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National Report on Category IV
Unqualified Youth in Eastern Germany

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I.1   Historical and GDR-specific factors

For a low level of qualifications to be a publicly acknowledged social and biographical problem is a new experience for eastern Germany. Whereas society in the former GDR allowed for educational differences and reproduced them in its own way, these differences were not linked to risks of social exclusion as they are now; this was mainly due to the absence of a labour market and the selective mechanisms that operated within this institution. What is more, schools in the GDR were not geared to differentiate pupils according to performance criteria. On the contrary, for reasons of state policy and ideology, one of their explicit goals was to enable the entire class to move up to the next grade every year. This was accomplished through intensive, additional help and informal support given to less able pupils; it also meant neglecting the more able ones to a certain extent in order to achieve a more even performance in the class as a whole (Hauser et al. 1996: 182).

It follows that the problems now facing unqualified youth in Germany did not exist in the days of the GDR. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, fewer people left school without graduating in the GDR than in West Germany, and secondly, unemployment was unknown in the former's non-market economy.[1] Pupils leaving 'Polyvalent Secondary School' (POS) after the 10th grade without achieving the appropriate diploma did not have to worry about unemployment: like everyone else, they were allocated a post in the production and manufacturing industries. As a general rule, less qualified school-leavers also received on-the-job vocational training, and were subsequently integrated into the economy (in one of the agricultural or industrial enterprises) as qualified – or, more frequently, as certified, 'semi-qualified' – workers. This form of certification was unique to the GDR and was not recognised by competent bodies after unification; as a result, a large number of 'GDR-qualified workers' were transformed into 'unqualified united-Germany workers' (see Mansel, Pollmer and Hurrelmann, 1992: 13).

It was only as a result of the transformations that the Unification of Germany brought about for former GDR citizens that the state ceased to secure social integration for the less qualified. The well-known selection machinery of educational systems and the labour market began to operate in eastern Germany too. Whether or not one manages successfully to cross the two selective thresholds to labour market insertion – the transition from school to vocational training or unqualified work, and the transition from there to qualified work and regular employment – has come to depend largely on educational achievement.[2] By

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[1] For a comprehensive, structural comparison of educational levels in eastern and western Germany shortly after unification, see Damm-Rueger, 1994: 19 et seqq.

[2] As of 1995, almost one in every two unemployed people in western Germany had not completed any vocational training. As we have pointed out, people in eastern Germany with minimal on-the-job training have been designated 'semi-qualified workers', thereby swelling the ranks of 'qualified workers' despite the fact that they would have been regarded as 'unqualified' by western German standards. The percentage of unqualified persons with no employment is formally lower in eastern Germany: 21% in 1995 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1997: 99; see also Damm-Rueger, 1994).

contrast, individual educational success in the GDR was much less important as far as social position and opportunities in life were concerned. **This raises the hypothesis that the increasing awareness among former-GDR pupils of the importance of professional success in the current economic and political situation may have been hindered by two factors: the deliberate absence of competitiveness (which worked to the advantage of 'solidarity' in East German schools), and the corresponding relative unimportance of educational achievement in an individual's life-course and life-style (The relation is:** *we know*: **there was less competitiveness, more solidarity, less importance of edu for social position;** *we suggest*, **that this may have hindered the development of a notion of key importance for professional success under the economic and political circumstances now prevailing.** If these factors still exist – and one may reasonably assume that they have not been completely lost or wiped out among teaching personnel and pupils – they may constitute an 'orientational ingredient' that is specific to eastern Germany, and is relevant to an understanding of the situation of unqualified youth today.[3]

I.2   Institutional background and recent developments

It is widely known that non-academic vocational training in Germany is governed by the 'dual system': this combines inputs from private enterprise and the state and seeks to guarantee high standards of practical and theoretical training, mostly for manual and service-sector occupations. Private enterprises are expected to offer jobs tied to apprenticeship schemes; these enable the apprentices to undergo the practical part of their vocational training on-site; for its part, the state has responsibility for the schools that apprentices have to attend regularly, and which are designed to provide general and specific theoretical training. This system worked well for many decades, but recently it has become unbalanced. For several years in succession, private enterprises have not been willing, or able, to offer apprenticeship-jobs sufficient in number for all the applicants. Although there has been no satisfactory balance of applicants and apprenticeship-jobs in the former GDR territories since German unification, this happened in the west for the first time in 1995 despite direct state intervention. In June 1997, there were still over 160,000 more applicants than apprenticeship-jobs, although the law states that there should be at least 12.5 per cent more apprenticeship-jobs on offer than being sought; no part of modern Germany is even approaching this target (Baethge, 1998). The situation is especially harsh for women, and more so in the east than in the west: at that time, 43 per cent of young west German women applying for vocational training in the 'dual system' had no apprenticeship-job; in the east, 62 per cent of young women who had applied the previous October were still without an apprenticeship-job (see Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 1997).

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[3] Of a total of 13 items, 'success orientation' registered the most dramatic change in a recent comparison of values and abilities acquired at school by young people in Saxony-Anhalt who had left school before and after the 'Wende': it rose from 39 per cent to 62 per cent. Generally speaking, individualistic values rose in importance; by contrast, solidarity, participation and cooperation appear to have been taught less in unified Germany than in the days of the GDR (Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungszentrum, 1998: 19).

The problem is being seen more and more as a 'youth unemployment crisis', and the seriousness of the situation is being increasingly acknowledged by the relevant political actors. Both trade unions and government agencies are putting pressure on private enterprise to increase the number of available apprenticeship-jobs, and are offering more jobs under direct state control to mitigate the situation. It also prompted the then candidate Gerhard Schröder to announce that a priority for a new government under his leadership would be an 'immediate action programme' (Sofortprogramm) to create an additional 100,000 jobs for unemployed youth.[4] Another far-reaching proposal emerged during the first weeks of the new German government and is currently under discussion. It incorporates two ways of re-distributing available work among people who want to work: by means of a more flexible transition to retirement, and by lowering the retirement age (thereby broadening the opportunities for the youngest to enter the labour market).[5]

Optimistically, this 'crisis' might be seen as nothing more than a gear-change, or a crisis of adaptation within the vocational training system where the distribution of tasks, profits and costs between state and private enterprise had been running smoothly for many years and was believed to require no tweaking – but now needs re-negotiating. However, a more complex description is probably required to provide a more adequate view of the situation. Our thesis is that the German educational system and the underlying social and political consensus supporting it are respectively undergoing a structural and normative shift.

Structurally, the effects are those of the globalisation of production and of capital. To a certain extent, industry has come to depend less on a well-trained German workforce as production sites can be moved world-wide to locations that are more economically favourable; meanwhile, in other fields such as the building sector, there is a growing inflow of trained workers from outside the EU who have come to join those from within it. Both phenomena have convergent effects, rendering it less vitally important for employers to invest in the reproduction of a qualified domestic workforce because of available alternatives. It is reasonable to assume that the lower echelons of skills will be more affected by these trends, while highly qualified and specialist sectors will remain competitive even in a market that is globalising in terms of labour and productivity. Increased global competition has also led enterprises to cater for shareholders' needs above all else, and therefore to pay more heed to short-term cost and profit advantages to the detriment of a longer-term perspective of securing continuity (e.g. investment in human capital) (Baethge, 1998).

Moreover, what is clearly happening in the labour market also seems to apply to schooling and training: the outcome is a withdrawal of 'fine distinctions' in favour of a crude distinction between 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Under the

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4 This initiative focussing on young people's skills and employment was adopted by the Federal Government on 25 November 1998. The one-year programme, which will have a budget of DM 2000, is funded through the Federal Employment Services (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit) and the European Social Fund. 40 per cent of this sum is to be spent in eastern Germany, where the situation is most acute (see Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 1998).

5 Trade unions have signalled their willingness to discuss the proposal. The degree to which such a scheme might help to mitigate youth unemployment in Germany in future will of course turn on the detail – for example on whether retirement under this scheme will be linked to the recruitment of a previously unemployed young person.

