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## Stasi Brainwashing in the GDR 1957 - 1990

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Stasi Brainwashing in the GDR 1957 - 1990

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
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Master of Arts  
in  
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by  
Jacob H. Solbrig  
B.A. Louisiana State University, 2007

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the methods used by the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS), more commonly known as the Stasi, or East German secret police, for extraction of information from citizens of the German Democratic Republic for the purpose of espionage and covert operations inside East Germany, as it pertains to the deliberate brainwashing of East German citizens. As one of the most efficient intelligence agencies to ever exist, the Stasi's main purpose was to monitor the population, gather intelligence, and collect or turn informants. The scope and breadth of the techniques and data compiled for use by the Stasi were exhaustive, and the repercussions of their use are still being felt and discovered twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This study aims to show the lasting effects brainwashing had on former informants and the Stasi's victims.

*Keywords: cold war, European history*

## Introduction

The Staatssicherheit, or Stasi, were the state security police force for East Germany. Described as the most effective and oppressive intelligence agency that has ever existed, its motto was “the Shield and Sword of the Party” referring to the communist *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, (SED). It lasted from February, 1950 to January, 1990 and employed over 274,000 people, lasting for 40 years. The Stasi brainwashed citizens of the German Democratic Republic to collect incriminating information and to act as spies for the SED. Ultimately the Stasi packaged these deeds to the public as a patriotic duty for the greater good—but it was anything but patriotic. In many cases the relationships between Stasi agents and their informers blurred the line, with agents posing as friends and colleagues and even lovers.<sup>1</sup> The Stasi carried out Government Sanctioned observation on the people of the GDR for over 30 years with the intention of discouraging dissent amongst the population, manipulating, and ultimately controlling the minds of its citizens. In an elaborate scheme of information collection and archiving, Stasi officials fed fragments of data back to the State Security Ministry. Using the most contemporary evidence available in English, the data reported here points to the fact that brainwashing had lasting effects still felt by Germans today.

Tensions ran high between the East and the West early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dating back to the period after World War I when major world powers began to redraw sovereign borders. The Berlin Wall became the Cold War line dividing Germany physically and ideologically, and spies increasingly played an important role for the East German government. Stasi members were instructed to use coercion methods learned from their Russian counterparts; since the 1950s they

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<sup>1</sup> Barbra Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany: Stasi Informers and their Impact on Society* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 60-62.

had been adapting many of their strategies.<sup>2</sup> Fearing the outbreak of another war, hard liners pushed to keep operations in East Germany as covert as possible, retreating into a Cold War stance favored by the Kremlin, which had long sanctioned covert operations when dealing with the West.<sup>3</sup>

During the Korean War (1950-1953) American soldiers were captured by the Chinese and subjected to various methods of coercive indoctrination which helped to explain why they defected from the United States. After being interviewed upon their return to the United States, it was discovered that they had been victims of experimental psychological techniques. They had been brainwashed. John Frankenheimer's (1962) film *The Manchurian Candidate*, and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), depict such brainwashing techniques.<sup>4</sup> The portrayal of Rubashov's recollections during Stalin's purges indicates the extent to which he was steeped in Communist indoctrination. This illustrates that the Soviets were experimenting with such techniques before World War II to try to control the words and ideas of their captives as well. This is the first time that the expression used to describe the concept of thought reform we have come to know as "brainwashing" in the West.<sup>5</sup>

The term brainwashing has many permutations. Among them are "coercive indoctrination," "thought reform," "menticide," "psychological warfare," or "brain warfare," and "programming," to name just a few. Scholars use them interchangeably to describe the same phenomena of techniques developed to control a victim's actions or reactions.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes

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<sup>2</sup> Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage Against the West* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *The Manchurian Candidate*, Directed by: John Frankenheimer. New York: MGM, 1962, VOD.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 174-175.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1989), 4-6.

of this paper the author uses the term Brainwashing to describe all tactics used by the Stasi for mass manipulation.

By controlling the information they were given, East German people were subject to the will of their Stasi oppressors. Consequently, life in East Germany became like living in an elaborate correctional facility. It was no secret that the Kremlin wanted to remake East Germany as the model of a socialist utopia. When the Second World War was over, the Soviets attempted to capture as many political and scientific minds as possible. They employed them to serve the Communist cause. Under Stalin a series of reforms occurred, reshaping the paramilitary organs of the Soviet Union's "All-Russian Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage," or VCheka or Chekists. The Cheka were renamed the State Political Directorate, or (O)GPU, from 1922 - 1934, and later still, the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB), and the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD).<sup>7</sup> After World War II, they became separate operating entities once more under ministry titles: Ministry for Internal Affairs (MVD) and Ministry for State Security (MGB). Their sole purpose was to prevent seditious activity with a by-any-means-necessary stance towards counterrevolution: one internally (MVD), and one with a more adaptive role (MGB, later the KGB).<sup>8</sup>

In order to investigate Brainwashing and the Stasi the research began with basic ideas about the way each individual thinks about the self as within Sigmund Freud's psychological principles. The beginning of the concept of Brainwashing as we know it today had its foundation in World War II, where collective guilt was harnessed to systemically repress the German people by the Communists, according to Ilya Zemtsov. Robert Lifton states that after the

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<sup>7</sup> Ilya Zemtsov, *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 13.



Korean War, American prisoners of war were affected by a kind of thought reform imposed on them by Chinese captors, changing their basic fundamental notions of ideology and patriotism. Edward Hunter coined the phrase “brainwashing” to refer to this thought reformism.

Next it was significant to gain a cursory examination of how the Stasi operated as a police organ within the GDR As depicted by Gary Bruce. Susan Carruthers alludes to the fact that the KGB (or Committee for State Security) was experimenting with the same kind of mental torture methods in tandem with the Chinese, which were in turn passed on to the GDR as the successor to *Real Working Socialism*. According to Oleg Kalugin the KGB taught operatives at the Leningrad in the Security Ministry’s Institute of Foreign Languages. These operatives would then be sent to other countries to carry out specific orders, anything from monitoring persons of interest to recruiting confidential informants. The Stasi were taught how to utilize the same methods according to Richard Condon in *Beyond the Wall*. Barbra Miller states that these informants would then be compensated with gifts, better jobs, and scholastic opportunities. The informants would meet discreetly with Stasi personnel to discuss the activities of targets. Hubertus Knabe and Siegmur Faust were just such people, and have given lectures to the effect that these intelligence operatives would follow them around and coerce people they knew into informing on them to the Stasi, including best friends and lovers.

*The Lives of Others* by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck depicts the controversial story of a writer that is monitored by the Stasi to find out if he is writing dissident literature that is considered treasonous to the East German State. This was a tactic used politically to prevent intellectuals from publishing revolutionary literature as written by Christ Wolf and described by Julia Hell in *Post Fascist Fantasies* and Siegmur Faust in his *Poor Germany Papers*. The tactics that were used were not simply *gaslighting*, or sowing seeds of doubt in the mind of the

individual or targeted groups, but a series of systemic repression tactics including interfering in personal relationships, preventing social mobility, blackmail, and detaining persons thought to have seditious or revolutionary ideas indefinitely, to name just a few. News and journal articles including those published in *Der Spiegel*, *Handelsblatt Global*, and *Der Nervenarzt* provided the much needed medical data and supporting information used to update perceptions of brainwashing herein.

### **Stasi Brainwashing Techniques**

Since the members of the East German Ministry for State Security were taught and trained by former NKGB agents, it is safe to assume that the Stasi had learned their interrogation techniques from the Soviets. They even shared the same name. In fact they learned their techniques so well that by 1958 they were operating well enough to take over themselves.<sup>9</sup> The German Democratic Republic was founded on October 7, 1949, and Walter Ulbricht, the General Secretary of the SED played an important role in its restructuring. The Stasi was formed a few months later on February 8, 1950. After an uprising in 1953, following Stalin's death, the Kremlin turned to Ulbricht's SED to ensure the future of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Social Democrats had been urged to merge with the Communists beneath one umbrella. Adhering to a Soviet-imposed ideology, the SED began to take a hard line in East Germany, with Ulbricht as its leader.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, Stalin hoped that the two Germanys would be reunited under a socialist government. By 1952 it became clear that German reunification would not happen and the

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<sup>9</sup> Lally Weymouth, "East Germany's Dirty Secret" *Washington Post*, (October 14, 1990) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/10/14/east-germanys-dirty-secret/09375b6f-2ae1-4173-a0dc-77a9c276aa4b/?utm\\_term=.078ace566ade](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/10/14/east-germanys-dirty-secret/09375b6f-2ae1-4173-a0dc-77a9c276aa4b/?utm_term=.078ace566ade). Last Accessed 10/27/2017.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Millington, *State, Society and Memories of the Uprising of 17 June 1953 in the GDR* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 172-175.

