with the service.

In 1984, she begins to study history in Halle, where she lives in a students' dormitory, sharing a room with three other girls. She usually spends her weekends in Karl-Marx-Stadt, where her parents live and also her boyfriend. Her musical activities have ceased altogether by then.

In her second year at university, at the age of twenty, she gets pregnant and doesn't know by whom. Her boyfriend at that time is Portuguese, a member of the Portuguese Communist Party, and studies with her. The relationship breaks down and she aborts (abortion at that time was legal and easily available in the GDR).

The following year, 1996, she gets married. Her husband is also a fellow student, two courses ahead of her. He will however get a slightly different and less promising degree than her and is destined to become a teacher of social science - i.e. Marxism-Leninism - after finishing his studies. He is a very

sporty type, of proletarian background and was raised in the same city as Heike, where his parents still live. They move in together and share one tiny room in the same dormitory where they had lived before separately.

In 1988, she is offered a three year research grant on the condition that she graduate ahead of time. The same year, she becomes a party member, and acquires responsibilities in the area of youth activities. In the autumn she graduates, two semesters earlier than would normally be expected, is awarded her grant and immediately begins her doctoral thesis, also working as a lecturer in the history department.

The year 1989 starts well, with the university providing a small one-room flat for the couple. In summer, she gets pregnant. Thus, her pregnancy falls exactly within the time of high political disorder, which ultimately led to the integration of GDR into the Federal Republic. In spring 1990, her son is born and she takes one year's maternity leave.

They move to their current three room flat in Halle-Neustadt - one of many left vacant by East-German 'emigrants' to Western Germany. Her husband has been re-trained by a major insurance company and works as a travelling insurance salesman, usually getting home late.

In 1991 she ends her maternity leave and resumes work on her thesis. However, the archive material she has been working with was confiscated by the state prosecutor and her former thesis supervisor had to leave the university on political grounds. She finally finds someone from a West German university who agrees to supervise her thesis but she has to make substantial thematical shifts in her research. Six months later her grant ends. As efforts to get a prolongation or additional funding from other institutions fail, she begins looking for work.

She applies for a job with 'Gauck-Institution', the Government agency in charge of securing and evaluating the highly sensitive files of the former GDR secret service, the 'Stasi'. She also applies for an office job within the public administration and ends up getting invited for interviews on the same day for two jobs. The interview for the administrative job is scheduled earlier, she is offered the job and takes it, withdrawing from the other interview.

She had recently, at the time of the interview, been through some major problems in her family life. She found out that her husband had been gambling and had lost their savings. She wanted to leave her husband then, but reconsidered after her parents intervened. However, she separates her bank account from his, and takes charge of the payment of essential bills (rent, energy supplies etc.) from her account.

She is 31 at the time of the interview and still has the same job, which is way below her qualification: the bulk of her work consists in entering data into computer files. Her doctoral thesis 'lays in a drawer' - she has found herself unable to combine her thesis work with the job - full time, but temporary - and her child care duties. Her contract has been prolonged once, but is due to end in September 96.

Half a year after the interview, I learn from her that her contract has been renewed, again temporarily, and that she has begun to take driving lessons. She is still living with her husband, still thinking about separation. She has no sexual relations with her husband any more, but she does have a secret but stable liaison with a colleague, considerably older than herself and married. However, they have only met at his office, after working hours, and no change of this situation is in sight, according to her. She knows that her lover will not separate from his wife. Her husband, whom she has tried to talk into moving out and taking an apartment by himself, does not seem to be making any moves towards a change of their situation.

'What do we do with a gambling salesman?'

The analysis of our cases takes into account not only the biographical data, the 'events' in our interviewee's life, but focuses on their own views and evaluations, which are contained in the structure of the 'narration', the account they give of their own life. Relating the 'lived life' and the 'told life' sets the necessary foundations for understanding each single case in its own terms; that is, it

enables us to understand and explain the emergence of orientations and strategies of action in the life course. The following paragraphs focus on the biographical strategy of Mrs. Frenzel, as reconstructed in the analysis of the interview data.

