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DISTANCING FROM THE PAST – LONGING FOR THE “HEARTLAND”: REFLECTIONS ON THE EAST GERMAN TEACHERS’ SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF THE *WENDE*

Introduction: Institutional expediency over cultural integration, accompanied by the speed and comprehensiveness of the systemic change in East Germany, marginalized the whole East German community, including one professional group of particular importance, namely teachers. How did they adapt to the new conditions? How did they perceive their new role in the changed social and educational system?

Research Aim: The answers to these questions are based on a review and critical analysis of German empirical research on experiences of the *Wende* among teachers from former East Germany. Excerpts from the author’s own research are also included.

Evidence-based Facts: In studies of teachers’ subjective perception of the *Wende*, there appear two significant strategies compensating for their biographical and professional insecurities. One is continuity, the accompanying lack of criticism and distance from the moral evaluation of the dismantled political system, including education. The other is the turn towards the idealized image of “lost community” and “closeness and care” as opposed to the “bureaucratic mentality” in the West.

Summary: East German teachers’ longing for egalitarianism, for the “closeness of relations”, and for the “heartland”, as well as distance from moral thinking about the past, are not only an educational version of the Fromm’s escape from freedom in the hardship of the transition to democracy and capitalism. They also constitute an effective means of dealing with the difficult past by gradually “taming” the experiences of life in the GDR.

Keywords: educational change, *Wende*, German unification, education, teachers, adaptation to change

INTRODUCTION

The heartland of Taggart is an ideal “*territory of the imagination*” reconstructed out of a sense of a better past, not rationally conceptualized but emotionally felt.

(Kammerlohr, 2018)

In 1945 there was only one type of German – shaped by the past. Today there are two types of Germans – shaped by different interpretations of the past.

(Kupferberg, 2002)

There remained humiliations, injuries, irritations, and I believe that we can also explain Pegida by having to see whether these injuries and humiliations have not been discussed again here and brought onto the streets.

(Hensel, 2017)

The recent thirtieth anniversary of German reunification revealed the persistent shortcomings of the swift transition to democracy and capitalism. Researchers mention the most visible signs: mass deindustrialization and depopulation (Glock, 2006; Arnold et al., 2020). But there is another serious consequence of being a “deprived community”. The continuing underrepresentation of East Germans in the country’s elites, including politics, corporate boardrooms and higher education has had an unsurprising consequence: the “new states” inhabitants’ feeling of cultural deprivation even after three decades in a unified country (Mau, 2019). The marginalized community is more likely to view society as an entity separated into two antagonistic groups – “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (Mudde, 2004). Populist and nativist¹ attitudes may drive citizens’ voting choices for a radically right-wing party. Hence, the success of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD) in eastern Germany, that – in the latest federal election in 2017 – received 22% of the popular vote versus 11% in the western *Länder* (Pesthy, Mader & Schoen, 2021). According to current research, the AfD’s right-wing populism was more radical in eastern than western Germany, and a Dresden-based protest movement of PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* [Eng.: Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident]) has been a vivid symbol of this radicalization (Jesse, 2017; Bieber et al., 2018).

An interesting comment comes from Jana Hensel, the co-author – with a sociologist, Wolfgang Engler – of the book *Wer wir sind: Die Erfahrung, ostdeutsch*

¹ Nativism favours the preservation of an ethnoculturally homogeneous nation, claiming that “non-native elements [...] are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde, 2007, p. 19).

zu sein (2018) (Eng.: Who We Are: The Experience of being East German). She concludes that PEGIDA and the AfD are a manifestation of defective and incomplete East German emancipation movement – “an emancipation movement without an emancipatory core”. The question is: How can people accept all the racism and xenophobia coming within this movement for an obvious criticism of the conditions, of the imposed, and not fully accepted socio-economic system? In the same interviews, Hensel uses an intentionally provocative tone: “The collapse of East German society is so extensive and is taking place with a speed that I believe has never happened in the world, and the interesting thing is: How has West German society often reacted to it? It said: Don’t complain so much” (*Der Kollaps der...*, 2018).