GDR's gravitation towards socialism was becoming clear, despite opposition. Ulbricht's Stalinist approach to forced industrialization and collective farming were at odds with the West's notions of a capitalist economy under a republican government. 360,000 East Germans fled to West Germany in 1952 alone.<sup>11</sup> Stalin's death did not hinder Ulbricht from continuing a policy of a state-run monopoly on industry. Despite the poor quality of goods produced, Ulbricht continued to press on with his dictatorial governmental style. The same was also true of the police and security ministries of the GDR citizenry. They adopted the Communist style of dress, armaments, and even their shield insignia resembled that of their Soviet counterparts.<sup>12</sup> Ulbricht deposed Wilhelm Zaisser, the first Minister of State Security of the GDR, and replaced him with Ernst Wollweber, after a failed attempt by Zaisser in the early 1950s to become the General Secretary of the SED.

It is no surprise that in this culture of paranoia Ulbricht wanted to create a strong security force to combat counterrevolution. He knew the tenuous nature of the government of which he was the figurehead. He was deeply suspicious of his East German people, a people which in his eyes had allowed Hitler to come to power.<sup>13</sup> As a result the Stasi utilized every trick in the book to spy upon the GDR to prevent anything from occurring which they did not know about, and that might endanger the Ulbricht regime. Ulbricht embraced a sense of unified national guilt as a vital tool, which made it easier not to question the motives of the Stasi.<sup>14</sup>

It is this collective national guilt that the Stasi tapped into to control the minds of East Germans. In 1946 at the conclusion of World War II, the German people were in a vulnerable

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Kitchen, *A History Of Modern Germany 1800–2000* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 329

<sup>12</sup> Victor Sebestyen, *1946: The Making of the Modern World* (New York: Pantheon, 2014), 120.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sebestyen, *1946*, 121.

psychological state. Their economy was shattered and there was the humiliation of being forced to pay reparations once again. In this state of general malaise, East Germans were in no position to take issue with the Soviet system taking root in their occupied land. Paradoxically, SED members held mixed emotions about the socialist system, simultaneously praising and condemning it for its merits as well as its fundamental flaws.<sup>15</sup> The Communists had been liberators in WWII. This gave them the right to enact their own system of control in the occupation zone in East Germany. At first the border between East and West was tense but fluid. Then, on August 1, 1961, the order came down from Nikita Khrushchev for the Berlin Wall to be built. Now reunification of Germany was to be in the far distant future.<sup>16</sup>

As the Cold War progressed, the tensions with the West increased. This allowed the Stasi to consolidate power in the hands of SED party elites, showing favoritism towards those individuals who pledged service to the party. Those GDR citizens who aided the Stasi with information on would-be defectors and dissidents were given better jobs, educational opportunities, and better pay in an increasingly troubled economic environment.<sup>17</sup> Between the 1970s and 1980s Stasi officials recruited large numbers of confidential informants to do their dirty work of monitoring and informing on friends, neighbors, and relatives of East German people, who had been branded as troublemakers or enemies of the party.<sup>18</sup> This phenomenon was most famously depicted in the film by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck *The Lives of Others* (2006). Actor Ulrich Mühe playing the fictional Stasi G man Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler

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<sup>15</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Klaus Wiegrefe, "The Khrushchev Connection Who Ordered the Construction of the Berlin Wall?" *Der Spiegel Online*, May 30, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-khrushchev-connection-who-ordered-the-construction-of-the-berlin-wall-a-628052.html>. Last accessed 08/22/2017.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany*, 47-48.

“gaslights” a dissident writer and his partner while simultaneously aiding them.<sup>19</sup> The portrayal is theatrical and poignant. Wiesler is representative of a faceless police state that is both familiar, and terrifyingly ever-present. He represents both the brainwasher and the brainwashed, while the paranoid minister himself mistrusts his own men.<sup>20</sup>

Desperate for hard currency, the GDR resorted to selling its own citizens with liberal leanings to the West. Many prominent writers and intellectuals gained their freedom from the GDR in this manner, and helped the SED prop up its regime longer with the influx of Western cash in exchange for the release of hostages.<sup>21</sup> Such a person was Siegmund Faust, a writer turned political dissident who famously penned the much circulated *Poor Germany* papers. The regime locked him up for his dangerous ideologies for a total of 4 years in 2 separate terms ending in the early 1970s. Faust was ardently against the isolation of the GDR. He was not alone, and several other influential writers such as Christa Wolf, Wolfgang Harich, Helmut Flieg, and Wolf Biermann all suffered persecution, exile, and even imprisonment within the GDR. All the way up to its abrupt end in 1989, the SED via the Stasi continued to control free thought and the press in East Germany.

An elaborate network of informants (including their case files and Stasi agents who handled them) were discovered in the Stasi archives beginning in the early 1990s detailing the largest espionage operation in existence to date. Those citizens who lived in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall were conflicted about their experiences. Some were angry about what

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<sup>19</sup> Robin Stern, “Are You Being Gaslighted?,” *Psychology Today*, May 19, 2009. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/power-in-relationships/200905/are-you-being-gaslighted>. Last Accessed: 9/11/2017.

<sup>20</sup> *The Lives of Others*. Directed by Florian von Donnersmarck. Berlin: Wiedemann & Berg Filmproduktion, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Arte, and Creado, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Siegmund Faust, *Poor Germany: How Did I Manage My Political Trauma? With Artistic Means*. From the Private Papers of Siegmund Faust (Berlin: Self Published 1974).

they had experienced, others felt a sense of “Ostalgie,” or longing to return to the way things were under communism.<sup>22</sup> This is depicted in the 2003 Movie *Goodbye Lenin!* This film shows a young man who must keep his fragile mother from finding out that East Germany no longer exists because she was so steeped in Communist Rhetoric the GDR that it would cause her psychological trauma, should she find out that Communism no longer existed in Germany. Although a parody, the film represents a psychological difficulty in adapting to the changes that had taken place around her after she recovers from a coma.<sup>23</sup> Like Katrin Saß in the film, former citizens of the GDR had been brainwashed by their government into believing that “real working socialism” was the answer to capitalism in the West by tapping into their collective unconscious desire to believe in it. The SED had used a strategy of brainwashing the GDR to continue its own fragile existence, with the Stasi as its enforcing arm even in the face of its dissolution.

Despite the poorly aging infrastructure and bloated bureaucratic systems, the SED failed to see its own demise, or refused to acknowledge its reality. As a result the Stasi archive is filled with overstuffed files from every citizen that had at any time lived in or had visited the GDR. What is most significant is how indelibly the Stasi’s effect on the GDR’s citizens was. Where there is mistrust between the people and their government there is room for criticism, but those voices had been all but silenced until their government had crumbled. Not until the wall started coming down in 1989 were people able to talk about what East German life was like. The GDR regime could not, for example, any longer prevent the influx of Western television programming into the country. This alone began an entire revolution in ideas driven by the instant gratification of modern media. The Stasi’s memory is still very fresh in the minds of the East German people.

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<sup>22</sup> Karen Leeder, *Rereading East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Goodbye Lenin!*. Directed by: Wolfgang Becker, (Berlin: Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Arte, 2003), VOD.

It is how the former GDR residents have dealt with this past that is the focus of the testimonials selected to highlight examples of brainwashing.

During the Cold War East Germans would have felt the yoke of Communism. Choices, ideas, and sense of self would have all been determined by the whims of the socialist state. Privileges, including education and access to work, all depended upon loyalty to the party. Those who resisted the state were treated as seditious and sent to jail. Seditious acts included such things as slandering the state, refusal to cooperate with a state security official, and conspiracy to leave the GDR. Many intellectuals did not appreciate the state monitoring their every move. Writers-turned-dissidents wanted to expose the hypocrisy. Those who did were imprisoned for harboring open thoughts of treason against the SED.<sup>24</sup>

Brainwashing brings to mind corruption of one's personal beliefs or values. Some may think of psychological and physical torture, political re-education, or indoctrination against a person's will. Many people's first frame of reference for this phenomenon, "*The Manchurian Candidate*," is in connection with 1950's anticommunism. However, the definition is older than that, having been developed by writers and theologians before World War II. Edward Hunter, the American war correspondent wrote articles on fascism in Europe while working for the Office of Strategic Services in the late 1940s, the predecessor to the CIA during World War II.<sup>25</sup> In his articles was the first time that the term "brainwashing" was used to describe what had happened to American troops during the Korean War.

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<sup>24</sup> Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis History and the Literature of East German* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1997), 32-37.

<sup>25</sup> Marcia Holmes, "Edward Hunter and the Origins of Brainwashing," *Hidden Persuaders BBC*, May 26, 2017, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/blog/hunter-origins-of-brainwashing/>. Last Accessed 10/14/2017.