'Bildungsexpansion' (the phase of educational expansion running since the 1970s), the educational and training system was significantly enlarged, and equal opportunities of access to (higher) education were politically supported by a fairly well-funded system of educational grants (Bafög). Now, a reverse trend is increasingly turning education and training into marketable commodities, students into paying 'consumers', and school-leavers looking for apprenticeship-jobs into competitors in a market of scarce goods[6]; moreover, Bafög has been severely pruned back over the last few years, almost to the point where it has no impact.[7] Politicians are also discussing the introduction of tuition fees for academic education, which has been virtually free of charge up till now. At the same time, the number of students who combine studies with part-time work has risen steadily; this has the effect of lengthening their period in education and weakening their individual chances on the labour market.

Symptomatic of the new public and political attitude towards education is the reappearance in public debate and policy of a concern for 'élites', and the need for élites and adequate élite training facilities. This issue has been practically banned from the public arena in Germany since the post-war years. In recent years however, Berlin's Humboldt university, a cadre-institution from the days of the GDR, has been turned into a small, exclusive public university; this has had a detrimental effect on the two universities that already exist in former West Berlin, and which represent the older model of 'mass' universities. Furthermore, the latest and highly publicised project for a new university, situated in Erfurt in eastern Germany, will also clearly be an élite institution. Its Director and academic Head is the German Social Democratic Party's senior expert in educational matters - a fact which nicely evidences that this élite revival in the educational sector is by no means a project backed only by conservative social forces.

This is enough to illustrate the increasing pressure coming from many quarters, and challenging the lower echelons of qualification in a newly emerging, or strengthening, educational stratification. Not only are job opportunities for unskilled labour being lost due to technological evolution (e.g. rationalisation, 'jobless growth' or an automated factory) and job exportation, but inflation and the concomitant devaluation of educational diplomas has raised the stakes and led to direct competition between unskilled and skilled labour. Finally, in response to experiences in the US, this situation has encouraged political debate on the introduction of a low-wage sector in Germany; it is an idea gaining significant support among the ranks of both social scientists and politicians. For example, the

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[6] It might be added that these goods are also of increasingly debatable value. Professional training and certificates can no longer guarantee successful entry into the labour market or secure a job. What is more, while it was once the practice for apprentices to be asked to stay on at the firm after finishing their training, it is not unusual these days for apprentices to know in advance that they will not be offered regular employment in the company when their training is over.

[7] The fact that government slightly raised Bafög by 2 per cent in June 1998 is not, in our view, at odds with the trend we have outlined above; in fact, the increase should be seen as a moderate concession to demands voiced by protesting students in late 1997 and early 1998. It is also one of a number of '11th hour' political decisions made by Kohl's conservative government, and in our opinion it should be viewed against the backdrop of the German general election held in September 1998. The newly elected social democratic government is however generally expected to reverse the above-mentioned tendency and increase spending for education and research, including the Bafög grants.

widely discussed 'Reports of the Bavarian-Saxon Commission on Future Issues' vigorously supports the idea, and expressly states that this will reduce the material standard of living of those affected; moreover, as an undesired but inevitable side-effect, and for a period of time in the short term, it will increase social inequality and build up further social tension.[8] The fact that the reports are a matter of controversy shows that, for the time being at least, a comprehensive reform of this kind of the German welfare state does not enjoy enough unanimous public and political support for it to be viable.

Finally, this report must touch on the issue of youth violence, if only because of the vehemence with which it has been publicly reported in Germany during the last few years. German transformation has been followed by a resurgence of right-wing ideologies, acts of vandalism committed in their name, and xenophobic violence. In general public discourse, these phenomena have become associated with young people generally, but especially those from eastern Germany – and particularly those who are unemployed or unqualified and male. Clearly, this stereotypical view of the dumb, violence-prone, xenophobic east German adolescent was given strong support in the elections of the Saxony-Anhalt regional parliament in April 1998 when the extreme right-wing DVU party managed to win 13 per cent of the votes; it was the first time the party had fought a state election. Analysis of the voting showed that it was the electoral behaviour of young voters that had been mainly responsible for the party's unexpected success. However, a recent opinion poll among young people in Saxony-Anhalt[9] has predictably confirmed what was already known about the population as a whole: namely that young people in Saxony-Anhalt overwhelmingly see this result as a protest against federal and state policy in general. What easier way is there of expressing discontent and disappointment with established politics and politicians than to do what you have always been warned against?[10] On the other hand, in the September 1998 elections of the regional parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, a state notorious for one of the most shameful incidents of xenophobic violence in the early 1990s in Rostock, none of the right-wing parties (including the DVU party) gained the necessary minimum 5 per cent of the vote.

Throughout the 1990s it was widely feared that extremist parties on the political right in western Germany might spread silently and effectively into the newly opened political wasteland of the east, feeding on long-repressed, hostile emotions and attitudes towards foreigners, and on anxieties triggered by the current anomic

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[8] The scientists and political investigators involved in the reports are well established in their respective fields. See 'Berichte der Kommission für Zukunftsfragen der Freistaaten Bayern und Sachsen' ('Reports of the Bavarian-Saxon Commission on Future Issues'), particularly Vol III. An English version of Vol II is available in hard copy. German versions of all volumes can be downloaded at: http://www.sachsen.de/deutsch/publikationen/download.html (July 1998).

[9] See Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungszentrum Berlin-Brandenburg e.V. (1998). We have used a preliminary version of the study drawn up for the Saxony-Anhalt Ministry for Labour, Women, Health and Social Affairs. The final version will be published by the end of 1998.

[10] In retrospect, it may even have been a rather rational and effective way of protesting: for one thing, it succeeded in drawing the nation's attention to the situation in eastern Germany, and especially to the depressing prospects facing young people; for another, it soon became clear that the DVU party was utterly incapable of carrying out political work. According to newspaper reports, their elected members in the state parliament do not even attend sessions most of the time.

situation, and it was thought that these parties would find easy prey amongst disoriented youth.

The spectre of neo-Nazism and youth violence has led the government to spend a considerable amount of money on research into youth violence, and on a variety of educational projects throughout the country aimed at countering these dangers. Those projects have addressed potentially violent youth, and focussed on groupings such as youth gangs, hooligans and skinheads in social danger areas in major cities, the suburbs and the countryside. However, most of these projects have had to operate within short time restrictions; the reason for this is that they are usually run by staff employed under job-creation measures that were adopted by the federal employment services, and which lasted for no more than one or two years. By the same token, the fate of such social policy measures has depended on the funds that parliament allocates each year to the federal employment services and on short-term political needs; this has in turn led more frequently to a restriction on the number of these contracts – and consequently to their cessation rather than to their expansion.[11]

There is little scientific doubt surrounding the common-sense assumption of a link between, on the one hand, violent or illegal behaviour and, on the other, social marginalisation, blocked opportunities and anomie.[12] Nor is there any doubt that social differences have increased in Germany during the 1990s, and that social problems are concentrating in certain segments of the population, and in specific neighbourhoods where housing, health and educational standards are low (but mainly where the incidence of immigration, unemployment and welfare dependence is high). However, these factors do not tell us about the particular circumstances in which a young man or woman grows up, and about his or her experiences. It follows that, if we want to find out more about the ways in which the lives of given adolescents are affected, what problems they encounter, what ways they have found of dealing with them, and what kind of social support is called for, there is no escaping the need to explore those circumstances and experiences by examining individual cases. Accordingly, we have not focussed especially on the relationship between a low level of qualification and violence in our investigation, but have followed a principle of openness[13] which encourages the emergence of themes and experiences that are biographically structuring in each case. Even so, although they do not necessarily play an emphatic role in the

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[11] It is worth mentioning that none of the projects was conceived in an all-embracing or unitary manner; they were all highly diverse in terms of their theoretical backgrounds and the practical instruments or measures they employed. Evaluation of their impact and outcomes is intrinsically difficult, and the authors currently believe that political actors are losing interest in the whole issue. The general public has only paid any attention to this 'anti-violence' and 'pro-tolerance' strand of social policy measures when some of the more unconventional and dangerous ones have been debated in public, or when especially brutal excesses have received wide media coverage (e.g. the attack by German hooligans on the French policeman, Daniel Nivel, during the World Cup football competition in France during the summer of 1998).