The East German school’s responsibility for simmering xenophobia has been discussed in the media and in research studies since the *Wende*.² Researchers observed discipline and motivation problems at schools and they argued that new freedoms, responsibilities and consumer culture had an overwhelming effect on young people in the new federal states (Sturzbecher, 1994). Wilfried Schubarth (1997, p. 151) points to the rising competition in the job market, parents’ unemployment, the breakdown of solidarity at schools (closing down of formerly state-sponsored and low-cost youth clubs, sport associations, and meeting places), and the increased role of money, accompanied by families’ limited financial abilities, as sources of frustration, aggression and xenophobia among youth. There were also public figures and prominent voices for minority rights and democratization, e.g. Freya Klier (1990) or Anetta Kahane (2004), who spoke of the authoritarian attitudes among teachers, and of more or less blatant racism experienced by foreigners’ children in schools in the new *Länder*. In 2015, in an interview, Klier stated that the primary reason behind Saxony’s racism still lies in schooling: “The teachers who were already there in GDR times have never been replaced. They never had to think about what they were actually doing before. During the GDR era I wrote a book about upbringing in the GDR, *Lüg Vaterland*.³ This atmosphere still exists today. And in parts of Saxony it has cultivated itself in such a way that nobody intervenes” (*Auch der DDR...*, 2015).

² The period of revolutionary political, economic and social changes in the GDR, starting in the late summer and fall of 1989 is often referred to as the *Wende* – the “turn” away from the existing ideology and its political and economic system, the transition to democracy and capitalism (Yoder, 1999, p. 62).

³ The book title in English: *Deceitful Fatherland. Education in the GDR* (1990).

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

With the *Wende* and the decision to incorporate the GDR into the Federal Republic of Germany, the requirement to adapt East German education to the legal, social and economic standards of West Germany also covered the professional life of East German teachers. Their functional disqualification concerned knowledge and competences, as well as patterns of professional conduct that became useless in a new social structure. Many scholars diagnosed the main issue after the reunification of Germany as concerning teachers' strategies for coping with structural, program and personnel changes. In other words, the way in which teachers who underwent vocational education and socialization in the GDR have dealt with a complete redefinition of their role (Döbert, 1995).

There is no unanimous assessment of East German teachers' situation after the *Wende* among German researchers. A rather negative image is presented by those, who – like Klaus-Jürgen Tillmann – refer to East German teachers' experience of a “deep rapture in their biography”, resulting in their perception of the systemic change as “a critical life event and the collapse of their conception of the world and professional life” (1996, p. 218). Elsewhere, he puts forward a thesis that “everything has changed and nothing has changed”, referring to the political, economic and legal transformation of the teaching profession, and the accompanying lack of major changes, or even outright continuity, not only in infrastructure, but, most of all, in the sphere of teaching methods, strategies and work ethics. There are those, however, who perceive the transformation of East Germany after the Unification as a process of “catching up modernization” (*nachholende Modernisierung*) and draw a positive image of the educational change, expressing flattering conclusions about the unprecedented adaptation achievements of East German teachers. There dominates an agreement that the modernization theory offers a suitable frame of reference for explaining the transformation processes after the collapse of state socialism. After all, as German sociologist Wolfgang Zapf (1992) points out, transformation processes are distinguished from modernization processes by the fact that the goal is known: the takeover of modern democratic, market-based institutions based on the rule of law.