In 1953 several U.S. Army Korean War POWs defected to China, leading to an American debate as to what caused men to abandon their country, and what ideological consequences followed. Explanations of brainwashing coined by Hunter and expounded upon by Robert Lifton were used to describe how totalitarian governments appeared to be able to methodically indoctrinate POWs. Lifton, author of *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China* (1961), was an early ground breaker in the study of coercive persuasion, offering insights as to why and how people can be controlled. He studied the secret to this unethical abuse of the human psyche. He was cautious of using the term brainwashing loosely though, arguing that no human being can ever be completely controlled.<sup>26</sup>

Lifton defines some of the more noxious methodologies used by the Chinese; he showed how various processes he defined—including milieu control, sacred language, mystical manipulation, the supremacy of doctrine over experience and the exercise of total power over life and death—that would all leave the victim profoundly vulnerable to indoctrination. Lifton did not believe, however, that any surefire or quick method would achieve desired results, and that any or all earmarks for the behavior of terrorists can be just as easily identified in any person on their best or worst days.<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud demonstrated in his psychoanalytical theories that no one person is internally the same as another, but we cannot with any certainty show that any set of circumstances yields a specific outcome every time.<sup>28</sup> Therefore brainwashing takes time, no one can be sure how long, and there are varying degrees of success, but the phenomena exists whereby a person can be persuaded through such processes to carry out orders.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Marks and Daniel Pick, “Lessons from the 1950s On Mind Control,” *The World Today* (March, 2017), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/twt/lessons-mind-control-1950s>. Last Accessed 9/1/2017.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “Mental Qualities,” Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (London: Read Books, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 438-441.



Imagine being imprisoned for having written a book that criticizes the way your city functions, that one does not like a politician or one make an unfavorable comment about someone's point of view. In America, someone would not have been arrested for this. That was the life German writer and activist Siegmar Faust found himself in when he was imprisoned by the Stasi. Faust spent 742 days in prison in total including his time in Leipzig. 400 or so of those days were spent in a "tiger cage."<sup>30</sup> Sentenced for two years for "subversive incitement," Faust first spent his jail time in a tiger cage, a small dank cell, for 33 months between 1970 and 1973. His supporters in the prison smuggled him such things as typewriter ribbon and butter which were endlessly rationed. In his writings he expresses his ability to overcome his surroundings with literature. Citing famous authors Berthold Brecht and Walt Whitman, specifically *Song of Myself*, a favorite, he poetically waxes about the socialist utopia he initially helped build.<sup>31</sup> Released in March 1976, he never forgot the isolation, oppression, and helplessness of his political imprisonment. He went on to play an integral role in the nation's reunification.

Marxist ideals that Faust stood for as a student in the 1960s conflicted with the current state around him, having grown up in a time when change was happening for the rest of the world but not in the GDR. Throughout his imprisonment and his life in East Germany, he felt wronged by his country, as if they had injured themselves. Faust asserts: "Such conflicting socialist collective ideology influences the opposition—which was getting bigger every day. Real-Socialist and current policy, the Czechoslovak dream of "socialism with a human face" was born shortly before ... I was brutally brought in August 1968 by the troops of the Warsaw Pact States

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<sup>30</sup> Siegmar Faust, "Exposing a Nation of Spies," *Oslo Freedom Forum*, (July 12, 2010), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnh2r5FITCg> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnh2r5FITCg>. Last Accessed 9/2/2017.

<sup>31</sup> Siegmar Faust, *Poor Germany: How Did I Manage My Political Trauma?*, 8-12.

to burst (in words) with anger.”<sup>32</sup> Notably he means his writings, which he privately circulated amongst friends and cohorts.

Faust was imprisoned twice for undermining the state, as was often the case with political prisoners, the state would use sale of hostages to profit by selling them to the West as a valuable source of hard currency. The GDR had teetered on bankruptcy especially towards the end of its existence. On both accounts he had Erich Honecker, the head of the SED party, to thank for his release.

Once Honecker’s amnesty freed me after his arrival in power in 1972, before that, according to the sentence, it had been planned by the Stasi without time limitation... I was to stay in a closed psychiatric facility and pumped full of drugs, and the second time I was sent in 1976 to pressure the West for international assistance, and to procure an effective letter of my former prison mate... [Honecker]...dismissed me from prison after 401 days in a basement in solitary confinement because of "good behavior."<sup>33</sup>

Faust’s awareness of the rise of modern socialist thought put him at the forefront of revolution ideologically, along with minds like Christa Wolf, the renowned feminist writer, Gert Neumann, the controversial writer who was excluded from the SED, Wolfgang Hilbig, author and poet who made regular trips to the West with his visa, and Andreas Reimann, the postmodern-pop artist. From these sources we can deduce that the revolution that took place in East Germany was an ideological one, fraught with the complications that only ideas can manifest. This is the psychological realm in which the battles to end Cold War communism were fought, with words and ideas instead of bullets and bombs.

The theme of captivity dominates the literature and ideology of communism; to capture or be taken captive as a spy was an obsession of the game of cat and mouse played by Anti-

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

communists in the United States and the West. Communist East Berliners and coordinating apparatchik (the amalgamated Eastern Bloc states) were committed to sharing intelligence.<sup>34</sup> Evidenced by these numbers; “by 1975, 400 spies in socialist countries were communicating with their handlers in the West.”<sup>35</sup> It would not be out of the question then to say that there were operatives that were entrusted with the task of using any means necessary to secure their objectives; anything from stealing secret documents from the West to brainwashing Western citizens by indoctrinating them against their will. The cases of Cardinal Mindszenty and U.S. Businessman Robert Vogeler perfectly exemplify this. In Hungary in 1950, when Robert Vogeler delivered a confession to crimes which nobody believed he had committed, it was obvious he had been “handled.”<sup>36</sup>

There are accounts from numerous people behind the Iron Curtain of the mental anguish suffered by prisoners of the regime, every individual experience is different, but all narratives have the same archetypal themes throughout: narratives of escape, uncertainty, demoralization, isolation and hopelessness pervade these accounts. Crucial to this study also is the brainwashing component. As early as February 1950, when Robert Vogeler delivered his confession to a Budapest court, Americans noticed cracks in the Soviet system of justice. The year before the trial of the Catholic Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, in which he was condemned to the gulag was broadcast on television, appeared strangely similar, noting the peculiarity of a staunch anti-communist Cardinal confessing to draconian crimes in the same Budapest courtroom. By what means had the Communists extracted that confession from him as well? Anti-communists at the time were outraged about the possibility of the Cardinal not only serving a life sentence, but

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<sup>34</sup> Kristie Macrackis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi's Spy Tech World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 164-165.

<sup>35</sup> Kristie Macrackis, *Seduced by Secrets*, 256.

<sup>36</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 17.

potentially dying in a Communist prison gulag in the worst case scenario, which was sure to kill him all the quicker with its brutality.<sup>37</sup>

Vogeler's case was particularly controversial because he was regarded with esteem by colleagues in America as an upstanding member of the community, a patriot, the father of two, and a senior executive of IT & T Telephone Company. His task at the time of his abduction was to keep Red Army troops from looting IT & T's subsidiaries' property and exporting it back to the USSR. It would seem logical then that Mátyás Rákosi's Hungarian communist regime wished to steal IT & T's corporate property and offer no compensation, and Vogeler was in their way. Therefore, during his captivity he became a tool of the Communist state of Hungary to demonstrate to Washington that they possessed psychological methods capable of manipulating a man into saying whatever they wished on the stand. During his testimony, his wife who normally characterized him as animated and almost nervous of disposition noticed that he was strangely calm, and his delivery was flat. Vogeler's wife asserted that he was wholly not himself, and cited 85 instances where words were inserted into his mouth. Gerald Mokma, counselor of the U.S. Legation in Budapest, Hungary concluded in a confidential memorandum that neither drugs nor hypnosis alone accounted for his behavior. He was incarcerated in a cell too small to lie down. He was subjected to a combination of extreme fatigue, inadequate food and drink, and potentially loud noises. He may have possibly been hypnotized, and drugged. These psychological terror methods likely accounted for his behavior at trial, and the sheer mental exhaustion of such an assault. This was similar to the methods used by the Chinese communists on U.S. consul Angus Ward, who had spent thirteen months as "virtual prisoner" to the Red Guard under similar

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<sup>37</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 136-139.

circumstances, stating “You can’t blame Vogeler or anyone else for confessing after being kept in isolation and interrogated continuously for months.”<sup>38</sup>

Since the KGB had trained the Stasi in its core tactics, it should come as no surprise that the Stasi would engage in the same kinds of warfare during the Cold War as their Russian counterparts. Indeed the espionage tactics used by the Stasi in the GDR so closely mimicked KGB methods that agents had trouble telling which agency they belonged to.<sup>39</sup> There are examples from both sides, East and West of entrapment and staging of events to incarcerate persons for perceived crimes. Common tactics include leaving paper messages in drop points, holding impromptu meetings, and staging public assemblies to discourage individual thoughts, in a most incoherent struggle to avoid the watchful eyes of the Stasi agents.<sup>40</sup> Often the Stasi would employ the use of “legends” to entrap someone with a plausible story of events and purpose for one’s whereabouts during their spying endeavors.<sup>41</sup>

Distasteful and ruthless activities of the Stasi under the leadership of Erich Mielke set the tone for how spies would treat their captives, how they themselves would be treated in captivity, which they perceived as an all-out war.<sup>42</sup> “The Stasi was much, much worse than the Gestapo, if you consider only the oppression of its own people” states Simon Wiesenthal of Vienna, renowned Nazi hunter. “The Gestapo had 40,000 officials watching a country of 80 million, the Stasi employed 102,000 to control only 17 million.”<sup>43</sup> The numbers are ridiculous for such a small country when one considers how many people the government employed as

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<sup>38</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 141-148.

