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The Socialist and Post-socialist *Jugendweihe*: Symbol of an Evolving East(ern) German Identity

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In 1990, after a life-span of merely 40 years, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) ceased to exist. During this short lifetime, the state went to great lengths to create amongst its citizens a strong GDR identity, in order to secure their loyalty and devotion, and thus the state's very future. This proved necessary not only due to the mental and physical insecurities left in the wake of the Second World War, but was further heightened by the presence of West Germany, and the need to "compete" for legitimacy. In the attempt to form a new emotional bond with its people, the GDR thus developed a rigorous program of national festivals, rousing demonstrations of state loyalty and ritual ceremonies designed to infiltrate every-day life, to compensate for the lack of firm historical foundations, and to provide a substitute for religious celebrations. As the GDR matured, so too did its ceremonies developing increasingly quasi-religious characteristics. A socialist naming ceremony, for example, was introduced as an alternative to baptism, couples could get married at socialist marriage ceremonies, and a harvest festival was adopted as a state occasion (Neubert 194-95). In 1958, the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), Walter Ulbricht, also announced ten "Gebote der sozialistischen Moral", by which all GDR citizens were to abide, and socialist ideology even subscribed to the concept of an "after-life": the future utopia of communism.¹ A "state-religion" thus rapidly formed, aiming not only to challenge the role of the Protestant and Catholic churches, whose beliefs and independence proved to be a thorn in the side of the GDR, but also to create loyalty to the socialist state amongst its citizens, thereby promoting a strong national identity.

The *Jugendweihe* was the ultimate example of the way in which religious symbolism was employed to both these ends. As a socialist equivalent to religious confirmation, in which 14-year-olds swore an oath of loyalty to the socialist state, it clearly aimed to draw young people away from the grasp of the Christian community, whilst also imbuing them with the

socialist morale and encouraging heightened patriotic behavior. Structurally the ceremony was remarkably similar to religious confirmation, including music such as *Jugendweihe* anthems, moralistic speeches and an oath of loyalty.² The ceremonies took place in the spring, traditionally the time for confirmation, and notably on Sunday mornings. Preparation for the event also involved a series of ten classes, at which the fundamentals of socialist society were studied and discussed. Clearly it was the difference between the content of this "state catechism" and that of the churches that made the two ceremonies so distinct from one another.

Of all the socialist rituals, however, the *Jugendweihe* proved to be unique. Firstly, unlike so many other aspects of GDR life, it was not an import from the Soviet Union, and found no equivalent in any of the other Eastern bloc countries. Although it was celebrated by a very small number of private, mainly humanist, circles in the Federal Republic, it remained foreign to the majority of West Germans, and thus enjoyed a particularly nation-specific status in the GDR. Secondly, the *Jugendweihe* has survived German unification, and is one of the few remaining institutions of GDR society to flourish today, although it did have to adapt and find a new perspective for itself. Indeed, it has become symbolic of the dilemmas of today's Eastern German community, caught between a new nation that is not yet fully within its grasp and the nostalgic vision of one that has slipped out of reach. This paper will explore the nature and evolution of national identity in Eastern Germany through the *Jugendweihe*, examining firstly its foundations and relevance in the GDR, before discussing its development and significance in a unified Germany.

The socialist 'Jugendweihe'

In accordance with changing GDR policy, the national emphasis of the *Jugendweihe* shifted during the 40 years of socialist rule, and it was in the 1980s that this aspect of the ceremony reached its height. The final decade of the GDR *Jugendweihe* thus provides the most fruitful period of analysis for this study. In order to enable a better understanding of the ritual's aims and effectiveness with regard to national identity during this period, however, a brief history of the *Jugendweihe* is first of all necessary.

The development of a national ritual

Whilst the origins of the *Jugendweihe* can be traced back to freethinking circles of the mid 19th-century, the ritual only became a mass phenomenon after 1954, when introduced by the SED in East Germany in the attempt to curb the influence of the churches. Following the introduction of the more liberal "new course" and the workers' uprising of 1953, the state could not allow itself to be so severe in the persecution of religious communities and youth groups as it had previously been. Thus in the attempt to diminish the influence of the churches through less authoritarian means, it introduced the *Jugendweihe*, which, despite receiving clear direction from the SED, was given the appearance of being run by an autonomous organization. Individual *Jugendweihe* committees formed in all regions of the GDR under the direction of the *Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe*, and in November 1954, an *Aufruf zur Jugendweihe* was publicized, signed by a number of well-known writers and artists such as Johannes R. Becher, Stephan Hermlin and Anna Seghers. Although the number of participants in the first year of 1955 totaled only 17% of all 14-year-olds, this rapidly rose to 87% by 1960, and encompassed over 97% of all young people by the mid 1970s, a level which was to remain constant until the end of the GDR (DDR-Handbuch 693).