[12] 'Young people are increasingly disposed to resort to aggressive behaviour when pathways into the world of grown-ups are blocked by the lack of educational opportunities and unemployment. Criminal careers then become attractive substitutes.' (Zukunftsinvestition Jugend 1998: 5; authors' translation)

[13] For a brief, comprehensive description of our methodological approach, see Roswitha Breckner's article in Sostris Working Paper 2 (BISP 1998).

debate on youth violence, experiences of violence play a prominent part in some of the accounts.

I.3   Quantitative Aspects

When we talk about low qualification as indicative of high exposure to (biographical) risk, we implicitly identify the labour market – and, more to the point, unsuccessful labour market integration – as the main risk facing this sector of the population. This view also influenced the 'Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies 1998', a document developed for the EU Jobs Summit in November 1997. In this document, the EU Commission states that half of the people currently unemployed in the EU have no vocational training. This applies in particular to long-term unemployment and youth unemployment.[14]

An attempt to assess the risk associated with low qualification and a young age in eastern Germany produces a mixed picture. First of all, if we sustain the European frame of reference, youth unemployment in Germany is comparatively low: according to Eurostat, it is less than half of the European average. Only in Austria and Luxembourg was youth unemployment lower in 1996 (see Table 1).

This may be partly accounted for by the high degree of integration in educational facilities by younger age-groups as this reduces their numbers on the labour market. The percentage of young people under the age of 20 in Germany undergoing education or training Germany is 10 per cent above the EU average.

Table 1: Youth unemployment in 1996

Percentages	EU 15		Germany	
	1993	1996	1993	1996
Total unemployment rate	10.7	10.9	7.9	8.9
Youth unemployment rate (15-24)	21.4	21.8	7.9	9.6
Youth 15-19 in education/training	80.8	82.5	91.0	92.0
Youth 20-24 in education/training	33.4	37.0	33.6	37.0

(Source: European Commission 1997: 117 ff.)

While acknowledging the relatively low level of youth unemployment in Germany at the present time, the above table nonetheless notes a considerable increase between 1993 and 1996 compared both with the average increase in the EU and with total unemployment in Germany. In other words, while unemployment is generally growing in Germany, it is growing faster among the younger age-groups. This may also be observed in eastern Germany, although the increase in youth unemployment as a proportion of total unemployment is less pronounced than in the whole of Germany (see Table 2).

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14 See European Commission: Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies 1998
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/elm/summit/guideen.htm (January 1999).

Table 2: Unemployment of certain 'risk groups' in Eastern Germany (1000s)

Category	1993	1994	1995	1996
Unemployed people	1 148.8	1 142.1	1 047.0	1 168.8
-Youth under 25	132.5	125.1	110.0	120.7
- Persons over 55	67.0	117.7	157.8	219.7
- Disabled persons	28.4	22.8	20.6	23.9
- Non-German citizens	14.6	11.8	11.8	14.2
% of youth unempl. on total unempl.	8.7	9.2	9.5	9.7
Total unemployment rate:	15.8	16.0	14.9	16.7

(Source: Federal Statistical Office of Germany. Statistical Yearbook 1997, Employment.)

Introducing gender changes this picture slightly, though interestingly. While overall unemployment is lower for men than for women, the reverse is true for youth unemployment where it is higher for men than for women. In other words, unlike the situation obtaining in older age-groups, the data here suggest that gender does not increase the risk of unemployment for young women; on the contrary, their male counterparts are more affected.[15]

If we now look at the structure of unemployment in eastern Germany and focus on 'risk groups', young people also seem to be comparatively unaffected: out of all unemployed people, fewer than 1 in every 10 was aged under 25 in 1996; moreover, while youth unemployment decreased in absolute terms between 1993 and 1996, unemployment among people aged 55 and above more than trebled during the same period (see Table 2).

However, Federal Employment Service figures indicate a considerably higher percentage of youth unemployment as a percentage of total unemployment: 13.0 per cent for western Germany, and 11.1 per cent for eastern Germany (1995 figures) (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1997: 97). Just the same, the youngest labour market participants aged 20 and under only account for 3.3 per cent of total unemployment in western Germany and 2.5 per cent in the east.

Turning now to levels of qualification, we propose, for our particular purposes, to define individuals as 'unqualified' if they have not undergone vocational training and have not gone beyond the level of extended elementary school (Hauptschule), or else have failed to complete this lowest grade attainable within the compulsory schooling period (i.e. they are dropouts). The dramatic reduction in labour market opportunities – and, by extension, of life chances in general – that results from this absence of educational resources cannot be over-estimated. Recent surveys show that 100 per cent of those who have not completed extended elementary school, and 45 per cent of those who have, fail to find employment in the current situation of labour market crisis (Erdmann and Rueckriem, 1996: 26). The data below

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[15] Different and contrasting explanations are put forward to explain this effect. According to one, younger women are less likely than men to register with employment agencies when they are out of work. By contrast, older women who had worked all their lives in the GDR 'naturally' expected to continue to do so after the advent of 'Die Wende', and they did register with the federal employment services if they had lost their previous job. Unemployment rates for women in eastern Germany are slowly but steadily decreasing at the present time; in the above light, this reflects a change of orientation (i.e. resignation or withdrawal), rather than an increase, in female labour market participation.

constitute only one of many sources confirming the inverse relationship of qualification to risk of unemployment: the lower the qualification, the higher the risk (see Table 3).

Table 3: Unemployment rates in Germany by educational level:

Unemployment rates as % of active population ...	West	East	Difference
- without professional training	14.2	23.8	9.6
- with professional training (Lehre)	7.2	18.7	11.5
- with academic training	4.9	7.5	2.6
overall unemployment rate	8.4	16.6	8.2

(Source: Institut fuer Weltwirtschaft, Kiel. In: Presse- u. Informationsamt 1997: 19)

The above table is also evidence of considerable regional differences in employment opportunities and risk of unemployment between the eastern and western German labour markets at all levels of qualification; this applies to manual jobs, unqualified people and, to a much smaller extent, to the academically educated.

In Saxony-Anhalt, the 'home-base' of Sostris Germany, over 22 per cent of those finishing compulsory school were unqualified under the above criteria. Yet, like statistics for most of the other eastern German 'Länder', this figure represents a percentage of lowly qualified school-leavers that is clearly more favourable than the overall German average. On the other hand, the proportion of the least qualified school dropouts is slightly higher in eastern Germany than in the west: over 13 per cent of school-leavers in Saxony-Anhalt in 1994 were dropouts, whereas on average only 9 per cent left school in the western German territories without completing the minimum grade (Hauser and Olk, 1997: 159).[16] The proportion is still high among young adults aged 20-29: according to the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB)[17], 14 per cent of them have no vocational training.

In other words, the educational system in eastern Germany, which was reformed like most other social institutions in the wake of German unification, seems to be working satisfactorily and is even slightly ahead of its western model; however, in terms of providing its young clientele with formal qualifications, there is a higher proportion of young people than in the west who do not 'fit' into the system and are excluded. It is tempting to relate this to the vast social transformations that have taken place in this part of Germany. Exactly how this 'educational incompatibility' of a relevant part of the younger population is related to the GDR past and its recent transformation is yet to be explored.

We might summarise the above by saying that age (under 25), qualification (low) and region (eastern Germany) should be regarded as separate risk factors when

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[16] This situation was rather different before the two Germanies were unified. A survey by the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB) reported a significantly lower proportion of unqualified people among employed persons in all age-groups, and a lower dropout rate in eastern Germany than in the west (Damm-Rueger, 1994: 28).

[17] BIBB (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung) Press Release, Berlin/Bonn, 30 May 1997.

assessing 'unqualified youth' as a risk-group with respect to the labour market. In Germany, the risk for younger age-groups seems to be more closely linked to a lack of skills or qualification and the regional (eastern) disadvantage than to age.[18] While collective bargaining in Germany has strengthened protective measures for 'job-owners', it and other institutionalised mechanisms fortunately do not act as effective obstacles to job-access for the vast majority of newcomers on the German labour market; this contrasts with the situation in other EU member-states.