<sup>39</sup> Lally Weymouth, “East Germany’s Dirty Secret” *Washington Post*, (October 14, 1990) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/10/14/east-germanys-dirty-secret/09375b6f-2ae1-4173-a0dc-77a9c276aa4b/?utm\\_term=.078ace566ade](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/10/14/east-germanys-dirty-secret/09375b6f-2ae1-4173-a0dc-77a9c276aa4b/?utm_term=.078ace566ade). Last Accessed: 10/27/2017.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *The Stasi Legacy*, 97.

<sup>41</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The File* (New York: Random House, 1997), 133.

<sup>42</sup> John Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder: Westview, 1999), 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

well. The number changed also, swelling to an increase of 1 in 6 people the Stasi had in their employ including confidential informants known as informal collaborators (IMs). When these IMs became public in 1989, the door was opened to allow people to talk about being monitored continuously. Though many of the documents are accounted for, some especially highly damaging documents taken by former Stasi agents still remain missing. They were confiscated so as not to destroy or bury people who were not allowed to talk freely about what it was like to live or work in a place where you are always under surveillance.<sup>44</sup>

The effect of the information provided by some informants was hard for them to grasp themselves, especially during their interrogations. In some circumstances the data collected was seemingly innocuous as to appear as harmless conversation, but was in reality collected for much more nefarious purposes. There was no such thing as a casual conversation with the Stasi. One informer that Timothy Garton Ash referred to as Michaela reported potentially damning information about him to the Stasi that was surprisingly accurate based on the short conversations that she had with him. What she told the Stasi was also quantified by her, noting that he seemed like a spy. Later in his Stasi file they noted that she was “ready to do things that she was not ready to do at the outset.”<sup>45</sup> This meant that Michaela had advanced in some degree in her willingness to cooperate further with them in exchange for benefits such as freedom to travel abroad, financial compensation, and continued employment with the Stasi. Ash decided to publish the information not for defamatory purposes, but to show how easily a person is “drawn into a secret police net— and to show where such collaboration will lead you.”<sup>46</sup> When confronted, she was mortified at the things the Stasi had written about both him and she, noting

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<sup>44</sup> Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic. “Overview: Ministry of State Security” *bstu.bund.de*, <http://www.bstu.bund.de/EN/MinistryOfStateSecurity/Overview/inhalt.html>. Last Accessed: 9/9/2017.

<sup>45</sup> Garton Ash, *The File*, 123.

<sup>46</sup> Garton Ash, *The File*, 121-126.

that there was no excuse for such behavior in retrospect. Ash wrote at the time “In the GDR Mephistopheles may still work for the devil, but Dr. Faust now works for the Stasi.”<sup>47</sup>

When Ash spoke to another woman, Frau R., a wealthy German-Jewish woman who had lived through the purges enduring the treatment in internment camps he was surprised that she still believed in Communism. She had informed on him to the Stasi as well. Even after having lived through such harsh treatment in the camps, Frau R. was so brainwashed that she was “still convinced of the ultimate lightness and greatness of the Communist cause.” Later, after the Stasi read what he had written for *The Spectator* in London he was banned from re-entering the country and the Stasi asserted in his file that “in fact (he) was urging the spread of counterrevolutionary developments to the GDR.”<sup>48</sup> This was of course because as an outsider he had the ability to move freely and speak his mind which was to the Stasi very volatile to the continued strategy of preventing Western influences.

The truth about the Stasi in their brainwashing tactics is that they wove deceitful nets entrapping everyday people. Their stories are the legacy of the plight they endured. Stories such as that of a woman named Miriam, who at 16 years old was tortured with sleep deprivation for 10 days in order to coerce a confession from her that she was a spy after being caught by the Stasi she was sent to solitary confinement for attempting escape. Miriam was not actually a spy as was revealed when she was interrogated by the Stasi, which leads us to conclude that the Stasi wished to keep its citizens so paralyzed with the fear that leaving meant certain death or indefinite internment in prison, that they could in essence do as they pleased. As we know, fear

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<sup>47</sup> Garton Ash, *The File*, 159.

<sup>48</sup> Garton Ash, *The File*, 160.

can be a powerful tool of psychological warfare. They had made an example of her. The fallout of such a tragic event left Miriam traumatized, and stayed with her for the rest of her life.<sup>49</sup>

A book merchant from Schwerin, Jürgen Schmidt-Pohl, was arrested by the Stasi and beaten several times until he was blinded in his right eye for the crime of selling prisoners to West Germany. This was not atypical of Stasi tactics which would go to great lengths to prevent egress from the country, and profiteering from selling citizens was most definitely an intolerable offense. “Although the Stasi did, on occasion arrange for the murder of regime opponents, this was far more the exception than the rule. Instead, the Stasi employed more refined methods of control—extensive behind-the-scenes monitoring by a vast army of informants, psychological methods to disrupt individual lives, prisoner neglect, blackmail, and coercion—methods, no matter how distasteful, that do not equate with a shaft to the eye or, in real terms, to the brutal torture methods of the Gestapo.”<sup>50</sup>

Escaping communist oppression by fleeing to the West was by no means a new idea. One of the more famous example was Oksana Kasenkina, a school teacher, who on August 12, 1948, was removed from her hiding place to the Soviet consulate in New York by comrade Lomakin. Kasenkina, who some days earlier fled Manhattan to avoid repatriation, now had to appear in court. To the surprise of the court, and to everyone present, she attempted to escape again by leaping out of a third story window. Shortly thereafter the news of her jump triggered a wave of anti-communist rhetoric, in film, literature, and other media. She became the first Russian woman to publicly protest repatriation to the USSR, citing political reasons.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories From Behind the Berlin Wall* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 27.



Kasenkina's story became famous even in Russia, as exemplified by the reactions of other Soviet citizens wishing to escape the Iron Curtain. Two young men, Piotr Pirogov and Captain Anatoly Barsov, flew a Russian plane into French airspace and landed successfully, where they secured passage to America. Monitored and beset by agents, Pirogov shortly after desired to return to Russia. Possibly homesick and missing his wife and children, he attempted to persuade his comrade to go back as well to escape punishment from Soviet authorities. Whether actually penitent to the Russian state, or whether he was unable or unwilling to adapt to capitalism, his words bore the somber note of inevitability. Punishment certainly awaited them. Barsov's journal bespoke a mind that was a "tormented thrall to Communism."<sup>52</sup> What is not known is to what extent the two men were threatened by Soviet authorities. The powerful sway of torturing one's loved ones is the first notion that comes to mind, but as it came to be known, the Kremlin had spies all over New York.<sup>53</sup> Whatever missing information there was, threats possibly to their loved ones still in the USSR, coupled with their own xenophobic terror of the West, drove the two to return to the Soviet Union not long after. There can be no clearer depiction of the psychological grip created by the Soviet government over its own people than choosing a life of inglorious servitude to that oppressive place after having witnessed prosperity and freedom on an unfathomable scale in the United States.

There were some East Germans that believed it was their sworn duty to the GDR to protect the interests of the SED at all costs, to the point of near fanaticism. Border guards such as Gerhard Lehmann who served for over 40 years patrolled a 15 km section of the border watching for escapees. Lehmann reminisced in the mental fugue of *Ostalgie*, thinking of his beloved GDR. He viewed anyone who tried to flee East Germany as traitors. He often showed his war

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<sup>52</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 64.