Once the SED had established a secure place for the *Jugendweihe* in the socialist calendar of national festivals and ceremonies, it began to adapt its content to suit the ideological needs of the state. By the late 1950s and 1960s, the number of young people receiving religious confirmation had fallen dramatically, and the state had ultimately gained the upper hand in its battle against the churches. At the same time, the need to legitimize the GDR became increasingly necessary in the face of an ever more powerful Federal Republic, and the emphasis of the *Jugendweihe* began to shift away from the materialist world view towards issues of citizenship and state loyalty. For example, the earliest volume of the book presented to *Jugendweihe* participants, *Weltall – Erde – Mensch*, published between 1955 and 1972, aimed to counter religious teachings on creationism by explaining the development of the universe and scientific phenomena such as atomic theory. In contrast, the later volumes, *Der Sozialismus – Deine Welt* and *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens*, laid greater emphasis on themes specific to the GDR and socialism, such as the GDR's revolutionary legacy, the relationship of peace and socialism, and the rights and duties of young citizens. The form of

these books was equally revealing, and whilst the earlier publications consisted of contributions by a variety of authors, the final volume of the 1980s contained one single narrative, clearly indicative of the SED's attempt to tighten its ideological dominance against the background of renewed cold war tensions. The *Jugendweihe* thus became an integral part of the GDR education system, completely coordinated with school curricula and free time activities, and increasingly weighted towards a patriotic focus. Indeed, as Egon Freyer, chairman of the central committee for *Jugendweihe* in the late 1980s, said of these ceremonies: "Sie sollen Ausdruck des Vertrauensverhältnisses zwischen SED und Volk sein" (Meier 217).

The patriotic program

How, then, did the *Jugendweihe* attempt to forge this emotional bond between young people and their state? The program of preparatory classes together with the *Jugendweihe* books of the 1980s reveal four distinct themes, each of which was clearly designed to create pride in the fatherland: the promotion of the achievements of the GDR, as well as that of its "progressive" historical legacy, the emphasis on proletarian internationalism, and the attempt to foreground the importance of military defense.

The first of these attempted to familiarize young people with the achievements of the GDR through a variety of activities. Whilst classes most commonly involved a guest speaker who then led group discussions on themes such as technical and industrial advances, or improvements in health care and education, participants were also taken to town halls to inspect plans for the future development of their locality, and some groups even organized their own mock council meetings. The aim here was clearly to involve young people in the workings of society, and thus to inspire active participation. Indeed, the alteration of the title of one preparatory class from "Die Welt verändert sich" to "Die Welt verändern wir" clearly symbolized this attitude.³ Respect for the present-day nation as a place of natural beauty was also targeted with camping trips and environmental projects, such as cleaning up local nature reserves, or planting trees in participants' home towns. However, these activities were often criticized for their lack of adequate political content, and as the *Jugendweihe* chair commented with reference to one tree-planting project in the district of Halle: "Im Mittelpunkt der Jugendstunden muß das Bestreben stehen, das Staatsbewußtsein der Mädchen und Jungen entwickeln und festigen zu helfen.

Und da – so meinen wir – gab es auch in diesem Jugendstundenjahr noch Reserven."⁴ As this demonstrates, issues of political activity and involved citizenship were to remain the primary aim.

The second theme promoted the "progressive" historical and cultural legacy of the GDR in order to develop participants' historical consciousness. Here the study of the antifascist tradition played an important role. Many teenagers were taken to the former concentration camp at Buchenwald, where they were taught not only about the evils of National Socialism, but also the heroism of the antifascist and communist resistance movement. Indeed, so dominant was the attempt to highlight this particular tradition that the Jewish victims were almost completely neglected. However, in accordance with the SED's move to widen its historical heritage during the final decade of the GDR, thereby creating a broader basis for national identity and increasing the legitimacy of the GDR, the 1980s marked a shift towards greater emphasis on "national" history in *Jugendweihe* classes. Thus, shortly after the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great was reinstated on *Unter den Linden* in Berlin in 1980, Luther suddenly appeared in *Jugendweihe* books as a great humanist and reformer, having never previously been mentioned, and lesser-known German thinkers and historical figures such as Wilhelm Weitling dominated to the neglect of more renowned foreign figures.

