



From party soldier to real journalist

– Professional identity and media systems in transition

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Abstract

This paper concerns East German journalists and the changes they have undergone, from working in the totalitarian regime of GDR to enter a western liberal media system. The purpose is to study how professional identity is created in a controlled and authoritarian media system, and how this identity and the journalistic values changes in a transition phase. Through qualitative in-depth interviews with six former East German journalists, who all has worked as journalists after the wall broke down, we are exploring how their journalistic values and the conception of their profession has changed during this tumultuous time. We selected journalists with experience of working in both East Germany and united Germany to be able to see these changes. The result shows that the journalists from GDR used an inner opposition, both to survive the dictatorship and to adapt to the new reality. This means that their level of professionalization, despite the fact that they lived under oppression, was relatively high. In between these two systems a journalistic vacuum occurred which show that a different, more democratic, way of organizing the press is possible. In this vacuum the values of the journalists could be expressed in a way that wasn't possible in GDR, nor in united Germany.

Keywords: East Germany, journalism, power, pressure, professionalization, socialist journalism, values.

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1. Opening and purpose

The ninth of November 2009 was the 20th anniversary of the breakdown of the Berlin wall. The importance of the fact that the wall that had divided Europe and the whole world, over one night disappeared, cannot be exaggerated. Symbolically, it was the end of a cold war that for decades had divided the world into an east and west block. In practical terms, it made a huge difference for millions of people's everyday life. In Germany it opened the border towards family, friends, work, finances and a future reunification. In the middle of this process were also the press, radio and television. The media landscape was undergoing a major transformation in which the western, economically-driven media tradition was intertwined with the East German socialist journalism.

This study concerns the East German journalists working within these processes. It is a report about their lives, their stories, their changes, and their individual transition towards a new reality and a new professional life. It is a description of two media systems colliding and how the people working in them are affected by their collision. The image of the East German as *Party Soldiers* and simple megaphones for the GDR regime is being studied and reviewed. We feel that most of the literature that we have come across is quite polarizing and inapprehensive in the description of the East German journalists. We hope that our study will provide a more extensive and nuanced picture.

People who witnessed and participated in this historical event is not only interesting from a general perspective, they also withhold information which is extremely important to take advantage of. Through these journalists' eyes we can see how the processes in a regulated, state-controlled media system were functioning, and how they affect the individual person in terms of values, ethics and professionalization. The East German journalists also have an experience of how these factors change when the outside conditions forces the media into a new reality.

Transitional processes like the one in East Germany are interesting because they clearly show how professional identities transform and give the people experiencing them a greater knowledge about the different shapes journalism can form into. Most of the former research that has dealt with these issues have been trying to describe the communistic countries transition into democracy, with focus on power, society and media. We believe there is a gap in the research in this area and precisely because of this we feel it is important to examine how these changes have affected the individual. The purpose with this paper is to study how professional identity is

created in a controlled and authoritarian media system, and how this identity and the journalistic values changes in a transition phase. The journalists, who experienced the unification of Germany, will with their stories hopefully complement and expand the research by showing how people relate to different types of power, and how power relates to people. But above all, it shows how values and identity is re-conceptualized when the professional circumstances change.

2. Background

Journalism in Germany is a story worth being told alone. Revolution in the Weimar Republic, oppression under the Nazi-regime and forty years of ideological shaping under the German Democratic Republic is historical procedures that have taken its tolls on German journalism. But journalism has also had its marks on the development of history. To thoroughly understand our subject matter it's important to know how journalism looked like in the GDR, how the journalists were educated, and how they handled the changes during *Die Wende*.

2.1 Journalism in the GDR

The East Germany media landscape wasn't formed like the traditional Western media systems. It was a controlled and closed organization and journalists were considered to be a "protected" profession. In other terms, the individual journalistic careers were to some extent preselected by the State. Factors like class, membership in the party and parental background all played a role in which people who got to become journalists.¹

To be able to become a journalist in the GDR there was only one way you could go and that was through the School of Journalism at Karl Marx University in Leipzig. But the process of getting there was not as easy as just to send in your application. At first you had to go through a one year voluntary period at a newspaper, radio- or TV station to be able to be recommended for higher studies. The recommendations was made within the media hierarchies, mostly by the editors, and were often based on which content the interns had the necessary blend of party discipline and intellectual talent to fulfil the SEDs vision of what a journalist should be like.²

Once the interns managed to get into the School of Journalism in Leipzig, also called *Die Rotes Kloster* (The red monastery) for its ideological focus, the students were facing a three year period

¹ Boyer, Dominic, 2005. *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture*, Chicago: The University of Chicago press. p.150.

² Ibid. p.151.

of hard studies and political drilling. There was a basic training for two years and then one year of specialization towards a certain media field, for example radio, TV or newspapers.

The schools vision of socialist journalism was built on five essential principles: *politicality*, *loyalty to the truth*, *scientific rationality*, *connection to the masses*, and *criticism*.³

These principles were the basis for all education and a way for the Party to extend its arms and to get into the heads of the students. The *politically* principle was based on the fundamental ideas of Marxism-Leninism and the interests, goals and social progress of the working class. Many of our interviewees refer to this part of the education as and something that they just had to force themselves through. The second principle was perhaps the hardest for the journalists to understand and it was often a subject of irony and sarcasm, even to those who were more loyal to the party line. The *loyalty to the truth* principle was connected to the idea of educating the people and to teach them what the truth was. The truth was in a sense something that was supposed to be created by the journalists. The general secretary of the SED between 1971 and 1989 Eric Honecker put this philosophy into words when he at a politburo meeting stated: “In our country, it is we who will determine whether the truth is being told or not!”⁴ With the *scientific rationality* principle the party meant that the German people should be driven into a higher form of education and learning. The SED party, the journalists and the teachers of the GDR were supposed to supervise and guide the people into a more self aware state of mind. This was a socialist vision that also has its roots in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. The fourth principle of socialist journalism, *connection to the masses*, was a way to remind the journalists that they were a part of the people. The flesh of the journalists was the flesh of the citizens and all the creative power sprung out from the glory of the people. In that sense the journalists had to think and reflect the thoughts of the people. This led to that many journalist edited the reader’s pages in the magazines and the newspapers so that personal critic against them didn’t show.⁵ The fifth and last principle was the principle of *criticism*. This was just like the *loyalty to the truth* principle a hard thing to get a grip around for many of the students. Some sort of criticism, such as complaints on materialistic forms, could be allowed within the GDR as long as that criticism proved the SED as the fighter for the perfect system. Criticism against the planning of the country or against the party itself was however strictly forbidden. In practice the criticism principle was mostly aimed against West Germany, capitalism and the Western imperialistic states.⁶

³ Boyer. p.123.

⁴ Ibid. p.124.

⁵ Ibid. p.126.

⁶ Ibidem.

The principles and values that the education in Leipzig gave the journalists had an obvious purpose; to create a perfect party soldier.⁷

2.2 Daily journalistic work

According to Boyer the everyday experience on party journalism was a question of “sweeten the shit”. One journalist in his study refers to the idea of *showing life as it really was*, in practical terms meant to “photograph Honnecker forty times at a rally” and that the job most of the time was a long struggle to “sprinkle chocolate on the shit that we do here”.⁸

For most of the part though the daily journalistic work in the GDR was quite similar to Western journalism. It consisted of normal tasks like writing articles, interviewing people and chasing deadlines. The journalist profession wasn't a popular profession, probably because the people related it so strong to the socialist state and party. But this unpopularity was also a reflection of the values concerning the working class in GDR. Journalists were academically trained and didn't have the status as the “working class hero” had.⁹ This also showed in the journalists pay checks, because many of the journalists earned less, or the same as an industrial worker.

2.3 Socialist journalism in transition

The transition for GDR journalism was of course built on a big variety of things. For outsiders you are easily led to believe that the so called “*Die Wende*” (The Change) was the period between the breakdown of the wall in November 1989 and the German unification in October 1990.

What you have to understand is that there are no time limits to this period and you cannot use calendrical parameters to describe it. It was a change of structure and politics but also a change of minds. And change in the mind of people is a process which is hard to link to certain periods of time. If you want to explain the transition there are however some factors that you have to include.

The period between November of 1989 and spring/summer of 1990 is described by many as a journalistic vacuum, a time without any control from party or owners which lead to a sort of freedom that no one had experienced before. Creativity and energies which had been hold back

⁷ Boyer. p. 121.

⁸ Ibid. p.154.

