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Frank Beier

Technical University of Dresden

E-Mail: frank.beier1@tu-dresden.de

URL: <https://tu-dresden.de/zlsb/die-einrichtung/graduiertenforum/FrankBeier>

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THE EMERGENCE OF BIOGRAPHY BLOCKADES: POLITICAL IMPRISONED WOMEN IN THE GDR AND THEIR FAMILY BACKGROUND

Frank Beier

There are only a few approaches in socialization theory that give empirical insights into the processes of growing up in an autocratic system. However, political regimes like the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) have (had) only limited control over private family structures. Thus, the different family backgrounds of women who were part of the opposition movement and imprisoned because they tried to (illegally) migrate to West Germany will be illustrated in this paper. The study consists of biographical narratives with women born in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. The very different family backgrounds of these women influenced the acquired strategies to deal with the autocratic system. However, these strategies can fail or become ineffective in different life circumstances leading to biographical blockades. I argue that biographical blockades can be considered as a key concept to explain high-risk emigration decisions.

Keywords: *Biography research; GDR; migration; flight; political prosecution*

1. FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN THE GDR: PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SOCIALIZATION CONTEXTS

Families can be seen as draw-back zones in dictatorships. The power of political regimes is more limited in private spheres than in public institutions. In the former socialist state of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the so called "withdrawal into the private" (Neubert 1998, 143) was a common strategy to deal with the political claims which were common in nearly every state institution. This does not mean that the state did not try to interfere in family affairs as well, proclaiming that the separation of private and public spheres were relicts of a bourgeois ideology (Lemke 1991, 87). Social politics as well as propaganda and observations by unofficial and official members of the secret service framed the everyday life of families massively. However, the socialist family ideal remained an empty slogan for most citizens and in fact most families remained in a specific "non-public sphere" in which "entirely different semantics were enforced" (Alheit et al. 2004, 28, own translation). For lack of an autonomous public sphere, individual private spheres were used for expressing dissatisfaction and critique of the system, which was uttered even by those who identified themselves with the socialist society (Geulen 1998). In most

cases, this was endured by the system. Furthermore, the ongoing critique of the system can be described as a "culture of constant grumbling" (Fulbrook 2005, 269) on the one hand, while "on the other hand, the channels of complaint were intended to be individual, rather than collective, in character" (ibid.). Socialization processes were framed by both the political socialist claims in the holistic and state controlled public sphere and the unofficial fragmented private spheres full of critique, ironic jokes, and dissatisfaction with the socialist political regime. While taking part in public political actions and rituals like demonstrations or faked elections were part of the common civil duties, most people, however, withdrew simultaneously into respective private spheres without any further political participation. In this sense, Christiane Lemke speaks of an "unpolitical political culture" (1991, 61) in the GDR. This double culture massively framed socialization in the GDR and most people learned to deal with the autocratic system. Since the Berlin Wall had been built in 1961, the people of the GDR had only a few chances to leave the country. Migration thus was a biographical non-option. This led to an increasing oppositional movement of people who tried to leave the country in the direction of West Germany in the 1970s and '80s (Wolle 1999). However, migration and flight decisions from East Germany were very risky. The border

police had a firing order to prevent people without a permission from passing the state border. People who tried to “illegally” migrate to West Germany were seen as political enemies and could be sentenced to prison.

In this paper, I will focus on the family background of women who nevertheless tried to overcome the socialist border regime and therefore were seen as political enemies by the GDR authorities. Their family background shaped the way these women related to the public sphere and the socialist claims which were expressed in nearly every public institution. The socialist regime explained the development of an oppositional consciousness or so-called renitent behavior with wrong socialization influences, such as bourgeois and civic family conditions, western media consumption, religion, oppositional youth-cultures, and so on (Lemke 1991; Michalzik 1994). In contrast to that simplifying explanation, the results of this research project reveal that migration and flight decisions can neither be solely explained by failed indoctrination, nor by specific oppositional socialization processes. Instead, flight and migration decisions of former female political prisoners will be reconstructed in their biographical framing. I will first outline the specific life course regime of the GDR, showing that the establishment of a life course was an important governmental practice of the autocratic system, which enforced the socialist ideology in the everyday life. The normal biography of women in the GDR will be illustrated, which included living in a family as a dominant cultural pattern. Secondly, several research projects will be discussed, which have revealed that family and other private spheres can be considered as separated social spheres in which more or less coherent self- and world-concepts were deliberated. Social history is perceived through family history (Rosenthal 2000). Thirdly, it will be illustrated with empirical examples, how coherencies and incoherencies between the life course regime and family backgrounds caused different strategies to cope with the autocratic system. Thus, I will argue that there is an indirect connection between family background, socialization, and the decision to leave the country, as it shaped the way these women acquired strategies to deal with the autocratic system leading to blockades in their biography.

