View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

brought to you by CORE

provided by London Academic Publishing Ltd.: Arts & Humanities...

DIFFERENCE AND DOMINANCE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: A PLEA FOR A NATIONWIDE REAPPRAISAL OF THE GERMAN UNIFICATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Ingrid Miethe

Professor, Justus Liebig University,
Giessen, Germany
ingrid.miethe@erziehung.uni-giessen.de

Abstract. There are now thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German unification. A whole generation has since then grown up in Germany, who knows the period of division only from history books. The subject of German division should be over and done with by now – should it not? The current developments in Germany would indicate otherwise. Among these developments, the success of the party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in state elections has reminded us that significant differences persist between Eastern and Western Germany. This current finding is only an outward manifestation, however, of the dissatisfaction with the process of unification that still persists on the part of many East Germans. For a long time, little was heard on the topic in the public sphere, but it is still current and must be addressed publicly lest further potential social conflicts develop from it.
The thesis of the present article is that the current differences between East and West Germans[1] can no longer be explained merely by differences in socialization before 1989, but are also the manifestation of a West German culture of dominance arising in the course of the German unification and the ensuing process of transformation. This culture of dominance is based, as we will show in detail in the following, on a combination of economic, political and cultural dimensions. To examine this complex, I will draw on Rommelspacher's (1995) concept of *dominance culture*.

Keywords: difference, dominance, Germany, unification

THE CONCEPT OF DOMINANCE CULTURE

The concept of *dominance culture* (Rommelspacher 1998, 2002) was originally developed in the context of women's racism and

migration studies and builds theoretically on various sociological approaches to relations between different marginalized groups (e.g. Elias, Scotson 1990; Hall 1992) in modern societies (Baumann 1992). Drawing on migration and racism studies, the concept goes beyond sociological analysis to expose in greater detail the psychological mechanisms that determine how and why members of different social groups in structural power relations communicate with one another as they do.

The concept is based on the assumption of a modern society that identifies itself as a meritocracy of equals, promising potentially equal opportunity to all. This promise of equality cannot be fulfilled in reality, however; rather, a democratic society continuously produces and reproduces social inequality. The "claim of equality while reproducing inequality is a central contradiction in the modern Western[2] world" (Rommelspacher 1998: 35; see also Foroutan 2019: 28 ff.). Since real inequality is not a central part of the self-definition of modern societies, power relations tend to be obscured. "The classic model of repression, which makes a relatively clear distinction between the dominant and the oppressed", Rommelspacher (1998: 23) writes, "progressively gives way in the course of the modern period to a structure in which power is located in the social agencies and in the normative orientations of the individuals. The seat of power is less clearly discernible; the relations of power become unclear and invisible".

Open hierarchies of power are supplanted by subtle dominances, which are broadly distributed in society, but which affect different social groups in different ways. In contrast to authoritarian rule, which is based "primarily on repression, on commands and prohibitions", dominance can count on "broad acceptance" because it is "mediated by the social structures and the internalized norms, so that it reproduces political, social and economic hierarchies in a more inconspicuous way" (Rommelspacher 1998: 26).

The establishment of such a social hierarchy takes place subtly and is "not even intentional on the part of many members of the majority" (Rommelspacher 2002: 18). Those who belong to a

"majority" are not fixed but can vary with different social situations. East Germans for example, whilst members of the majority culture in respect of their legal position (in contrast to immigrants), are at the same time in a marginalized position compared with West Germans (see below) in respect of their representation in the country's elite positions or their representations in the media. When East Germans attack immigrants in East Germany, naturally those East Germans are in the dominant position, just as West Germans in East Germany can experience stigmatization as "*Besser-Wessis*" ["Western know-it-alls"], and find themselves in a non-dominant position. At the same time, the fact of being East or West German is not the only relevant category: categories such as age, gender, ability, race and ethnicity interact in complex ways. For example, people of colour find themselves in a marginalized position in the group of East Germans, but can, at the same time, belong to a dominant group in the group of people of colour by virtue of their gender or sexual orientation. Thus, very different dimensions of power exist in a given person and between social groups, and the individual dimensions can relativize or reinforce one another (Rommelspacher 1998: 28). "The fact that individuals are located in a mesh of different dominances implies that everyone is privileged in certain regards, and discriminated against in other regards – although in very different degrees" (ibid. 35).

Such interdependencies between "dimensions of social relations of power, authority and normativity" are also described in terms of intersectionality. Characteristically, this concept observes only such categories as "gender, social milieu, migration background, nation, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, ability, generation, etc."[3]. The dimension of East-West differences is usually not to be found in such concepts. East-West is an "et cetera", that is, a dimension which may possibly be relevant but is not central to this discourse. Although the concept of intersectionality has thus contributed little to an explanation of East-West dynamics up to now, its fundamental conception of the interdependence of individual categories is also at the root of the concept of *dominance culture*.

When we describe East Germans as members of the non-dominant group in relation to West Germans as a dominant group, this means:

1. this is not the only relevant dimension or a permanent disposition, and East Germans can certainly be in a dominant role in relation to other groups, such as immigrants; and
2. statements are being made, not about individual persons and their personal experiences, but about structures and social groups – such statements necessarily implying analytical abstractions and generalizations.

The concept of *dominance culture* combines economic, political and cultural dimensions, and exposes how economic and/or political marginalizations provoke specific cultural and/or psychological responses. There are two dimensions to be examined here: Rommelspacher (2002: 15) calls them the "horizontal axis of difference and the vertical axis of social inequality". The horizontal axis refers to cultural distances caused by different values or influences. The vertical axis includes factors of structural inequality in society, such as income, wealth, and professional status. The two interact and must be considered together.