Heike Frenzel follows the path outlined by her parents, especially her father. She became an active member of the leading political class. That is, she followed an *elite strategy*, hampered only by personal fears rooted in her family history, which may account for her refusal to go abroad for further improvement of her professional career.

Her case shows the intricate interrelations existing between historical / political macro forces, and events and domains usually thought of as intimately personal, such as love relationships and marriage. The socialist GDR context may just have provided the necessary surplus elements that led Heike Frenzel and her husband to get married and have children, rather than just get along well as friends and companions at the university. These elements have been thoroughly devalued in the context of the Federal Republic, and may now constitute reasons which account for an unhappy marriage and Heike's desire to break up the relationship.

The GDR framework was favourable to Mrs. Frenzel, and made it easy for her to pursue a strong professional career. It could only confirm her own aspirations and opportunities that she married a person who had weaker social background than herself, and was slightly inferior in his educational achievement. Two years older than her, of proletarian origin and studying the same career as did she, though without the extra help and opportunities that she was given, he constituted a partner for her who was politically very correct, who could be an intellectually equal companion to her and who would, himself being only moderately successful, not endanger the career she was being prepared for. There can be little doubt, that in her parents' eyes, he must have seemed to be an ideal match. After the 1990 transformations, when Mrs. Frenzel was ready to break their relationship because of her perception of her husband's acquired gambling habit, her parents convinced her to stay with him. This shows that even such 'strategically adequate' matches as this one are not the result of conscious deliberations alone, but are shaped by sympathies and emotions.

Meanwhile her own biographical strategy has effectively been suspended by the German Transformation, her resources rendered relatively useless or even transformed into handicaps. In what way is this likely to affect her marriage?

If we are correct in claiming that for her, marriage was motivated primarily by its convenient fit with her career-centred biographical strategy, rather than by a less instrumental and more personal motive such as romantic love, and that this strategy was subsequently invalidated or suspended by the course of events, then her marriage could hardly remain unaffected. Under the present circumstances her husband is not seen by her as yet another resource allowing her to continue or resume her upward oriented former biographical strategy. On the contrary she experiences him now as an additional obstacle to her efforts to adapt to the new circumstances. She wishes to transform her GDR-acquired resources, connections and educational certificates into as good a starting position in the new society as possible, especially in the field of work. He is himself suffering from a 'professional devaluation', and from a consequent loss of orientation and self-confidence. (Like many ex-GDR men, he is working as a travelling salesman.) She begins to notice 'new, negative aspects in him', that she hadn't been aware of before. Instead of complementing and backing her, he is now in need of support himself - something she doesn't seem to have expected. While before, they may have lived together happily in one tiny room, emotional intimacy was not the core of their relationship. In her account of the times before the German unification, her husband was part of a network of friends and fellow students, which *as a whole* supported them and served their emotional needs. This network however has dissolved, couples have separated, fellow students have gone to other places or are trying to organise their lives on their own. At present, according to Mrs. Frenzel, her husband does not have a single friend left. Suddenly, she has become his sole emotional supporter and has to act as a reliable partner in times of distress - something that she has not been prepared for and has difficulties coping with. For her, marriage was an appropriate thing to do at the time, it fitted her life script, and he seemed to fit it

in too - for the reasons we have already stated and because, as she said, she expected him to be no trouble, contrary to the boyfriend she had had immediately before him and who abandoned her when she was pregnant. Therefore, she probably never expected to have to deal with the sort of emotional demands she is now facing. That was not what a marriage in the GDR would typically have to deal with,⁴ and that was not what she had married her partner for. She does however recognise his being a loving father to their son and, apart of the gambling episode, she does not blame him for anything. And yet - her fondness has vanished, she claims to feel pity and even contempt for him at times.