However, educational researchers point out that the interpretation of the transformation process as a “catching up modernization”, which has dominated up to recent times, obscures the view of the problematic elements that are being rejected in the educational reality, including the subjective situation of teachers, parents and students within the changing education system. There are unintentional consequences of the educational process and East-specific constellations that require the use of an expanded perspective of transformation research, one

that enables one to construct a heuristic framework of teaching conditions and experiences in the former GDR education. There appears a concept of a “double modernization process” used, e.g. by Melanie Fabel-Lamla, the author of the monograph *Professionalisierungspfade Ostdeutscher Lehrer* [*Professionalization Paths of East German Teachers*] (2004). In her analysis of teachers’ biographies and professionalization processes, she refers to the heuristic of double modernization, described by U. Beck (1995) as a “conflict between two modernities”. According to Beck, the perspective of “catching up modernization” of East Germany is too simple and even precariously unreflexive:

The truth lies in thinking together: The emerging Germany is a Germany of the two modernities that has to deal with these new European and global conflicts within itself. [...] Tolerance, the endurance of inextricable contradictions, looking at the world from the opposite point of view – these skills and readiness have never been so urgent and at the same time never so endangered as in this impending conflict between the two modernities. (1991, p. 51)

Within the socio-political systemic change, the former East German school system has been under double pressure to modernize. On the one hand, the educational actors have had to cope with the adaptation requirements of the institutional transfer. On the other, they have been confronted with all-German transformation pressures, risks and ambivalences of advanced modernity, including innovation, globalization and Europeanization of educational institutions (Fabel-Lamla, 2004).

The aim of this article is to reflect on the perception of social and educational change by teachers in eastern Germany. They were educational actors who carried the burden of internal school reform. East German teachers faced the difficult task of translating systemic changes into school reality. How did they adopt to the new conditions? How did they perceive their new role in the changed social and educational system? The answers to these questions are based on a review and critical analysis of German empirical research on experiences of the *Wende* among teachers from former East Germany. A major source of data from the field was provided by semi-structured or unstructured – e.g. biographical interviews – life history (*lebensgeschichtliche Interviews*), focusing on the subjective professional experiences of teachers.⁴ The article also includes excerpts from the semi-structured interviews (*Leitfadeninterviews*) collected by the author dur-

⁴ For more detailed information about the studies included in the article, see: Hildebrandt (2004, Chapter 5).

ing her study visits in two new federal states: Brandenburg and Saxony in 2004. Qualitative studies' findings focus on the bottom-up approach – perception of the social and educational change from the perspective on East German teachers. It should be emphasized that references to numerous studies do not, however, create an exhaustive and comprehensive picture of teachers' adaptation reactions to the *Wende*. The research intention was to capture a possibly adequate set of patterns of behavior in a specific, unique social situation.

EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS: “EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED
AND NOTHING HAS CHANGED” – CONTINUITY
AND DISTANCE FROM MORAL THINKING

In the professional life of East German teachers after the *Wende*, three objectives to deal with appeared: personnel changes due to political verification, recognition of professional qualification, and employment status – which were linked to the new remuneration rules. Political verification, due to the significant politization of the teaching profession in the GDR, covered both so-called professional (qualifications, seniority) and political (party and membership of other mass organizations, and possible cooperation with the State Security – *Stasi*) suitability. An obvious controversy behind this process was linked to the introduction, by law, of the priority of professional suitability over political. The result was the dismissal of politically uninvolved teachers with lower qualifications and the continued employment of those politically burdened, but qualified to teach two subjects.⁵ Also the accompanying (from 1993/1994 school year) personnel changes due to unfavourable demographic trends were based on the principal of “compliance with the social contract”, meaning that in case of senior teachers – despite their political burden – the dismissal was excluded for social reasons (protection from unemployment).⁶ Many observers claim, however, that the personnel shifts in compulsory education were less traumatic compared to, e.g. the exchange of

⁵ The former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (1990–2000) and the former President of Germany (2012–2017), Joachim Gauck, noted for the State of Berlin that out of 4.7% of teachers registered as politically burdened (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter, IM-Belastete*) only one in five (0.9%) was dismissed (Gauck, 1997, p. 7).