In this model, different groups such as Saxons and Bavarians are not simply "different" in a horizontal plane. Rather, their difference is always inscribed, at the same time, with the vertical dimension of power, which is manifested in economic and political differences. Hence, groups of people are not merely different yet equal; their difference entails a dimension of power which privileges one side over the other.

Rommelspacher (2000: 15 f., 67 ff.) herself has applied this concept to the German-German situation by noting that dominance can be observed "*in statu nascendi*" in German unification: "When the Wall fell", she writes, "expectations of equality were at first activated by references to national unity, cultural community and social solidarity between the 'brothers and sisters' in East and West. With time, however, more and more differences were seen, which

resulted from the different histories, but increasingly brought with them asymmetric relational experiences as the new dominant normality was substantially determined by West Germans". This concept was also used in explaining the differences between the East and West German women's movements to show why the unification did not result in an all-German "sisterhood", but rather in West German dominance and mutual exclusion (Miethe 2002, 2005). Rommelspacher does not examine the dynamics of East/West German relations in-depth, however. The present essay does so in an attempt to demonstrate what vertical differences continue to exist between Eastern and Western Germany, and what effects they have on the horizontal plane.

Economic Inequality

On the economic level, we can observe that the standard of living in East Germany has risen in comparison with the period before 1989. Incomes and pensions have also risen. The accumulation of assets, especially in the form of homeownership, has increased. The economic situation is thus on the whole significantly better than before 1989.

But if we compare it, not with the time before 1989, but with the current situation in the West German states, the case looks different: although unemployment in the East has declined, it is still higher than in the West (2017: 7.6% in the East, 5.3% in the West; BMWi 2017: 48). Furthermore, the reduction in the unemployment rate in the East correlates with a massive westward migration of the East German population. Thus, 1.74 million people migrated from East to West Germany in the period from the end of the GDR to 2006 (Kubis/Schneider 2008). These persons, then, cease to figure in the East German unemployment statistics. At the same time, the problem ensures that the East loses mainly its young workers with better than average qualifications (Schneider 2005). This has consequences for the East German economy, and also for social

cohesion (*e.g.*, older parents remain in the East whilst their children live in the West).

Incomes in the East have increased, but those increases are concentrated in the first five years after unification: after that, incomes gradually stabilized at about 75% (Destatis 2015: 69) or 83% (BMWi 2018: 50) of the Western level. At the same time, working hours are longer than in West Germany (Ludwig 2015: 35). In other words, people in the East work more for less money. This situation is a far cry from the traditional labour union demand for equal pay for equal work. Pensions too have yet to attain the Western level (BMWi 2018: 49). Accordingly, the average income of East German households is only 83% of West German households (Ludwig 2015: 14)[4].

Moreover, the focus on the difference in income describes only the "tip of the iceberg". A look at the distribution of assets shows an exponentially greater difference. "The economic and social problems expressed in the accumulation of wealth were grossly underestimated from the beginning, that is, in the negotiations on the currency union in spring of 1990 […] and systematically undervalued as a defining factor in the equalization of living conditions of the people in East and West" (Busch 2015: 51). Under the socialist economy, citizens of the GDR had had fewer opportunities to accumulate wealth than West Germans. Although assets (mainly real property) have increased since the end of the GDR, the gap between the two halves of the country has remained the same (Grabka 2014: 962). The average net worth attained in East Germany is less than the half the Western figure (ibid. 959), and income from assets in East Germany is only half as great as in the West (Destatis 2015: 79). Of the 500 wealthiest families in Germany, not one lives in the new states (Busch 2015: 59).

"Large fortunes", writes Grabka (2014: 959), "bring with them economic and political power, and can be used to attain or maintain a high social status, or to secure advantages for children. In this way, they serve to form and reproduce elites". In addition, they can be inherited by the next generation. The German "golden spoon

generation" (van Laak 2016) is primarily West German. The "polarization of wealth" between East and West, according to Ahbe (2005: 270), is "a self-reproducing structure". At this point, if not before, it becomes clear that the difference between East and West will be carried forward into the next generation, and that this difference runs counter to the society's self-image as a meritocracy.

In view of the complexity and speed of the process of German unification, it was inevitable that some decisions were taken, which had unintended consequences. This is true of all actors involved. The problem, furthermore, is less the fact that social inequality *exists* (and persists) between East and West than the fact that it is accompanied by an idea of merit. From this point of view, the inferior situation of the East Germans is explained – mainly in the public media discourse (see below) – by a lack of productivity and ambition, and not by a fundamental structural disadvantage. The pan-German myth of a meritocracy obstructs the view of the social reality: that is, of a society in which different social groups start out with different conditions. This is true not only in regard to immigrants (see *e.g.* Foroutan et al. 2019) but also in regard to East Germans.

Unequal Access to Elite Positions

East Germans are also marginalized in regard to access to elite positions. The "Potsdam elites study" of the mid-1990s found that "East Germans are underrepresented among the elite, measured by the proportions of East and West Germans in the population" (Bürklin, Rebenstorf et al. 1997: 65). East Germans were represented commensurately with their proportion of the population only in the field of politics. In business, they held only 0.4% of elite positions; in the trade associations, 8.1%; in research, 7.3%; in the military and in the judiciary, 0%. In all sectors, the proportion of East Germans among the elites was 11.6%, while they made up about 20% of the total population. This indicates that the

opportunities for East Germans to attain elite positions were about half as great as those of West Germans.

This finding is often qualified by the remark that a substitution was necessary because of the ideological disqualification of GDR elites and that only the West German elites possessed the specialist knowledge (especially in law and administration) that was required for the reorganization of East Germany. In the meantime, however, a new generation has reached the age at which it might take its place among the elites in many sectors (Kollmorgen 2017: 61). Yet a current study shows that even today, East Germans are not proportionately represented in leadership positions. In some cases, instead of equalization, a retrograde development can be observed; in other words, the proportion of East Germans among the elites has become even smaller.