From another angle, however, her attitude towards her husband could be seen as egoistic or utilitarian, and as exposing an utter lack of solidarity. While initially her husband fitted in handily into her career-oriented strategy, providing her with a politically very correct and stable family setting, she is not willing now, when he experiences more difficulties than her in coping, to cooperate with him reciprocally to find solutions to their problems. In any case, the Frenzels' marriage highlights once more the inconveniences of a marriage of convenience: Should, for some unaccountable reason, the 'joint-venture' become inconvenient for one of the partners, the marriage loses its basis. Had there been a more emotional basis to their relationship, they might have engaged in a joint endeavour of working on their (mutual) disappointments and biographical re-orientations (as seems to be the case of Mrs. Siehlmann, as we will see later.). Relationships based on romantic love, though inherently unstable, do have the advantage of being much more independent of external conditions than relations based on 'mutual benefit' or similar more rational concerns.. Romantic, 'passionate love', as a contrasting type to other kinds of 'love' like for example the 'companionship love' that marriages of convenience hope for, is ideally grounded on love only (not on beauty, origin, wealth...); according to this ideal, only love triggers love and only the absence or betrayal of love destroys it.

The structure of Heike Frenzel's dominant orientation⁵ at present could be summarised in the following way: She tends to believe that she is 'at one man's distance' from a satisfying life. (I.e. only one thing separates her from a satisfying life: the right man / husband.) If she had a responsible, loving, and employed partner, she could leave her present husband and significantly improve her private life, without necessarily having to feel bad about her son's well-being - this is something that she is worried about. At the same time, she figures, this would allow her more social life and possibly even give her a chance to finish her doctoral thesis, and thus improve also her professional standing.

The event that structures her told life is the 1989 transformation. It becomes a personal 'historic' turning point for her - though she did not participate in any of the political events of these days, instead staying home with her new-born child. In the first place, the transformation devalues her professional formation and future. She has to change the subject of her doctoral thesis, and loses her supervisor. The thesis remains unfinished. She had already worked at the university, taught classes, and had a good chance to start an academic career in the former GDR, and she loses all of this. But it also devalues her private life: she now discovers new, unattractive features in her husband: he is unable to cope with the newly-arisen western-type society. Her marriage is ruined, she says, she only stays with him because she pities him and because of their common child.

4 Marriages, and families as well, were not typically in the GDR the sort of emotionally highly charged and well delimited nuclei that they were expected to be in Western Germany for example. The Parsonian distinction of emotional functions, assigned to the sphere of the family and instrumental functions, assigned particularly to the sphere of work, is even less applicable to the GDR society than it might be considered to be to western societies. Many of the interviews conducted for the SOSTRIS research programme have confirmed that the significance and emotional weight of the social interactions taking place in the family sphere has grown after the unification of Germany while the emotional and informal content of the interaction/s related to the labour sphere has diminished. See also our more detailed description of the effect of these changes in: Breckner, R./Hungerbuehler, W./Olk, Th. 1998.

5 This is not a paraphrase of her conscious orientations and intentions as expressed in the interview, but our assessment of her present situation and reconstruction of her orientation, which, though guiding her actions and perceptions, remains latent, i.e. not explicitly known to her or reflected upon.

Conclusions

Mrs. Frenzel's biography has been 'system-conformist'. Had things not changed the way they have on a national and international political scale, we might have seen her following in the footsteps of her father, perhaps occupying a somewhat lesser, middle-range position within the ruling party's apparatus. Whether or not her family life would have looked more satisfying to her than it does now, is open to speculation.

When the political system in which she was born and for which she was raised and trained expired, she was too young to be very compromised. Still 'die Wende' (the transformation of 1989) truncated her career and put different mechanisms of social exclusion to work that affected almost every level of her life. Die Wende was therefore a personal biographical inflection point for her. A logic of 'guided autonomy' (i.e. her 'own' decisions, under the auspices of her father, lead to a smooth, self-assumed biography of perfect system conformity) is replaced by a new logic of 'heteronomous decline' (Fritz Schütze's 'Verlaufskurve', see Schütze 1983): Even though she tries, she can not any more maintain her slowly upward-moving biographical path. A political earthquake, completely out of anybody's control, inverted all the parameters of (private) orientation and (public) evaluation: what had been correct before was viewed with utter suspicion now, what was an advantage before could turn against one now.