<sup>53</sup> Kalugin, *The First Directorate*, 1994, 33.

medals for service to the GDR, stating: “A country is bled dry when the highly qualified leave just for the sake of better doctor’s pay, a better car, or the freedom to travel. They took the education they had received in East Germany; they went over to the other side to enjoy better economic opportunities. In my opinion they were traitors who had committed a crime.”<sup>54</sup>

Bernhard Fey, a man who suffered directly at the mercy of the very same border guard system, recalls having tried to climb a section of the fence to freedom with a friend when he was 19. He suffered directly at the hands of his captors who felt it was their duty to prevent escape from the GDR. His leg was shattered by a self-firing mechanism attached to the fence, but that was not all the damage he suffered. His speech has also been impaired by this incident. “I wanted to work in bridge construction, dam building, or tunnel building. That was almost impossible due to the restrictions in East Germany.” His friend was arrested immediately, and Fey was left to lie in a pool of his own blood with an East German soldier pointing a gun at him until he could be taken to a military hospital. Fey’s story served as a cautionary tale to prevent further defections which exemplifies how the Stasi used force to psychologically terrorize people into staying or believing escape to be impossible. He spent almost 2 years in prison afterwards. Fey’s story is not uncommon amongst defectors from the East. If caught there was a mandatory prison sentence followed by restricted access to jobs, schools, and other opportunities. Defecting or even attempting to defect was a punishable offence.<sup>55</sup>

Something similar to this happened to Fritz Schaarschmidt, when he applied to leave the former GDR years before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Later when the wall came down, he published his story on the internet. Publication caused controversy over the fact that he had

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<sup>54</sup> *The East German refugee and the border guard 20 years after the fall of the wall*, Alexander Fesit, Deutsche Welle News Group, (Nov. 18, 2009), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOF9EtFxr8o>. Last Accessed: 10/27/2017.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

named the school inspector who recommend that he not be permitted to study for a high school diploma. This had long and lasting effects on Schaarschmidt's life and his career path. His education was determined by a voluntary appeal to leave the GDR. He had not actually named any informants on his web site, and yet recently in 2008, he was sued by the school inspector who had cooperated with the Stasi. A lawyer began extorting money from Schaarschmidt, citing the defamatory nature of the web site. According to the logic, as explained by Johannes Weberling, a media lawyer, is that it will scare people away from the process and hopefully discourage further legal actions against either side.<sup>56</sup>

Any sort of criticism toward the SED was strictly forbidden and punishable by prison sentence, as evinced by the story of two Berlin architects: Bernd Ettl and Christian Enzmann talked about their experiences with the Stasi and the 2 year prison sentence they served between 1984 and 1986 for "defamation of the state." They assert that they were not part of any Western group of a seditious nature.

We grew up in the 50s and 60s and went to a school where simply having a pencil from another part of the world caused problems; where it was impossible to wear Levis (desirable if controversial American clothes). There was a distinct cultural border, with no alternative on offer. And you'd always be tested to find out if you respected this border. Always the same questions: Would you do this? Do you behave like that? Increasingly in the 1980s we tried to take part in international architectural competitions. We tried to do this through official channels but were denied this right. In October 1983 we decided to do something independently, and entered a competition without permission from the authorities. The aim of the competition was to design a memorial to the victims of the Third Reich who died here in Berlin.<sup>57</sup>

Their model depicted the SS and the Gestapo on one side flanked by the Berlin Wall, signifying the tyranny of the East German state. The rest of the monument allowed someone to

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<sup>56</sup> *A Right to Forget? How former Stasi agents continue to harass their victims*, Deutsche Welle News Group, (December 7, 2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5B5KRSvj2Q>. Last Accessed: 10/27/2017.

<sup>57</sup> Christian Enzmann and Bernd Ettl, Berlin Architectural Competition, *BersarinPlatz*, Berlin East, 1983.

walk through the various stages of the construction of a totalitarian regime. Their proposed installation would depict how a dictatorship such as the GDR would function.

Because their work was critical of the state, the architects suffered severe consequences for criticism of the GDR. The Stasi watched, took note of how they worked with the West, documented the case, and waited to see what they would do. The fact that they waited until July 1984 to make the arrest of the young architects speaks to how the Stasi clearly comprehended the political implications of the model, and interpreted it as provocation as seditious activity. Ettel continues,

They wanted to establish that we did the project to expose East Germany internationally as a dictatorship. That would be enough to charge us with slandering the state or even spying. They wanted a confession so that they could push up the sentence. The Stasi interrogated us for 24 hours and got nowhere. We were interrogated separately even though we were in the same building. Because I denied everything and gave nothing away, they tried solitary confinement to see how I would react to total isolation. They hoped I'd be more talkative when the next statement was taken. The interrogations went on for about 6 months. A warden collected me from my cell at 8 in the morning, after breakfast, and led me through the corridors, always in isolation. There were 800 people in this prison, but I never saw one of them.<sup>58</sup>

Hohenschönhausen was a former National Socialist Welfare complex which was designed for isolation and interrogation by the Stasi after conversion from a welfare kitchen following World War II. The Stasi ran their own private prisons and made their own arrests, independent of the police, and frequently used the complex for lengthy repetitious inquiries that could last days or months. The prison was initially characterized by the deplorable conditions when the Stasi took over its functions. Enzmann described a typical Stasi interrogation room:

Behind the door was a chair for the person being questioned, it has the feel of an ordinary East German living room, the wallpaper, the floor and furnishings are all in the normal everyday style. Maybe that's why the interrogators felt comfortable here, it was like home. Only later in the normal prison did I come across other people who were in prison

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<sup>58</sup> Barbara Miller, *How the DDR Stasi Worked Interviews*, Stasi Documentary (Apr 13, 2015 from 1997), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2ezHKxo8Ws>. Last Accessed: 10/12/2017.

for all kinds of reasons: because they'd written to the Pope, met up with a forbidden writer, all kinds of reasons. So the (Berlin) wall wasn't just a wall that stopped people from leaving, it made all kinds of other things impossible as well.<sup>59</sup>

Under Stalin, terror became the most significant characteristic of the Communist dictator's secret police. Checkists directed attention not only towards actual or perceived opponents of the Soviet regime, but against millions of innocent citizens, and even genuine supporters of communism. "I thought after having been detained by the Stasi that this system would exist in perfection for another 1000 years. I didn't know what was happening in the background and so I was sure nothing was going to change. I knew there were people who were supporting and carrying the system."<sup>60</sup> In retrospect, Thomas Lukow says that communism was a disaster, and that even the idea of it was unthinkable. "It was a system that enforced its ideas in an immoral way. It used violence – terror and violence. So you have to ask, what can be good about this? If you let a whole continent, Eastern Europe, degenerate economically, ecologically, and morally, and even the idea is no longer suitable."<sup>61</sup> Lukow now tours schools teaching children what really happened in the GDR as a warning to what can happen if governments do not act in the interest of their own people.

Dr. Frank Eigenfeld, another victim of Stasi abuse tactics shared how the Stasi repeatedly asked the same questions, presumably to make him crack under the pressure. Two facts became apparent in Eigenfeld's interview concerning his run-ins with the Stasi; that he was first monitored constantly, resulting in the second fact, the "gaslighting" effect, the phenomenon of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Memories of a Former Stasi Prisoner, *Euronews*, (November 7, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3le69-Daok>. Last Accessed 10/27/2017.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

continually insisting that there is something wrong with the victim's behavior causes them to gradually lose their grip on sanity.<sup>62</sup>

It was gaslighting that affected his subconscious, and since the Stasi wanted to know everything, he knew they would do whatever it took to get it. In his words: "I was not a human being to them... more like a test subject. I was their enemy, and they wanted to know all about the people I knew, it was one of the most important questions to them, every time if they caught me it was the same procedure, but I didn't know what they really wanted. They wanted to know everything about everyone I knew, and that was the major concern during each interrogation, but they were always unsuccessful."<sup>63</sup> Based on his account one can tell the procedure of capture and release was time consuming, and yet the more facts amassed, the clearer the picture became. A state security force so large, in such a small country would have eyes and ears literally everywhere. Confidential informants existed in every building in East Germany.<sup>64</sup>

Andreas Sinakowski, the novelist, worked as an IM for the Stasi for many years. He was first introduced to the world of intelligence gathering having met an older male friend at a party. After which he began regular dialogues with the Stasi agent. "We met often, had dinner together a lot. He grew into a very fatherly friend. He was also a substitute for the father I never had, and of course I wanted to please this father. I think it was about a year and a half later that he told me he worked for the Ministry for State Security. And from then on, for me, the Ministry was ...*him*. East Germany was a society of shortages. And right in the middle of that society sat (the Stasi). And they could get things for you; places at university, training, places jobs were all dependent on your political integrity, so you needed references. And of course these references could be written by the Ministry. So, 'If you give me the information, I'll write you the reference, and you will get the job of your dreams.' Every officer appealed to the vulnerabilities of the people he had before him. It started when he came to me one day and said, 'For God's sake, I have a big problem on my hands.' And that as a friend, a *false* friend, but you only learn that later. 'There's a meeting taking place and we have absolutely nobody to send. And the day