⁶ In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the percentage of young teachers (under 30) decreased from 16.7 to 3.1% between 1991 and 1999. In 1997, about one third of public compulsory school teachers reached the age of 50 (Hübner-Oberndörfer, 2001, p. 26).

elites at the political⁷ or academic⁸ level. As indicated by John Rodden (2002, p. 191): “The result was that school personnel changed much less than feared – or hoped after the collapse of communism”. By the end of the first restructuring phase (around 1996), with at least partial recognition of teaching qualifications, most teachers returned to work. The political verification process ended up with the early retirement for less than 10% of them (Döbert, 1997).

Much more devastating for teachers’ professional integrity was the process of the recognition of GDR qualifications and the related issue of teachers’ employment status and salaries. When analyzing research findings, one is confronted with the plethora of qualitative data revealing the disillusionment and marginalization due to elite replacement and public disbelief in the real educational change of those who remained. As members of the leading cultural cadre, teachers were often perceived as cynical *Wendehälse* (reversible necks) by parents and pupils (Rodden, 2002).

Disappearance of curricular guidelines kept reoccurring in teachers’ statements as a sign of the deficits in professional training and a source of deepening frustration and uncertainty. It was accompanied by an open critique of the way of introducing curricular changes. As one of the teachers from Thuringia bitterly commented on the reform’s implementation: “We got our textbooks from Rhineland-Palatinate, professional training conducted by people from Hessen, and the curriculum was from Bavaria. It didn’t work” (Weiler, Mintrop, Fuhrmann, 1996, p. 46). The dominant strategy of coping with the new requirements, so different from their previous routinized and predictable teaching practice, was continuity, confirmed in numerous studies (Döbert, 1995; Schröter, 1995; Tillmann, 1996; Neumann, 1997; Fiedler, 2012). Reaching for teaching strategies and plans originating from the dismantled educational system, but cleansed of ideological content, was the result of the search for the “handrail”, reference to the known and reworked (*Rückgriff auf Bekanntes und Gewohntes*) (Döbert, 1995, p. 190; Döbert, 1997, p. 352). In all studies focusing on the former GDR teachers’ perception of educational change, their source of professional integrity was based on their reference to the “solid

⁷ As pointed out by Jennifer A. Yoder (1999, p. 85), although the dynamics of the parliamentary and executive elite change varied, depending on the level of governance, a prominent feature of the post-communist political-administrative elite-building was elite replacement and “the transplant of personnel from the West”, most visible in the higher echelons of the executive. As she indicated further: “The number of western personnel transferred to the east is difficult to pinpoint, but the number is generally believed to be somewhere around 20,000 by 1992” (Yoder, 1999, p. 92).

⁸ As indicated by William A. Pelz (2017, p. 47) in the context of unprecedented marginalization of GDR historiography, by 1998, out of 1,878 professors employed in the new German states only slightly over a hundred were from the former GDR. He also refers to the controversial argument made in *Kolonialisierung der DDR* (Colonization of the GDR): “the social liquidation of not only the political elite but also the intellectuals of the country” (p. 48).

education” acquired in the GDR (Schröter, 1995, p. 24). “Teaching skills are independent of events such as the *Wende*” (*Pädagogisches Geschick ist wendefrei*) – as one of the teachers in Brandenburg stated (Wilde, 2003, p. 110).

The focus on continuity sometimes entailed the accompanying distance from the moral evaluation of the dismantled political system, including education. Lack of criticism or any political assessment may seem to be a defense mechanism against the uncertainty. It manifested itself as a “professional” lack of interest in the development of the political situation in the “outside world”, and focus on “teaching tasks”. One of the teachers, interviewed in 2004, referred to the past events of 1989 (the Fall of the Berlin Wall) and the mass demonstrations⁹ afterwards as follows:

I couldn't go, I had classes at school then. And there were classes on Saturday as well. And I was not one of the teachers who were saying: “Now I don't care, I just want to go to these demonstrations”, and who were going to West Berlin with their students. It was a time of chaos, almost anarchy, and I'm not for anarchy. So I went teaching on the 4th of November 1989, shortly before the Wall fell [...]