- In the professional sphere, her doctoral thesis had not been acceptable to the appointed West-German evaluator - she had to change her subject, redo it, and eventually stopped working on it.
- While the GDR would back her financially, with a grant, united Germany would not.
- While the GDR favoured by institutional measures (child care infrastructure) the professional re-integration of mothers, the newly adopted system is characterised by structural negligence towards the family (strukturelle Rücksichtslosigkeit gegenüber der Familie' (see Kaufmann 1988), a built-in institutional incompatibility between child-rearing and professional activity.

The overall effect on her life consisted in a drastic *reduction of options and securities* at both the professional and the private level, to which she adapted by downgrading her expectations. As long as she still has work - below her qualifications, and with low pay and low security for now - and doesn't get discredited on the grounds of a possible implication in Stasi activities (something which six years after the opening of the Stasi archives is not very probable, but can not be completely discarded) there is still one level where social exclusion applies to her in a rather strict sense. She is, is practically excluded from the public sphere, from civil society. Her public appearances are reduced to bringing and getting her child to and from school, going to work and doing the necessary shopping. This partially self-inflicted exclusion (she could try to organise baby-sitting - but her economic margins are tight) could be seen as a way of avoiding new male acquaintances - which could possibly result in even more strain on her private living arrangements. Barely satisfying as they may be, they still provides some residual stability. It could be a manifestation of an emergent effort to regain control over the events of her life, of literally re-taking the wheel, that in the autumn of 1996 she began to take driving lessons.

There are some more general observations to be drawn from this case. Not surprisingly, the first one is, that young women are taking considerable risks when they decide to have a child. In the case of women born in GDR, these decisions were taken mostly under a completely different set of circumstances, in which such a decision could be emotionally based well as rationally or practically feasible. Nowadays, under a different set of rules for East German women, the decision to have a family can easily turn out to be the entrance gate into a long-lasting, multifaceted pattern of interrelated dependencies. Then, the only decision open to a women may well be to decide whether it is preferable to depend on a husband/man, the welfare institutions or a combination of tolerant employer and child-care infrastructure.

A second general conclusion may possibly be more controversial. In the early eighties Ulrich Beck coined the metaphor of the 'social elevator effect' (Fahrstuhleffekt), by which inequality is not reduced, but mitigated by increased affluence: some have more than others, but everybody has enough. This situation has changed in our opinion, the elevator has got stuck, and may even be on its way back down. Or more precisely: the people inhabiting the first storey and ground floor are on their way to the cellar - whereas the upper storeys seem to be more stably built. Economic and social data, political discourse and policy measures convey the message: that you might not become excluded for good, but you will get less. Set your mind accordingly, the situation is here to stay. 'Reduce your expectations!' seems to be the word of the day or the decade. This suggests indeed, that it may not only be individual empowerment - i.e. actively improving the conditions of one's own life - which is core to coping with biographically difficult situations and social exclusion. The other side of the coin may consist in an enhanced capacity to tolerate frustration, for both individuals and social groups. It seems unavoidable in this situation that at times expectations and hopes must be downsized. This may not only reduce personal damage, but also significantly improve the individual's future perspectives - *if* such an adaptive readjustment can be achieved which leaves morale, will and basic optimism as little damaged as possible. 'Adaptation', especially to sociologists who still experience Parsonian nightmares, has some terribly conservative connotations. However, it is only the case of Heike Frenzel which suggests that individuals who can adapt cognitively and emotionally to 'lesser' perspectives, are better off for doing so. .