A final word on poverty. Unfortunately, we have no data linking poverty rates to age-groups and to levels of qualification. However, in this context we should like to point to one relevant phenomenon: the 'infantilisation of poverty'. This refers to the highest rates of poverty that are found among children and young people, a trend that was observed in West Germany back in 1980, and which began to affect eastern Germany from 1990 onwards: in the ex-GDR territories, poverty rates for children and youth up to 17 years of age more than doubled the respective average rates for both genders in 1995 (Becker and Hauser, 1997: 76 et seqq).

II   Cases

If skills and qualification constitute the core of the labour market-related risk-situation on the aggregate level, it raises the question of how to account for the absence of qualification. How is such a situation constituted in the life-course, and what kinds of experience go along with it? What kind of biographical experiences lead young east Germans to leave school without proper qualifications? It is true that only an extensive qualitative investigation of biographical pathways leading to such a situation could hope to identify the core elements that account for such a biographical development to their full extent, but careful analysis of an individual case, complemented by profiles of other cases, can show how social, political and psychological elements interact in its formation. Individual case re-constructions provide a privileged – if not the only feasible – way of identifying 'typical' constellations of biographical events and experiences. The 'typicalness' of a case does not depend on some sort of numerical representativeness, but on the rebuilt structure or evolutionary dynamic which, although drawn from a unique case, is described and analysed as one of a particular kind. Nevertheless, more cases than time and resources permit would be necessary to achieve empirical saturation, and evaluate the specific relevance of a case to the phenomenon under scrutiny.

II.1   Case Analysis: Olaf Menzel

A. Knives

Olaf Menzel was a boy or young man of 15 at the time of the interview. He had already experienced an important biographical turning-point that can be condensed in a single, poignant picture: Olaf at home with his parents, and the boy

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[18] As we pointed out in our national report on early retirement, age does act as an additional risk factor for higher age-groups; this is especially so for women (see Hungerbühler, Breckner and Olk. 1998).

holding a knife to his father's throat and threatening to 'slice him up'. At the time of this incident, Olaf was 12 years old.

In the course of this scene, which was intensely violent both physically and psychologically, Olaf was severely injured; it was the culmination of a long history of domestic violence and abuse. At its core, we find a father of whom we know very little except for his heavy drinking and abusive behaviour towards his family. Living with him was a young woman – Olaf's mother - who was only 20 when Olaf was born in 1981; one year earlier, she had given birth to his elder brother.[19] She was a post-office clerk at the time, and still works for the mail services.

We do not have any information as to what may account for the father's behaviour and when it began,[20] although we do know that he often quarrelled with Olaf's mother and beat her as well as the children. In the course of these violent outbursts, the mother would often seek refuge in her sons' room. Our second, imaginary picture is therefore that of a very young, weak mother and two small children huddled in a room, trying to avoid the abusive attacks of a loud, drunken, violent man.

This sketch is probably enough to show that Olaf grew up in a situation marked both by arbitrary, physical violence perpetrated by a man on his female partner and their children, and by helplessness on the part of the mother. She seems to have been at least as helpless as the boys – seeking refuge in their room, and spending the night with them while using them for protection. That, at least, is how Olaf perceived the situation.[21]

There is also evidence that the family's situation was further aggravated by poverty as the father normally gave them no money. Olaf said quite explicitly – and strikingly so for a boy of his age and situation – that he did not get any love from his father either. His mother, by contrast, had always been supportive.[22]

Though helpless, and suffering material as well as emotional deprivation, Olaf was not entirely inactive. Even then, he had developed what might be termed an incipient strategy of resistance, although this was still a rather impotent course of action if what he wanted to do was influence the situation and to protect others.

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[19] While this may seem to be rather young to be having a child, it was fairly normal in the GDR. Since the demise of the GDR, the age of first-time mothers has risen sharply and moved close to the west German model. In general terms, the dramatic changes in demographic variables are amongst the most impressive quantitative representations of the social transformations that have been experienced in eastern Germany.

[20] Other cases suggest that there are links between personal experiences relating to German transformation and a drink problem, but there is no evidence for that being the case here. Even if there were, such a link would not be a constituent element of the case-structure as it has no impact on Olaf.

[21] Another plausible interpretation would be that the mother protects the boys by joining them in their room and trying to keep them safe during the night. However, our subject's account clearly leaves no room for such a view as being relevant to his experience and understanding of these situations.

[22] There is one notable exception to this. When, not for the first time, she was summoned by the school board to hear yet more criticism of Olaf's behaviour, she agreed (in tears, as he recalls) to him being transferred to another school although she knew that Olaf did not want to go there. However, Olaf seems to have realised that the situation was completely outside his mother's control; he also understood that while she really worried about how he was doing at school and getting the blame for the things he did wrong, his father could not care less. All in all, this episode seems not to have changed the good and caring relation between mother and son.

When his father started to hit his elder brother, Olaf used to ask his father to beat him up instead. Notwithstanding this peculiar and remarkable 'defensive' strategy of his,[23] nobody – neither he nor his elder brother nor his mother – seemed to have found a way of stopping or countering father's violence. The rest of the family was helplessly exposed to his arbitrary attacks, and was forced to endure them rather passively.

Until one day. In Olaf's own dispassionate phrase, '… and then he wanted to kill my mother'. First, the father hit Olaf with a poker – an iron stick with a handle and a bent sharp end – severely injuring his knee, and he then proceeded to attack the mother. It was then that Olaf grabbed a kitchen knife and threatened his father; it seems that the latter was sufficiently 'persuaded' to desist. From then on, we are told, his father never again entered the boys' room – in other words, everyone, including the mother, had now conquered a space where they were safe from him. It was a territory which, it appears, the father did not dare violate. Some time later, the mother and the boys moved out and went to live in a flat in another part of town, while the father stayed behind in the old place.

The grip of terror and helplessness in which this dangerous father held the rest of the family was thus broken when Olaf, too, in a possibly life-threatening situation, had spontaneous, desperate recourse to physical violence. The passivity, the suffering and the impotence were broken, the family history thereafter took another course. The former victims' abandoning of the arena, actively getting rid of the violent man and establishing themselves elsewhere on their own, is a symbol and proof of it, and it sets a seal on an ugly past.

Discovering the conquest of violence as a resource was indubitably a valuable experience for Olaf, and a positive, possibly life-saving one at that. For him, it marked a new beginning to his life. The significance Olaf attributes to this dividing-line in his biography is neatly mirrored in the way he told his life: he began the interview by stating that he did not want to recall or talk about what happened up to three years ago. They had been bad times, he said, and he had drawn a line under them; he just wanted to forget and leave it behind. His subsequent account can be seen as a deployment of the ambivalence contained in this initial statement: like a black hole, the sealed past he did not want to talk about became the starting point and centre of his whole account. Despite his conscious determination and efforts to dismiss and not recall experiences associated with that period, he was still drawn in; he could not avoid beginning there. In fact, this period of his life remained largely 'black' in his account – apart from the turning-point episode, no experiences were spelled out in detail – but it is still clearly the centre of gravity to which most other episodes in his life and his own account refer. While his narration portrays an effort to propel himself away from that centre, his experiences in 'real life' constantly refer back to it. His tight-lipped reluctance to talk and the vividly detailed accounts of more or less violent encounters in his life after the 'dividing-line' (e.g. experiences at school) are part of this structure.

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[23] It would be interesting to explore the origin, motivation and meaning of Olaf's behaviour further, possibly with the help of psychological tools. We will return to this issue later on in the analysis.

B. Fisticuffs

To resume our case-reconstruction, there are of course more elements to be taken into account. In addition to the experience of domestic violence, there were various types of violence and elements of delinquency and conflict that occurred while Olaf was growing up, but we cannot locate them in time with any accuracy. As we have already stated, the episodes he reported in detail belong to the period after the turning-point. At that time, he was involved in gang-fights, shoplifting, joy-riding and the like; he was arrested on several occasions, and was eventually sentenced to community work.