I must honestly say I was rather careful. My intuition told me that it was all happening too fast, that it was not well thought out. [...] I wasn't euphoric, I was rather careful. Now I'm more euphoric than I was back then. Then I felt a bit confused. (teacher of English and German, *Gymnasium* in Brandenburg, 2004, own research¹⁰)

Notably, these kind of statements often came from younger teachers, entering their professional life around the time of the *Wende*. The teacher cited above, interviewed by the author, began her teaching career in 1988. A similar observation was made by E. Neather who undertook a qualitative life history interviewing process and created portraits (case-studies) of eight East German teachers. One of them was Lorna, a graduate of a teaching college right before the systemic change. She also expressed her disbelief in the GDR coming to an end. Despite living in Dresden, a city embraced by anti-government demonstrations, she remained surprisingly indifferent in the time of social upheaval. She remembered finding out about the fall of the Wall later because of “living in her own, small world” (Neather, 2000, p. 32). It is similar to the statement of the informant cited above, saying: “I didn't believe that the Wall could have fallen. The event completely surprised the majority of people I knew. We missed that night when it all happened. We

⁹ As noticed by Biskupek (2002, p. 158), in the time right after the fall of the Wall many school classes were empty on Saturdays, and students, parents, and some teachers as well were traveling “to the other side” (*Westereisen* – travels to the West), to participate in mass demonstrations.

¹⁰ For more detailed description of the research findings, see: Hildebrandt (2006).

simply went to bed that night. Next morning we were completely taken aback” (teacher of English and German, *Gymnasium* in Brandenburg, own research).

A broader context of the corruption of civic ideals with younger GDR teachers was the inactivity and listlessness of former east German universities in the process of systemic change. Unlike in other communist countries, e.g. Poland or Hungary, a small part of the academic community, both students and scientists, became politically engaged in the GDR. Both Lorna and the teacher from Brandenburg epitomize that a large group of students in East Germany were said to have “slept through the revolution” (Neather, 2000, p. 33). A similar observation appeared in Hester Vaizey case-study of Mirko, who “slept through the night of 9 November, only learning about the fall of the Wall on the radio the next day” (2015, p. 140). This attitude showed how successful the socialization of the GDR elite was. As George Orwell famously stated: “*Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past*”. Pressure on loyalty to the system – imprinted in the indoctrinating nature of GDR schooling – resulted in their restraint against social change and their inability to critically evaluate political and social principles (Neather, 2000).

A key threat posed by indifference and distance to the moral evaluation of “the old system” was the continuous weakening of civic and democratic ideals – the ideal ground for future populism (Mudde, 2004, p. 541). Some scholars (Schröter, 1995; Weiler, Mintrop, Fuhrmann, 1996; Rodden, 2002) pointed to teachers’ skepticism towards “imported” democracy, their questioning of West German political freedom and only partial acceptance for political changes after the *Wende*. However, there was one high psychological cost of the “overnight Westernization” that dominated most teachers’ adaptation strategies: forced “devaluation” of not only their professional, but also their life experiences (Freudenstein, 2009). Rodden points to a “psychological purging” as the most psychologically painful result of asymmetrical process of merging East and West. Adjusting the communist educational system to the capitalist one entailed

the purging of the East German past, the purging of East German identity [...]. *Verostung* (becoming eastern, “rusting out”, i.e. “Ossification”) was coming to mean accepting the paralyzing ossification of the eastern German spirit. *Verostung* was thus actually a widely resisted process of what could also have been called *Verwestung* (becoming western), for it signified an acquiescence to the supremacy of the *Besserwessi*, whose agenda was to clone the western infrastructure in the east, i.e., to *wessify* it. (Rodden, 2002, p. 191)

EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS: “WHY DIDN’T WE KEEP WHAT WAS GOOD” – LONGING FOR THE LOST COMMUNITY

Hans N. Weiler, Heinrich Mintrop, and Elisabeth Fuhrmann (1996, p. 43) indicated that most teachers after the *Wende* presented themselves as “advocates of meritocracy”, turning to the enforcement of new achievement standards. In their process of relearning, the former GDR teachers adopted an ahistorical attitude and used “conversion” – one of the dominant adaptive reactions during the systemic change, also in Poland (Kwieciński, 2000). As Rodden pointed out: “Having been trained to treat pupils as collective beings and thereby create »socialist personalities«, they were now being told to teach critical thinking and to treat pupils as individuals with their own unique talents” (2002, p. 183). The need of getting on with their lives and succeeding in the new system prevailed.

There remained, however, a contradiction in focusing solely on educating and ignoring the upbringing elements. One of the key problematic issues articulated by teachers in qualitative studies were the close relations lost after the *Wende*. Schubarth (1997) points out that the educational change after the *Wende* “destroyed helpful support systems” in the new federal states (Schubarth, 1997, p. 151). The upbringing tasks of GDR teachers included extracurricular time in pioneer organizations¹¹ (*Freie Deutsch Jugend*, FDJ [Free German Youth, JP] or visiting students in their homes (Rodden, 2002). The lost “closeness” was mentioned in the author’s conversation with a teacher who several times generally referred to the dominant value of the GDR society: “being a support for each other” (*die Füreinander da sein*) (teacher of the Russian language, ethics and philosophy, *Gymnasium* in Saxony, 2004, own research). Although implicitly or explicitly politicized, extracurricular activities “contributed to a sense of »closeness« between teachers and pupils” (Wilde, 2003, p. 58). In teachers’ narratives, East German school is pictured as a place where “they knew their students well, were close to them, and bonded with them”. Thus, in many teachers’ view, their authority was based “not only on discipline but also on paternal and maternal closeness” (Mintrop, 1996, p. 373).

¹¹ An interesting, contrary to some teachers’ beliefs, account of students’ experience was given by Vaizey’s portrait of Mirko, the son of a politically engaged father (a Stasi informer). In spite of progressing within the FDJ (he was given the position of *Agitator* – speech maker), his commitment to the organization was superficial and opportunist: “On a fundamental level, Mirko does not have particularly fond memories of the FDJ. It was obvious that it was compulsory, he explains, and many pupils were clearly bored by the activities. He recalls little emotional attachment to the ideas expounded by the FDJ leaders, and, like many others of his age, he wore the uniform and took part in the youth movement’s activities until the autumn of 1989 because his parents told him not to make a fuss or irritate the authorities” (Vaizey, 2015, p. 135).

Hans Döbert pointed out the dominance of positive or ambivalent (positive/negative) perception of teachers' extracurricular work in the FDJ and pioneer organizations. Only 30% found the teachers' role there as burdensome; the rest expressed their approval about it, or expressed their ambivalent assessment with the “yes” and “no” answer (Döbert, 1997). Neather (2000, p. 20) also wrote about the dominant feeling of loss due to the “dismantling of the collective” – a specific form of upbringing and social control, giving both a sense of security and a feeling of belonging to something beyond a mere working group: a community. Teachers were not the only group remembering the GDR as a benevolent welfare state where most people found a niche and lived their lives, maybe not in prosperity, but in peace. Faced with the experience of increased anonymity and reduced care (and control), teachers were looking back fondly to paternalistic relationships between them and both students and parents.