The increasing emphasis on the GDR nation was not, however, to the exclusion of all other cultures, for proletarian internationalism constituted the third theme, and participants met Soviet soldiers, studied the culture of the Soviet Union, and even received membership to the *Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft* (DSF). Although the relationship with the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries proved dominant here, active support for other socialist nations such as Vietnam, Angola and Tanzania was also encouraged. Here the aim was not only to complement the national emphasis of the majority of *Jugendweihe* classes, and thus to avoid nationalist overtones, but also to secure the socialist alliance. The emphasis on proletarian internationalism thus served a dual protective purpose: first to prevent GDR patriotism from mutating into narrow-minded nationalism, and second to defend it against hostile propaganda from the West.

Protection also played a prominent role in the final theme of military defense, which was regarded to be the most honorable and patriotic act of all. Activities involved discussions with army officers, visits to bar-

racks and basic military training, and official reports revealed that the *Jugendweihe* was to be mobilized in the campaign to recruit more young people for military careers.⁵ In order to make such actions legitimate, however, and highlight the strictly defensive role of the East German forces, it became necessary to emphasize the hostile image of the enemy. The predominant image of the West portrayed in preparatory classes was thus one of unemployment, violence, racism, and, of course, military aggression: "Wir sind verpflichtet alle Möglichkeiten des Jugendstundenprogramms zu nutzen, den USA-Imperialismus und seine Verbündeten anzuklagen, Reagan zu entlarven, daß, wenn er von Frieden spricht, Krieg, Vernichtung und Mord meint und praktiziert."⁶

The patriotic emphasis of these classes was further enhanced by elements such as the playing of the national anthem at all ceremonies and the frequent laying of wreaths at local antifascist war memorials. Indeed, the ceremonies were seen to fulfill the emotional needs of the community at large, and to quote one official report: "Die hohe Emotionalität der meisten Reden sowie der Feiern insgesamt hinterließ bei allen Anwesenden eine tiefe Wirkung. Das trifft auch auf die Bürger zu, die sonst kaum in der ideologischen Arbeit erreicht werden."⁷ The SED intended, thus, for the *Jugendweihe* not only to assume a central role in the patriotic education of teenagers, but also to provide a celebration of national identity for the GDR population at large.

A patriotic youth?

The expectations of the party concerning the *Jugendweihe*'s role in identity formation were clearly high, but like so many areas of GDR policy they were somewhat unrealistic. Indeed, the attitudes of young people towards the ceremony reveal a youth rather different to the patriotic vanguard that was envisaged. While the high participation rate suggested that the *Jugendweihe* had become widely accepted, those who refused participation risked being barred from further education, and thus endangered future career prospects. As a result, the huge majority of young people committed themselves without considerable reflection, and the *Jugendweihe* simply became a routine event in a young person's biography. It was perhaps only those who refused to participate who took its content seriously, for they were prepared to risk a future life of discrimination through its rejection. Indeed, organizers consistently complained that participants lacked sin-

cerity in their actions, and to quote one example: "[...] wir legen uns die Frage vor, was kann und muß getan werden, während und nach der *Jugendweihe*, um das Gelöbnis bei den 14jährigen zu verinnerlichen, damit, wie vielfach geschieht, das 'ja, das geloben wir' nicht nur nachgeplappert wird, ohne sich moralisch zur Einhaltung verpflichtet zu fühlen" (cit. in Meier 25).

Needless to say, activities with a clear ideological agenda found little acceptance amongst young people, and organizers' complaints over the lack of personal commitment towards military defense were particularly rife. To quote one such example: "Obwohl es gerade in diesem Jahr viele Jugendstunden gab, in denen eindrucksvoll die Notwendigkeit der Verteidigungsbereitschaft besprochen wurde, fällt es Jugendlichen schwer, daraus Schlußfolgerungen für ihr eigenes Leben zu ziehen und zum Beispiel bereit zu sein, länger in der NVA zu dienen."⁸ Part of this failure was undoubtedly owing to the fact that young people increasingly idolized the pop and fashion culture of the Western world, and thus lost willingness to see it as the enemy. They were clearly no longer prepared to put unilateral blame for the threat of war on the Western world, especially where the Federal Republic was concerned. As their visions turned westwards, the question of friendship with the Soviet Union found equally little acceptance amongst young people, and complaints about their lack of personal commitment to the cause were similar: "Es scheint uns, daß die Fragen der Freundschaft zur Sowjetunion in den Jugendstunden noch zu wenig ideologisch zugespitzt werden. Es wird noch zuviel über die Freundschaft geredet, sie zu wenig auf persönliche Haltungen und das Handeln der Jugendlichen bezogen."⁹