This is also the case in the new states themselves. Although East Germans there make up about 87% of the population, only 23% of the elites are East German. Nationwide, only 1.7% of the top positions are held by East Germans. Only the federal government itself reflects the proportion of the East German population (cf. Bluhm, Jacobs 2016: 6). Even in the field of politics, in which East Germans did comparatively well in the Potsdam elites study, their standing deteriorated: in the five East German state governments, there are now fewer East German politicians than just a few years ago. The proportion of West German state secretaries (just below the ministerial level) increased from 26% to 46%, and only three of the 60 state secretaries in the federal government are East German (cf. Bluhm, Jacobs 2016: 6). At East German colleges and universities, the percentage of East German rectors has been halved. At the moment, no president or rector of a German university is from East Germany (CHE 2018)[5]. The proportion of East Germans has also declined in business, in leadership and personnel functions in research institutes, among presiding judges of the highest courts, in the media and in the military (cf. Bluhm, Jacobs 2016: 6).

Although there are methodological differences in the definitions of elites or of East Germans, the basic findings of the various studies

on elites are not significantly different; all confirm the underrepresentation of East Germans at state and federal levels (cf. Gebauer et al. 2017: 18). Kollmorgen (2017: 58) says pointedly: "The higher the job classification, the less probable that it is filled by East Germans". Even if "the West German dominance may have been unavoidable at first, nothing was done to counteract its perpetuation" (Köpping 2018: 105).

The lack of representation of East Germans among Germany's elites has a symbolic significance and is indeed perceived as a problem among East Germans. Köpping (2018: 183) refers in this regard to a "thorn of humiliation in the side of many East Germans". The low acceptance of the West German institutions transferred to East Germany (Gebauer et al. 2017: 22; Vogel 2017: 52) may also be caused in part by this situation. The situation may also have consequences for the following generation in view of the dearth of positive East German role models. If you want to succeed in unified Germany, the subtext of this reality says to the upcoming generation, you have to become West German. Being East German, and publicly identifying as such, is not conducive to an eminent career (cf. Engler, Hensel 2018: 77).

West German Hegemonial Media Discourse and Its Effects

Inequality, devaluation and stigmatization are not causally connected with a person's economic situation or position in society as a whole but are mediated by specific social discourses. Discourses in the Foucauldian sense define what is sayable in the society: what can be said by whom, in what form, and what cannot. "In every society", writes Foucault (1981: 11), "the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed". In this way, dominant interpretations prevail in negotiations of conflict in the society in which questions of power play an important part, and these interpretations influence the society in turn. The inclusion or exclusion of certain population groups is a part of this process. Such

exclusions can be quite unrelated to a person's economic status; in other words, even financially well-situated persons can be stigmatized if they are discernible as members of a stigmatized or marginalized group.

In unified Germany, hegemonial mass media discourse dominated by West Germans can be documented early on[6]. This has been repeatedly shown in analyses of the principal print media[7] of unified Germany (Ahbe et al. 2006; Kollmorgen et al. 2011; Pates, Schochow 2013). The findings of these studies are unambiguous: West Germany and the West Germans are the positive norm, and East Germany and the East Germans deviate from it. In other words, rather than being different but equal, the East Germans are "different in the wrong way" (Pates 2013: 15). "The hegemonial mass media discourse on East Germany and the German unification", write Kollmorgen and Hans (2011: 131), "established in the early 1990s had a logic of discursive subordination of the East Germans and East Germany, which was intensified beginning in the mid-1990s and partially broken and revised only from about 2005". The East Germans, Ahbe too writes (2004: 21), "are attributed those properties that the West Germans – in their own self-image – have succeeded in casting off: authoritarianism and obedient irresponsibility, xenophobia, racism and indifference towards National Socialism". The fundamental logic of these depictions is that individuals are equated with a system: the West Germans come from a democratic system, *ergo* they are democratic; the East Germans come from a totalitarian system, ergo they are totalitarian. The discourse ignores individual spheres and strategies of action that people can develop even under totalitarian conditions.

This "contrast to 'normal' Germans" illustrates that "there's something wrong with the 'Ossis'" (ibid. 9). The terms "Ossi" and "Wessi" are thus "asymmetric, such that 'Ossi' plays the part of the 'marked' term, a term which has the function of explaining an individual's actions by his 'nature', designating them as abnormal in contrast to the unmarked opposite term 'Wessi'" (ibid.). Although this hegemonial discourse has been somewhat disrupted in recent

years (Kollmorgen, Hans 2011: 136), the texts in Pates (2013) demonstrate that a positive image of East Germans was portrayed mainly when the purpose was to impose unpopular neoliberal reforms. Little has changed in the fundamental logic of the characterizations: "East Germans are portrayed as decidedly abnormal in constant comparison with West Germans" (ibid. 15). In this way, "social differences are naturalized" by being "represented as natural results of a group's specific properties" (ibid. 17 f.). All of the social inequalities described here become the results of the East Germans' wrong actions and wrong thinking – and thus social conflicts are personalized as specific to the group. The dominance of this kind is not limited to the media discourse, however, but permeates the everyday lives of East Germans, not least because the media discourse has strong echoes in day-to-day life. Petra Köpping (2018) has emphatically pointed out this circumstance in her book *Integriert doch erst mal uns!* ["First integrate us!"]. She describes the experiences – mainly situated in the 1990s – of "unresolved humiliation, insults and injustices" that continue to affect the East Germans today, "regardless of whether they succeeded in making their way after 1990 or not" (ibid. 9). All criticism of the Western system or the process of German unification was quickly disqualified as that of "whining Ossis", "losers of the transition" or "GDR nostalgia" (ibid. 69). Everything that preceded 1989 "became a footnote, ancient history, ballast" (ibid. 70). Another line of criticism cites socialization in the GDR to derive a specific collectivistic structure of social behaviour from it.