III Other cases

Of the other six interviews in this category, two cases are especially interesting to compare with the above case. The first one, the case of Mrs. Siehlmann, has already been referred to.. Mrs. Siehlmann is a colleague of Mrs. Frenzel, they are both currently working in the same institution. Her background, education and trajectory are in many ways similar to Mrs. Frenzel's, and like her, she had been able to take advantage of her GDR connections to secure herself a job. Her family however was not that close to the GDR power elite and the pressure exerted on her was less. This seems to have given her more liberty to decide upon her life and future. She was therefore in a situation to chose her partner with more care, i.e. to marry a person that she felt emotionally close to. Thus, while all these four individuals (the two women and their partners) were following the same educational career path and saw their professional future truncated in the same way with the dissolution of the GDR state - both men are now travelling salesmen, their wives both are employed on unstable terms and far below their qualifications - their ways of coping as couples have nevertheless been quite different. Contrary to the Frenzels, in the Siehlmann couple it was the male partner who had the stronger career ambitions. This may be one reason why Mrs. Siehlmann's husband is seeing his new job as an opportunity (and not, like Mr. Frenzel, as a great misfortune) and is again making plans for his career, in his new professional sector. . Of much greater importance, however, is the fact that this couple seems to be engaged with each other's situation, as well as their own, and are mutually supportive. They have even had a baby a few years into the German unification. This is at a time when demographers reported a low point in birth-rates in the ex-GDR territory without historical precedent, something which has been attributed to the overwhelming sense of general insecurity.⁶ The Siehlmann family also had to cope with truncated careers, blocked futures and disappointment. Their good personal relationship however has made an essential difference. It proved to be stable and reliable ground in a turmoil of change on the social and the individual level. Because they were able to provide for each other a supportive personal environment, they experienced sufficient elements of continuity and security to

⁶ It has been argued convincingly, that in such a situation of utter insecurity, where all plans have been suspended by force, individuals tend to postpone decisions that have far-reaching consequences in the future - as is the case of biographical decisions and particularly those concerning childrearing, marriage and also separation (See: Zapf/Mau 1993).

engage in a long-term private project, their child, and to face the large-scale social transformations with all the problematic features that they have also brought for them.

The second case that we would like to contrast to our main case, Mrs. Frenzel, is the case of Mrs. Monica Berger. Her family is of humble, but not strictly 'proletarian' origin, her mother slightly more educated than her father. Both her parents were not close to GDR politics, but not in political opposition either. Under these conditions she had to fight for her career in the GDR. After high school in the northern town of Rostock she wanted to study literature in Leipzig in 1982, but failed to pass the political part of the compulsory interview, and was rejected. Rather than settling for the career of a college teacher of German and Russian languages or studying for some other career that she would be allowed to enter, she took a job and applied again the following year, this time better prepared for the political questioning. Rejected again, she began to study for a college teaching career in Leipzig. Her good grades earned her the status of a 'special student', and a small grant after the first year. She spent an obligatory half year at Moscow University, enjoying this, as she points out, and after getting her diploma in 1988, she moved to Halle because she had been assigned to a college there. The same year, aged 25, she married an engineer. One year later, a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, a daughter is born and Monica Berger takes a one-year maternity leave, as most GDR women with babies have done. Under the new political circumstances she sees a chance to follow her vocation for an academic life and takes up doctoral studies in Leipzig in 1990. During her work on her thesis she also completed the Cambridge First Certificate of English Language. After handing in her thesis in 1993, she was unemployed and continually applied for jobs, while also broadening her skills, taking typewriting and computing courses. Occasionally she wrote book reviews for a local newspaper. After one year of continuous unemployment she became entitled to a state-financed 'job promotion measure' (ABM-job) on the secondary labour market, and began working for a research institution which turned out to be a device for gaining access to federal research money. Even though she felt betrayed and despite heavy conflicts at work, she continued to work there, for lack of alternatives. In 1995, almost two years after she had handed in her thesis, she was able finally to take the associated compulsory exam and earn her doctoral degree. A short time thereafter, her ABM-contract ended. Despite her attempts at getting work, she has been unemployed since then.