Clearly, the ideological basis of the *Jugendweihe* was far from successful. The attraction proved, instead, to be the festive atmosphere, and the major motivation for young people was undoubtedly provided by the promise of money and gifts, the average value of which increased dramatically over the years. Indeed, shops aimed their advertising at prospective *Jugendweihe* participants to such an extent that it achieved the status of a "second" Christmas. However, it was also widely accepted as a rite of passage into adulthood, and seen as an important turning point in the lives of young people, with the next celebration of such magnitude normally being marriage. Whilst this was frequently understood on a superficial level, with young people making the most of their first opportunity to drink alcohol, the age of fourteen did mark a certain maturity, for it was at this

age that one received a full passport, entered the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ), and received increased legal responsibility. For parents it also marked a new stage in the lives of their children, and family traditions proved vital to the *Jugendweihe* tradition. Indeed, the ritual provided a valid excuse for family reunions in the East, to which Western relatives could legitimately be invited (Kärgling 119). Along with social conformity, the above motivations all lacked an ideological basis, and clearly demonstrate the extent to which the *Jugendweihe* was rejected as a celebration of public values, and accepted instead for its private meaning. Through highlighting the nature of the GDR as a "niche society", in which citizens found true fulfillment only in private circles, the *Jugendweihe* thus also demonstrated the ultimate failure of the SED to promote a prominent national identity.

The post-socialist 'Jugendweihe'

In 1990, it was assumed by a great many Germans that the institution of the *Jugendweihe* would simply disappear along with the GDR, the SED and its youth organizations. *Die Zeit*, for example, typically reported: "Jugendweihe – 1990? Doch, es gibt sie noch. Zum letzten Mal" ("Seid ihr"). However, following an initial lull in participation immediately after unification, the number taking part has now reached over 60% of all 14-year-olds, in some areas reaching almost 70%.¹⁰ The *Jugendweihe* is thus one of the few formal institutions of GDR society to have survived with such success; the FDJ, for example, struggles to exist today, and the SED can only continue its life under a different name and radically reformed appearance. However, while the *Jugendweihe* flourishes in Eastern Germany, it has aroused little interest in the West, condemned as a communist ritual that can no longer claim a meaningful place in today's society, and dismissed as mere *Ostalgie*. Indeed, to quote the *Freie Presse* in 1998: "Mit dem Ritual Jugendweihe [wird] unter Verleugnung der tatsächlichen Zusammenhänge der Hang zur DDR-Nostalgie gepflegt" (cit. in Illing 57). The fixed geographical boundaries of this ritual certainly suggest that it feeds off a common Eastern mentality, thus extending beyond the bounds of a purely private celebration. However, where can the foundations of this mentality be found, and what role does the *Jugendweihe* play in the radically different social and political climate of Germany today? Can it, indeed, be anything more meaningful than ritualized nostalgia for a world that has slipped out of reach?

Reformed yet void of meaning?

Structurally, there have been surprisingly few changes since 1989/90, and although the *Jugendweihe* is now organized by several competing groups, the *Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe e.V.*, which took over from the former GDR organization in 1990, is by far the largest and most influential.¹¹ Many of the employees and volunteers who organized the socialist ritual simply continued in their duties following unification, and as a result the basic organizational structure has remained almost identical. Indeed, whilst the ceremony no longer claims an official status within the education system, schools frequently continue to be the centers of activity. Ceremonies still take place between March and May, with the *Jugendweihe* "year" beginning in November. Although the rigid structure of obligatory classes no longer exists, a program of voluntary events still constitutes an integral part of the *Jugendweihe*. The ceremony itself naturally remains the central focus, incorporating all the traditional elements such as speeches, music, and the presentation of a book and flower along with the *Jugendweihe* certificate. Only two major components are omitted today: the uniform oath, which was abandoned in late 1989 in favor of an optional and freely-written "promise", and the GDR national anthem, which has not, interestingly, been replaced with that of the Federal Republic.