2. THE LIFE COURSE REGIME IN THE GDR: NORMAL BIOGRAPHY AS A GOVERNMENTAL PRACTICE

The GDR was an autocratic state based on socialist ideology. Nearly every social area (including culture, education, economy, or law) was connected with the political agenda. Without going into historical details, it can be remarked that the women in this research sample belong to the so called “Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ)” generation (Fulbrook 2006). The Berlin Wall was built when these women were children or young adolescents. They belong to the first generation that fully experienced the socialist education system, including political youth mass organizations, without the realistic alternative to simply emigrate to West Germany in their future life course (Völter 1996). The experiences of this generation were different than the war and post-war experiences of their parents and grandparents (Geulen 1998). This was particularly true for females: On the one hand women in this generation benefited from the educational expansion in the 1950s and '60s and had better chances for social advancement than their mothers and grandmothers before (Fulbrook 2006; Miethe 2007). On the other hand, state regulations and institutions had a major impact on life course decisions leading to a specific life course regime (Beier 2018). Following Lutz Niethammer, one can call this kind of regime “biocracy,” which refers to the “direct bureaucratic administration of the course, shape and content of individual life histories” (1996, 380, own translation).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that GDR authorities had already realized many emancipatory rights of women in the 1950s and '60s (Meier 1991). However, those rights had not been the result of a social movement and the change of power due to a general cultural shift: “There was no student and no women movement in the GDR which – like in western industrial states – fundamentally questioned civic life forms and tried to change traditional family values” (Huinink/Wagner 1995, 152). Instead, the concept of women was intertwined with the political agenda of the GDR. Labor work was a crucial part of the socialist ideology (Grunenberg 1990) and, in consequence, the integration of women into the labor

market represented a central goal of the socialist policy.

“Women were pictured, too, in overalls and hard hats, driving trucks, cranes and operating heavy machinery. This signified one crucial area of change in gender constructions in ‘actually existing socialism’” (Fulbrook 2005, 141).

While women achieved many opportunities and chances for participation on the one hand, there were restrictions and burdens for women in the GDR on the other (Trappe 1996). The very narrow concept of the so-called socialist women, including them to be workers and mothers at the same time, led to specific life courses with the social assignment to detach themselves from their birth families early, to start a family and a household while beginning their labor career at the same time (Schwartz 2005; Meier 1991). Johannes Huninik and Michael Wagner (1995) point out that marriage and parenthood were important preconditions to get access to an own flat, since there was only a limited number of living spaces. Starting a family within the early twenties was the matter of course for many young GDR citizens. To live in a family was the dominant and robust cultural pattern in the GDR, leading to “missing alternatives to family mode of lives in the individual biography and relatively stable life course perspectives” (ibid., 147). Family life thus had an ambivalent character for the system: Political influence was more limited in families than in public spheres, but families were also a major social integration mechanism, leading to a widespread normal biography which followed quite similar trajectories. Alternative live plans were politicalized and were considered as an offense to socialist culture. This was particularly the case when young adults orientated themselves towards western youth culture (Janssen 2010). Apart from that, political engagement in socialist organizations and collective actions were often preconditions for higher education (Geißler 2008; Nagel et al. 2005). The relation of subject and society was justified with a theory of socialism and left only little room for individualized life plans and a public discourse of life alternatives.

One can assume that the socialist regime was not successful in socializing so called socialist personalities on a bigger scale, but the normal

biography was well-spread including the undoubted self-concept of being a female labor worker and mother at the same time as well as the world-concept of a society which supported family living forms. With this, women were well integrated into socialist society. Supporting family structures (e.g. with free childcare institutions, privileges for married people, and so on) belonged to the crucial legitimation of socialist society, but it was also a more or less private area where different worldviews could be deliberated and transferred from generation to generation.