Under such circumstances the endurance, patience, and self-confidence of women like this who need personal and intellectual challenge, and who are not willing completely to 'privatise' their aspirations, are being sorely tried.

Going somewhat more into the detail of this case, we will briefly touch on the way she presented herself in the interview. Hers was a story of an ordinary person, reaching her goals through tenacity, hard work and intelligence; it is a story of (moderate) success attributable to herself. However in the last few years, her slow but steady upward-pointing path has come to a halt. And so her self-presentation, and the stability of the self-conception she expresses through it, is threatened. We see it as no accident that the story of her life was clearly focused on developments in the educational and professional fields. From what she said and from what we could reconstruct, her childhood and family experiences must have been very problematic in part. Thus, she chose an area for constructing her told biography in which she was most clearly able to experience and present herself as a person successfully in control of her life. If she is now, unexpectedly, also encountering problems in this sphere of her life that has so far been a reliable pillar for her, her whole self-conception is thereby endangered. Difficulties belonging to other domains of her life that she has been able successfully to counterbalance through her educational success and career stability, have now come to the fore again, and threaten to overwhelm her. (These difficulties relate to her family of origin, perhaps her own family, even perhaps to episodes in her own childhood.) Thus, the professional impasse in which she currently sees herself is seriously endangering the construction upon which she has based her adult life. Should this pillar prove unreliable, despite all of her efforts, she may inevitably be forced to turn to the other pillars of her life. She seems to be rather afraid that they may not hold sufficiently.

It may add to the dramatic quality of her situation, that the one sphere of her life that she has experienced as constituted autonomously (i.e. that was shaped by her own decisions), in contrast to others that she experienced as heteronomously constituted (beyond her control - for example her health problems, or family difficulties in her childhood) should now also be shaped by factors completely outside her control. She could obviously not have prevented the collapse of the GDR and the ensuing social transformations (nor would she have wanted to). There is almost nothing, in fact, in her current unsatisfactory situation, for which she can blame herself, or that she is in any position to change or improve. She has already acquired formidable qualifications, and at a younger age than most people, yet still, she is unemployed. What can she do about the fact that she is a woman, is East German and has a child? All of which are to be seen as disadvantages now, even though they did not previously constitute obstacles to professional success in the GDR.

Conclusion:

First of all, the cases outlined above point to an interesting issue in terms of the theory of 'modernisation'. Contrary to what Parsons suggested, more modernisation, in these days and for women raised in the ex-GDR, does not imply a 'pattern variable' shift from ascription to achievement - rather the opposite is true. Negative effects stemming from regional (GDR) and gender (woman / mother) ascriptions clearly prevail over achievement aspects: formal education, motivation, intelligence, readiness and ability to learn etc. Comparing the biographies of Mrs. Frenzel (and, to a lesser extent, Mrs. Siehlmann) with the biography of Mrs. Berger corroborates the prevalence, in these contemporary East German cases, of ascription over achievement, a pattern which was generally thought to be pre- or anti-modern. All the professional engagement and achievement of Mrs. Berger has not provided her with work. Mrs. Siehlmann and Frenzel, on the other hand, highlight the productive, individually functional aspects of this 'premodern' pattern. Neither engaged in anything comparable to Mrs. Berger's initiatives and activities: they were literally offered their jobs without having to ask for them. Their key resource when it came to getting a job, was, not too surprisingly, of an informal nature: social capital - inherited social contacts and networks.