Characteristically, or frighteningly, the numerous autobiographical novels by young East German authors[8] associate the basic fact of growing up under the conditions which devalue their own East German background with the desire to leave those experiences behind them. At the same time, this experience seems to shape a multi-generational East German identity: Jana Hensel (*1976) and Wolfgang Engler (*1952) are unanimous in describing their experience of "Ossi-bashing" and their perception of "cultural marginalization" (Engler, Hensel 2018: 31-35). The East German

identity narrative, according to Jana Hensel, "remains the deficient, the subordinate, the marginalized one, and often simply that which is completely overlooked. In any case, it is one which is far from being included in a unified German identity narrative" (ibid. 57).

The Subtle Mechanisms of Dominance and Its Reproduction

In theory, the democratic principle of equality is applicable equally to all social groups – to West and East Germans just as much as to immigrants and their descendants. When newly arrived groups demand equality, however, "competition" (Foroutan et al. 2019: 42) inevitably results. "Participation in power", Rommelspacher (1998: 33) writes, "means not just privilege, but also the struggle to maintain privileges. In this struggle, the participants in power must assert their claims both towards the competitors and towards the victims of discrimination and must maintain at least the appearance of legitimacy. And ultimately, they must also justify that claim to themselves. This is only possible if they personally meet certain expectations and reject competing motives". Thus, Rommelspacher describes the psychological mechanisms that members of dominant and non-dominant groups develop in order to realize their respective interests – namely, the preservation of privileges and participation in power. The ensuing actions and decisions are not premeditated; rather, these mechanisms are deeply internalized, subtle, and usually not intentional on the part of the people involved. Rommelspacher describes several such mechanisms. Because these are useful for understanding the relationship between East and West, I will present them briefly here.

Denial of Inequality and Conservation of Privilege

The self-image of modern societies, Rommelspacher (1998: 30) writes, involves a "denial of inequality". This results from the interest, whether conscious or not, of the dominant group or groups

in preserving their own dominance. No special measures are required; the conservation of privilege is "reproduced primarily by the maintenance of *normality* and not by conscious (…) intentional action." (Rommelspacher 1998: 32; emphasis in the original).

Very simple examples may suffice to illustrate this. One such example is the birth year books made by the publishing house Wartenberg. These books are widely distributed in Germany and are sold not only in bookshops but also in gift shops and the like. Titled *Wir vom Jahrgang XXXX* ["We who were born in the year XXXX"], these books compile the influential events from the childhood and adolescence of a specific cohort. Originally, none of these birth-year books so much mentioned the diverging life reality and experience of those who grew up in the East. The publisher has recently expanded the series, and now offers the books with a subtitle, "Born in the GDR". The GDR is thus a special circumstance calling for special mention. The original series does not bear any subtitle such as "Born in West Germany". The simple "we" of the title refers to West Germans. This example illustrates that the "maintenance of normality" is the maintenance of the West Germans' day-to-day reality – even 30 years after the German unification.

There is no need to change anything about the society; newly arriving social groups such as immigrants or East Germans must integrate themselves inconspicuously in the existing social order. It is tacitly assumed that the upper tiers are already occupied by the dominant groups, and the lower tiers are reserved for the new arrivals. As a rule, it is left to the non-dominant groups to point out their lack of social representation, their economically inferior situation, and their unequal opportunities. Their doing so disturbs the social *status quo*, in which the members of the dominant groups are privileged.

A mechanism that can develop here is the denial of real social inequality by members of the dominant groups. Such a denial serves to preserve their privileges. This mechanism is difficult to be observed since the members of dominant groups are usually not conscious of their own privileges. To them, the social *status quo* is

simply "normal". Because the "acceptance of their own role by members of dominant groups" is difficult, Rommelspacher (1998: 185) writes that they have a "denied identity".

The denial of their privilege over East Germans seems to be very strong among West Germans. In a current study, Foroutan et al. (2019) have examined East and West Germans' attitudes towards each other and towards Muslim immigrants. In regard to West Germans' perception of East Germans, they found that West Germans "hardly take the East Germans' feeling of deprivation seriously" (Foroutan et al. 2019: 22). The structural discrimination of East Germans described above is hardly acknowledged by West Germans. While almost half of East Germans (49.1%) agree with the statement that "East Germans must make greater efforts than West Germans to obtain equal rewards", that opinion is shared by less than a third of West Germans (29.6%). East Germans' limited access to elite positions is perceived by more than a third (37.3%) of East Germans, but only by less than a fifth of West Germans (18.6%).

Foroutan et al. (2019: 37) summarize their findings thus: "West Germans do not recognize the situation of East Germans to a comparable degree. Thus, they ignore the wounds of the Reunification". Interestingly, the deprivation of Muslims is recognized by both East and West Germans to an almost equal degree. Such a finding permits the inference that West Germans are much less conscious of the structural discrimination of East Germans than of that of Muslim immigrants. The shared language and the centuries of shared cultural background apparently obscure their sight of the structural inequalities which have formed over 45 years of divided history and 30 years of unification under a dominance culture. Another identifiable pattern is the denial or trivialization of the persistent inequality between East and West. This can occur by means of an exclusive focus on the progress of incomes to the exclusion of wealth, for example (cf. Busch 2015). But it may also occur through an excessive emphasis on regional differences. As gratifying as it may be to observe that a region such