3. FAMILY STRUCTURES AND LIFE HISTORIES IN THE GDR: STATE OF RESEARCH

There have been several studies that showed that the intergenerational negotiation of historical events influenced the way in which people dealt with the political system of the GDR. Simone Kreher analyzed in her case study women of three generations in the GDR that share a remarkable stable common intergenerational leitmotif in their biographies which seems way more important than the socialist educational influences (2002, 197). Kreher follows a historical-sociological biography research approach (Rosenthal 2000), displaying the mediation of social history by the family background in various case studies. The results show that there exist more or less unconscious adoptions of behavior patterns (Dausien 1997) which are transmitted from one generation to the other.

Karin Bock (1999, 2006) analyzed the political socialization processes in the biographies of three generations within East German families in her study. Her argumentation inverts the existence of continuous and discontinuous socialization processes as well as the differentiation between the influence historical events and societal change have on the two types of family. In discontinuous socialization processes, family members looked for emancipation, coping strategies with new historical challenges and opportunities, or even social acknowledgement. In these cases, the younger generation handled their lives differently than their parents, leading to an engagement and confrontation with the political system. In contrast, the division between private and public spheres remained very important in continuous socialization patterns, regardless of

political events or societal change. In these cases, family values remained more important than the societal environment (also Alheit et al. 2004).

In the two studies of Ingrid Miethe (1999, 2002, 2006) and Dieter Geulen (1998), discontinuous processes seem to be more relevant in explaining why people identified with the system or developed an oppositional action frame. Geulen conducted biographical group interviews with different cohorts (born in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s) of people who belonged to the academic milieu of the GDR. He also states that separation processes from the parents could lead to an identification with the state ideology, especially in the 1950s cohort. This indicates that identification with the system was moderated by the detachment of the family background and the question how the younger generation would participate in the new socialist society that offered opportunities but also restrictions which were very different from those that their parents and grandparents have experienced in their lives so far. However, Miethe argues that oppositional actions in the GDR referred to some extent to the family history as well. "For different types of women, different parts of the family history were found to have different crucial functions" (2002, 221). In the case of some women, engagement in an oppositional women group was framed by the motive to act differently towards an unjust totalitarian system than her parents did during National Socialism. For some others, it was a coping strategy to deal with domestic violence experiences or a way to deal with these repressions of the GDR regime.

All of the studies demonstrate that the political socialization is a rather active than passive process. The effect of family structures depends on the coping strategies which were developed to balance public and private spheres. It raises the question how oppositional women experienced the socialist society and the narrow socialist life course regime and how it can be explained that these women distanced themselves from the GDR in such a way that they were willing to take the high risks of migration and flight. I tried to find answers to this question by conducting biographical interviews with women who were former political prisoners in the GDR. In the next

chapter, the sampling and research strategy will be described briefly.

4. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

Between 2012 and 2014, 18 biographical narrative interviews (Schütze 1983) with women who opposed the border regime of the GDR and tried to leave the country to West Germany were conducted. 17 of them were subsequently convicted as political enemies and incarcerated. The interviews lasted between one and a half and seven hours and were recorded and transcribed with GAT2 (Selting et al. 2009). The imprisonment was a big burden for all of the women and their self-identity (Richmond 2010), leading to major biographical consequences still relevant in the present (Punamäki et al. 2010). This may be one reason why it was hard to find women who were willing to give an interview. It was only possible to find interview partners because of the support of a woman who led an association of former political imprisoned women. With her recommendation, other women agreed to take part in the interview study, while other sample strategies have failed before. The interviews were used each time to ask for further potential interview partners which worked out in some cases (snowball sampling). However, this sample strategy contains the large disadvantage that it only represents the different perspectives of those women who were chosen by others and who managed to migrate to West Germany. It can be assumed that biographies of women who were released in the GDR have had different outcomes. Despite those restrictions, the sample allows us to reconstruct the biographies of women who tried to flee or (illegally) migrate to West Germany, although the biographical costs were very high. Six of the 18 interviewed women were born in the late 1940s, eleven women were born in the '50s, and one woman was born in the '60s. Most of the women were in their early or mid-twenties when they were imprisoned (in the 1970s and early '80s). Following an approach of symbolic interactionism, the biographies were analyzed with reconstructing structural processes of life courses by the methods proposed by Fritz Schütze (1983, 2016). All biographical narratives were divided in narration segments and analyzed sequence by sequence to reconstruct the biographical overall shape of the life

histories. With a focus on the results of the empirical investigation, the presentation of the results will be limited to central analytical categories in the next chapter, which will be illustrated with some data examples.