⁹ Gellner, Winand & Robertson, John D., 2003. *The Berlin republic. German unification and a decade of changes*, New York: Frank Cass & Co. p. 68.

for so long was suddenly let free, and this without any regulations or system that watched over it . In Dominic Boyer's book *Spirit and System* the journalist Dietmar L describes this period like this:

To experience the end of a System, there's nothing like it. It was like fairy tales; there's no way to describe that (...) It was a time when one System had come to an end, and the next one hadn't yet come to take its place. There were no regulations.¹⁰ / **Dietmar L**

In practical terms this journalistic vacuum took its forms in election of new editors. The old ones, controlled by the party were quickly fired and replaced by people that were trusted by their colleagues. The organization was often driven democratically and by self-governing decisions. The redactions simply wrote about whatever they wanted to write about. Long time mistrust from the people towards the media also played its role and pushed many media organizations to quick and revolutionizing changes. It's notable that during this time (Nov 89 – April 90) all the GDR media was still financed by the SED party. They did however not have any influences over the journalistic work and had no expectations on making profit. This is truly a unique mass media situation considering the range of autonomy, lack of market accountability and governmental control.¹¹

Despite its democratic nature the journalistic vacuum could not go on forever. The economical interest from the West was strong in the media sector and when the Treuhand (*Treuhandanstalt* or Treuhand agency)- a organization created in June 1990 by the Peoples Chamber to privatize the East German companies¹²- gave the power of the press to big media corporations like Springer and WAZ it lead to the end of the journalistic vacuum. The democratic elected editors were replaced by editors from Western magazines that in many cases didn't know their audience. In the papers the people could read about the amazing new system and all the new improvements in society. The problem was that their reality was different. When the wall broke down many of the East German enterprises lost their traditional markets because the West German D-mark was too expensive for the East European market to trade with. Former partners like Ukraine and Poland couldn't handle GDRs economic transition. The consequence was that the GDR enterprises went bankrupt and many people lost their jobs. This development was not described in the media and the readers quickly left their traditional papers. Because of this there were less magazines and newspapers in Germany 1994 than in 1989.

¹⁰ Boyer p. 221.

¹¹ Ibid. p.224.

¹² Ibid. p.190.

3. Theories and former research

The former research has not highlighted the phenomenon of the journalists from GDR who overnight went from one media world to another. We have found that most of the previous research is about the media in transformation or the media in a post-communist world. The only study we've found that addresses the issue of the East German journalists in a detailed way is Dominic Boyer's *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture*, which serves as inspiration and also as a guide because it contains qualitative interviews with journalists from GDR. Our work follows in the footsteps of Dominic Boyer and is largely an attempt to adapt his work to the journalistic field, because the book's main purpose is actually to investigate how the dialectic has affected and influenced German culture since the 1800s. To be able to adapt this work we believe it is important to start from a theoretical framework that deals with the socialist media systems transition to a liberal and open media system. We will start out with a general description about the media system in Germany today, followed by a critical reevaluation of how we think about socialistic media. Then we will describe the socialist media and its transition to the liberal and capitalist media system. At the end of this chapter, we will further describe Dominic Boyer's three case study and the ideas we have chosen to relate to.

Most of the studies written about how media relate to power and politics, and why the press functions the way it does, are derived from the book *Four theories of the press* which is one of the most influential books in the development of theorizing about the media. We will not use the theories presented in this book but we think it is important to describe the influence it has played in the scientific society. Its main message was that the shape of a given media system can be traced to certain values in a society. These values meant primarily the economic and political conditions in the country, and that there is a fundamental difference between economic pressures and political influences on the media. This theory arose during the Cold War when the American media system, with its strict separation between state and capital, was set against the Soviet totalitarian, state media system. These conclusions have since the book came out made its way into scientists' subconscious and influenced the debate on state-controlled media and financials. But the book has also been subject for critique as well as attempts to rewrite and extend the theories presented.¹³ One of these critical reviews is made in *De-Westernizing Media Studies* by the author Colin Sparks. We will present his thoughts later in this chapter.

¹³ McQuail, Denis, 2005. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, London: Sage. p. 176-178.

3.1 Media systems and Politics

In *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* the authors Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini work on the same supposition framed in *Four Theories of the Press*: namely that the press is always formed by the social and political structures. But Hallin and Mancini try to go further by seeking after the press systems underlying ideologies. The way to find these, as the title implicates, are by genuine comparative studies, and the book is in a way a guide for analyzing the relation between the media and the political system. Because our study isn't of comparative art it might seem that Hallin and Mancini's work is of no use, but it clearly describes how the Western media systems are arranged and how the media and politics are related. They identify the main differences in media systems and describe how politics have played an important role in their shaping. The authors move on with presenting three major models of media systems; the *Polarized Pluralist*, *Democratic Corporatist*, and *Liberal* model. Germany is placed in the *Democratic Corporatist* model which is recognized by a tendency to consensus in the political system, a pluralism that is organized and a high professionalization of journalism.¹⁴ In relation to the *Democratic Corporatist* model the authors propose four dimensions that give a wide understanding of how the media system is constructed. These dimensions are:

- (1) the development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of a mass circulation press;
- (2) political parallelism; that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society;
- (3) the development of journalistic professionalism; and
- (4) the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system.¹⁵

These four dimensions will work as a guide in our understanding of the German media system after the breakdown of the wall. But because the book only describes democratic media systems of today- and therefore does not directly include socialistic journalism- we need additional studies to understand how the communistic media system was arranged. One problem lies in the fact that socialistic media systems do not exist in Europe anymore and that theory that describes how these systems was arranged therefore are hard to find. The studies that we present in the next part of this chapter describe different historical events in Eastern Europe and will help us to better understand the socialistic media system. But before that we would like to mention why the fall of communism challenges our way of thinking about media, and that the "West" and "East" way of thinking maybe wasn't so different after all.

¹⁴ Hallin, Daniel C. & Mancini, Paolo, 2004. *Comparin media systems. Three models of media and politics*, New York: Cambridge University press. p.144-145.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.21.

De-Westernizing Media Studies is an attempt to nuance the picture of different media systems by giving examples from all around the world instead of generalizing from a few rich countries in the west, which was the case with *Four Theories of the Press*. By using examples from Asia, Africa, North and South America, Europe, the Middle East and Australia the editors James Curran and Myung-Park Jin tries to answer the questions about how media connects to power in society, who and what influences the media, what the nature of media power is, and finally how globalization is changing media and society. The book is in many ways interesting and helpful for our study. However it is especially chapter three, *Media theory after the fall of communism: Why the old models from east and west won't do anymore*, written by Colin Sparks, that is of interest in trying to understand how the communist media system worked. However, this chapter is not mainly a description about how the media system in the communistic block was arranged. It is more of a polemic discussion about how this kind of media system has been handled in different theories and disquisitions, particularly in *Four Theories of the Press* where it was stated that the shape of a given media system can be traced to certain values in a society. Colin Sparks argues that if the "Soviet communist theory of the press" really was an articulation of society's core values, you should expect the media system to embody these values very clearly. But the problem with this theory is that it didn't correspond to reality. In the 80s the media systems in the communistic countries had clear differences. Colin Spark means that this disproves that there was one communistic media system that was reproduced at all time and everywhere, in the same way. And far from being totally isolated from influences from the West, many of the media systems in Central and East European countries were surprisingly open. Even though many radiobroadcasts from the West were blocked, was this almost never the case with television. Broadcasting networks in Central European communist countries had primarily a pragmatic attitude towards West media and their broadcasts. For example in GDR the majority of the population could watch broadcasts from the capitalistic West Germany.¹⁶

The experience from Central and Eastern Europe shows that there is a strong bond between capital and politics, in almost all cases. Sparks says that media owners and politicians are neither the same people, nor natural enemies. They may have disagreements but can also join in alliances. They are both in the same class of power. Sparks finds it obvious that if real press freedom should ever be maintained, the attention must be drawn away from the discussions about state and the market, towards the relations between media and people¹⁷:

¹⁶ Curran, James & Park, Myung-Jin, 2000. *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, London: Routledge. p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 47.

In both the communist and the capitalist versions, the media were and are run by people very remote from the lives of the masses, and over whom the masses have no control whatsoever. Democratizing the media means breaking the control of those elites over what are necessarily the main means of public speech in large-scale societies.¹⁸

This kind of knowledge is provided from *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, but it clearly isn't enough to get the overall picture about how the media system looked like in GDR. We will therefore continue with describing interesting thoughts that will help us in this manner. The studies are: *Central European Journal of Communication, Volume 1 no.1*. which contains short articles about journalism in Europe. *Poland's journalists: professionalism and politics*, by Jane Leftwich Curry and finally *Russian Reports: Studies in post-communist transformation of media and journalism* by Jan Ekecrantz and Kerstin Olofsson.