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<sup>62</sup> Robin Stern, "Are You Being Gaslighted?" *Psychology Today*, (May 19, 2009,) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/power-in-relationships/200905/are-you-being-gaslighted>. Last Accessed 9/1/2017.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Eigenfeld, Stasi Questionnaire, Email message to the author, 10/16/2016.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Wensierski, "East German Snitching Went Far Beyond the Stasi," *Der Spiegel Online*, (July 10, 2015) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/east-german-domestic-surveillance-went-far-beyond-the-stasi-a-1042883.html> Last Accessed 10/27/2017.

after tomorrow I have to tell my boss what went on.’ And I said ‘well then I’ll go along for you.’ Just like that. Afterwards we met for coffee and I told him what happened. It was shockingly normal, and it became more and more so. And it was built up systematically from there, as a young author, I was sent to cocktail parties, foreign embassies and so on. Then I actually began to enjoy speculating about these people—what kind of mind do they have? It was exciting. It’s the old pact between Faust and Mephisto: Give me your soul and I’ll show you things you would otherwise never see. And I was very conscious of that, and therefore the guilt is that much greater.”<sup>65</sup>

The guilt that Sinakowski refers to is the complicity of belonging to both camps: those who were indelibly a part of the Stasi’s informant network, and those that were a part of a resistance movement which characterized the rest of East Germany, those who believed that change would come, and it would come from the West. Eventually when change did come, those informants who gave away their neighbors, friends, relatives, even loved ones felt the weight of their deeds ever more so, having to confront the former members of the Stasi, returned friend and loved ones, and even personal guilt of having been complicit in accusations against more outspoken members of their community.

Religious freedom was not allowed to interfere with SED party politics with regard to the free thinking community. No member of the GDR was allowed to communicate with the Catholic Church directly for the thirty odd years during the Stasi’s reign in East Germany. For example, one informer who wished to remain anonymous was born into a Catholic family in the 1960s. There was one of the few Catholic families in the area of East Germany. The Stasi took an interest in her after she refused the rite of passage of *Jugendweihe*: a Christian youth ceremony similar to confirmation that was commonly practiced in East Germany. This sent up a red flag for the Stasi to watch her because it meant she felt she grew up in a diaspora. She described her life as characterized by inner and outer conflict. The Stasi watched her and

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<sup>65</sup> Barbara Miller, “How the DDR Stasi Worked Interviews,” Stasi Documentary (Apr 13, 2015 from 1997), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2ezHKxo8Ws>. Last Accessed: 10/12/2017.

thought of her as a symbol of religious rebellion in East Germany, a rebellious influence which could not be pursued, even after many years of terror and abuse. They stunted her ability to progress at work and her avenues of career success. Eventually her husband and she parted because her religious leanings destroyed his career goals. She then had a relationship with an Algerian, desperately tried to become a Buddhist, and applied to leave the country. Her life got successively worse after that. She was implicated in an escape plot, and forced to work as an informant, made to sign an oath of silence, and forced to be an agent of the Stasi from 1985 until 1989 under penalty of imprisonment.<sup>66</sup> This was the type of social engineering routinely heard in the testimony of Stasi IMs, they wanted to control everything, and it was a very potent strategy.

We recognize 25 years later that the circumstances of the GDR could only have come about because of the sociopolitical atmosphere after World War II. Antifascism being the tone of that day, we should be very certain in understanding the issues that faced the founders of the GDR, that no one wanted the National Socialist Party to be reborn. In particular we must be careful with the locus of power that is allocated to agencies whose job it is to monitor the people. The true lessons of the GDR are those of rhetoric as well. Socialism sounded like the answer to fascism, but the ideology of Communism is dangerous because it excludes individuals' needs and rights in order to accomplish the will of the people. For example Stalin's purges killed millions, whereas democracy unites individuals in commerce respectively. Although not everyone participates in capitalism, that is also a choice by the individual.

Over time the Stasi spread its influence and developed techniques aided by technology and information.<sup>67</sup> With this development of its capabilities inside and outside the GDR the Stasi flexed its muscle on the people almost constantly. The Stasi figured out that they could use

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Macrackis, *Seduced by Secrets*, 156-157.



people unofficially for information gathering which changed the role of the common citizen to act as a cell inside their own country.<sup>68</sup> The new police apparatus forced its citizens to act as informants. Their informants installed bugs, hidden cameras, and motion detectors. The Stasi manipulated citizens to do these tasks in exchange for small gifts, favors, and lump sums of cash.<sup>69</sup>

The East German Government allowed the criminal violation of privacy to take place so that they could develop psychological weaponry to use against the West. The SED mobilized its citizens to act as spies in a mosaic of officious tactics designed to give no one person a whole picture of the Stasi's strategies. Politically and socially, repression became the drum beat that East Germans were forced to step to in Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honnecker's Germany. Repression was a serious problem beginning in the 1960s in East Berlin, as evinced by the inability to speak about the wall, about social change, or defame the regime or the SED in any open sense.<sup>70</sup>

The proof of the Stasi's mission: all-pervasive spying efforts to control every facet of life in the GDR lies in the archive at the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records, which houses all the records on every citizen of interest to the former GDR that was not already destroyed by former agents under Honnecker before reunification could be completed. The unanimous narrative of East Germany has been accepted into common knowledge that the Stasi spied on its own people. They were caught red handed shredding millions of documents on-site at Stasi Records Office in Berlin. The testimonies of countless former prisoners of the police state can

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<sup>68</sup> Wensierski, "East German Snitching Went Far Beyond the Stasi," *Der Spiegel Online*, (July 10, 2015), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/east-german-domestic-surveillance-went-far-beyond-the-stasi-a-1042883.html>. Last Accessed 10/14/2017.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance*, 67.

<sup>70</sup> Cassie Leventhal, "Berlin After the Wall: Decades After Its Fall, History Still Haunts," *Inquiries Journal*, Vol. 2 No. 04, (2010): <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/authors/205/cassie-r-leventhal>. Last Accessed: 10/14/2017.

be found there. The GDR under Honnecker had a utopian view of how their society would be run. Based on one's subscription to these ideals, one could be fully accepted by the society or rejected accordingly. Former residents for example recall growing up a member of the Communist Party as part of one's duties—as being casual and normal.<sup>71</sup>

As a result of the Stasi's strangle-hold on East Germans lives, former East Germans were ill equipped to re-enter a capitalist society comparable to *Weimar*, or pre-World War II era German democracy. Feelings of dissociation and confusion relating to Ostalgie and Communism wracked the former residents of East Germany initially after the fall of the Berlin wall, as longer term effects began to set in. Many former residents of both sides viewed the reunification of 1990 as disorienting and destabilizing. Many of the GDR's victims still exhibit signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,<sup>72</sup> and account for many cases of suicide and depression still occurring 25 years later. Professor Ina Merkel describes a more specific shock, the assault of images celebrating the Western world and its commodities and its sexuality.<sup>73</sup> The images and depictions of women using makeup and sexy clothes urged women to put their bodies on display. German women wanted to be allowed to purchase these items in stores. The names of streets were changed to reflect capitalist sensibilities. The books used to teach in schools were all changed to completely different texts, and there was a sudden availability of goods and jobs relating to the transition to Western life.<sup>74</sup>

Comparisons can be drawn from how other communist nations treat people today.

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<sup>71</sup> Julia Bonstein, Majority of Eastern Germans Feel Life Better under Communism, *Der Spiegel* (July 03, 2009), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/homesick-for-a-dictatorship-majority-of-eastern-germans-feel-life-better-under-communism-a-634122.html>. Last Accessed: 8/23/2017.

<sup>72</sup> Hell, *Post Fascist Fantasies*, 7-8.

<sup>73</sup> Hell, *Post Fascist Fantasies*, 328.

<sup>74</sup> Cassie Leventhal, Berlin After the Wall: Decades After Its Fall, History Still Haunts, *Inquiries* Vol. 2 No. 4, (2010) <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/authors/205/cassie-r-leventhal>. Last Accessed: 10/14/2017.

Contemporary Authoritarian governments continue to inflict trauma today. One can draw similarities between divided countries and totalitarian governmental intercession with regard to their treatment of the population. Communist nations historically show little clemency to its prisoners, and as recently as 1989 the GDR engaged in brainwashing political prisoners with no differentiation between civilians of their own country.<sup>75</sup> This has been happening in other countries for inordinate amounts of time, and continues today in Communist governments such as the ones still extant in North Korea and China. There it is commonplace to restrict the free access of foods and medicine, keeping these vital commodities for their preferred party member elite. What's more, the restrictions on books and information keep the laboring class at bay with ignorance.<sup>76</sup> Ignorance is a powerful tool used by communists that we in the West take for granted. Blocking out outside influences allows the people to be controlled like cattle. In the case of the GDR, ignorance was used as an undeniable tool of influence. Soviet-controlled East Germany kept the notions of freedom hidden from the people as much as possible, yet radio and television trickled Western influence into the country, ultimately sowing the seeds of its demise. It is possible that the same may occur with these last vestiges of Communism in Europe undone by easy access to information.