Many people complain about the FDJ or pioneering afternoons, but these days students really don't have any opportunity to do something together anymore. Of course, it was compulsory for us to spend one evening a month with the students, but until it wasn't anything political, students seemed to like it. It is equally important too for teachers to get to know their students in a different setting and vice versa. It is a mutual understanding, a chance for students to realize that the person in front of them is not just a teacher, but a normal person who can have fun. (*Gesamtschule* teacher from Brandenburg) (Schröter, 1995, p. 28)

Putting the idealized image of “closeness and care of the students” as opposed to the “bureaucratic mentality” (*Beamtenmentalität*) of Western educators was a strategy compensating for the indoctrinating character of teaching in the GDR. Many East German teachers searched in their professional biographies for an ideal “territory of the imagination”, Paul Taggart's “heartland” (pol. *rdzenna kraina*). The heartland embodied the “positive aspects of everyday life”, the life that used to be structured and predictable, based on such virtues as clarity, common-sense and tradition (Taggart, 2000, pp. 95–97). The reference to the upbringing role of GDR teachers was as attempt to preserve the consoling fragments of the past. An idea of “romantic collectivism” of GDR teachers appeared in many studies and was represented by many teachers' voices, e.g. “Certainly, East German teachers' skills of shaping social attitudes were outstanding. If these had still been in the curriculum, the teachers from the East would have been better. But that is not what is required today” (Schröter, 1995, p. 27); “Everything is highly formalized and clerical. And meanwhile there is no pedagogical mention of what is good for students [...]. We no longer have any truly personal relationship to this profession [...]. But that's not what teaching is about” (Art teacher, *Gymnasium* in Brandenburg, 2004, own research).

Less rationally conceptualized, more emotionally felt, these statements are in line with the still present discourse, recently and most interestingly described by Anja Goerz (2019) in her interview book: *Der Osten ist ein Gefühl. Über die Mauer im Kopf* [*The East is a Feeling. About the Wall in the Mind*]. As described by Feiwel Kupferberg, both East and West Germans stereotype themselves and the other, but a comparison of the stereotypes of the two groups shows a contrasting categorization. East Germans perceive themselves as better than West Germans, whereas West Germans are more self-critical and tend to see themselves in a less flattering light. The West German collective image is significantly more negative than the one of East Germans, who view themselves in a rather positive light. Kupferberg associates this phenomenon with a different level of individual empowerment and group conformity between both groups. He refers to the “greater dependence upon and integration into the group among East Germans” and sums up: “The reason West German stereotypes are more self-reflexive is that the individual is less dependent upon the group for his or her self-esteem than is the East” (Kupferberg, 2002, p. 8).

CONCLUSION

Criticism regarding the body of research on East German schools and teachers raised the idea that it distanced itself from the problem of the teachers’ moral thinking in the former communist state whose legitimacy was founded upon a myth. Instead, East German scholars “have concentrated on what they consider more pressing issues, such as the insecurity East German teachers felt in trying to get a foothold in the new system” (Kupferberg, 2002, p. 62). Even publicists, e.g. Hensel (mentioned above), were accused of downplaying the GDR as an unjust state by bowing to childhood memories and glossing over reality. It is, however, hard to overlook that a great many phenomena in East Germany, including educational challenges, are still viewed from a West German perspective.

Kupferberg accurately points out that “the emphasis on **belonging** [emphasis added] is one of issues that divides the present German nation. (...) One of the most divisive, if not the most divisive, cultural issues after reunification is the strong presence among East Germans of feelings of belonging to the »German« nation in the historical sense and the absence of such feelings among the majority of West Germans” (2002, p. 13).¹² He also refers to the paradoxical situation that

¹² Kupferberg refers to numerous studies, incl. those conducted by Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt (1994), Thomas Blank (1997) and Bettina Westle (1999).

despite these feelings of belonging to the “German” nation, there was an accompanying feeling of cultural and political alienation from the actual, new German state among East Germans. Jennifer A. Yoder (1999, p. 83) cited an ironic phrase to sum up the disappointment of the former GDR citizens: “We wanted justice (*Recht*) and we got the state of law (*Rechtsstaat*)”.