5. ADAPTED, CONFORMAL, AND OPPOSITIONAL BACKGROUNDS OF POLITICAL IMPRISONED WOMEN AND THEIR BIOGRAPHICAL MEANING

The women in the interview study have had quite different family backgrounds. In most cases, the women describe their parents as somehow adapted to the autocratic system, although they were critical of some aspects. In three cases, the women grew up in a family which was engaged in the Socialist Central Party and supported the socialist regime. Here especially, the fathers and grandfathers are described as political advocates of the system with a rather long family history connected to communist movements. In five cases, the women grew up in a rather oppositional family context. Those families separated themselves from the public sphere as far as possible. In one case, the father of the interviewed woman in the sample was himself imprisoned because of political reasons when she was fourteen. Examples for all three kinds of family backgrounds will be presented in the following chapters, discussing how they shaped the way the women related to private and public spheres while growing up.

5.1 Adapted Family Background: Family Missions and Coherence to the Life Course Regime Leading to Blocked Normal Biographies

As stated before, we can consider that most families in the GDR found a way to arrange themselves with the political system in the GDR and found private niches in their everyday life. We can speak of a normalization processes (Madarász 2013, 54) that framed the lives of most GDR citizens which led to a silent approval of the system, although there was constant grumbling and critique in the private spheres about rare goods, limited travel opportunities, or political participation. Women who did not perceive any conflicts with the socialist society in their family life emphasized usually already at the beginning of their biographical narratives that their childhood was

“normal,” “sheltered,” and “happy.” Mrs. Bürger (born in the middle 1950s), for example, began her biographical narration just not by mentioning the socialist system but the more important rural context of her socialization: “We grew up in a village and developed as it was typical in rural spaces.” A major socialization background is the expectation of her not to bring shame to the family, e.g. by pre-marital pregnancy. All in all, Mrs. Bürger is not mentioning any bad influences on her socialization process by state authorities or public educators. Instead, she states to have enjoyed the offers of the socialist organizations in which she actively took part, even feeling proud.

This is quite similar to the case of Mrs. Gaspar (born in the late 1940s). In the interview, she, for example, recounts the following:

“I was, you know, not sad or something like that – since we did not have any contact to the West, I was satisfied with everything; and in school, they cared about the children a lot; there were the “Pioniere” [youth organization] and everything; later FDJ; ehm, I have to say my childhood was nice.”

The “nice” and “sheltered” childhood is accompanied by a close relationship to the parental generation which is eager to enable their daughters to live a good and secure life in the GDR. Family delegations in the form of imposing missions on descendants can often be found in these narratives. Mrs. Gaspar, for example, explains that her future life planning was entirely determined by her parents: “Actually, we did not think about it – we did what our parents told us to do.”

The parents of Mrs. Bürger, for example, arranged and organized her marriage when she was about twenty years old. After the marriage, her son was born and a tough time began because she had to arrange work and childcare obligations. Her marriage remained unemotional for her, although she shared a friendship with her husband. Mrs. Gaspar and Mrs. Bürger followed the family mission. They did not question following the sequences of a normal biography and tried to fulfill parental and public expectations (Mrs. Gaspar followed the vocational training plan of her parents; Mrs. Bürger started a family including an arranged marriage). These women

followed an institutional expectation pattern “in which persons are following up institutionally shaped and normatively defined courses of life” (Schütze 2016, 86).

Neither did West Germany play a role in their future life plans, nor did these women perceive any political restrictions. These narratives do not provide any explicit affirmation of socialist ideology or politics but a general identification with private living opportunities and culture (Nagel/Riemann 2018). With the detachment of the parental household, these women faced the challenge to fulfill the family mission and to integrate themselves into the institutional pattern of the GDR society.

In these cases, a specific life crisis leading to a breakdown of the institutional life pattern caused the basic change in their life histories. In some cases, husbands who looked critically at the regime and criticized the narrow life perspectives in the GDR created major conflicts within their marriages. Other women suffered from unexpected disadvantages of the regime or the loss of a close family member. In all instances of the study in which women were well integrated in the institutional patterns of a normal biography, the decision to leave the GDR for West Germany was framed by the feeling that the so far prevalent normal life could not be accomplished in the GDR anymore. The decision to migrate or flee to West Germany was therefore not fueled by the hope for a better and more fulfilling life but rather by a desire to restore normality. In the cases of Mrs. Bürger and Mrs. Gaspar, it was the male partner who rebelled against the socialist system and who wanted to emigrate. Both women did not agree at first, only after they had perceived the first sanctions and disadvantages caused by the police and the secret service. These women were shocked by the repression and the breakdown of their institutional expectation pattern. By then, the perceived coherence between the public and the private sphere was over and these women did not know how to deal with the new situation. To restore a normal family life and to fulfill the family mission of their parents seemed hardly possible in the GDR anymore, so they took action to leave the GDR.