With access to the black market distribution of Western television purchased with food rations, there will always be a possibility of revolution.<sup>77</sup> What we can glean from this example is that with democracy comes the responsibility to be socially aware of what is happening around the world. Ignorance is not bliss—ignorance is naïve. Scientifically, like the greenhouse effect, if you are trapped inside the communist world, you're doomed to suffocate because there is a

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<sup>75</sup> Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance*, 46-51.

<sup>76</sup> Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigolout, *Aquariums of Pyongyang* (New York: Perseus Books), 66.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Shim, Ex-U.N. official: North Korean caste system is the new apartheid, *UPI News Group* (October 22, 2015), [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2015/10/22/Ex-UN-official-North-Korean-caste-system-is-the-new-apartheid/157144526152/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2015/10/22/Ex-UN-official-North-Korean-caste-system-is-the-new-apartheid/157144526152/). Last Accessed: 9/1/2017.

fundamental lack of innovation to refresh the economy either through trade or capital. Human nature seeks to satisfy curiosity. Denial of the influence of the West can lead directly to the overthrow of communism.<sup>78</sup> This was the result of the revolution that occurred in 1989.

The Soviets tried to concentrate scientists and intellectuals after World War II for the purposes of staying ahead in the arms race with the West. Before the Stasi the East German arm of the KGB were in the business of collecting intelligence agents as early as 1946.<sup>79</sup> They also recruited spy agents from within the ranks of the Komsomol and military and regularly sent high ranking members to train in Leningrad at the Security Ministry's Institute of Foreign Languages. After thorough examinations, the KGB would assign them a network within which they would send reports, usually within the Soviet Union. Infrequently, select members would be sent to the West to spy for the KGB abroad. As part of their curriculum they were indoctrinated in torture techniques which included gaslighting and intimidation.<sup>80</sup>

With the previous isolation from the West and after building the Berlin Wall, it is possible that former East German citizens exaggerated the breadth and scope of trauma inflicted upon them by the MfS, but that is unlikely. In the name of enforcement in the GDR, the Stasi engaged in psychological examination and experimentation on its own citizens for the purpose of combating Western ways of life which were a threat to "real working socialism." The number of individuals treated for mental health after the fall of the Berlin Wall was greater than ever recorded in German history. Witnesses came forth after the wall came down who describe how the Stasi terrorized them there, and admitted in detail the evidence of this assertion.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Oxford: Pan Books, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> Macrackis, *Seduced by Secrets*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Kalugin, *The First Directorate*, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Miller, *The Stasi Legacy*, 177-178.

Located in records kept by private companies and universities in the former U.S.S.R. a person concerned that they had been watched during the Cold War could find out that any number of behaviors contributed to why one's life had suddenly become upended. Losing valuable schools, jobs, and places of business due to their associations with pro-Westerners, typically family members, friends or business colleagues were spied on. Explanations were found in documents kept in the archives of political parties, factories and universities. There one learned that skipping a language class, making an ill-considered comment at the student union, or exhibiting a persistent lack of the "proletarian point of view" potentially got someone in trouble.<sup>82</sup>

During the 1970s, departmental redundancy among the East German MfS foreign intelligence the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HVA), with its 21 sections and 5 task forces and the KGB's Kommissariat 5 (K5 unit), whose agents were allowed to conduct their own investigations in the GDR, reached near obsessive levels of surveillance. This culminated in numerous people observing one person for various offices and purposes simultaneously. "The State Security had access to all areas of life in the GDR—even though this was not always noticeable to the individuals themselves. The MfS penetrated into the citizens' private lives; observing them, bugging their phones, spying on them, arresting and interrogating them. The MfS worked in close cooperation with the police force, the customs authorities, employment offices and other GDR institutions to implement its policy of blanket control. It had access to almost any information or documents it wanted."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Wensierski, "East German Snitching Went Far Beyond the Stasi," *Der Spiegel Online* (July 10, 2015) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/east-german-domestic-surveillance-went-far-beyond-the-stasi-a-1042883.html>. Last Accessed 10/27/2017.

<sup>83</sup> Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic, [http://www.bstu.bund.de/EN/Home/home\\_node.html](http://www.bstu.bund.de/EN/Home/home_node.html). Last Accessed: 9/1/2017.

The fever pitch of these obsessive surveillance events led to the culmination of Communist obsession with “Working towards the West” with Operation Scorpion, the MfS operation whose explicit purpose was to root out and destroy any opposition to the SED’s policy of maintaining border security to prevent escapes to the West. Its head, General Gerhard Neiber was in charge of preventing escapees, and used a “by any means necessary” approach to doing so.<sup>84</sup> Those persons lucky enough to smuggle citizens across the border were regaled as heroes, such as Ralph Kabisch who dug a tunnel under a section of the wall and helped 57 people including women and children escape.<sup>85</sup>

By brainwashing GDR citizens Honecker’s and Mielke’s Stasi took the soul out the people’s movement. Brainwashing by the Stasi was an extremely effective strategy designed to suppress the potential spread of Western ideas in the GDR, forming the most powerful police-state created in its time. With it the psychological technology to brainwash its citizens to think whatever they wished, to believe whatever they wished, they had created a methodical propaganda machine which pacified its citizens. In addition, every attempt by residents of the GDR to express individuality, to talk critically about life inside the state or, to leave the GDR were met with obsessive counterintelligence initiatives, a form of “big brother” actions straight out of George Orwell’s *1984*.

Comparisons with the Nazi dictatorship favor the SED regime as being more humane, because the GDR was not actively entrenched in an active war. Yet in Europe's so-called relaxation period political prisoners languished for months, kept in cold, dank, “tiger cages.” That sort of treatment leaves mental scars, namely, post-traumatic stress disorder; PTSD, that never really heals. Outside the prisons, the GDR was a battle ground being constantly

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<sup>84</sup> John O. Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>85</sup> *Beyond the wall*, United States: Beyond the Wall Films, 2010, VOD, <http://beyondthewallfilms.com/>. Last Accessed 9/12/2017.

undermined by Stasi *Zersetzung*, or biodegradation. According to more than one source, this was normal operational procedure.<sup>86</sup> While doing this research several survivors declined to talk to this author about the experiences because of this very trauma, citing that it was in fact still too difficult to speak about even after 25 years. For example, Sigemar Faust declined to answer the questionnaire, but instead offered his personal writings on the subject.<sup>87</sup>

Amnesty International defined the issues facing the former GDR in 1977 with a brochure made specifically for American agents traveling abroad with these concerns. Namely the existence of legislation leading to violations of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular of Articles 12, 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The continued practice of arrests, prolonged pre-trial detention and imprisonment of citizens who show themselves critical of the state and/or society or who try to exercise other internationally recognized civil rights in a nonviolent manner all occurred in the name of *Zersetzung*. As a last resort, the GDR kept the death penalty for a series of political and military offences.

Through a loophole of international law, namely that the West would not intervene in East German affairs, Soviet controlled areas were allowed to abuse the policing authority vested in them by the division of Berlin along political lines drafted after World War II to control persons living in the GDR branded as “critical of the state and or society,” and “those who try to exercise other civil rights.” Perhaps no greater image of what can happen when the will of the people is ignored than can be found in Romania’s trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu of the late 1980s. The people’s answer to his Stalinist rule was to have him and his wife executed to ensure that no communists could inherit his legacy.

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<sup>86</sup> Knabe, *The Dark Secrets of A Surveillance State*, TedTalk (6/2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWjzT2I5C34>. Last Accessed: 9/1/2017.

<sup>87</sup> Faust, *How Did I Manage my Political Trauma?*, 10.