His encounters with the police make an interesting chapter in themselves. He seems to have deliberately and repeatedly provoked policemen into maltreating him, and often sooner or later during these encounters he would manoeuvre himself into a losing position – either because he was hopelessly outnumbered or handcuffed, or because he was otherwise subdued. That was the point at which he usually went onto the counter-attack.[24]

His school career was very conflictive. He changed schools repeatedly, he was expelled twice, and at the age of 13 he stopped attending school altogether. For the next two years he had occasional jobs, but he mostly 'hung around' – at home in the mornings and in the streets the rest of the day – until he was eventually contacted by a social worker. Shortly after their first meeting, he began to take part in a low-level project for unqualified youth, and it was there that we met him.

If we look more closely at the sort of trouble that he was involved in at school after the decisive fight with his father, in one incident he narrated in particular detail we find him involved in a violent fight with his male class-teacher and simultaneously managing to secure the (ineffective) support of a female teacher. It is clear that this setting closely resembles the structure of the domestic scene of violence: Olaf turns to physical violence to fight a male authority (policemen also served this purpose, as we have seen), a father-figure; moreover, he has a woman – who, like his mother, is weak – as an ally. On a subsequent occasion, in an out-of-school setting, Olaf organises a similar fight that follows exactly the same pattern.

We can summarise the case so far as follows: in a situation of extreme danger, Olaf overcomes his helplessness through an active counter-strategy based on violence, and it enables him to control the situation satisfactorily. However, the strategy prompts a series of *new problems* for him.

The first of these is the one we have outlined above. He transfers this strategy – and, in some cases, even the structural setting in which he first used it successfully – from its original domestic context to other domains of life where it has effects that contrast sharply with his initial experience. He has to face sanctions and penalties: for example, he is expelled from school after the fight with his class-teacher. In other words, his way of overcoming his helplessness entraps him in situations of even greater helplessness. Now he is confronting teachers, provoking

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[24] The most startling of these incidents took place when he was eventually taken home in a police-car in the early hours of the morning after being questioned and spending half the night in police custody. For no apparent reason – and he was not able to supply one himself – he flew out of control and started to wreck the car that brought him home. Once again, it was when everything was over and the police were letting him go, literally doing him a favour by driving him home.

policemen and breaking laws, and is therefore up against public institutions, the state, the law and its entire enforcement apparatus. Now that he is rid of the original antagonist (his father), it is as if he transforms the domestic conflict scenery (that he once experienced as empowering in its outcome) through a sort of manic, upward move to the level of society. Here, too, he is immersed in situations where he is subjected to violence that he perceives as arbitrary and unjustified, and he again confronts a counterpart that seems overwhelmingly more powerful than him.[25]

The second problem that emerges from his recourse to violence is the question of the legitimacy of his own violence. Though he does not expressly elaborate this issue in his account, he is very careful to present himself as being conscious of the circumstances in which he resorts to violence, namely when he is attacked or falsely accused, and when he is defending others. However, he would never would be violent to a woman, although he has been accused of that and reports it with clear indignation in his voice. As a victim of violence who has come to adopt violence himself, he seems to have the problem of drawing a line between what he does (which must be justified), and what has been and is still being done to him. The need to establish this separation clearly is why it is so important for him to legitimise his course of action.

In our view, it is significant that he experiences this problem of legitimacy at all. Firstly, it indicates that his use of violence is problematic to himself, and that he therefore perceives himself as a person guided by moral precepts. However, this perception is not shared by the outside world, which condemns many of his activities and thereby threatens Olaf's self-conception. Secondly, a situation like that may prompt a reaction of urgent self-affirmation – or, as in Olaf's case, it calls for reasoning and triggers a process of *reflection* (itself an antidote to violence).[26] No doubt, such a process of self-reflection must have been supported, possibly even prompted, by the interaction with the social worker who contacted Olaf; experiences in the project he is now involved in will, in all probability, strengthen them further. To summarise, it is our view that the legitimacy problem has the potential to serve as a guideline for coming out of the current impasse, if it keeps bothering Olaf sufficiently to motivate a search for other less problematic, and socially more acceptable, strategies. Currently, he is involved in a setting that is supportive of such a process.

C. Karate

Highlighting one aspect of Olaf's current life situation may help to illustrate that the above hypothesis is not the product of some optimistic 'social science fiction', but is a real possibility. In our view, this aspect once again points to people's 'self-healing' potential and their creativity in finding ways out of trouble; furthermore,

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[25] Our material does not conclusively explain exactly why he develops this kind of behaviour and what might be motivating him. We will nevertheless explore this question further in the analysis.

[26] If we weigh up the options and the consequences, it takes us longer to make decisions and engage in spontaneous action. In the case of ordinary violence, a pause for thought is almost certain to encourage arguments and considerations which in turn tend to discourage violent behaviour, whether for pragmatic or moral reasons.

it exemplifies the impact that (re-)definitions of 'self' and 'situation' have on processes of improving one's life. In this case, it is also an example of good intuition or the ingenuity of a project.

As we have tried to show, Olaf's key problem on a practical level is how to find a way out of violence. In a reference during the interview to a recent conflictive situation, he stated that he would have loved to punch his opponent in the face. 'But', he went on, 'you know, I can't do that any more. Because I'm doing karate training now at the project site, my body's like a weapon; my whole body's been turned into a weapon. Of course, I can't use it, because if I do, I get put inside. It's only when I'm attacked that I can hit the guy and knock him unconscious.'

We think that this karate-based construction is as ingenious as it may be fantastic. Adopting a new, highly refined and effective form of violence could (paradoxically, it appears) open up a way for Olaf to escape the violence and the consequences it entails. (This superior form of violence simultaneously binds the bearer of such knowledge by a strict moral code.) It allows Olaf to remain a morally impeccable person in the eyes of himself and others, and to maintain a position of strength: he will not employ violence, but that is because he is in control, not because he is helpless. The bottom line is that his identity can now draw strength from the fact that he *does not need to apply violence*.

D. What about Love? A Digression

But what about his *need to suffer from violence*? We have mentioned that Olaf literally invited other people to hurt him on several occasions; the earliest instance of this behaviour was when he repeatedly offered himself in place of his brother as an object for his father's rage. Later episodes confirm that this frightening disrespect for his own suffering is part of his identity and self-presentation.[27]

The following ideas are not fully supported by our material, and they are therefore presented as a mere hypothesis. One connection we can see would start with a link to the legitimation problem we dealt with earlier. Although Olaf has sometimes used violence against people, he has problems legitimising this, and he may possibly feel more legitimised to use violence himself if he has been hurt 'sufficiently' before – or if other people (more to the point, women, who have never been legitimate objects of violence for him) are in danger. It was only after he invited policemen to beat him harder – because 'it hadn't hurt' so far, and then they *did* – that he returned the physical aggression: although handcuffed, he caused one of the policemen to fall through a glass door. In the crucial scene with his father, the same elements were present. Previously, he had often asked his father to beat him instead of his elder brother. During that fight, his father had first hurt him badly before turning to threaten Olaf's mother. Then, although severely

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[27] A non-verbal detail provides further confirmation of this: the day we asked him for an interview, Olaf wore blue jeans that were neatly torn in one place; this suggested that they had been deliberately cut when new, and that it was not a case of an accidental cut or the innocent use of an otherwise undamaged article of clothing. As we later discovered, the knee partially exposed by the gash in the fabric was where Olaf had been injured by his father. Though not immediately visible, the injury had left his knee damaged for good. Of all the possible parts of his body that he had left deliberately unprotected, this was the one. At the same time, through this particular choice of clothes, he allowed everyone to see with their own eyes a physically inscribed memory of the most dramatic moments in his life.

injured himself and with the prospect of immediate danger to his mother, he fought back. In this way, contrary to what one might expect of a boy with Olaf's police record, there is evidence of strong inhibitory norms with respect to violence against people, and of the importance of protecting others from it as well.[28]

However, the fact that this masochistic element only comes into play with his father, or with substitutes for him, points in a new direction and suggests a link between violence and recognition. Olaf expressly says that his father used to beat his mother and his brother. We can assume that the father also had (or at least had once had) feelings of love for his wife; moreover, according to Olaf, his father had spoilt him before he began to abuse his brother, giving him 'all sorts of things'. We also know that Olaf accuses his father of never giving him anything over a period of 14 years: 'no love - nothing'.