3.2 Socialist journalism

The transition from a totally controlled media to a total freedom of expression was of course one of the most dramatic events in the countries of the former communistic bloc. The censorship had penetrated all aspects of everyday life, and the media were in an especially bad position. The situation for journalists was therefore strained when the surveillance of the authorities was upon them every woken hour. The fact that all forms of communication could be checked forced the journalists into a self-censorship; a way to survive professionally. Journalists knew very well what they could say, what kind of issues that were sensitive and which names you shouldn't mention.¹⁹ In East- and Central European communist countries the authoritarian political structure and censorship made it impossible for the people to freely express and receive thoughts. At least this was the official case, but underneath the surface people could with the help of artistic skill get pass the censorship and in some way express their thoughts and feelings. That this really happened and have played an important role can be seen in the maintenance of a national identity in many of the countries during the communistic period. The main tool for doing this was by using metaphors which at a first glance made the text seem to play by the official rules. The truth was that it at the same time referred to something else.²⁰ In some cases this lead to consequences for the journalists. In Poland the journalists succeeded in having a high level of autonomy towards the party, much because of the success of trade union *Solidarity*. But in a way the journalists were punished when martial law was imposed in Poland. The journalist's undeclared

¹⁸ Curran & Park. P. 47.

¹⁹ Lauk, Epp & Høyer, Svernik, 2008. *Recreating journalism after censorship. Generational shifts and professional ambiguities among journalists after changes in the political systems*, in "Central European Journal of Communication", volume 1 no.1, Wroclaw: University of Wroclaw press. p. 13-14.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

crime- both before and after martial law- seemed to have been their “insistence on acting and being treated as professionals rather than as obedient followers of political leaders.”²¹ Jane Leftwich Curry argues that the experiences of the journalists in Poland show how professionalism can be molded out from an atmosphere of control; how professionals find their way around different types of oppression and fight against the politicization of the decision-making.²² According to a liberal media perspective professionalization and strong control from outside actors cannot coexist. This model is presented by Hallin & Mancini as a norm in the field of journalistic research, a norm which they, together with Curry, strongly reject.²³ One reason to why journalists get into a close relationship with politics and the decision-makers is of course because of medias ability to reach the masses, but also because of the fact that journalism is easy to penetrate and control, which is a result of its poorly defined professional qualifications. But the Polish journalist took a clear stand and stated that they were professionals in the way that they were first experts and then communist, never a mixture of both. So even if the salaries were paid by the party to write or broadcast what they wanted, the Polish journalists regarded their professional work as something that happened behind the scenes, a work with political and governmental authorities to gain contacts which later worked as channels to obtain a profession free from influence from the outside world.²⁴ Curry states four elements that eventually will transform the individual into a professional:

- (1) the recruitment and training process;
- (2) work experiences and the resulting interaction with fellow professionals;
- (3) the structures and rules for controlling professionals behavior that are developed within the profession and codified and reinforced by formal and informal professional associations;
- and (4) the impact of external images of the profession held by the society.²⁵

These elements are all very important in transforming an individual into a professional, but also in the creation of a profession as a whole. The case with the Polish journalist shows that political pressure does not stop the process of professionalization. It may slow it down or force it to setbacks, but in the long run political pressure will just make it more urgent to reach a state of professionalism.²⁶

When the censorship finally was lifted and the transition from communism to capitalism was on the way, many problems had to be solved in a short period. In GDR this situation

²¹ Curry, Jane Leftwich, 1990. *Poland's journalist: professionalism and politics*, New York: Cambridge University press. p. 2.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Hallin & Mancini. p. 38-41.

²⁴ Curry. p. 6-7.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁶ Ibidem.

was certainly present because of the rapid change supported by West Germany. Not only would a new political system be put into place, but the whole media system was in for a big change: new capital, technology, advertising and a new way of relating to politics.²⁷ In Estonia for example, there was practically no regulations of the media before the new constitution was passed. This led to that many journalists saw freedom of the press as freedom from any kind of regulations. This total freedom in the beginning of the 90s led to a euphoric mood where journalists seemed to be able to do whatever they wanted, thus making them divert from the conventions of their profession and sometimes publishing articles containing sensitive issues.²⁸ Problems during the transition phase occurred in other places as well. In Russia for example journalism seemed to be stuck in the old ways. It was hard for them to find a role as a new and free press. The journalists used a lot of quotes and seemed to rely a lot on governmental expertise. In western journalism a quote might have less credibility with the readers compared to if it would be presented as a fact, made by the journalist in a self-written article. In Soviet journalism it was the opposite. More credibility was gained by the usage of official sources and external opinions. This is to some extent preserved in today's Russian journalism.²⁹ The sudden transition might be a reason to why the Russian journalists have had a hard time to adapt. The conditions of the liberal media system was certainly a new experience for them:

Journalists of the Soviet era had a relatively strong identity - they faced no competition and were supported by the state, society, their community, and their connections. During perestroika, this closed system disintegrated and competition was introduced. (...) Post-perestroika journalists are primarily concerned with the commercial sphere. Their creativity processes and relationship with their publics are subject to market dictates.³⁰

In many East- and Central European countries the demand for journalists increased drastically after the fall of communism, because the system went from being centralized to open and diversified. Many journalists were driven to re-conceptualize their view on the profession, the values and ethics of it, when they suddenly stood before a total press freedom.³¹ This is interesting because the situation in GDR was totally different. Many of the East German journalists lost their jobs but for those who didn't the adaptation to the liberal media system

²⁷ Lauk & Høyer, p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁹ Ekecrantz, Jan & Olofsson, Kerstin (red.), 2000. *Russian reports. Studies in post-communist transformation of media and journalism*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International. p. 134-135.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 194.

³¹ Lauk & Høyer, p.13.

wasn't that demanding for most of them. All this because of the relationship to West Germany; which stood behind the shaping of the new media scene. This meant that most of the journalists from West kept their jobs, while the journalists from east, who were the ones to adapt, had to fight harder to keep their careers going. At the same time the journalists from GDR had been influenced by West Germany's way of making journalism, thus- paradoxically- making the adaptation for them easier.

3.3 Spirit and System

Dominic Boyer's sociological, ethnographic and historical study *Spirit and System: Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture* are without a doubt the most important influence for our research. It is an ambitious three case study which aims to recognize German identification and social awareness through a historical guiding from nineteenth century university culture, to the Nazi-regime and all the way to GDR post-journalism. Boyer describes a struggle and pressure between *Spirit*, the inner mind, and the *System*, the world surrounding the individual, and how it has been especially vivid in the case of German culture and the term "Germanness". It is an analysis of the birth and expansion of modern intellectual culture and its views on dialectic knowledge, but also an observation of the institutionalization of these ideas in the Third Reich and in the GDR. It is however the third stage of Boyer's study, the collapse of the GDR system and the transition from past to present for the journalists working within the system, that is of most relevance to us. In the chapter *Between Ideals and System: Memories of Journalism in the GDR* Boyer informs the reader, through qualitative interviews, about the way in to journalism, the education and how it was to work practically as a journalist in the GDR. Among other things he states that the only education, the school of journalism in Leipzig, was highly qualitative in terms of craftsmanship³²; that most journalists were freethinking and constantly maintained a struggle between their true ideals and what they could do in practical terms.³³ Many journalists, despite all the failures of GDR journalism, worked towards a better cause than free capitalistic journalism, namely *Die Bildung des Volkes*³⁴ (The education of the people)

In the beginning of the book Boyer states that his early incitement was to write about "the fate of East German Journalists after 1989 and their professional transition to life and work in the

³² Boyer, p.151.

³³ Ibid., p.154.

³⁴ Ibid., p.158.

(West) German media industry of united Germany” (in other words very similar to our starting point) but that the work changed its course during the interviews leaning more towards the fascination of “the centrality of the term *System* to recollection of the GDR and by how journalists so frequently relied upon it in conversations to condense the entirety of their experience with the GDR state and society in single breath phrases such as ‘*that was just how the system was.*’”³⁵ Boyer claims that the term *System* is significant for West countries as well as in the GDR but that it in the latter example became an obsession. System rhetoric was everywhere, and they even tried to change specific phrases and words into more system clinging expressions, not so much unlike the Cultural Revolution in China.³⁶

Boyer’s focus on *Spirit* and *System* is relevant to us but our center lies closer to the journalistic issues he presents. The education and the re-education in the new society, the values in change, the journalistic vacuum that evolved during the transition phase and the professionalization of the journalists in the GDR are all subject matters which he uses to get closer to his dialectic analysis of the German national identity linked to *System*. In contrary to him, we want to use those subjects and try to validate the journalist, not the German people in general. We use Boyer’s research, sharpen it, and lay the focus on the journalists, in more specific terms, our journalists. In other words very much like Boyer’s original intention.