The major organizational difference is, of course, that the *Jugendweihe* is no longer controlled by any one political party, an element reflected in its ideological content, which has clearly been forced to adapt to the pluralism of present-day society. Themes such as the evils of imperialism, the special friendship with Russia and the emphasis on military protection are, of course, now all absent. Indeed, today's organizers are careful to make sure that no remnants of GDR ideology are left to linger, and activities center around the immediate lives of young people, focusing on issues such as love, friendship and drugs, with visits to career centers and charitable organizations.¹² Although the majority of themes are clearly rooted in present-day materialist society, history is not entirely neglected, for in the attempt to revise the GDR's historiography of the Third Reich, this period is still featured. Indeed, excursions to Buchenwald and other former concentration camps continue, only the emphasis is now placed on the fate of the Jews rather than the antifascist victims. Interestingly, however, the study of Germany's past focuses very rarely on issues concerning

the GDR, and any real examination of the immediate socialist past and the structures of the GDR is avoided. This is no clearer than in the *Jugendweihe* tradition itself, for official literature frequently emphasizes the ritual's 19th-century humanist roots rather than choosing to dwell on its stronger GDR history, and as a result its former repressive nature often remains forgotten. Understandably, this provokes much criticism from religious communities, and especially from those who experienced discrimination due to non-participation. Indeed, as one man complained: "My punishment was not being allowed to go to grammar school. People have forgotten how much suffering was connected with the Jugendweihe" ("East Germans" 18). In contrast to the structure of the ritual, its content has radically changed, yet the old and new *Jugendweihe* find one similarity here, for both refrained from truly examining the most difficult and debated areas of their immediate social history.

A closer examination of the program of events offered to young participants today reveals the extent to which the modern *Jugendweihe* reflects, rather than prescribes, the interests of young people. The 2000/2001 brochure for Saxony-Anhalt, for example, devotes 23 pages to day trips and holidays, 18 to free-time activities, sports events and discos, 12 to themes such as drugs, love, relationships and careers, and a mere four pages to political activities (*The best*). Not only this, but the voluntary nature of events invariably means that those concerning political and social issues never even take place due to lack of numbers. In contrast, the events which arouse the greatest interest, such as fashion shows and sports tournaments, often appear to be devoid of any didactic content. It is here that many critics of the *Jugendweihe* find justification in their claim that the ceremony has become nothing more than empty nostalgia for a fictitious rosy past, and to quote the *Deutsche Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt* in 1999: "Das Fest sei 'weitgehend inhaltsleer' [...] Ein kräftiger Schuß Ostalgie ist auch mit im Spiel" (cit. in Griese 38).

While it cannot be denied that the *Jugendweihe* has lost the pedagogical importance it once claimed to hold, it does still attempt to shape the collective identity of participants by encouraging responsible citizenship. However, due to the problematic nature of appealing to a national identity in the new German states since unification, the emphasis of the *Jugendweihe* has shifted away from the national to the regional and supranational levels. In Brandenburg, for example, participants' certificates in the mid-1990s cited the following words: "Die Brandenburger sind bekannt

für ihre Tugenden, und sie sind stolz darauf. Dazu zählt auch, daß sich dieses Land den Ruf erworben hat, Heimstatt geistiger, religiöser und weltanschaulicher Toleranz zu sein. Bewahren Sie diesen in der heutigen Zeit unschätzbaren Wert [...] So sichern Sie auch die eigene Identität. [...] Bleiben Sie Brandenburger! Das Land braucht Sie!" (Knoblich; cit. in *Jugendweihe* certificate). Other regions, such as Saxony, have adopted similar strategies, for example by presenting participants with books on local traditions or engravings of their towns ("East Germans" 18; Meier 55). In many ways, the new regional structure of the *Interessenvereinigung* only serves to further this trend, and local pride is undoubtedly emerging as a reaction to the decades of enforced GDR centralism. Most importantly, however, regional identity provides a comfortable compromise: whilst allowing unambiguous pride in one's identity, it still provides for an Eastern German character, yet does not exclude allegiance to all-German citizenship. At the other end of the scale, appeal is also made to European citizenship, which provides a similar 'safe' identity. Indeed, the official *Jugendweihe* book of the mid-1990s, entitled *Europa - Ein Kontinent und seine Staaten*, introduces the history, countries and traditions of all European countries to its readers. In contrast to the regional tradition, which provides many of the necessary emotional and historical elements of a collective identity, the emphasis on Europe points rather to the future. The appeal to the supranational level has even been taken one step further, for the present *Jugendweihe* volume takes the form of a reference book named *Die Welt in der wir leben*. This includes not only a chapter dedicated to each continent, but also sections on natural resources, different religions and customs, a history of the United Nations, and short biographies of children from a variety of countries. The aim is clearly to create amongst today's youth an awareness of their identity as world citizens, encouraging them to respect values such as tolerance, equality and justice, and teaching them that their actions as individuals can make a difference.