This corroborates an idea recently presented by Brauer and Willisch: contrary to the market ideology and the predictions of modernisation theory, which associate success with individual effort, activity and investment, we can observe in East-Germany, and probably in other similar settings a (non-exclusive) pattern of 'active losers' and 'passive winners' (Brauer/Willisch 1997):

Status Situation	Integrational Efforts	
	Lower	Higher
Positive / Increased	<i>'Passive Winners'</i>	<i>'Active Winners'</i>
Negative / Decreased	<i>'Passive Losers'</i>	<i>'Active Losers'</i>

(Diagram according to Brauer/Willisch 1997)

In these terms, while Mrs. Frenzel and Mrs. Siehlmann are examples of 'passive winners' in the professional sphere, Mrs. Berger exemplifies the corresponding and much more problematic 'Active Loser'-type.⁷ This is not only linked to possibly dramatic experiences of personal disappointment but

⁷ The labelling of the Frenzel and Siehlmann cases is only valid in this comparative framework: they are winners in relation to other women who were in similar position of their career at the advent of the German unification. Our overall designation of Mrs. Frenzel as a clear case of 'transformation loser' remains valid. According to that view, the relevant frame of reference is 'East Germany before and after Unification.'

bears a socially disintegrative potential. If the rewards promised for commitment, effort, and achievement fail to materialise, whereas those rewards can be gained without prior investment (in accordance with the rules of the game), people will ask why they should any longer trust a society that allows for this be trusted any longer, and they should be expected to observe its rules? If playing the game well leads you to lose then one of the following may be true: you have been deceived; or, the winning rules are others than the ones that you were taught; or you were cheated. In all these cases, the society concerned appears to be morally bankrupt. We have come to accept social difference and inequality in modern western societies as long as we can believe in the reasonable transparency and justice of their distributive mechanisms. The 'active loser' type of experience is not consistent with this belief and should it happen to more than very marginal numbers it constitutes a challenge to the normative legitimization of these societies.

There is not a specific risk of exclusion for young graduates. Rather, exclusion comes into play through their belonging to other 'risk groups', such as living in East-Germany; being a woman; and having children to take care of (the last of which is to say that you are not flexible enough in labour market terms).

Young graduates in East-Germany do encounter exclusion from, or more precisely a temporarily blocked entrance to the labour market, and consequently exclusion from the social goods that are distributed primarily through the labour market (money, prestige, experience, social security entitlements etc.) This exclusion is predominantly transitional, however, and at present of short duration. The systemic frictions that affect the transition from the educational to the professional sphere, as a result of their inherently different internal logics, can hardly be avoided altogether. Nevertheless, educational institutions should be encouraged to enhance the employability of their clientele, for example through observation of the economic sphere and through establishing close contact with prospective employers.

Thus, according to our findings, the structuring problem of this group is *insecurity* rather than exclusion. It is temporally limited, socially generalised, and materially penetrative of all domains of life. Young people cannot any more look forward as their parents still could, to a future of personal development the general lines of which could be anticipated and predicted with confidence. Neither in the private domain of living and family arrangements nor, much less, in the professional sphere can decisions be taken on a secure basis. In such a situation of generalised insecurity, and rapid social, cultural, political and economic change any kind of determination and decision might be something to be regretted in the future. The general risk for young graduates is thus twofold: it is risky to decide (on a profession, a career, a specific job, a partner, whether or not to move away, to have children, ...) but it is at least as risky not to decide. The latter blocks activity and hinders further professional and personal development while others move on, possibly gaining decisive comparative advantages. The decision one has not dared to take a year ago might just have been the right one, whereas now the occasion has passed, and the same decision might not yield the desired effects if taken now. The opportunity costs of decisions taken are higher than ever for young adults. Conflicting requirements have to be met at a time: in order to be competitive in the labour market, to stick out of the mass, young graduates ought to offer just the right kind of *specialisation*. But they are also expected to be flexible and adaptive, willing to move spatially and enter new fields of specialisation professionally. And these conflicting demands converge in a stage of life, where decisions concerning one's private and professional future are socially expected. Of two opposed states of mind that could be expected to go along with such prospects, namely pessimistic fatalism on the one hand side and a short-term 'anything goes' carelessness on the other, our interviewees were clearly inclined towards the first option. More salient were however the efforts of all the individuals interviewed to hold on to their plans and ideas, despite disappointments they all have already had to come to terms with.

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