4. Questions

In order to investigate how a professional identity and professional values are created in a controlled media system and how this changes in a transition phase, we realize that the key is to be aware of what the essential issues are. Based upon earlier studies and theories about media systems and politics, socialist journalism and the research of Dominic Boyer we have formulated seven questions that we think will answer our main issue about how the journalists have experienced the transition phase, and how they have reevaluated their professional roles during *Die Wende*.

1. How did the interviewees enter the journalistic profession?
2. How did they experience their work situation in GDR?
3. How did the journalists experience the time between the two systems?

³⁵ Boyer. p.7.

³⁶ Ibid. p.8.

4. How did they manage to re-educate themselves after *Die Wende*?
5. How did they experience their work situation in united Germany?
6. What do the respondents think about journalistic values and their professional role, both in GDR and in united Germany?
7. In which way is the pressure different today from back in GDR?

These questions are answered under the result and analysis chapter in the chronological order as presented above.

5. Method

We saw no other way to conduct this study than through qualitative interviews. Science seems to constantly strive for concrete verifiable results, but in this case, it is about something else. Even if the stories are subjective and even though it is 20 years since these reporters went through the changes, it is their stories we wanted to focus on. To draw conclusions from this material may seem strange, but as we see it, it is the only method that can be used. Especially since there not a lot of research done in this field we feel that this it is extra suitable. On page 280 in *Metodpraktikan* the authors describe the method as follows:

Guidance is however that dialogue interviews is particularly appropriate in situations where we (the scientific community) do not have much knowledge at all, or when we want our results to say something about people's everyday experiences.

We feel that this statement really is spot on in relation to the study we focused on and we believe that a well-conducted interview study may help to fill the gap that exists in this area.

5.1 Qualitative interviews

The choice of method is demanding. *Metodpraktikan* and Karin Widerberg's book, *Qualitative research in practice* has however been a great help. The key word in the process of the interviews has been interplay, interaction and modesty. By this we mean that we have strived for thoughtful conversations with our interviewees and that we have been relaxed and undemanding in relation to the responses we have got. We have been aware of the fact that we are from another community and that we don't have the pre-understanding as the journalists that we interviewed

have. At the same time, we went into the process well prepared and with a real desire to understand and empathetically interpret the interviewees. Of course we used interview guides to prepare for our dialogues (see attachments) and we read the literature thoroughly, but because each interviewee is unique and has their own background, we didn't use any standardized set of questions. The interviews were allowed to develop freely in the situation and according to the person. The main purpose of interviews was to obtain descriptions of the interviewees own, deep-rooted, experiences. It is this knowledge that we subsequently want to try to interpret the meanings and patterns of.

5.2 Choice of interviews

The choice of interview persons was primarily driven by which people we got hold on. In a second step, we tried to talk to people who are as normal as possible. By normal we mean that we tried to talk to working reporters and not experts or professors that make a living on lecturing about these issues. All these journalists are indeed unusual in the sense that they have witnessed something historic, but we still wanted to be aware of subjective experts.³⁷ The number of people we interviewed was also guided by those who could, and wanted to be interviewed but the goal was to be contact with 5-10 former East German journalists. In the end, we did 6 interviews. The persons we have interviewed are:

- **Bettina Erdmann** – A freelance journalist born in a small village close to Dresden 1951. Before she turned a freelancer she worked for *Süd Deutsche Zeitung* and the East German women's magazine *Für Dich*. Today she collectively runs the freelance agency Transit Pressebüro.
- **Helma Nehrlich** – A 53 year old freelance journalist born in Leipzig. She is a professor in media communications and has also worked for the newspaper *Leipziger Volks Zeitung*. Today she works together with Bettina Erdmann at the freelance agency Transit Pressebüro.
- **Holger Wenk** – Holger Wenk is a 52 years old consultant; spokesman and a freelance journalist specialized on mass media. In GDR he worked at the SEDs newspaper flagship *Neues Deutschland* as an African correspondent.
- **Wolfgang Kil** – Is an architect and a writer. In GDR he was an editor for the biggest architecture magazine and later he worked at the West Berlin magazine *Baumwelt*. He has

³⁷ Esaiason, Peter (red.), 2007. *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, Stockholm: Norstedts juridik. p. 286.

also written several books about the architectural changes in Berlin during the nineties and early twenties. Today he is retired

- **Mathias Müller** – A radio journalist currently working for the regional public service station Antenne Brandenburg. Back in GDR he worked for the governmental radio as a news informer.
- **Hannelore Steer** – Hannelore Steer is a well known person in German radio, both as a reporter, an African specialist and as a program director. She was born 1943 in Arnsdorf outside Dresden. Before *Die Wende* she worked as a radio journalist at Radio Berlin International at the African Department. After the break down of the wall she became program director for the RBB (Radio Berlin-Brandenburg). Today she is retired.

5.3 Validity and reliability

We are very humble to the validity of the results of our study. In comparison with Dominic Boyer, who has conducted a large amount of interviews over a period of several years, our study only contains six interviews and is written in about three months. Because of this we are very much aware of the fact that we can't draw any wider conclusions from our work. What we can do is focus on these journalists and the fact that they have managed to adapt to the changes and survive professionally in the new media system. The selection of interviewees does in many ways affect the result of this study. We wanted to know how a professional identity is created in a controlled media system and how this identity changes when the outer circumstances alters. Because of this we chose only East German journalists who successfully managed the transition. One big disadvantage with this selection is the fact that many GDR journalists lost their job when the wall came down, and never managed to come back. If we would have chose to speak with these journalists as well the nature of our study would have been totally different, and a more nuanced picture could have been developed. Another interesting selection could have been to interview both East German and West German journalists, as an attempt to study the meeting between two different journalistic cultures. These two different selections of interviewees are both very interesting and we hope that studies will be done based upon them in the future. The choice to only interview journalists from GDR that managed the transition was natural for us because we think it is the only way to reach the purpose of this study. Our attitude towards the interviews with the journalist has been that we wanted to create a truly open-minded and honest conversation. We really felt that we managed to do so and we think that this is one of the strengths with our report. This is of course a subjective interpretation but because we sometimes discussed very painful memories we honestly believe that they spoke from their hearts. An

important thing to remember though is how the memory might affect the stories of our interviewees. Many of the events that they speak about happened more than twenty years ago and there is always a risk that the memories has been reformed because of feelings and nostalgia. The memory loss is biggest just after an event, but what remains in the memory stays there for a long time. After a week you may remember only half of what you could tell an hour after the event. However, the difference between what you remember after four and five years is marginal. We remember what we are interested in better than what we don't care about and the quality of the memories depends on what kind of memories it is. Details are easier to remember from processes that have been repeated many times.³⁸ When the interviewees talk about their childhood and education, describing it as a good and happy part of their lives, it is hard to determine if nostalgia has altered the memories. For our study this is not really a big problem, because we want to see the events through the eyes of our interviewees. How they perceive or imagine different phenomena is the foundation of this study. This is something that can't be tested by source criticism, or as the authors of *Metodpraktikan* puts it: "These views can't be said to be true or false. The challenge is rather to get so close to the interviewees that it is possible to really capture their world of ideas".³⁹ The interviews were based upon the question formulations we declared in chapter 4. Specifically what questions we asked can be seen in the question template attached to the end of this report.

The interviews were conducted during one week in Berlin in the beginning of November 2009, just around the time for the 20th celebrations of the breakdown of the wall. We met the interviewees in their private homes and also at their work. Most of the interviews took about two hours to complete and we used both recorders and traditional noting. We transcribed large parts of the material, something that took more time than planned. However, looking back, we realize that the fact that we did this has strengthened the reliability of our study. Transcribing the interviews linked us closer to the respondents and gave us a second chance to really get to know them and their answers. It is also much easier to get an overview of the material when it is printed. The decisions of which quotes we have used in the result and analyze chapter were based upon to which extent we felt the respondents answered our questions suggestively. This have led to that some of the interviewees hasn't got as much space as others. Despite this fact all the interviews has laid the foundation for the analysis.

³⁸ Thurén, Torsten, 2005. *Källkritik*, Stockholm: Liber. p. 30-32.

³⁹ Esaiason. p. 291.

6. Result and analysis

We will present the result of our study in the five chapters that follows. In the first chapter, *from beginning to working life*, we try to answer the questions about how the interviewees entered their journalistic profession and how they experienced their work situation in the GDR. The second chapter, *A journalistic vacuum*, describes the journalists experiences of the tumultuous time between the two systems. The questions about how they manage to start over and re-educate themselves and what they thought about their new work situation in United Germany, is answered in chapter three, *Re-education for a new reality*. In chapter four and five (*Values and professionalization* and *Pressure, now and then*) we talk about professional identity in change and how the pressure differs today from back in the GDR.