Citing a poll conducted in 2008 by the World Health Organization from 210 data collection points throughout Germany, statistics are very revealing of the facts as they are relevant to this study. The graph in Appendix I is that of residents of Germany indicating in the post war period (the 18 years following the destruction of the Berlin Wall) that Germans suffered a much higher incidence of PTSD than successive generations. Specifically in a broad ranging epidemiological study of respondents 14-95 years old, the incidences of persons who suffered PTSD were more than twice those of respondents in those younger than thirty. In the 30-59 age group the average incidence of PTSD was 3.4-3.8% as opposed to 1.3% in 14-29 year olds. To put into perspective, American soldiers who had lived through war events average 8.8%.<sup>88</sup> The numbers indicate that those German residents who had dealt with the consequences of World War II, namely division of Germany and living in occupied zones had markedly increase stress levels. In addition Germans living under a Stasi controlled communist East Germany had comparable increased stress levels as well.<sup>89</sup>

The medical history of the Stasi is a chequered one. The trend indicated in Appendix I demonstrates that living under closely monitored police state restrictions caused increased stress levels that had lasting impacts eighteen years after the collapse of communism in Germany. The study also indicates that Germans who lived through communist rule had the hardest time coping with reunification as well. As after effects to brainwashing, PTSD and partial PTSD is another indicator that the Stasi was practicing psychological experiments on the German people as evinced by increased stress levels during the Cold War period.<sup>90</sup> As was demonstrated before,

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<sup>88</sup> A. Maercker, S. Forstmeier, B. Wagner, H. Glaesmer, E. Brähler, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Germany: Results of a nationwide epidemiological study, *Nervenarzt* (May, 2008), <http://www.istss.org/education-research/traumatic-stresspoints/2008-july/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-in-germany-results-o.aspx>. Last Accessed: 10/27/2017.

<sup>89</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



time is a factor most significant to brainwashing and repetition a close second. If it took a lifetime of living in the GDR for individuals to believe in “real working socialism” it would take almost as long, and perhaps never to come to terms with the demise of the police state. Based on the data from the World Health Organization, Germans appear to have believed that their country was perpetually in a state of turmoil and that their government did not have their best interests in mind. This effect could potentially last throughout their entire lives.

The Stasi’s chequered medical history does not end with a simple terror campaign. As an example, the Stasi covered up illegal hormonal and steroidal compounds being administered to young women during the formative years of Olympic athletes. The East German government thereby caused those athletes involved lasting side effects medically, which resulted in at least 30 deaths of young athletes during the period from 1981 to 1984. Turinabol, which turned out to be testosterone was knowingly given to them. It is irrefutable that the Stasi directly influenced these events and the usage has been well documented.<sup>91</sup> The young women have asked that their records be redacted due to knowledge of the shame of the incidents.

It goes without saying that the standard coping mechanisms for such prolonged and stressful conditions were medicated in certain circumstances. Use of pain medication to cope with the stress of dealing with the unglamorous toil of socialist collective, duty to the party, Stasi informants and/or agents, and paranoia of the outside world, made private drug usage practically nonexistent. Designer drugs such as morphine, dimorphine, and sedatives like benzodiazepines were available exclusively to government agencies that could use them to take advantage of an IM, for example. There is little information about the availability of recreational drugs used in

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<sup>91</sup> Jana Schlüter, “East Germany’s Lucky Human Guinea Pigs,” *Handelsblatt Global* (March 17, 2016), <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/east-germanys-lucky-human-guinea-pigs-473405>. Last Accessed: 9/10/2017.

the GDR, but we can be fairly certain that any and almost all drug usage in the GDR was illicit, pain medications administered by doctors notwithstanding.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This study is meant to offer evidence of the various mechanisms of brainwashing used by the Stasi, answering how and why the East Germans experimented on their own people for total control of the GDR and to gauge the long term effects on former citizens of the GDR today. Further it demonstrates how Stasi victims have been adjusting during the past 25 years after the collapse of the SED in 1989. By applying the theories established in the ongoing discussion about programming and the effects that it has on the human psyche, this work links information from the Stasi archives and medical evidence, to testimonies from former GDR citizens who were used as instruments of the state.<sup>93</sup>

The Stasi were initially trained by Soviet Chekist operatives. They used brainwashing techniques and in turn advanced psychological programming a step further to systemic repression. Stasi interrogators use and abuse of power urged by the government of the GDR leveraged tactics to undermine individuals by recruiting informants from friends and loved ones, isolating them and thereby making it impossible to resist incrimination of oneself to a relentless onslaught. Intelligence gathering under the Stasi was unrivaled in its time, and remains in the minds of the survivors as a reminder of a dystopian world. “To be able to look at your own Stasi

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<sup>92</sup> J. Dressler and E. Muller., “Drugs in East Germany,” *American Journal of Forensic Medical Pathology*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, (September 18, 1997): 303-305, <http://journals.lww.com/amjforensicmedicine/Pages/toc.aspx?year=1997&issue=09000>. Last Accessed: 10/14/2017.

<sup>93</sup> Jana Schlüter, “East Germany's Lucky Human Guinea Pigs,” *Handelsblatt Global* (March 17, 2016), <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/east-germanys-lucky-human-guinea-pigs-473405>. Last Accessed: 9/2/2017.

file and see what someone you didn't know, or even meet, wrote about you would have an effect on anyone."<sup>94</sup>

The former Soviet Union, China, and North Korea have all studied Stasi control methodologies both before and since the fall of the Berlin wall.<sup>95</sup> Knowledge about brainwashing can be applied to any terrorist organization, dictatorship, and even medically to identify PTSD victims. We have the opportunity to learn from the GDR to change how we view the human mind, as a most malleable instrument. By identifying the program or the threat to global health and security, in the field it could be used to prevent terrorist attacks. In the public sphere, the more people who are sensitized to the concept of programming would better prepare individuals to react. If we can effectively disarm brainwashed citizens much like a bomb squad team defuses a bomb, this is a powerful tool. Medically this is also a significant find in that if doctors can identify brainwashed individuals. They could be helped in a controlled psychiatric setting, as programming displays earmarks; signs such as interminably built up tension or frustration, anxiety or paranoia, exhaustion, and repetition of strictly coded phrases to deflect prying, coupled with withdrawal from the public sphere.<sup>96</sup>

Finally, further applications for this research include understanding current authoritarian regimes and the way they treat their citizens, and the furthering of the study of brainwashing medically and socio-politically. The current study is limited by the availability of sources in English, access to classified documents, and a more substantial pool of interviewees.

Nevertheless, it adds to the body of knowledge on the subject of brainwashing as used during the

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<sup>94</sup> Hubertus Knabe, Famous Speaker on Behalf of Political Prisoners of the GDR, *TED Talk*, (June, 2014.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWjzT2I5C34&t=24s>. Last Accessed: 9/1/2017.

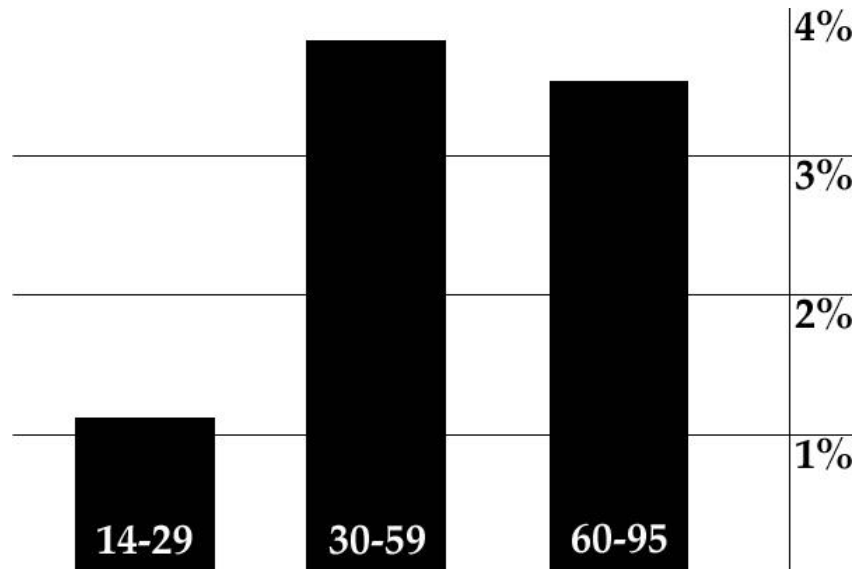
<sup>95</sup> Bernd Schaefer, North Korea and the East Germans Stasi, 1987-1989, *The Wilson Center* (May 8, 2017), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/north-korea-and-the-east-german-stasi-1987-1989>. Last Accessed: 10/27/2017.

<sup>96</sup> Carruthers, *Cold War Captives*, 143-144.

Cold War. The strength of the study is that it concretely supports the link between brainwashing utilized as a tool by the Stasi to control East Germans and its link to Soviet brainwashing techniques.

Appendix I.

WHO Data representing the number of Germans Suffering from PTSD from 2008



WHO Statistics from source data, designed by Jacob Solbrig 9/1/2017

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## **Vita**

Jacob Hagen Solbrig was born in Bangor, Maine and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. He enrolled in college at the University of New Orleans to earn his Bachelor's degree in 2001, transferring to Louisiana State University after 2 years of courses to complete his degree in Art History in August, 2007. He worked as an assistant archivist at UNO's Earl K. Long Library for 3 years, and freelanced in historical restoration with a focus on 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century design. He re-enrolled at the University of New Orleans in Fall 2016 to complete his Master's Thesis. His primary historical focus is on Eastern and Central Europe in the world, particularly its politics. He plans to continue this research in a PhD program.