Therefore it may be that father simply ignored Olaf and did not care about him, and in his desperation to get attention from his father, the boy may have offered himself to be beaten instead of his brother. Thus, at the root of Olaf's pattern of provoking male authorities (father substitutes) to assault him physically, we may find a child desperate to get the attention of his father, who in turn does not seem to acknowledge his second son's very existence except through physical abuse.[29]

A *summary* of the case would read as follows. A strategy that Olaf developed under extreme pressure, and which was successful then in terms of power and protection, proved to be highly problematic in other aspects:

- it is not adequate in other situations to which he nevertheless transfers the strategy;

- it entails at least two new problems, namely illegality (with new danger and sanctions) and the problem of the legitimacy of his violence;

- finally, the strategy *does not solve the basic problem*, which is his desire for love and recognition from a father-figure. While his violent action sometimes successfully solves the power-related side of his problems, it falls a long way short of bringing him the recognition he so badly misses. The main task of anyone working with Olaf must then be to help him accept the futility of the goal and the inadequacy of the means.

E. So what?

We have left Olaf at the point of having found the 'perfect solution': he is going to be so strong and dangerous through his Karate training that he will never need, or dare to, use violence ever again. Of course, this is no more than a construct of Olaf's, at least for the time being: an ingenious new way of looking at violence, at

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[28] It is probable that Olaf also tried to protect his mother in earlier situations. We might attribute the fact that the father wanted him out of the way before attacking his mother to the indiscriminate fury of a drunkard, but there is cause to suggest that it was linked to the fact that the father knew that, if he wanted to hurt the mother, he first had to 'dispatch' the son.

[29] The above hypothesis may seem far-fetched, but authoritative sources support the most critical element: that absence of attention and recognition (by the father) can be absolutely unsupportable and lead to 'the loss of self' of a person, and that almost anything might therefore be preferable – in this case, abuse. See Laing, 1961 (with an important quotation by William James) and Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967, Chapter 3.333 'Disconfirmation'.

himself and others, a construction he has built for himself, made of elements suggested in the context of the educational project that he is involved in. However, it is a construct that has apparently already changed his behaviour in certain situations, made him feel better, and enabled him to avoid trouble. Olaf undoubtedly needs further support to get rid of his immediate problems; then, he might be free enough to set his mind to acquiring basic qualifications. In this context, he does have some things working in his favour. Although he hated school, he likes to work ('Work's great'), he has worked before, and he is now working in the context of the project. At the time of the interview, project officers confirmed that, as if setting out to prove his motivation, Olaf was always there at opening time (7.00 a.m.) and stayed until closing time at 5.00 p.m., even though he was only required to spend four hours on project premises. That is no small feat for a 15 year old, particularly as he had been spending all day 'hanging around' not so long before. As different experts have confirmed to us, these are still *the* essential requirements for labour market success, and it is where many unqualified youth fall down: getting up in the morning, arriving on time, and having the strength to get through an 8-hour working day. Olaf is currently proving he can do it. If his motivation is strong enough, and if he is lucky enough to get the institutional support and personal guidance he needs, he could overcome his personal shortcoming and might then be ready to confront the labour market. There he will probably be quickly reminded that for young men like him the problems are all but over.

II.2   Profiles

The following cases have not been wholly subjected to methodical analysis. The main difference between a fully analysed case and what we have termed 'case profiles' is not necessarily that one has a more extensive presentation; it is rather that a fully reconstructed case can be presented by means of a case structure. This is much better based empirically than profiles; these have not been treated so rigorously. However, by relating profiles to the more detailed knowledge of the main case, we can still derive a great deal of insight from them.

Bille Dachs

This case of an East German girl is strikingly similar in a way to the case discussed above, though it might not seem so at first sight.

Bille Dachs was born in 1975. Her school record only goes up to the 6th grade, and she had begun to stay away from school before that. Her mother sometimes stood outside the school, and personally brought her daughter back into the classroom when she caught her sneaking out. Bille had always felt neglected by her mother, who favoured her elder sister. At one point, she was told that her mother had not wanted her, and would have preferred to have a son. Following a serious confrontation with her mother, who denied the story, Bille left home. Her account of the period she spent away from home is not consistent. Sometimes, she left home between the ages of eight and eleven and stayed away for a long time, possibly more than a year; she always managed to find families who took her in,

treated her well and did not send her back to her family of origin.[30] It was not until her mother finally came to meet her in West Germany, where Bille was living at the time, that she went back to live with her family. Her mother, sister and Bille celebrated their reconciliation with a party. However, she noticed that her father still did not like her. He has been unemployed since two successive accidents at work left him incapable of work and also exacerbated his drinking habit.

Bille did not return to school, but instead went to work with her mother, 'helping her' with pre-school infants at the nursery where she worked. At the age of 12 or 13, she met her current boyfriend, a welder who is seven years older than her, and began dating him. When she was about 15, she moved in with him, living in his family's flat where seven other people were already living. Two years later, when she was pregnant, the two of them were allocated their own flat. They have two children now, the first born when she was 18, the second when she was 21.[31] Her boyfriend formally proposed a couple of months ago, and she is now making up her mind, she says, as to what answer she should give at the Town Hall where the wedding ceremony has already been booked. Meanwhile, she is involved in a one-year educational programme for unqualified young women where she gets trained in basic office skills.

The similarity of these two cases lies in the central role played in the children's successive biographical development by an emotionally distressing climate at home. Both experience an atmosphere of existential insecurity: physical violence in the case of Olaf; a more subtle threat in Bille's case. In both cases, their family circumstances culminate in a single event in which they are actively involved, and which dramatically alters the situation: Olaf engages in a life-threatening fight with his father, and Bille leaves home for good – at the age of eight or nine, she says. We shall confine ourselves to two of the main biographical consequences that were similar in these two cases. Accordingly, we shall set aside all differences concerning the nature of the problem and the children's attempted solutions, and disregard the similarities of their experiences. Only a deeper exploration could back up an intuitive feeling that they are not merely coincidental: both had a serious fight with one parent (the parent of the same sex) and, to make matters worse, received no effective support from within the family, either from the other parent or from their siblings (also same sex).

Firstly, we can see that both individuals frequently re-enacted their initial problematic constellations outside their original context, thus transferring the problem to other areas of life. We have seen how Olaf re-arranged the domestic constellation at school, and did so again in another educational context years later. Bille found her 'way out of trouble', and not through violence but through physical separation; she endured this until her mother begged her to come back and reassured Bille of her love. This 'game' of punishing others with separation,

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[30] For a detailed account of the situation of runaway children and 'street-children' in eastern Germany, and a discussion of specific problems and social work intervention, see Doelle, 1997.

[31] One interesting, yet unexplored, feature of this case is the striking coincidence of the birth-dates: Mrs Dachs' son was born on her father's birthday, her daughter on her mother's birthday. Even more strikingly, perhaps, both children were literally born in the middle of their respective birthday celebrations 'while we were at home having a cup of tea.'

and having them insistently express their feelings of love or appreciation before accepting reconciliation, appears in Bille's biography in various ways and in various contexts. It is most obvious in her relationship. It is not surprising, during the interview, that she did not even initially recall the event that caused their temporal separation and prompted her to exclude her boyfriend from their shared home. Thereafter, she told us, he came by to see her every day, bringing flowers or candies, and begging her to forgive him and let them get back together again – until eight months later, she says, when she was prepared to give in.

Secondly, both saw their educational careers ruined. There had been problems at school before each of them took their particular courses of action, and they did nothing to improve their situation at school; indeed, in both cases the problems alienated these young people even further from the educational sphere. It is no wonder that they have neither of them even paused to consider the consequences of their actions (e.g. non-attendance at school) for their future. Much more surprisingly, neither parents nor institutions cut in sufficiently early and decisively to protect these children from the consequences of withdrawal from education. Their truncated school careers leave both of them very exposed to labour market-related risks; this affects Olaf much more directly than Bille. She is a calm young lady whose impression of frailty is underlined by her smooth, faint voice, and she has shown how she can involve people in protective, close relationships with her. More than once, if we accept her account, complete strangers took good care of her during her runaway period and accepted her in their families along with their own children. Now, she seems to have a reliable husband who is fond of her and their children and is fulfilling the family-breadwinner role. More than seven years into their relationship and with two children, he even staged a 'picture post-card setting' in which to propose to her – just as she had always wanted.