6.1 From beginning to a working life

The interviewee's way into journalism seems to start with the family. The majority of their parents encouraged writing, reading and open minded discussions and that was in many cases the essential factor for their career choice. Others were born into journalist families and some talked about the pressure to follow in their parent's footsteps. The family's connection to the party is also something that might have helped them. Boyer states, even though it was never openly discussed, that students coming from families with "high-ranked party members" had an advantage of entering the profession.⁴⁰ Even though no one of our interviewees mentions this advantage several of them states that their parents were members of the party and that they, at least in the beginning, had a strong believe in socialism. Many of their parents also had professions that were closely connected to the system, like teacher and journalists. Nobody mentions that there was a specific event or happening that influenced them in becoming journalists. Ideology or strong believes in the system also didn't seem to be a big issue. The former newspaper journalist Holger Wenk was really keen on showing his father's influence on his career choice. He felt that he was lucky to have a dad that was so encouraging when it came to democratic ideals.

My father was officially a teacher in German and History and he had all the official books. That was an interesting point because he knew which themes that he wasn't suppose to teach about. He often gave me other books and taught me things that weren't on the official educational table. From a normal standpoint he showed me the whole variety of knowledge and not only the party view. This

⁴⁰ Boyer. p. 151.

was a big part of my development. He gave me all these books and said: “Read this, and maybe you will have an opinion afterwards and we will discuss it.” Looking back, that was a good education for me. But it was also a question of luck. Other people didn’t have such a father. / **Holger Wenk**

Almost every one of our respondents went to the journalist school in Leipzig, or if you use the colloquial expression, *Die Rotes Kloster*. The ones who didn’t were Wolfgang Kil and Hannelore Steer and they both had educations in areas that they later connected to the journalist profession, namely architecture and African science. The opinions about the school in Leipzig is overall very positive. The journalists point out that the education was extensive and that the studies were on a high, solid level. Both theoretical, methodical and perhaps above all, stylistically. The training in good stylistic writing was something that they spoke very persistent about. This was not only because of the School of Journalism in Leipzig, it was also a consequence of the validation process and the volunteer period they had gone through before even knowing if they were allowed to start the program. In *Spirit and System* the feelings about the School in Leipzig vary a bit more than in our study. Some people found the education as a “complete waste of time and an endless nightmare of ideological rubbish”.⁴¹ Others point out, just as our respondents, the solidity of the training and that it really made them prepared for a life as working journalists. Bettina Erdmann, who specialized on journalism and economic history at the university, puts it like this:

It was a good preparation. We had a diploma in several directions. And also my baccalaureate was very various: I had a profession, I had my degree, I had three languages, I had all scientific directions like physics, chemistry, biology. You couldn’t just stop and say “Hey I don’t want to learn any longer!” You had to do all things and it was a very spread education (...) I think we learned the profession from the bottom, like a handcraft, a very precise handcraft. We had to look for the main ideas and to find the variety, but of course we couldn’t write about whatever we wanted. There was a censorship also in school. But I think our preparation was much better than the West Germans, because we had such a strong education. / **Bettina Erdmann**

Some point out that the stylistic level is something that’s strongly missing amongst younger journalists today. According to several of the interviewees the modern journalistic educations doesn’t give the students the skills to handle different styles and techniques.

Contrary to the statements about the high level of theoretical training and good stylistic knowledge there was a lot of political pressure on the pupils. This pressure took its forms mainly in the studies of Marxism-Leninism, political economy (which both were standard in all

⁴¹ Boyer. p. 151.

educational programs) and due to the five essential principles (see p. 3). The ideological drilling was also very strong in the field of journalism and it is obvious that the SED party put a lot of focus on shaping the journalist pupils in line with the party; to make them become socialist journalists.⁴² They did however not succeed with its ideological missions all the way. Holger Wenk remembers that it was quite clear from the beginning which people who were going to follow the party line.

The split between, what I call, the "party soldiers" and the "real" journalist also started to show under this period. In each group there were 15 to 20 students and perhaps half of them were party soldiers. They were often narrow minded, not very skilled, but every day and in every second in line with the party. On the other side you had people such as me and others that wanted to travel and do other things than to just be a transmission medium for the party. / **Holger Wenk**

However you must add to the equation that the interviewees evidently claim that the ideology was based mainly in these fields and that it didn't penetrate other subjects like history, philosophy or English.

This political pressure was also stated in the fact that the students experienced a constant surveillance. One of our respondents says that they often had discussions and open minded lectures in the parks outside the university. Inside the classrooms they didn't dare to speak openly because they were afraid of hidden microphones and surveillance equipment. If this was true or not were of less significance. Like in many other parts of the eastern bloc, where there were risks of being monitored; this kind of self censorship was a strategy from the journalists to survive professionally and limit the risks of being detected when discussing open mindedly.⁴³

Even though the journalists experienced and felt the SEDs influence over the School all teachers were not a part of this. Many teachers told them things, like how to write "between the lines" to avoid censorship, and the interviewees felt that many of them wanted them to have a knowledge about "free journalism" and that they tried to shape them into something else than the official line stated. In this sense you can argue that the school worked contrary to its goals and that it also taught the journalists how to avoid the censorship. The School of Journalism was a education in socialist journalism and a way to get the people "in line". But at the same time it contained this double nature as a "School of avoiding censorship". Curry talks about that identification with individuals within the profession is stronger than with official policies and with the education

⁴² Boyer. p. 122.

⁴³ Lauk & Høyer. p. 13-14.

itself. Groups interact unofficial with another based upon friendship and common interests in the profession.⁴⁴ This means that the contact with these teachers often meant more to the journalist students than the formal guidelines of the education.

Holger Wenk remembers one of his teachers especially well who was brought in temporarily from England. He had a history of working at *The Times* and because of this he gained a lot of attention from the students.

Luckily we had a very interesting teacher there, in Leipzig. He was a journalist from the UK and he tried to write his doctor thesis about German/British history of working class. In former times he was a journalist at the Times so he was not only an English teacher for us, but also a good educator in how free journalism worked. We talked a lot about it, but not officially of course. Officially we had English courses but we went to the parks and talked because we were not sure if there were security around us and so on. Under the trees we learned English but we also gathered ideas and thoughts about how it was to be working as a journalist at the Times in London. So this was very interesting. The education was normally under strict party and state control but we were lucky and this teacher also had an influence on my personal development. / **Holger Wenk**

The way from the university out in the working life was decided by a commission from state and party. In GDR there were no more journalists educated than considered needed for the society to function. Everyone got jobs, very much like in many western countries police educations. The commission decided where the newly educated journalists were placed. After their placement most of them stayed at the same magazine or newspaper all the way to *Die Wende*. This was the case for Holger Wenk (*Neues Deutschland*), Bettina Erdmann (*Für Dich*), Mattias Müller (*Rundfunk der DDR*), Hannelore Steer (*Radio Berlin International*) and Helma Nehrlich (*Leipziger Volkszeitung*). Helma Nehrlich worked as a capital reporter in Berlin for her newspaper until 1992 when the media companies Springer and Madsack came in and took over. She says that she liked working as a reporter in the GDR even though there were strong regulations.

At that time it was very clear that we had orders to write about certain things and we had to avoid others. It was a very strong management in these papers. Lenin said that “a newspaper is an instrument for the party”, just like a military instrument. And at the time it was, at least sometimes it was. Nevertheless we had a fun time doing this work because we worked together very fine and there was never any concurrence between the colleagues. Now it is, not in our office, but in other places. I

⁴⁴ Curry. p. 12.

think many of our colleagues from GDR didn't want the concurrence and felt they needed to find a place where they could work without it, but that is not only up to you. / **Helma Nehrlich**

The work out in the editorial offices is often described as fun and exciting. The everyday work seemed to be shaped by the nice atmosphere that they had together with the colleagues. The reporters states that they had a good connection amongst each other and that the competition, that nowadays seems to be a natural part of the journalistic work, was very small. Many of them were friends and did things together after work, for example celebrating birthdays and holidays. The problems emerged when they had to report about events, news and persons that were connected with the system or the party. Bettina Erdmann, which we partly interviewed at the same time as Helma, remembers a job that made her somewhat depressed.

I had to make a portrait about a female major in the GDR. This lady was so awful and closed. She didn't tell us anything and she didn't have any personal opinions. I asked her what her idea of dreaming was. "What do you dream about?" I asked her. She said "I don't dream. I'm following party decisions." I came back to my editor-in-chief and said that I can't write about this lady, it is impossible. I had come up with another idea; about the migration out of the villages, about people moving to other places and starting new lives. I felt I came back with such a great idea and my editor-in-chief laughed at me and said "Do you want us to leave this place, your job? We can't write about that, you know this. Go back and write about this lady." And I did it. But I didn't write my name under the article because it was so awful. And you know they made the space between the lines larger because I had to fill four or five pages but I couldn't. This was so horrible and at that moment I hated what I was doing. There was no possibility to say no. / **Bettina Erdmann**

This impossibility of saying no to jobs and the constant demands from the leaders above them was always on their minds. But these directions seemed to grow in the middle of the 80s and some of our respondents claim that if the fall of the wall hadn't occurred they couldn't have handled this psychological pressure for much longer.