as Saxony, in the East, is viewed as comparable with the Ruhr area in the West, it is problematic that fundamental disparities between East and West are thus obscured. Without a doubt, there do exist regional differences, North-South differences, and typical problems of metropolitan areas in contrast to rural ones. These lines of contrast are often oblique to the persistent disparity between East and West. Such comparisons, however, focus only on *one* individual factor, such as economic growth. Yet East-West differences are determined by a cumulation of the dimensions described above. Since the unification, East Germans have made the negative experiences of non-representation among elites; of finding their issues underrepresented or negatively distorted in the unified German media discourse; of stigmatization and devaluation whose existence is at the same time denied; of working longer while attaining lower incomes and wealth. Precisely this *cumulation of disadvantages* – although of course not all of the factors mentioned must coincide in every case – must be taken into account in order to perceive and grasp the inequality between East and West as a structural and multi-generational problem. As described above, there is a real, quantifiable social inequality between East and West Germans. The economic discrimination of East Germans and their lack of representation among the elites are not subjective feelings, but findings supported by empirical data. This inequality is largely denied and ignored by West Germans, however, and reinterpreted as an unjustified *subjective feeling* on the part of East Germans. "In the West", writes Richter (2018: 38), "the stereotype of the ungrateful, malcontent Ossi has taken root" (see also the findings of Foroutan et al. 2919: 37).

Displacement and Reversal of the Problem

Another mechanism of imposing dominance described by Rommelspacher (1998: 176 f.) is the displacement and reversal of a problem. In *problem displacement*, the focus is placed not on the real problems – in this case, economic and cultural discrimination – but

on their consequences. In other words, critical analysis is brought to bear not on the problems in the society, such as mass unemployment resulting from drastic reorganization, a comprehensive transformation affecting all areas of life, and a hegemonic discourse of devaluation of the East, but on an allegedly inadequate response on the part of those affected by such changes. An illustrative example is the "post-traumatic embitterment disorder" (PTED), which psychotherapists have diagnosed in East Germans (Linden 2003). This disorder is caused in otherwise healthy subjects by a traumatizing experience: the East German transition. The problem is seen not in massive processes of transformation such as people have rarely been forced to undergo, nor in a lack of appreciation and respect in unified Germany, but in the deficient ability of the East Germans to cope. East Germans are seen to exhibit "abnormal behaviour" (ibid. 196) – but not a word is said about any "abnormality" of the social transformation with its consequences and upheavals.

Problem reversal goes a step further. "It not only shifts the problems onto the weaker party but, at the same time, holds that party responsible for the problems. The existing hierarchies of power are replaced by an opposite hierarchy of responsibility" (Rommelspacher 1998: 177). Thus, minorities are held responsible for the fact that the majority has problems. This perspective continues to dominate the perception of East Germans and East Germany today. "The East" and "the East Germans" are the problem to be solved – not the West German economic system, mistakes made in the unification, or the process of transformation. In general, only East Germany is talked about, while West Germany is not under discussion. The West German "problems which would call for a joint assessment and analysis mutate under West German discursive hegemony into inexhaustible evidence of the backwardness of the East" (Engler, Hensel 2018: 134).

When behaviour occurs in East Germany that would, without a doubt, merit criticism, such as xenophobic or racist violence, no causes are sought, no narrow definition of the circle of persons

involved is sought; rather, the East Germans are generalized as an "enraged mob" which, oscillating "between self-pity and barbarity", "tends towards acts of racist and xenophobic violence" (Bittermann 1993). Meanwhile, the xenophobic and racist violence which, in fact, occurs in West Germany too is not used to derive general traits of West Germans. Right-wing extremism is "thus no longer a fundamental social problem", but is "located primarily in the East" (Pates 2013: 18).

This displacement of the problem to East Germany goes hand in hand with a trivialization of the extent of racism and xenophobia, and although xenophobia can be documented to a greater degree in the East than in West Germany, it does exist in the West as well (cf. Zick, Küpper 2016: 94 ff.). Thus, the East must serve as the scapegoat for current problems. East Germans' appreciation of their own East German roots and influences is no more welcome ("ostalgia") than criticism of the Western system ("whining"). The East is the problem, once and for all – the West may have a problem with the East, but is in no way a part of the problem itself (for a critical view, see Köpping 2018: 69 ff.; Engler, Hensel 2018: 29).

Internalization of Dominance and Discrimination

The "denied identity" of the dominant group corresponds with a "rejected identity" on the part of the marginalized group (Rommelspacher 1998: 184). Thus, the "negotiation of identities and positions of power" is very difficult, since "the opposite party is difficult to pin down" (ibid.). "Rejected identity" means that the dominant groups declare the cultural influences and experiences of the non-dominant groups to be irrelevant. This was clearly visible in the process of German unification, which was not taken as an opportunity for reforms necessary in a united Germany, but as an application of the West German system (with few exceptions) to East Germany. East German models or proposals from the civil rights movements of autumn of 1989 were dismissed, unexamined, as unsuitable by definition for a unified Germany. This

marginalization of the GDR heritage is reflected in the history curriculum as well, in which the GDR is insufficiently included (Arnswald 2004). The personal stories and life experiences of East Germans were also massively devalued after 1990 (cf. Köpping (2018).

In such circumstances, it is not easy for members of socially stigmatized groups to accept and assert their own group membership since it is "often enough associated with social discrimination" (Rommelspacher 1998: 181). A typical strategy for coping with this situation is assimilation. This refers to the rejection of one's own stigmatized group and the internalization of the values and norms of the dominant group. This may not even be seen as a problem since democratic values are certainly more worthy of emulation than those of a dictatorship. The problem here, however, is that life in the GDR cannot be reduced to the experience of dictatorship: even under conditions of totalitarianism, people develop strategies of autonomous action, and there were in fact "limits to the dictatorship" (Bessel, Jessen 1996). An identity problem for people of East German backgrounds results when precisely these experiences are considered irrelevant and have no place in a unified Germany. East Germans, who identify with these origins and experiences, risk being stigmatized and devalued. The price of assimilation is the abandonment of one's original background and identity.