Institutional expediency over cultural integration, accompanied by the speed and comprehensiveness of the systemic change in East Germany marginalized the whole East German community. And populism becomes stronger in marginalized communities; there appears the danger of “a Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes” (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). The longer-term legacy of the transition after the reunification is the existence of two parallel social structures and the growing political cleavage, with the populist, far-right AfD reaching 20% in most East German states in the 2017 federal election, much more than in Western Germany (Williams, 2019).

Teachers’ longing for the apparent egalitarianism, for the “closeness of relations”, for the idealized “heartland”, as well as distance from moral thinking about the past, are not only an educational version of the Fromm’s escape from freedom, and search of a “cozy sense of security” against the hardship of the transition (Neather, 2000, p. 35). This “selective nostalgia for certain reassuring aspects of the old regime” (Hofferbert, Klingemann, 2000, p. 2) was not only a defensive response to the shock of modernization (longing for equality in the socialist system) and individualism (longing for the collective). It was also an effective means of gradually “taming” the experiences of life in the GDR. One of the more emotional statements of one teacher showed how difficult and extensive the process of dealing with the past, repressions, people’s tragedies and the vices of the old regime, was:

Everything related to the *Wende* has taken a long time for me to adapt to, and it will certainly take some more time. In the fall 1989, I didn’t understand some things, although I knew intuitively that it had to change. Many things happened in the GDR which I would prefer not to know. It all fell on me so unexpectedly and with such force... I read a lot, it even gave me some sleepless nights, but I wanted to understand better. And even when I’m reading today, I think: “Oh my God, it was not happening. All this could not be true”. But I have lived in this country. And I have to deal with all this. (Russian, Ethics and Philosophy teacher in *Gymnasium* in Saxony, 2004; own research)

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ODDALENIE OD PRZESZŁOŚCI – TĘSKNOTA ZA „RDZENNĄ KRAINĄ”:
NAMYSŁ NAD SUBIEKTYWNYMI DOŚWIADCZENIAMI PRZEŁOMU 1989 ROKU
WŚRÓD WSCHODNIONIEMIECKICH NAUCZYCIELI

Wprowadzenie: Dominacja instytucjonalizacji nad integracją kulturową, szybkość i wszechogarniający wymiar zmiany systemowej doprowadziły do marginalizacji całego społeczeństwa Niemiec Wschodnich, w tym grupy zawodowej o szczególnym znaczeniu społecznym: nauczycieli. Jak dostosowali się do nowych warunków? Jak postrzegali swoją nową rolę w zmienionym systemie społecznym i oświatowym?

Cel badań: Odpowiedzi na te pytania dostarczyły przegląd i krytyczna analiza niemieckich badań empirycznych nad subiektywnymi doświadczeniami przełomu wśród nauczycieli z byłej NRD. Uwzględniono również fragmenty badań własnych.

Stan wiedzy: Wyniki badań wskazują na dwie istotne strategie kompensujące niepewność biograficzną i zawodową nauczycieli. Jedną z nich jest zwrócenie się ku kontynuacji oraz towarzyszący jej brak krytyki, dystans do moralnej oceny zdemontowanego systemu politycznego, w tym edukacji. Drugi to mentalny zwrot ku wyidealizowanej „wspólnocie utraconej”, a także ku „bliskości i trosce”, będących przeciwieństwem nowej, zachodniej „mentalności urzędniczej”.

Podsumowanie: Tęsknota nauczycieli wschodnioniemieckich za egalitaryzmem i familiaryzmem „rdzennej krainy”, a także dystans wobec moralnego myślenia o przeszłości, to nie wyłącznie edukacyjna wersja Fromma ucieczki od wolności w obliczu trudów przejścia do demokracji i kapitalizmu. Były one sposobem na długotrwały proces uporania się z trudną przeszłością i „oswajania” doświadczeń życia w NRD.

Słowa kluczowe: zmiana edukacyjna, transformacja Niemiec Wschodnich, zjednoczenie Niemiec, edukacja, nauczyciele, dostosowanie do zmiany