6.2 A journalistic vacuum

We had real press freedom for three quarters of a year; from November of 1989 up till the summer of 1990. We had no owners and the party was gone.

/ **Bettina Erdmann**

I am so happy that I, as a journalist, got to experience that period. It was truly the best of times.

/ **Mathias Müller**

In every interview we've made, from the first to the last, everyone talks about a golden era for journalism in Germany. This period appeared with the fall of the wall and lasted for about 5-6 months. It was a time of happiness, freedom and willingness to break with old regulations. The journalists let their creativity go and made truly amazing jobs without considering party lines or economical winnings. This phenomenon, even though very different from one another, appeared all over the East European communist countries. For a brief period of time journalists and media employees enjoyed a great deal of freedom and large possibilities to report and discuss their societies, both its history and future. These periods ended with a transition turning to traditional capitalistic democratic system where a new structure of ownership and control was established.⁴⁵ In the case of East Germany some of our interviewees, such as Bettina, go as far as saying that this period was the true meaning of free journalism. Because of the huge enthusiasm our respondents have shown us about this experience we feel a strong reluctance to further analyze this "journalistic vacuum".

At first you have to understand that this time was very emotional for everyone involved. The world around them changed rapidly and everything that people had known and grown up with was quickly altering. Many of our interviewees mean that they were simply not themselves during this period. Wolfgang Kil, who for the most part of his interview talked more about his links to architecture than to journalism, gave us this good insight of how confusing it really was:

Between the fall of the wall and the New Year I don't remember much. I was at a restaurant with some friends sharing a bottle of wine when I got the message that the wall was gone. I remember this because a confused BBC journalist stormed in to the place and screamed out the news. But after this I don't remember anything until in January. I have magazines and articles saved from this period but I don't remember writing them. I must have managed to work through everything. There were so many things going on so I probably just blocked it out. / **Wolfgang Kil**

Because of all this disorder you can easily argue that it was the stop of the long time pressure that built up a glorification of this period. The end of over forty years of censorship and regulations must without a doubt create a great sense of freedom and independence. In *Spirit and System* Dominic Boyer means that this time was only *Spirit* and no *System*.⁴⁶ The journalists were completely driven by their creativity and ambition and there were structure to hold these forces in place. This is also stated by a number of interviews that he makes. One journalist said that *Die*

⁴⁵ Curran & Park. p. 47.

⁴⁶ Boyer. p. 219.

Wende had little to do with journalism; it was simply about excess, intellectual energy and utopian visions⁴⁷. On the other hand our interviewees really felt that they witnessed something unique and real, not denying the need of future structure and organization, but still something that was close to what journalism could be at its very best. Hannelore Steer worked with a radio program that broadcasted international news and remembers this period very well.

After the wall broke down we did programs until December 1991. It was a wonderful time and a really good experience. We did two things: The first is that we reported about these different developments which we had here in East Berlin. We did many interviews with people from different branches and I think we did a good journalistic work. For example people appreciated the GDR TV more than the West German TV at this time because we were very near all the happenings. We covered the round table discussions and we prepared the elections of March 18th 1990 in a way we couldn't do before. We could speak with all the candidates and we could ask them directly and openly. If you were a candidate from the CDU⁴⁸ and I was a reporter I could ask what you wanted to do if you were elected. This we couldn't do before. When we had elections to the Volkskammer in GDR we couldn't speak to the candidates in such way. Perhaps we said to the candidate: "What have you done in your life? or "How do you think about this?" But to ask for real answers we couldn't do before, and this we did really good at this time. (...) We had press freedom in every way. We could do what we wanted to do. We did what we thought was necessary to do in these months of changes, both in our lives and for our listeners and spectators. / **Hannelore Steer**

Holger Wenk had similar experiences. For him the period of November of 1989 until the summer of 1990 was a time of democratization.

It was a very interesting landscape for us journalists. In the established media the journalists freed themselves. When I was in Namibia at the time and my colleagues elected a new editor in chief for *Nenes Deutschland*. They said to the old one: "Hey, go home. No more party, no more official, no more policy!" I think the editor changed twice during my stay in Namibia. First they elected a new editor in chief but after only one week or so they realized that he was false and that he was a party soldier. Then they elected a new one. It was the best time! Until May 1990 when the market economy started to establish and these state/party own magazines and newspapers were sold to the Western owners. The new owners came in and said: "Hey, not under my command!" And then the first new restrictions started. No contact to the left wing, no this, no that. There were training courses in "free journalism" that you had to attend and so on. New editors often appeared and the elected ones were abolished. The new owner brought their own editors who often had no idea what East German readers were like, how they behaved and in which situation they were in. / **Holger Wenk**

⁴⁷ Boyer. p. 222.

⁴⁸ *Christlich Demokratische Union* - one of the biggest and most influential political parties in Germany.

The interesting point, just as Holger Wenk says, is that our respondents felt that this feeling of ultimate press freedom stopped right after that the new owners from the west came in and took over. The pressure from the party was gone, but a new one arise, the economical pressure. When *Die Trenband* (see p. 5) distributed the economical rights to the GDR media many of the former reporters felt completely run over. The dream that they lately had experienced was replaced by a new economically driven reality. Bettina Erdmann felt that her magazine changed into something she really didn't wanted it to be.

Then the new owners from Grüner Jahr⁴⁹ came and said: "You are a newspaper for women; you have to write about cosmetics, cooking, how to dress and how to take care about your husband."

I thought these were really bad ideas. We had other themes that we felt were more interesting for working women, but they said no. This was a big drop in quality. After a short period of time they closed our magazine because *Für Dich* was a complement to *Für Sie* in Hamburg. We were their concurrent and they closed us. / **Bettina Erdmann**

The lack of *System* that Boyer brings up doesn't seem to be a big problem for our respondents. During the journalistic vacuum they simply continued with new democratic elected editors and took decisions together of what they should write about. The financial issue is however something that was of concern. The German press continued to be financed by the SED party during this period⁵⁰, and that could of course not go on forever. In order to keep this exclusive press freedom going, without party or market economy control, thoughts on how to rebuild the East German media system was exchanged between the journalists. Many of them seemed to dream about a "third way" construction of the press, much like how the public service owned radio and TV is organized but financed by different funds and organizations.

I'm dreaming a little bit about a third way. One way is just market economy in mass media. The second way is state or party control. It doesn't work and it's horrible for journalistic working conditions. I dream a little bit about a third way that means market based economy in the mass media sector, with a strong public TV and radio financed by all, and maybe with additional foundations for good investigating journalism and qualitative journalism. This is starting right now in the USA. In the middle of this crisis they have started two or three projects like this, about a year ago I think, and from this maybe we could learn. Journalism, especially in the printing sector, only depends on advertisement. It is also a danger. You are permanently under economic pressure and for example you cannot risk writing critical articles about your advertising partners. The other way to go is foundations or that people have to pay 4 or 5 euro a day for a good newspaper or magazine. / **Holger Wenk**

⁴⁹ A global printing enterprise controlling 285 magazines and newspapers in 22 countries.

⁵⁰ Boyer. p. 224.

The dream of a third way was widely spread among our journalists. On union meetings and different discussion boards ideas and organizational structures for the press were discussed. The Kohl government⁵¹ did however dismiss every such attempt to create a different type of media structure and the vacuum was soon to be replaced by the traditional western capitalistic system. The voices that spoke for a third way simply didn't have the political power or reliability in the eyes of the west. Boyer states that politicians in many interviews referred to the East Germans as to immature to participate in the process of democratization and that the unification therefore was provided, as a service, for them.⁵²

The story of the German journalistic vacuum is unfortunately a story not well told in the history of mass media. You can argue that the circumstances caused this situation. That it is simply a matter of glorification from the journalists that for the first time in their life were free independent writers. Or, if you will, *Spirit* without *System* as Boyer puts it. On the other hand you can use this case as a model and an example that it is possible to organize the press in a different way. If the *Treuhand* hadn't so strongly forced the privatization of the East German media sector and if the voices for the third way model had been more respected, Germany could have displayed a unique media structure that might have lived up to the term free journalism. It was certainly not a question of lack of enthusiasm and eager from the journalists that stopped this from being carried out. One other thing you can consider is the ideas exposed by Colin Sparks in the chapter "Media theory after the fall of European communism" in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. He means that in order to talk about real democratic journalism you'll have to shift the perspective away from the question about the state and the market and turn more to the question of the mass population. The losing communist system was replaced by another sort of media system that in many ways was similar to the old one in the aspect of elitist ownership. Just like in the GDR the media was controlled by a small elite group with the same interest to preserve power.⁵³ This journalistic vacuum shows that a different medial structure is possible, perhaps with the use of a third way. In other words, a model for the press built up in similar ways as public service radio and TV stations.