Examples can be found in recent East German literature and in public proclamations. Jana Hensel, for example, writes about her childhood and youth in the GDR: "Perhaps later, when I tell my children about our youth, I will simply pretend it began at the age of 22; perhaps I will summarily erase those first unsure, ugly years from our lives" (Hensel 2002: 60). What Hensel describes here is the anticipated denial of her GDR identity, since her experience is that experiences of the GDR do not fit in the unified German discourse under West German hegemony. The danger of being misunderstood and negatively interpreted or exoticized is too great.

The denial of one's identity inevitably leads to individualization

of the problem, since identification with the group results in social stigmatization. "To be openly East German, to bear prominent witness to the paradoxical experiences that are one's heritage from that country, required courage. To deny that experience, to keep silent about it", Engler writes, "was more promising for one's career" (Engler, Hensel 2018: 77).

Thus, if East Germans publicly cease to see East-West problems, this need does not imply that the problems do not exist. It is just as likely that they have learned – not least out of self-defence – to keep quiet about such issues in public (cf. Miethe, Ely 2016). This silence about one's background, history and identity eventually has the effect that the succeeding generation can hardly grasp its origins. The fact that young people who knew the GDR only as children or adolescents have joined together in an initiative called "Third Generation East" (Hacker et al. 2012) is an indication of the necessity of finding a space in which they can talk about their influences. This initiative also shows, however, that it is possible to do so in a democratic Germany.

CONCLUSION

In sum, we find that the differences which are still to be found today between East and West Germans are not explainable simply by their socialization before 1989. Rather, those differences result primarily from experiences in the process of German unification, the process of transformation, and the current situation in Germany. It is important here to change our perspective – both in the academic discourse and in public discussion.

There are no easy solutions, since some of the problems described here, such as the enormous disparity in wealth, can hardly be solved politically – at least, not by means that are legal in a democracy. The media too will hardly accept instructions as to how they should write about different population groups. We might make the demand, however, that a minimum of political correctness

must be observed in reporting on East Germans. Other problems, such as the underrepresentation of East Germans among elites, for example, could be solved. This would require taking the problem seriously in the first place and forming a political will to change it.

But that would depend in turn on perceiving the relations of dominance between East and West, and defining them as a problem of *all Germans* – not just the *Ossis'* problem. The developments after 1989 are shared German history, which in East Germany has been strongly influenced by West German elites. The mistakes and the unintended consequences in this process must be addressed as much as the successes and dealt with by East and West jointly. In this light, the history of the process of German unification and the subsequent transformation of East Germany is not finished, but more topical than ever, and its appraisal should be considered a project of all Germany.

NOTES

1. It is often rightly pointed out that the assignment to one of these two categories is not a simple matter. In the present article, I follow Bluhm and Jacobs (2015: 4) who, with reference to Kollmorgen (2015: 20), call those persons "East German" who grew up in the GDR up to 1990, and who spent most of their lives there (regardless of their present domicile), and those persons born in the GDR or the new states after 1975, whose environment ensured an "East German" socialization.
2. Rommelspacher's use of the term "Western" does not refer to an East-West difference, but to the Eurocentric perspective, which is shared by the Eastern part of Europe. The line of conflict opened here between Western (Eurocentric) countries and the global South is oblique to the present East-West topic, and cannot be further examined in this article. For clarity, I will prefer here the terms "dominant" and "non-dominant" and that of "modern society" in order to avoid misunderstandings and false equivalences with the global discourse.
3. From the self-concept page of a German web portal on intersectionality, "Portal Intersektionalität", http://portal-intersektionalitaet.de/konzept/ (accessed 27 October 2019).
4. These findings are sometimes qualified with the argument that the cost of living is also lower in the East than in the West. However, prices have by

now largely equalized in East and West (Vortmann et al. 2013).

5. http://www.che.de/downloads/CHECK_Universitaetsleitung_in_Deutschland.pdf.
6. A distinction between Eastern and Western media in this connection is not relevant. The publishing world of the GDR succumbed to a massive process of contraction after 1989 (cf. Links 2016), and the East German newspaper market was rapidly divided up among the West German publishers (cf. Bahrmann 2005). The few small publishers under East German management play only a marginal role in the unified German discourse.
7. The studies cited in the following mainly analyzed periodicals such as *Frankfurter Allgmeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), *Die Welt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*), *BZ*, *Der Spiegel*, *Stern*, *Die Zeit*, and television news programs and political magazine formats in the public networks ARD and ZDF (cf. Kollmorgen, Hans 2011: 136).
8. Autobiographical novels tend to be written at an older age. The fact that remarkably many young East Germans engage with their biographical experience of the post-unification period in particular is an indication of the topicality and relevance of the subject.

REFERENCES

Ahbe, Thomas (2004): Die Konstruktion der Ostdeutschen. Diskursive Spannungen, Stereotype und Identitäten seit 1989. In: APuZ, B 41-41, pp. 12-22.

Ahbe, Thomas (2005): Der Osten aus der Sicht des Westens. Die Bilder von den Ostdeutschen und ihre Konstrukte. In: Bahrmann, Hannes; Links, Christoph (ed.): Am Ziel vorbei. Die deutsche Einheit – Eine Zwischenbilanz. Berlin: Chr. Links, pp. 268-281.