The missions which were provided by the parents to their daughters caused the integration of these women into to GDR society and to the institutionalized life course regime. Thus, the security of state socialism was a worthy resource for them. Although they did not share the exaggerated political claims of this specific socialist way of life, public institutions helped to arrange everyday-life and to achieve future goals. They succeeded in doing so – until some sort of crisis began, leading to a breakdown of institutional patterns. In this sense, these women's exit-decisions were framed by a crisis and a trajectory of suffering. The institutions they had relied on so far got out of reach or lost relevance for them for different reasons. These women shared a blocked normal biography. In line with the findings of the reported studies, we can speak of an intergenerational continuous socialization which resulted in an integrative socialization pattern, which does not lead to individualized life-plans or an intense confrontation with political topics. It might be interesting that in my sample most of the women belong into this category. Opposing the border regime was thus more a reaction to a life-crisis than an active political act of regime enemies.

5.2 Conformal Family Background: Adolescent Crisis and Confrontation with Society Leading to Inhibited Individualization

In contrast to this, there are women with conformal family background who perceived a severe discrepancy between the official and the private sphere. For those women, the life histories of their parental or grandparental generation were at no point a convincing model for their own lives. Detachment and adolescence crisis play a major role in their narratives, leading to discontinuous socialization processes and disintegration. These women often talk of a split childhood: the nice and harmonic early childhood within the family relation and the conflictual later childhood, when politics started to matter. In strong contrast to the narratives of Mrs. Gaspar and Mrs. Bürger, they explicitly talk about their ambiguous school experiences and the insincere talk in school which they could not identify with. In the interview, Mrs. Sommer (born in the late 1940s) – a daughter of a high ranking employee of the central socialist party (SED) – states e.g. the following about

political education in school: "I did not understand: Why was it the bad West? For me it was the beautiful West!"

Mrs. Sommer explicitly opposes the enemy scheme of socialist education, starting an individual acquisition of a different world- and self-concept. The division between west and east is a major topic in her narrative. These women more or less questioned the lifestyle of their parents, leading to conflicts in the intergenerational order. Mrs. Sommer says she had a "good father" in her early childhood but in her adolescence, there were more and more conflicts that led to a total loss of contact for a certain while: "[L]ater, we did not talk to each other for some years." As she decided to try to get out of the GDR she went to her father; She remembers the situation like this:

"[W]ell, I would not need to tell you; actually I did not want to tell you at all; but I tell you; because I do know – now that I applied for migration – now YOU will need to come to your comrades and have to give a statement; what your BAD daughter made; that's why I tell you and that you don't faint; that's why I tell you and besides that, it's none of your business at all."

These women perceive and describe themselves as "rebellious." While for some women western pop culture became more and more important, leading to conflicts with teachers and the police, others engaged in church. Either way, these women had to experience how the regime intervened in their personal life. Disadvantages in school, in their vocational training, or at work enforced a distance to the state, leading on to major complications and sometimes even surveillance by the secret service. Other than the women assimilating to the society of the GDR, the GDR represented a totalitarian state and a dictatorship for these women (similar see Miethe 1999). For them, leaving the GDR towards West Germany constituted an oppositional act, framed by the notion of leaving this unjust and threatening state. These women knew about the danger of getting imprisoned. However, entering the prison, these women literally feared for their lives since they thought they could be brought to a concentration camp.

It is quite obvious that these women were not able to identify with the closed self- and world-concepts in the GDR. They were looking for alternatives which were hard to conceive since, apart from private contacts, there were no alternative discourses in the public sphere. In this sense, a basic challenge in these women's late adolescence was to find an individual way of living and a coherent self- and world-concept. This becomes obvious in many narratives and can be illustrated with the following quote from an interview with Mrs. Fischer (born in the 1950s):

"There must be a different life, um, besides that in a small town, right? Well, a different life than 'Plattenbau' [typical GDR panel constructed buildings] and, um, married with 23 and labor union holidays, well, I knew that! Well, I knew I did not want THAT, I don't, but I did not know what I wanted, but I knew, what I did not want; [...] that life, um, that was too narrow."