⁵¹ Helmut Kohl; chancellor of West Germany 1982 -1990 and of United Germany 1990 - 1998

⁵² Boyer. p. 189.

⁵³ Curran & Park. p. 47.

Whether or not you want to draw conclusions on media systems and political organizations from this period you can clearly say that our interviewees were sincerely happy to have participated in this transition and that it will always be one of the biggest experiences in their working life.

6.3 Re-education for a new reality

The ability to start over and re-educate after the *Die Wende* was vital for our journalists. It was a question of leaving former values and collective truths behind them and to adapt to new ones. As we will see in chapter 6.4 *Values and professionalization*, it was vital for the journalists to maintain their true values during all the years of oppression. The ability to do so seems to vary a little bit. Many of them had solid, secure jobs and to move on to a different reality was hard. Even though no one wanted to keep the old system they clearly said that it was difficult to leave it.

The meeting between the East and the West journalists were often complex. Many of our interviewees felt that they were met by patronizing attitudes. Some of the colleagues from the West had little understanding of what the Eastern reporters had gone through. Hannelore Steer remembers that the West German journalists often made their own experience into the norm. They treated, both journalist colleagues and the public, without the consideration that they were going through a very tumultuous change. Hannelore Steer means that the West reporters sometimes had a hard time seeing the East Germans as human beings with their own families, jobs, friends and experiences. To some of them the East Germans were simply victims under a communist dictatorship. Holger Wenk also felt these reluctant attitudes from the Western colleagues. At one of the meetings that the journalist union organized during *Die Wende* one West reporter expressed very strong opinions about the East German journalists.

In one of these meetings a colleague openly said that all East German journalists should be dismissed and they should be excluded from the profession. He proposed that there should be an organ that the former East German journalists should apply to and that this organ should prove the East Germans as real journalists. This organ should decide which one should be able to work and which one who couldn't. This was rubbish because in the time from November 1989 to the summer of 1990 there was a self refreshing process in GDR journalism. We knew our guys, our bad and black and white guys and we dismissed them by ourselves.(...) We refreshed our professional circles by ourselves so this proposal from the West Berlin colleague was rubbish. The bad ones that still worked as journalists at the time of these meetings were recognized by the colleagues and the audience in a kind of self-control.

/ **Holger Wenk**

Holger Wenks opinion about the West journalists was that they considered themselves as the winners. In his mind most of them came in with the attitude to teach the East journalists what “real journalism” was. He means that this is the same kind of attitude that he got from the party soldiers and the party connected people from back in the GDR. They wanted to tell him how to write well and how to do correct research, things he already felt he already knew well from all his work and travelling.

At the same time the interviewees also point out that it was necessary for them to adapt and change. And not all Western journalists had these patronizing attitudes. In contrast to these people who were demeaning and who looked down on the Eastern journalists there were also truly helpful people. Today many of the editors and publishers from West Germany often feel a strong enthusiasm about East German journalists. They are seen as regional experts, skilled writers and at the same time very team oriented.⁵⁴ That being said, it’s a fact that many editors preferred to hire young GDR journalists into their media companies during *Die Wende*. The old ones often considered to be polluted by the socialistic system.⁵⁵ Bettina Erdmann, who sometimes really felt disrespected, also admits that there were Western colleagues that were supportive and interested in making the transformation process work smooth. She believes that this process also was difficult for the West Germans and that they had to work collectively together to solve the problems.

I went to this press office that was situated in West Berlin. At this office there was a West Berlin journalist, a man, who was looking for female journalist from East Germany. This man really helped us. Helma came one month after and joined this team. They helped us to understand how the trade unions in West Germany are working, which possibilities there are. How to work as a freelancer and how to sell an article. This was very helpful and we are still in contact with this press office. I am very grateful for this help. It was not a bad start as a freelancer, to join such a team and to feel so welcome.

/Bettina Erdmann

The East journalists told us how the meetings with the West strengthened the belief in themselves. At first there was a lot of nervousness and disbelief involved, but after a while when they realized that their level of education was just as good, if not better, many of them got a boost of confidence. What you have to remember in this aspect is GDRs unique situation in terms of an east socialist country. The fact that Germany was separated helped the East German journalists in many ways. Mathias Müller said that the short distance to the West, especially as a

⁵⁴ Boyer. p. 199.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 193.

Berlin citizen, really helped him when the time for rethinking finally came. All of his life he had secretly listened to West German radio stations, looked at West TV and also sometimes read West magazines. These habits of using Western media in the GDR is confirmed by Colin Sparks in the chapter “Media theory after the fall of European communism” in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*.⁵⁶ In countries like Estonia, where the journalists didn’t have a clear role model to look at, no “West” close by, was the transition much harder. They had to make the transition towards liberal media all by themselves and there were no premade laws or regulations that they could use once the Soviet system imploded⁵⁷. It was also a question of ethics and views on their profession. In many other parts of central and Eastern Europe the journalists were forced to totally re-conceptualize their thinking.⁵⁸ In GDR this was not the case, at least not to the same extent since West Germanys influence on the media workers and journalists always had been strong.

The physical meeting out in the editorial offices was also filled with distinctions. With laughter the reporters tells us stories about the social part of the meetings. There was a definite difference on how to interact with each other and how to organize the everyday work. Stories about the competitive and a closed West German in contrary to the more calm and team working East German were often brought up. The lunch seemed to be one of the times where these differences were especially obvious.

When I came to radio station Antenna Brandenburg, in August or September 1992, most of the staff came from Potsdam. But they also had freelancers and most of them came from West Germany. It was very strange for them that we, the Potsdam people, went together to have lunch. It took a long time before they joined us; at first they built their own groups. And this was not good, these divided groups. When I came there I tried to bring them more together but naturally it took time. It was simply a question about different experience of life. / **Hannelore Steer**

The re-education for the journalists was in many cases a question of adapting to the new outer circumstances, to the colleagues and the new working place. But it was also an adaption between two cultures. In *Spirit and System* Boyer tries to declare the typical attributes for an “Ossie” (East German) and a “Wessie” (West German). He means that East German reporters often tend to strongly connect themselves with their “easterness”. Despite the fact that it often labels them, both politically and in life in general.⁵⁹ Matthias Müller also stated this in his interview. Even

⁵⁶ Curran & Park. p. 38.

⁵⁷ Lauk & Høyer. p. 15.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

⁵⁹ Boyer. p. 201.

though he in many ways didn't like the system he grew up in he said that he often felt like an East German and a citizen of the GDR and that this followed him for years.

This is also something to consider when it comes to the re-education and the new work situation for the East German reporters. Even though many of them successfully adapted to the new system they didn't let go of their eastern heritage.

6.4 Values and professionalization

When you ask the journalists about what their journalistic values were in the GDR and what they thought journalism was supposed to be, it is obvious that their ideas in many ways are consistent with the view of journalists in free and democratic societies. They all followed the directions and did what was required of them, but inside they had other ideas about the profession. They are all talking of an inner opposition which could freely be expressed when *Die Wende* finally came. This is a fact that Boyer also points out: that the struggle between, what he calls true ideals and what officially was possible to do was very common among the journalists in East Germany.⁶⁰ This inner opposition was something that was planted in their minds already at a young age:

We discussed very openly in my family; my father cared for having a kind of thinking which was also critical. We all grew up in the GDR but they taught us to think with our own heads, and to get and preserve a critical brain, a critical way of thinking. This was very important for me up till now. The years before the wall came down, before GDR vanished, was very difficult for us as journalists. And those who were total believers of the GDR, got a little bit mad and tired. It was such a total change. But it never changed inside for me. And this was very good.