Ahbe, Thomas; Gries, Rainer; Schmale, Wolfgang (ed.) (2009): Die Ostdeutschen in den Medien. Das Bild von den Anderen nach 1990. Leipzig: Universitätsverlag.

Bahrmann, Hannes (2005): Gestörte Kommunikation. Die Umgestaltung der Medienlandschaft. In: idem; Links, Christoph (ed.), Am Ziel vorbei. Die deutsche Einheit – Eine Zwischenbilanz. Berlin: Chr. Links, pp. 251-267.

Baumann, Zygmunt (1992): Moderne und Ambivalenz. Das Ende der Eindeutigkeit. Hamburg.

Bessel, Richard; Jessen, Ralph (1996): Einleitung. Die Grenzen der Diktatur. In: eadem (ed.): Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 7-23.

Bittermann, Klaus (ed.) (1993): Der rasende Mob. Ossis zwischen Selbstmitleid und Barbarei. Berlin: Edition Tiamat.

Bluhm, Michael; Jacobs, Olaf (2016): Wer beherrscht den Osten? Ostdeutsche Eliten ein Vierteljahrhundert nach der deutschen Vereinigung. Universität Leipzig: Institut für Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft. https://www.mdr.de/heute-im-osten/wer-beherrscht-den-osten-studie-100-downloadFile.pdf (accessed October 27, 2019).

BMWi (2018): Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der deutschen Einheit 2018. https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Neue-Laender/jahresbericht-zum-stand-der-deutschen-einheit-2018.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

Bürklin, Wilhelm; Rebenstorf, Hilke u.a. (1997): Eliten in Deutschland. Rekrutierung und Integration. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.

Busch, Ulrich (2015): Zwischen Konvergenz und Divergenz. Zur Entwicklung privater Vermögen in Ost- und Westdeutschland. In: Berliner Debatte Initial 26, book 2, pp. 50-65.

CHE Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (2018): CHECK – Universitätsleitung in Deutschland. http://www.che.de/downloads/CHECK_Universitaetsleitung_in_Deutschland.pdf (accessed October 27, 2019).

Destatis (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und des Landes) (2015) 25 Jahre deutsche Einheit. Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Laender-Regionen/Regionales/Publikationen/Downloads/25-jahre-deutsche-einheit-0007028159004.

Elias, Norbert; Scotson, John L. (1990) Etablierte und Außenseiter. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Engler, Wolfgang; Hensel, Jana (2018): Wer wir sind. Die Erfahrung ostdeutsch zu sein. Berlin: Aufbau.

Feustel, Robert (2013): “Fremde Vertraute” – Bilder von Ostdeutschen im Kontext der Psychotherapie. In: Pates, Rebecca; Schochow, Maximilian (ed.) (2013): Der “Ossi”. Mikropolitische Studien über einen symbolischen Ausländer. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 129-149.

Foroutan, Naika; Kalter, Frank; Canan, Coscun; Simon, Mara (2019): Ost-migrantische Analogien I. Konkurrenz um Anerkennung. Berlin: DeZIm-Institut. https://www.dezim-institut.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Projekte/Ost- Migrantische_Analogien/Booklet_OstMig_1_web.pdf.

Foroutan, Naika (2019) Die post-migrantische Gesellschaft. Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie. Bielefeld: transcript.

Foucault, Michel (1981) ‘The Order of Discourse’ (inaugural lecture, Collège de France, 2 Dec. 1970,) trans. Ian McLeod. In: Robert Young (ed.), Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 48-78.

Gebauer, Ronald; Salheiser, Axel; Vogel, Lars (2017) Bestandsaufnahme. In: Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. (ed.): Ostdeutsche Eliten. Träume, Wirklichkeiten und Perspektiven. pp. 14-33. http://www.deutsche-

gesellschaft-ev.de/images/veranstaltungen/konferenzen-tagungen/2017-pb-ostdeutsche-eliten/Deutsche_Gesellschaft_eV_Broschuere_Ostdeutsche_Eliten.pdf (accessed October 27, 2019).

Grabka, Markus M. (2014): Private Vermögen in Ost- und Westdeutschland gleichen sich nur langsam an. In: DIW-Wochenbericht 40, pp. 959-966. https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.483776.de/14-40-4.pdf.

Hacker, Michael u. a. (2012): Dritte Generation Ost. Wer wir sind, was wir wollen. Berlin: Chr. Links.

Hall, Stuart (1992): The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power. In: idem; Gieben, Bram (ed.): Formations of Modernity. Cambridge, Oxford: XXXX, pp. XXX-XXX.

Hensel, Jana (2002): Zonenkinder. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Kollmorgen, Raj (2015): Aus dem Osten an die Spitze? In: Berliner Debatte Initial 26, book 2, pp. 17-33.

Kollmorgen, Raj (2017) Ostdeutsche in den Eliten. Problemdimensionen und Zukunftsperspektiven. In: Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. (ed.): Ostdeutsche Eliten. Träume, Wirklichkeiten und Perspektiven. pp. 54-66. http://www.deutsche-gesellschaft-ev.de/images/veranstaltungen/konferenzen-tagungen/2017-pb-ostdeutsche-eliten/Deutsche_Gesellschaft_eV_Broschuere_Ostdeutsche_Eliten.pdf (accessed October 27, 2019).

Kollmorgen, Raj; Hans, Torsten (2011) Der verlorene Osten. Massenmediale Diskurse über Ostdeutschland und die innere Einheit. In: Kollmorgen, Raj; Koch, Frank Thomas; Dienel, Hans-Liudger (ed.), Diskurse der deutschen Einheit. Kritik und Alternativen. Wiesbaden: VS, pp. 107-166.

Köpping, Petra (2018) Integriert doch erst mal uns! Eine Streitschrift für den Osten. Berlin: Chr. Links.