Neither did the GDR offer opportunities for the development of a worthy perspective for one's own life, nor were there chances to deliberate on possible concepts. The society of West Germany thus became a place of belonging for these women since they hoped for a chance to achieve an individual live perspective there. It seems that these women probably might have engaged in oppositional groups (and some of them indeed did to some extent) if they just would have had the opportunity. In contrast to the women who followed an institutional expectation pattern, these women actively confronted themselves with socialist ideology and seemed to be quite close to modern socialization concepts, describing socialization as individualization, biography work, and the development of autonomy through adolescence crisis. Intergenerational conflicts enforce the specific development task of finding an individual way of life in a collectively organized society. These conflicts were especially heavy if the parents actively agreed with the system or were – in the eyes of their daughters – not oppositional enough. For these women, West Germany thus represented a place where they hoped to find conditions for a more autonomous live and to open up blocked individualization processes.

5.3 Oppositional Family Background: Familiarization and Exclusion Processes Leading to Blocked Withdrawal Spaces

In contrast to the disintegrative socialization patterns, women who grew up in some sort of parallel society developed a very critical and even oppositional attitude towards the socialist regime as well. However, they were not struggling with finding an individualized way of living since they experienced some kind of community of shared values and perspectives. These women talk about their childhood as being nice and protected since family and peer networks supported a lot of solidarity. However, these nice childhoods were threatened by state organizations and rituals. Taking part in the youth mass organization was not seen as a joyful and useful leisure activity but as a burden or even a threat. School and other institutions were seen as representatives of an authoritarian state. To illustrate these childhood and school memories, which are very different compared to those presented before, we can have a closer look at Mrs. Glöckner's (born in the 1950s) narrative in which she states:

„But we were scared as kids, right? We already felt the burden of the system and in which direction things will develop. [...] And I did not go to after-school activities. There was this group building, they arranged that – I didn't like that, right? We stayed more in our community and it was good like that.”

These women withdrew into private spheres and tried not to participate in collective actions or rituals. This was criticized by state authorities, for example when they did not participate in elections. In fact, there are many hints that the SED regime tolerated such private alternative lifeworlds to a certain extent since this reduced the oppositional pressure on public institutions. The family life-arrangement described by Schütze (2014, 172f.) can thus be found in these biographical narratives, including reports of close and trustful private relationships within the family but also within the regional community – but a bigger mistrust against public institutions in contrast.

„My childhood was nice because we stayed among ourselves; I did not have anything to do

with the children who were raised with strictness – like FDJ or pioneers and all that stuff –; we did not have anything to do with them and we actually also did not want to; maybe my parents did not want that as well, but we actually never talked about that; we played a lot outside and were raised differently, more free, and not in sports organizations or other stuff; that was good. I also liked that I did not need to go to kindergarten.”

In contrast to the women raised in conformal families, these women did not get in conflict with their parental or grandparental generation, and in contrast to women in adapted families, they did not perceive a family mission to integrate themselves into the institutional pattern of society. Instead, these women were socialized in a parallel lifeworld, which separated itself as far it was possible from the socialist society. Although they experienced disadvantages within official institutions, these conflicts did not result in a general questioning or discussion of socialist and non-socialist world- and self-concepts. Instead, all socialist ideas were completely rejected as a totalitarian ideology. This resulted in the challenge to find ways and strategies of dealing with the official expectations conceived as a burden and illegitimate intervention into their personal lives connected with living conditions which were perceived as “modest” without any perspective for individual progress. “[W]e were fed up; you could not buy anything; one wanted to travel; right? Not just with a cold shower in a trailer; and even for that, you had to be lucky [...]; at the Baltic sea [...], that was supposed to be a luxury holiday.”

The desire to finally leave the country grew over time and in these cases, the start of an own family was the crucial driving force behind it. The women did not want their children “to grow up in this crappy state,” as Mrs. Glöckner states. In these cases, the decision to proceed was often made together with their husbands. Both shared a common world (see Berger/Kellner 1965) that was incoherent with the socialist state. They perceived themselves living in some sort of incompatible second society with a western lifestyle which could not be played out in the GDR.