It would, however, be incorrect to claim that the *Jugendweihe* fails to incorporate any elements of a national identity. Despite the omission of the national anthem and the clear absence of state symbolism today, some ceremonies turn instead to German culture as the foundation for an all-German identity, making use of patriotic poems by Goethe and Schiller, or musical excerpts by Bach and Beethoven ("Die Peinlichkeiten" 28). Others look towards the country's natural heritage, and in 1993 and 1994 the encyclopedia *Deutschland. So schön ist unser Land* was published for the

Interessenvereinigung in order to accompany the *Jugendweihe*. As a cross between a travel guide and a road atlas, this volume aimed to introduce the different regions of the Federal Republic to its young citizens through their natural landscapes – once again conveniently apolitical in nature. Even though the majority of *Jugendweihe* activities today clearly lack an ideological agenda, the ritual still incorporates elements of identity formation, and although these concentrate primarily on the regional and individual identities of young people, pride in German citizenship is still encouraged. This is done, however, in a careful, over-cautious way, demonstrating just how far the ritual has moved from its former status as a comprehensive celebration of supposed national virtues.

An initiation into the Eastern German community?

The apparent lack of display of national pride does not mean to say, however, that the ritual has lost its function as a public festival. Ironically, this element appears to have increased in importance, for in reaction to the reforms that swept from West to East following unification, the ceremony has become symbolic of the attempt to reassert an Eastern identity. In contrast to other Eastern bloc countries such as Poland or Hungary, where citizens still remained Poles and Hungarians following the demise of communism, GDR citizens clearly ceased to be GDR citizens, and the reform of their country went hand in hand with a new national identity. The desire to retain not only an element of familiarity, but also self-worth, was thus widespread, and the *Jugendweihe* provided an ideal ritual in which Eastern Germans could take pride as their own, for its long tradition dating back to the 19th century conveniently freed it from the shackles of an all-communist past. Indeed, the two elements rendering this ceremony so unique are closely related, for the fact that it was not an import from the Soviet Union has probably secured its future life in unified Germany. Whereas the majority of West Germans, who know little about its history, dismiss it to be a relict of socialist society, many in the East value it as a source of stability in a society marked by turbulent change. The determination to retain the ceremony has thus become an act of defiance in the face of the West, and those who argue that the *Jugendweihe* survives today simply due to its relevance in the private sphere overlook an important aspect of its development (see Neubert 168). Indeed, to quote the *Mitteldeutsche* newspaper: "Ihren Wert hatte die Veranstaltung, weil

Ostdeutsche sich ein Stück Deutungshoheit zurückholten über eine DDR-Geschichte, die wohl allzu oft von Westdeutschen geschrieben wird [...]" (cit. in Griesse 41).

It is, however, not only the principle of the *Jugendweihe* that anchors it firmly in the East, for an Eastern flavor also permeates the ceremonies and preparatory activities, which frequently play on an anti-Western sentiment. One songwriter's performance at a ceremony in Eastern Berlin in 1992, for example, included a lesson in West German acronyms, teaching those present the meaning of GmbH: "Gehört meinem Bruder Helmut?" (Bollwahn 5). Even today, discussions about contemporary society often employ terms such as *Ellenbogengesellschaft*, and focus on the immediate problems of life in the East, such as unemployment and urban renewal, thereby providing definition from the West. Speeches often hark back to the "people's revolution" of 1989, stressing the role played by the GDR people in bringing down the Wall, and citing slogans such as Rosa Luxemburg's famous line: "Die Freiheit ist immer die Freiheit des Andersdenkenden!" In many ways, the *Jugendweihe* has, thus, become an institution welcoming young people into the community of Eastern Germany at large. In a region which has been subject to radical transformation over the past decade, this ritual appears to offer stability and continuity, creating the feeling of a close-knit community in the face of Westerners who are often perceived as arrogant and lacking understanding. Indeed, it could be argued that only now has the *Jugendweihe* truly reached the status of a people's festival that touches the real emotions of all involved.