Kubis, Alexander; Schneider, Lutz (2008): Im Fokus: Wanderungsverhaltender Ostdeutschen, Wirtschaft im Wandel, ISSN 2194-2129, Leibniz-Institut fürWirtschaftsforschung Halle (IWH), Halle (Saale), Vol. 14, Iss. 4, pp. 128-131

Laak, Dirk van (2016): Die Deutschen erben immer mehr: Generation Goldener Löffel. In: Der Tagesspiegel, 30.072016. https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/die-deutschen-erben-immer-mehr-generation-goldener-loeffel/13942288.html (accessed October 27, 2019).

Linden, Michael (2003) Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder. In: Psychotherapy and Psychosomatic 72, pp. 195-202, DOI 10.1159/000070783.

Links, Christoph (2016): Das Schicksal der DDR-Verlage. Die Privatisierung und ihre Konsequenzen. Berlin: edition berolina.

Ludwig, Udo (2015): Der unvollendete Aufholprozess der ostdeutschen Wirtschaft. Gesamtwirtschaftliche Befunde. In: Berliner Debatte Initial 26, book 2, pp. 34-49.

Maaz, Hans-Joachim (1990): Der Gefühlsstau. Ein Psychogramm der DDR. Berlin: Argon.

Miethe, Ingrid (2002): Women's Movements in Unified Germany: Experiences and Expectations of East German Women. In: Feminist Movements in a Globalization World: German and American Perspectives, edited by Silke Roth and Sara Lennox. AICGS Humanities Volume 11, Washington D.C.: AICGS, pp. 43-59.

Miethe, Ingrid (2005): Dominanz und Differenz. Verständigungsprozesse zwischen feministischen Akteurinnen aus Ost- und Westdeutschland. In: Schäfer, Eva u. a. (ed.), Irritation Ostdeutschland. Geschlechterverhältnisse in Deutschland 13 Jahre nach der Wende. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, pp. 218-234.

Miethe, Ingrid (2008): From "Strange Sisters" to "Europe's Daughters"? European Enlargements as a Chance for Women's Movement in East and West Germany. In: Roth, Silke (ed.), Gender Politics in the Expanding European Union. Mobilization, Inclusion, Exclusion. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 118-136.

Miethe, Ingrid (2014): Dominanz und Hierarchie begegnen. Interkulturelle Dimensionen deutsch-deutscher Biografiearbeit. In: Ernst, Christian (ed.): Geschichte im Dialog? ‚DDR-Zeitzeugen' in Geschichtskultur und Bildungspraxis. Schwalbach: Wochenschau, pp. 128-141.

Miethe, Ingrid; Ely, Bianca (2016): "Ihr stellt die Fragen der Westdeutschen". Ein Briefwechsel. In: Endres, Judith; Schulze, Mandy; Ely, Bianca (ed.), Wie war das für euch? Die Dritte Generation Ost im Gespräch mit ihren Eltern. Berlin: Chr. Links, pp. 49-63.

Pates, Rebecca (2013): Einleitung – Der "Ossi" als symbolischer Ausländer. In: eadem; Schochow, Maximilian (ed.) (2013): Der "Ossi". Mikropolitische Studien über einen symbolischen Ausländer. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 7-20.

Pates, Rebecca; Schochow, Maximilian (ed.) (2013): Der "Ossi". Mikropolitische Studien über einen symbolischen Ausländer. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Ragnitz, Joachim (2015): Ostdeutschland im Schatten gesamtwirtschaftlicher Entwicklungen. Kann die "Angleichung der Lebensverhältnisse" noch gelingen? In: Berliner Debatte Initial 26, book 2, pp. 5-16.

Richter, Frank (2018): Hört endlich zu! Weil Demokratie Auseinandersetzung bedeutet. Berlin: Ullstein.

Roethe, Thomas (1999): Arbeiten wie bei Honecker, leben wie bei Kohl. Ein Plädoyer für das Ende der Schonfrist. Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn.

Rommelspacher, Birgit (1998): Dominanzkultur. Texte zu Fremdheit. Berlin: Orlanda.

Rommelspacher, Birgit (2002): Anerkennung und Ausgrenzung. Deutschland als multikulturelle Gesellschaft. Frankfurt a. M., New York: Campus.

Schneider, Lutz (2005): Ost-West-Binnenwanderung: Gravierender Verlust an Humankapital. In: Wirtschaft im Wandel 10/2015, pp. 309-314.

Sinn, Hans-Werner (1994): Magere Erlöse. In: Wirtschaftswoche 1-2, January 7, 1994, pp. 36-40.

Vogel, Lars (2017): (Ostdeutsche) Politische Eliten zwischen Integration und Repräsentation. In: Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. (ed.), Ostdeutsche Eliten. Träume, Wirklichkeiten und Perspektiven. pp. 45-53. http://www.deutsche-gesellschaft-ev.de/images/veranstaltungen/konferenzen-tagungen/2017-pb-ostdeutsche-eliten/Deutsche_Gesellschaft_eV_ Broschuere_Ostdeutsche_Eliten.pdf (accessed October 27, 2019).

Vortmann, Heinz; Goebel, Jan; Krause, Peter; Wagner, Gert G. (2013): Zur Entwicklung des Preisniveaus in Ost- und Westdeutschland – Zugleich eine Dokumentation verschiedener Preisniveau-Zeitreihen für das geteilte und das vereinigte Deutschland. DIW-Discussion Papers 1269, https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.415388.de/dp1269.pdf.

Zick, Andreas/ Küppers, Rechtsextreme und menschenfeindliche Einstellungen. In: Virchow, Fabian/ Langebach, Martin/ Häusler, Alexander (2016), Handbuch Rechtsextremismus. Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 83-113.