This again constitutes a major contrast to the women who actively confronted themselves and their parents with socialist society and tried to find individualized ways of living. In the oppositional family backgrounds, women perceived prosecution and restrictions by educators and other state authorities very early in their lives and thus withdrew from any confrontation with socialist ideology, which they totally refused instead. However, they did not report of intergenerational conflicts but only of conflicts with public institutions. Biographical decisions are disrupted by these actors and the state is seen as an illegitimate intruder into the private domain, limiting the freedom in raising their own children as well as other crucial aspects of private life, such as career perspectives. These women experienced disadvantages or even prosecution by state institutions because they drew back from the common civil duties of citizens of the socialist system (like taking part in faked elections or being a member of some socialist organizations). However, they were not only excluded and marginalized within public institutions but also within their private spheres. For those women, even this withdrawal space was blocked and the decision to migrate thus embodied the only way of getting out of reach of state authorities. Migration was a reaction to denied possibilities for them to act freely in private spheres.

6. BIOGRAPHY BLOCKADES: A CONCEPT TO EXPLAIN OPPOSITIONAL ACTION AGAINST THE BORDER REGIME OF THE GDR

The illustrated results demonstrate that the interviewed women balanced out the double culture of private and public spheres in the GDR very differently. All the interviewed women decided to leave the GDR at some point in their lives, although they knew that they would have to face many disadvantages. It is the major thesis of this paper that the migration processes of all these women can be described as reactions to blocked biographies. But these blockades developed very differently, depending on how the women experienced their family background and shaped their future life: Women who were raised in conformal families tended to individualize themselves, questioning the way of life of their parents. The institutionalized normal biography and the role model of a socialist woman who starts a career

and a family after moving out of the parental household was not sufficient and the socialist life perspectives seemed too narrow for them. However, there were only very limited chances for alternative life conceptions in the GDR. Migrating to West-Germany in these cases was an explicit political act. They opposed against the unjust border regime, which cut off individual rights and the chances to fulfill individual life plans. In accordance with the biographical studies of Geulen (1998), Bock (1999, 2006), and Miethé (2002), these women experienced discontinuous socialization within their respective families. To act differently towards socialist society in comparison to the way of life of their parents, characterized their individualization process.

In maximum contrast to this type, other women were raised to integrate themselves into socialist society and to follow the life course regime. Adapted families did not face any major conflicts with the regime. Women, raised in these families, did not perceive the GDR as a totalitarian regime but more as a protective institutional framework. Surprisingly, these women opposed the border regime and committed themselves to migrate to West Germany. In all of these cases, the institutional pattern broke down for them at a certain stage in their biography. That was often connected to a husband or partner with a western orientation and some sort of marriage crisis. In reaction to this life crisis, these women agreed to the migration to West Germany which started a trajectory of suffering, because for the first time in their life they had to face sanctions and prosecution by state authorities. The biographies of these women equal a habitus formation which Nagel and Riemann called the "learned GDR citizen" (Nagel/Riemann 2018, 19). There were no hints that they would oppose the SED regime until a crisis destroyed their normal biography. The migration process is a coping strategy of this crisis, hoping to restore the normal biography in West Germany again.

When women perceived their family background as oppositional, the family sphere became the most important socialization context in the biographies. They feared sanctions and experienced disadvantages in public spheres. The state threatened the private lifeworld which was the major motive of these women to leave the GDR.

These women opposed against the border regime because they perceived an illegitimate intervention of the state into to their private spheres. Thus, we can talk of blocked private withdrawal spaces in their biographies.

Families reproduced lifestyles and influenced the way the younger generation shaped their future life in the GDR. The relation of family and state is thus crucial to understand the stability of an autocratic system. However, migration decisions were rare. Most of the people may have made similar experiences as the women in the presented study. "Illegal" migration was not a direct result of a specific family background or a specific deviant socialization process but rather a reaction to different kinds of blocked biographies which developed as a consequence of deliberating life course perspectives framed by different family backgrounds. Migration was an attempt to unblock them.

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About the author

Frank Beier is a scientific assistant at the Center of Teacher Education and Educational Research at the Technical University of Dresden where he leads the “Graduate Forum Teacher Education” (founded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Quality Campaign Teacher Education). His research interests are biography research, lesson studies and methodology in pedagogy and educational sciences.

Contact

Frank Beier
Technische Universität Dresden, TUD Sylber
Ludwig-Ermold-Str. 3
01217 Dresden

E-Mail: frank.beier1@tu-dresden.de

URL: <https://tu-dresden.de/zlsb/die-einrichtung/graduierenforum/FrankBeier>