Whilst today's 14-year-olds clearly accept the ritual as a cultural model, materialist motivations remain constant, with the promise of money and gifts forming the prime incentive. Indeed, participants can frequently be heard to make comments such as "es war ungefähr so wie Geburtstag", or "es ist ein bißchen Weihnachten im Frühling!" ("Ungefähr" 31). However, with a participation rate of over 60%, peer pressure is also extremely influential, ironically lending new life to the previously despised element of social conformity. In many ways, the *Jugendweihe* is increasingly adopting the markings of an initiation into social life, and as one 14-year-old girl claimed: "ja vielleicht nach der Jugendweihe hat sich der Klassenverband irgendwie ein bißchen enger geschlossen [...] vorher gab's da irgendwie immer paar Trüppchen und einzelne waren auch alleine oder so aber jetzt arbeiten wir sogar mal mit den Jungs zusammen ganz was Neues" (cit. in Döhnert 245). Despite a clear individualization of youth culture since the

fall of the wall, the *Jugendweibe* thus still remains a collective coming of age ritual, welcoming young people en masse into a new phase of life. In contrast to the pluralism of today's society and the progressively earlier age at which children mature, it seems that the GDR tradition of treating "the youth" as a homogenous group has not entirely disappeared (Griese 15). Indeed, being a member of a larger collective offers some kind of welcome security and identity to young people themselves, many of whom may have experienced the chaos of parents' unemployment or involuntary retraining. Ironically, the collective thus appears to have adopted a similar role as the "niche" in the GDR, offering an escape from the pressures of everyday life, and providing a positive, alternative identity.

How, then, does this identity relate to the nation? Does the collective element of the *Jugendweibe* encourage an Eastern identity amongst young people today? Many believe this not to be the case, adhering to the thesis typified by the journalists Kerstin and Gunnar Decker: "Die Ostdeutschen sterben aus. Man erkennt es daran, daß schon unsere Kinder das Wort DDR aussprechen, als sagten sie Der dreißigjährige Krieg oder Das alte Rom. [...] Unsere Kinder werden keine Ostdeutschen mehr sein" (Decker and Decker 9). It seems that there is a certain amount of truth here, for today's *Jugendweibe* participants do show clear signs of identification with a unified Germany, and popular culture, such as music, fashion and the electronic media are clearly orientated towards the West. Last year's booklet of *Jugendweibe* activities in Saxony-Anhalt, for example, cites a selection of items which teenagers in one school class considered to be "in" and "out". As one would expect, the lists assiduously follow the music charts and fashion magazines, but two entries prove rather more revealing: whilst "GDR" stands under the heading "out", *Bundesliga* is said to be "in" (*The best* 8). Trivial though this example may seem, it demonstrates this generation's desire to look to the future rather than the past for its identity.

However, while young people today may claim to have no interest in the past, it is undoubtedly a force that continues to manifest itself, and a number of trends suggest that the transition from "East German" to "Federal citizen" may take longer than one generation. Indeed, the importance attributed to the collective is of great influence here, for young East Germans today continue to define themselves in the face of the West. However, it is not only here that the young generation finds definition, for its clear acceptance of the *Jugendweibe* also reveals a willingness to maintain certain Eastern traditions. Indeed, an opinion poll carried out by the

Allensbach Institute in 1995 revealed that the youngest age-group of 16-29 proved to be most in favor of keeping the *Jugendweibe* tradition, with as many as 85% giving it their support, in contrast to an average of 77% amongst older generations (Noelle-Neumann and Köcher 10: 587). Although young people are, in many ways, adapting to a unified Germany, it seems that an East German community may well outlive the memory of the GDR, and for the time being the *Jugendweibe*, along with its Eastern flavor, is set to stay as a key expression of this alternative identity.

Conclusion

Whilst transition is continuous, and a more integrated future lies on the horizon, the institution of the *Jugendweibe* clearly highlights the present dilemmas of a people whose nation disappeared overnight. Although a craving for stability, coupled with resentment towards the West, may have created a desire to retain the *Jugendweibe* as a principle rather than a pedagogical institution, it cannot be claimed that it occupies a purely nostalgic and meaningless function in today's society. Indeed, popular reception of the ceremony has become indicative of the desire to create a new Eastern identity. Symbolic of the quest for a genuine identity, the *Jugendweibe* before and after 1990 thus share one important feature, for each has been accepted and utilized by the population for its own needs. In the GDR, where authorities increasingly accentuated the element of state-loyalty, the ritual became popular for its private meaning, whereas today's ceremony, which has consistently avoided emphasizing an overt national identity, has unofficially become dedicated to Eastern German values. The *Jugendweibe* as a popular tradition thus appears to have turned full circle, for it is now being utilized in the way the SED originally intended in 1954: as a ceremony to create stability in the East, and to encourage an emotional bond between a threatened community and its citizens. It is only in the absence of the GDR nation, however, that this has proved possible.