Her main motivation for attending the course that the labour market office offered her to improve her labour market opportunities is that she wants to be involved in an out-of-the-home activity while her boyfriend is out at work and her children are at kindergarten. In other words, what she likes is seeing people and having something to do. Labour market integration, a higher household income, and the achievement of more economic independence or security – these are no concerns of hers.

This marks one important distinction between the cases of Olaf and Bille which, unlike all other matters raised so far, is clearly gender-related: there is an alternative role available to her beyond the sphere of work, and it is not equally conceivable for male youth for the time being. In Bille's case, primary dedication to her family role seems to be satisfying; it even makes her proud as the words with which she opened the interview - 'I have a family' - clearly demonstrate.

Heinz-Jürgen Gerhard

This case is different from those of all our other interviewees insofar as Heinz-Jürgen does not report problematic relations with the police, teachers, other institutions or his parents. They all have positive connotations – they are the allies he turns to when he has further problems with peers, or else when he has been robbed, threatened or beaten up by youth gangs – despite his experience that these people and institutions are often enough unable or unwilling to help him. When

his father informed the school authorities that Heinz-Jürgen was afraid to go to school because he was regularly attacked, their only reaction was to threaten the father with a fine if his son did not attend compulsory education. He did not return to school, and he was then sent on a youth-project where he was 'taken care of'.

Heinz-Jürgen does not lack moral guidelines, he distinguishes right from wrong, he ponders the legitimacy of his own acts and those of others, and he is sometimes consumed with moral outrage. On the other hand, there was no sign of any realistic planning and assessment of his own situation, and no sense of the importance of school or training. Generally, he seemed unable to make a useful distinction between things of higher and lesser importance.

All things considered, the basic problem seems to lie in this young man's mental limitations and in a variety of health problems. He is, in our opinion, a case for special education or care, and he should not therefore be expected to become an autonomous participant in the labour market. To put it in another way, in normal classroom conditions, he is too slow and lacks the concentration to follow lessons successfully. Although this would need to be explored further, our impression is that the relevant authorities of neither the education system nor the welfare department seem to have taken any responsibility for his future development. His non-attendance at school is tolerated, but no suitable alternative is offered.[32] On the other hand, this may have helped to avoid one form of exclusion he may be in serious danger of experiencing: confinement to a 'specialised institution'.

One aspect of this case is particularly intriguing. He spoke with clarity and richness of detail about fights with peers and youth gangs, and was astonishingly clear and literate when talking about his interactions with institutions, doctors, police and the like and made good use of specific terminology. However, with regard to his family, his account was chaotic, and no useful picture of his family background emerged. The most precise details we got about his brother – the family member he talked about most – were the brandnames of the cars his brother had owned at different times. This striking 'rhetoric imbalance' suggests that those domains (areas such as problems, tussles with multi-party involvement, and the workings of the administration that are widely believed to be rather complex and difficult to understand properly) seemed to pose a much smaller problem for him (in terms of getting himself oriented and finding out 'what's going on') than the sphere of his own family.

Maik Sandler

Maik was five years old when his younger brother, the child of his mother's lover, a subordinate of Maik's father, was born. He started primary school in the late 1980s when his parents separated and his mother finally married her lover.

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[32] School attendance is compulsory for all children in Saxony-Anhalt until they have successfully completed the 9th grade or reached the age of 18. Non-attendance constitutes a legal offence and those failing to comply lay themselves open to prosecution. Some youth projects, including the one Heinz-Jürgen is on, are not covered by this obligation because involvement in them is considered equivalent to attending school. In fact, this project has teachers officially assigned to it by the Ministry of Education to ensure that the project's charges receive a proper education.

A few years later, in 1990, Maik began to steal bicycles and his problems at school increased. In the meantime, his stepfather had lost his job and turned to drink. During the ensuing years, Maik stopped attending school altogether, lived mostly 'on the street', and got more deeply involved in serious crime. At home, he occasionally had fights with his stepfather when the latter attacked Maik's mother; she always supported and protected Maik, and is still loyal to him to this day. Although he was terrified of being sent back to prison after his first sentence at the age of 13, and although he respected and liked the female social worker who was assigned to work with him at the time, he kept going down the same 'evil track', as he called it. At the time of the interview, when he was 18 years old, he saw himself as being 'on a straight track' and hoped he was 'over the mountain': his 2½-year jail sentence had been suspended temporarily, he had not stolen a car or done 'anything else stupid' for the last six months, he was attending a manual training course for unqualified youth, and he was making plans for the future that included completing his school term. Though it is hard to assess the stability of his new situation, there has been a clear shift of orientation in Maik. More specifically, he has acquired an orientation, maybe for the first time in his life.

In the absence of a proper analysis of the case, we cannot give a detailed account of how this change came about, and what made him stray from the 'straight track' in the first place. Various elements seem to have contributed to his changed attitude and behaviour, and they will be important if Maik is to keep on a stable course. Firstly, there is one thing that Maik knows only too well: he has experienced prison and does not want to go back. 'Jail's the end, it's the pits.' The threat of being sent back to jail to complete a long sentence is a powerful deterrent for him, despite the fact that he relapsed on earlier occasions. Secondly, in spite of these lapses, Maik has experienced secure, stable personal support – initially from his mother. A more unusual development probably concerns the social worker who began to work with him when he was 13, and has been continuously supporting him until now. Maik is proud that she has not let go of him, even though he has let her down once, and that she is still actively supporting him although he is beyond the age of her professional competence. The most recent and youngest element in this chain of female supporters, although the one with the strongest impact at present, is his girlfriend. According to Maik, this girl, who he got to know through a gang of peers, was not at all impressed by his criminal acts. In fact, she made him choose between continuing to steal cars and so on, and having her as his girlfriend. 'I took her – what else could I do?' Given the knowledge at our disposal, this has to be seen as a rather surprising and fortunate event in Maik's life. Within his present perspective, the relationship with his girlfriend, which had been up and running for over six months at the time of the interview, plays a central role. Although he met her in a context that was linked to his 'old' life, she represents something completely new. Not only are her values different; her family – a decent, 'normal' working-class family – represents the 'good life' and the harmonious family he has never experienced, and, most importantly, they accept him. They take him with them on their outings, not minding that he does not really know how to behave in a restaurant, and they even invited him to go abroad with them on holiday. In this way, the combined but independent support of three women, the experience of an intimate loving relationship (possibly for the first time), and the threat of punishment push Maik into a direction that promises acceptance, security and a future in a world that is

different from the one he saw himself as belonging to. Sad as it may be, the fact that all but one of his 'friends' are currently in prison might also help.

Andrea Selke

Andrea, the eldest of five siblings, lived in a household marked by alcohol abuse and parental neglect. She and her younger brother had a father who was not the man their mother was then married to. When Andrea was about eight years old, her and her brother had to look after the house and care for their much younger siblings; both of their parents were more often drunk than sober. The children lacked the necessary time to devote to their school duties, and were too tired and couldn't muster the concentration to follow lessons at school. At the age of eleven Andrea ran away from home for the first time. At 16, she stayed away for half a year, and when she returned home she was four months pregnant. She soon left home again, and gave birth to her black child in a public care centre, where she then stayed for more than a year until she was allocated her own flat in a small town. Since the birth of her first child, she has been living on welfare.

Today, Andrea has three children, each by a different man; two of them are black. She originally thought she would not be able to cope with another child, and had been about to give away her third child for adoption immediately after it was born, but backed off when nurses laid the newly born child on her stomach: after a few days at home, she went back to the hospital to take her daughter home; as she says now, she has not regretted it for a single moment. Ms Selke has moved more than five times in the last five years to escape from racism and unbearable living conditions. For the last year, she has been living with a partner who is fond of her children and supports her in her educational tasks. Without him, it would not be possible for her to attend the educational programme for unqualified women that she is now involved in. Moneywise, however, their situation is still 'bad, but okay'; her partner lost his job a few months ago.