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Notes

¹ For a detailed analysis of religious symbolism used in the GDR, see: Nothnagle, Alan. *Building the East German Myth. Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*. Michigan: U of Michigan P,

1999.

² An example of such an anthem is the *Kantate zur Jugendweihe*, text: Louis Fürnberg, music: Ernst Hermann Meyer, SAPMO-BArch, D 21/23

³ *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses für Jugendweihe am 16. Mai 1984*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/18, 291.

⁴ *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses am 5. Mai 1983*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/18, 55. Emphasis in original.

⁵ Explicitly stated by Egon Freyer at the *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses für Jugendweihe am 15. Mai 1985*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/19, 63.

⁶ *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses für Jugendweihe am 8. November 1983*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/18, 176.

⁷ *Information zum Anlauf der Jugendweihfeiern 1986*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 30/J IV 2/9.05/15.

⁸ *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses für Jugendweihe am 6. Mai 1981*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/17, 31.

⁹ *Tagung des Zentralen Ausschusses am 6.5.1980*. SAPMO-BArch. DY 21/16, 187. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ For example in Magdeburg 2000, according to the records of the Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt der Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe e.V. See also Griesé, Hartmut M. Ed. *Übergangsrituale im Jugendalter*. Münster: LIT, 2000: 122.

¹¹ This was officially renamed the *Interessenvereinigung für humanistische Jugendarbeit und Jugendweihe e.V.* in August 1992. The only other major organization offering the *Jugendweihe* throughout the east is the *Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands*, founded in 1993, which names its ritual the *JugendFEIER*. Others, such as the *Deutscher Freidenker-Verband*, operate within smaller regional circles.

¹² See, for example, *Zwischen Nicht mehr und Noch nicht* and *The best of life*.

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tionen der DDR im Bundesarchiv
DY 21: Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe
DY 30: SED (all files cited are from the Abteilung
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Thomas Manns *Schwere Stunde*. Schiller und Goethe – Krise und Ausweg?

Thomas Schneider

Man soll sich nicht über den Umfang meiner Arbeit wundern. Man darf nicht vergessen, welch große Leistungen man vollbringen kann, wenn einem die Zeit und der Fleiß zur Verfügung stehen“, erklärte Thomas Mann in einem Gespräch mit Paul Pereszlenyi. „Die Zeit war mir gegeben als ein Geschenk, wofür ich selbst nichts kann“ (zit. nach Hansen 393). Zeit war ihm in hohem Maße gegeben, denn zum Zeitpunkt des zitierten Interviews, das am 1. Juni 1955, also fünf Tage vor seinem 80. Geburtstag, in der Stuttgarter Zeitung veröffentlicht wurde, konnte er immerhin auf 60 Jahre schriftstellerischer Tätigkeit zurückblicken und hatte tatsächlich große Leistungen vollbracht, zumindest was den beträchtlichen Umfang seiner Arbeiten betrifft. „Anders ist es mit dem Fleiß und mit dem Willen zur Arbeit, deren Bedeutung mir erst klar wurde, als ich mich mit dem Leben Schillers eingehend beschäftigte.“ Dieser Aussage ist bereits ein ernst zu nehmender Hinweis auf die zentrale Bedeutung der literarischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Leben und Werk Friedrich Schillers und der daraus hervorgegangenen Studie *Schwere Stunde* zu entnehmen. Zwar ist gewiß nicht anzunehmen, daß Thomas Mann vor dieser Zeit nicht fleißig oder gar faul gewesen sei, zweifellos wird jedoch deutlich, daß seit jeher die Orientierung an dichterischen Vorbildern ein nicht unwesentlicher Faktor seiner Motivation und ein Motor seines Schreibens gewesen sein muß.

„Schiller war immer fleißig, was auch vielleicht mit der Kürze seines Lebens zusammenhängt. Dies dürfte das Phänomen erklären, daß Schriftsteller und Künstler, deren Leben nur verhältnismäßig kurz ist, meist so produktiv sind, daß ihr Lebenswerk jenes lange arbeitender Schriftsteller weit übertrifft.“ Diese Aussage mag zunächst befremden, da der Eindruck entstehen kann, Mann grenze sich hier bewußt von Schiller ab und spreche diesem den Fleiß, sich selbst hingegen das unverdiente Geschenk eines langen (Arbeits-) Lebens zu. Diese Vermutung erweist sich jedoch als nicht