Andrea is the intellectually most agile interviewee in this category. She is reflective, witty, and concerned about the future of her children in the light of her own childhood experiences. She has only completed the 8th grade, and has not yet been able to do any professional training. She feels she has not had a childhood, and now tries to make up a little for the teenage years that she dedicated to her children.

III   Conclusion

Instead of a single, general conclusion, we shall briefly highlight some themes that have emerged as important for this category.

As previous reports have established, problems of a very different nature from what the 'category-label' (lack of qualification) indicates are becoming clear for all to see. Of key importance is *the experience of violence* in different forms in the family, and later on in the public arena as well. Its pervasiveness in the biographies of all of our interviewees, who were selected only because they met the criterion of lacking qualification, is remarkable.

The cases reveal a salient mechanism whereby ***children inherit a marginal social position***: alcohol abuse, often occurring together with unemployment, by one or both parents. It led to school problems for all of our interviewees who grew up in such a setting. Their critical situation at home made it impossible for them to muster the energy, concentration or motivation necessary to complete their education successfully. None of our interviewees has since been able to correct this 'biographical defect' of the early school years.

The above factors also lead us to acknowledge that primary school years are a ***biographically highly sensitive period***. Problematic situations at home resulted in failure to complete primary school in all our cases, but the routes were very varied. The fact that some of our young interviewees reported that their problems at school only began at a particular point, at the 3rd grade or later, seems to indicate that it is not necessarily very early childhood experiences, but experiences occurring at a later stage that were responsible for diverting the children's educational paths in a way which, to say the least, makes later corrections difficult and costly.[33]

In another way, these cases draw our attention to 'time', '***timing***' and the risk of dysfunctional perpetuation. Both the social sphere of education and individual experience are highly sensitive to timing in their own ways. As there are adequate time slots for educational achievement, our cases show that the time-span available for effective solutions to emotional problems also seems to be limited. While Bille and her mother may celebrate their reconciliation and thus finally 'solve' their problem, Bille's biography demonstrates that, years after the reconciliation, the initial trauma was still powerfully present in her life: the 'solution' came late and could not provide the reassurance the little girl so desperately needed. Her emotional wound remained open, causing the adolescent and the grown-up woman to re-enact similar, emotionally stressful situations time and again without ever resolving the emotional doubt. A similar inadequate perpetuation of an early acquired pattern of action has been shown in the case of Olaf.

These young people have not developed an ***orientation towards the future***. This lack of planning ability, and of a sufficient understanding of the consequences of their actions is, in our opinion, not due to a missing 'achievement orientation' of the school system in the former GDR. Instead, extremely problematic and often violent family contexts that were not unknown, but were less visible, in the GDR seem to be directly responsible for such an absence of 'biographical responsibility'. In such circumstances, there is no scope for drawing up a rational or future-oriented list of priorities, or for considering the consequences; on the contrary, it may be vital to concentrate on the most immediately pressing problems and needs. The most immediate problem is the most important. Correspondingly, our interviewees inevitably developed an orientation towards immediate problems to the detriment of (long-term) goal-orientation and planning. Schimank has coined the notion of 'Biographical Incrementalism' for such a pattern or strategy: a biographical development that is not *towards* (goals) but *away from* (preceding

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[33] This relationship is confirmed by the results of a qualitative panel study in which the complementary positive relationship was also found: young people who had achieved upward social mobility through schooling and education predominantly came from humble, but *intact*, families (see Raab, 1997).

problems), and achieved through a sort of recursive, situative 'muddling through' (Schimank, 1987).[34]

Phenomena like 'destandardisation' and 'individualisation' of the life course (Kohli, 1988) and the ***erosion of 'normal' transitions*** have long been discussed as affecting the more qualified and privileged social strata either primarily or exclusively (higher education as prolonged youth moratorium, e.g.). Our cases demonstrate that these phenomena have reached – or are primarily affecting (Braun, 1998a) – youth, particularly the most unqualified, at a time of scarce opportunities for employment and training.

Skills in the emotional domains of family and ***close relationships***, classically ascribed to women, may – for women who do have those skills under certain circumstances – balance a lack of more formal resources and achievements. Emotional skills may, in terms of resources required for providing reasonably secure, stable and satisfying life arrangements, to a certain degree be functionally equivalent to other skills normally traded on the labour market.[35] On the other hand, such relationships of trust and love may be powerful motivators for young people struggling to improve their prospects and get a better hold on their lives.

Our analysis also points, once more, to the ***doubtful value of repressive measures***. They do not prevent youth from committing typical forms of youth crime as they do not solve any of their problems. Thus repressive measures are unlikely to change problematic or criminal behaviour effectively – even if, as in Maik's case, the young people affected are aware and afraid of legal punishment.

Finally, a debate that has become increasingly important in recent years, and which is directly linked to these cases, can only be mentioned in brief: it concerns the extent to which the ***normative guiding lines*** that inform welfare institutions and projects dealing with unqualified youth have become outdated and unrealistic in the current state of the labour market and society at large.[36] While 'qualifying for (stable) integration into the primary labour market' is still the goal to which all efforts are geared, the illusionary nature of this idea is becoming more and more transparent. For decades now, labour markets in industrialised societies have been unable to absorb the labour supplied; furthermore, demand for simple manual jobs, for which the more promising among unqualified youth are often supposed to be prepared, is falling away. In general, there will always be a number of people who, by the standards of the time, are too unqualified to be economically 'useful'. The pressing question is therefore: what are we going to qualify unqualified youth for? What can we expect from them, and what can they expect from society and

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[34] Interestingly, Schimank has claimed this as a way of organising biographies that meets the demands of a modern, functionally differentiated society. Individuals find themselves in a variety of situations and social settings and have to fulfil a multiplicity of roles; consequently integrating it all in a meaningful biography can pose problems. Apart from 'biographical incrementalism' - the self-reflexive stumbling from problem (solution) to problem (solution) - regressive role de-differentiation, and renouncing a consistent life-history and identity are other possible ways of dealing with this pressure.

[35] We wish to stress that, in so saying, we do not mean that lack of qualification should be regarded differently when it affects young women.

[36] For evidence supporting the view that the general performance of social policy measures designed to improve levels of qualifications and labour market integration for youth is sometimes problematic, and can even contribute to further exclusion, see Lex, 1997.

the labour market? Is it desirable that young people should be imbued with the traditional labour ethic if they are never likely to be in long-term, full-time employment (while people in older age-groups struggle with excessively work-centred orientations and life arrangements)? What kind of social resources or vocational qualifications will best prepare young people for getting on with few marketable resources to offer? Might the above-mentioned 'incrementalistic', situationally adaptive attitude be better suited for this task than a more teleological one that focusses on goals that cannot be reached or which, when reached, have all of a sudden become useless?

In this sense it may seem an adequate attitude on the part of our interviewees that none of them seem to take too much interest in a specific job or occupation, and that they do not have their minds set on achieving stable, full-time employment. Their minds *are* occupied with issues like getting out of trouble, having somewhere to go, and being respected, and they *are* interested in having something to do, getting or earning money, and communicating.

All the elements of this incomplete list are compatible with employment, but hardly any of them can *only* be realised through employment. Naturally, all of the above concerns can easily be interpreted as components of social inclusion or exclusion.

The massive expansion of the educational sector in Germany during the last four decades has focussed on higher education, that is to say the production of academic qualifications, and not on securing standards of minimal qualifications. It is in the interest of all of us to pay much more attention to the latter, lest we risk socially excluding major sections of the young population –particularly at a time when enterprises in the market economy are gradually withdrawing their contribution to preparing youth for the labour market (see Zukunftsinvestition Jugend, 1998). In our view, social intervention through the state is not only imperative in the educational sector; it is also needed where families cannot provide the necessary basic elements of security and nurturing that enable children and young people to concentrate on their schooling and training with sufficient success.

A personal coda:

There was a car accident. The driver died and the young man in the passenger seat was thrown through the front windscreen and seriously injured. He was in a coma for several days on the verge of clinical death.

We heard about the accident after the interview was over, when we asked him about the scars all over his face and throat. The episode had been so comparatively irrelevant to the complicated life of this calm, likeable young man that he allocated it no room when he narrated the story of his life to us.

At the time of writing, he was back in prison for an offence committed years ago.

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