/ **Bettina Erdmann**

The official duty for journalists was to act for the benefit of the party and to help realizing the political goals. The values that the journalists got from education and in the editorial offices were to serve the state and the party and to fight for social freedom and justice. Even though not officially, many journalists didn't agree with this value and opposed. Holger Wenk says that he thinks this is typical for the East German journalist, the private vision contra the official. These private ideals were created when interacting with teachers, family, friends and colleagues that expressed other forms of values. In *Comparing Media Systems*, Hallin and Mancini talks about the unique quality that the journalistic profession withholds. The possibility to separate between own opinions and the rules of the profession, with all the idealistic contradictions connected to it, is a

⁶⁰ Boyer. p.154.

part of the professional role as a journalist.⁶¹ In the East German case this distinction between private and professional values was particularly necessary to keep an identity, because in the everyday journalistic work the idealistic values were hard to realize:

As a young journalist I felt a task to inform educate, and enlighten people. We tried to practice this, but it was – of course- an illusion. On one hand because the dreams and wishes did not go hand in hand with the real possibilities at all, and on the other hand because of the special conditions of GDR journalism. / **Helma Nehrlich**

The special conditions of GDR journalism resulted in many cases with the creation of party soldiers, who were strong followers of the party line. But for our interviewees the inner resistance made it possible to keep their democratic ideals. Hannelore Steer says that the most important value for her is that journalism should help people to better understand things around them. The task is to explain in such a way that people who are listening or reading can form their own opinion about the subject. Steer says that the values that she finds the most important, hasn't changed for her:

My values are the same as in GDR but now I can realize them, they are living. During my life in GDR the values were theoretically for me. Even if I could speak in sessions with people I couldn't speak about the values, the real values. I think that very many journalists in GDR had values like journalists have today, but we couldn't- they couldn't- realize them. And some of them said: "Okay I can't do it so I do it the way they want me to". But in their hearts they were not happy with it.

/ **Hannelore Steer**

Although this division between professional and private values was necessary for the own person it meant that the East German journalists, objectively speaking, had a low degree of professionalization. At least if you use Hallin and Mancini's definition of professionalization: *professionalization exists where journalism is developed as a distinct field with significant autonomy from other social fields, including the political field.*⁶² The East German journalists were directly under the directives from the party and did not do much practically to achieve a higher degree of autonomy. In Poland the journalists succeeded with gaining the highest amount of autonomy towards the party in the whole eastern bloc. Instead of fighting against the censorship as individuals they teamed up as a group to fight for a new press law. Rather than fighting against the problem that they couldn't provide the information they wanted, the journalists in Poland

⁶¹ Hallin & Mancini. p. 177-178.

⁶² Ibid. p. 38.

gathered and distributed information about the wrongs that had been forced upon the media sphere.⁶³ It is difficult to determine whether these differences between Polish and East German journalists are due to variations in cultures, but it is clear that the inner resistance that our interviewees were taught played an important role. On multiple levels the East German journalists lived a double life, and in the profession this meant that they said and wrote what was required of them while inside they felt a fury of being controlled which grew stronger by the years. It was a compromise that was necessary to make in order to survive as a journalist and to be able to achieve their goals in the profession. These sacrifices can, when looking into the rear-view mirror, be painful to think about. Holger Wenk wanted to become a correspondent in Africa, but to fulfill this dream he had to think in line with the party, and not as the critical and free-thinking journalist that he wanted to be. This forced him to make choices which he today questions:

I often had to make compromises which I today claim was too much. But you have your idea, your goal and you had to pay a price for this. Today I think the price we've paid was too high. And even in that period, especially from 1985 and on, when the Glasnost⁶⁴ started in Russia, we often had the feeling that we made too many compromises. We made things that we weren't convinced of, but you made them anyway because if we hadn't then it had been the stop of our careers and the end of our dreams. / **Holger Wenk**

If our journalists had to make sacrifices like this and live by values they didn't embrace it is hard to understand how they manage to survive in the profession. Hannelore Steer says that she seriously thought about leaving journalism for good:

I was not feeling so good with my work. And I thought about finding another job, really serious. I knew a lady from a factory...I knew her from the trade fair where her factory participated, and she told me to think about if I wanted to come and work for her. / **Hannelore Steer**

But Hannelore didn't change job, and the reason was much because she and the other journalists found a way to write and talk about the things they found interesting. It was the technique of writing between the lines, and in the radio the same effect was created by telling a story that with the help of metaphors and similes referred to something else. This was autonomy at a small level but it helped the journalists to ventilate their frustration and to realize their professional values. In Hannelores radio department it was a duty to report about certain things every day, but in

⁶³ Curry. p. 240.

⁶⁴ The Soviet Union leader Michail Gorbatsjovs name for the democratic reform that started in Russia in 1985.

some parts of the program she also had the freedom to choose themes that she thought were interesting for the listeners and where she didn't have to lie. Of course these parts were censored so that they didn't contain criticism towards socialism or the politicians, but it gave Hannelore and her colleagues the possibility to go as far as possible to report about the real conditions in GDR:

In GDR there were big communities of agriculture called LPG⁶⁵. The politicians in GDR were very proud of the agriculture and said it was a big development going on. But once I created a series for our listeners. And after two weeks I did a twelve minutes long reportage about a little village in Brandenburg. Before I went, we were two or three people looking for a village, we didn't want one that was very modern and completed. No we looked for a very simple village and where there was no central water. So this we could do; we took this village as an example to say that even in socialism not everything is okay. It was our intention to give also a piece, an impression of what is true. Of the truth in this country. / **Hannelore Steer**

Bettina Erdmann describes a similar will to serve the audience with some kind of truth:

I couldn't make revolution because then I would lose my job and I had two children. But I tried to make some truth undercover, a little bit between the lines. And in the pictures; we packed into the pictures some small truth. And we hoped the censors didn't see it and remark on it.

/ **Bettina Erdmann**

This method to bring some truth to the listeners and readers, and to criticize the system, is not an organized way to create more independence for the journalistic profession. But it is definitely an individual way of realizing values. Therefore it is a part of a professionalization because it is a step towards "isolation from the influence of nonprofessionals"⁶⁶, meaning that journalists try to work by values that has been created within the profession and not by those that are inflicted from outside interest groups. The process towards autonomy didn't go much further than this for the journalists in GDR. They didn't manage to influence the profession in the way the Polish journalists did by taking active roles in politics.⁶⁷ The reason to this difference, as earlier mentioned, is not easy to identify but are connected to the fact that the political situation in Poland was much more turbulent than in GDR. The demands on the journalists in Poland were therefore never consistent and forced them to constantly rethink their professional and personal

⁶⁵ Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft. Collectively driven farms which was the base of the GDR agriculture production.

⁶⁶ Curry. p. 208.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

ideals and values.⁶⁸ In GDR the political climate was much more stable, Erich Honecker was for instance the General Secretary of the SED party for eighteen years straight (1971-1989). The demands on the East German journalists were always the same and gave them few chances to reevaluate their ideals and to change the conditions of the profession.

When *Die Wende* finally came, the real values and the inner opposition could finally be expressed by the journalists. Their opinion about the journalistic profession was, both in GDR and united Germany, to work as a serviceman of the people; to help explain and clarify things in a way that makes it easier to form an own opinion. Their values have shifted in some ways through the years but have always been directed towards this opinion about the profession. The level of their professionalization is seen by the way they have managed to keep and nourish such democratic ideals through times of oppression. In some ways the experiences of working as a journalist in an authoritarian regime seems to have led to a higher form of professionalization:

I as an East German journalist say: Okay, I only earn one third of the salaries at Spiegel or Springer as a freelancer but it's enough for me. I have the freedom to write my own opinion and about subjects that I find essential. Freedom is more important than the money. I think this is a difference between East and West German journalist. Not for everyone of course, but for many. / **Holger Wenk**

Also Helma Nehrlich sees a big difference between the professional attitudes in GDR and in United Germany:

The dreams of journalists now are to have a big story, to have a very good article and to have success in the editorial offices. I think that we had visions about our profession in the GDR times and it was not such a bad thing to have. We thought at this time that we were very strong. We were but we couldn't do it right. To feel very strong about something and to want to be able to do more than you actually can is not a bad thing for journalists, it is a special kind of motivation. / **Helma Nehrlich**

6.5 Pressure, now and then

Political and economic influence is something that journalists always have been compelled to struggle with, and probably always will have to do. In GDR the control was mainly political, and put pressure on journalists, both in private- and professional life. In today's German media world the slogan is freedom and democracy. But the impact in terms of economy and market interest continues to exert a major influence on journalists. A clear difference in opinion between our respondents can be seen among those who are working in public service and those working in

⁶⁸ Curry. p.24.

the private media sector, such as freelancers. But all are aware that influence and pressure also occurs in the liberal media system. In GDR, it was a political doctrine which formed the basis for all decisions making. This means that control and pressure, which aimed to steer society in a given direction, was practiced in all parts of the GDR community.

As shown in the chapter 6.1 *From beginning to a working life* the educational system and the School of journalism in Leipzig was a big part of exercising political pressure upon the journalists. Holger Wenk means that the journalistic educational system was a way to control the profession, because it gave the opportunity to stop the people who were to open minded and critical from entering it. For Wenk and those who managed to become journalists a system of political influence waited ahead. Hannelore Steer explains that it took her longer than normal to become leader of her department just because she refused to get politically involved:

I was not a member of the SED, so I couldn't do a big career in the radio. But nevertheless in the middle of the eighties, I could become the leader of the African department. Some people would have done it earlier but it was not possible, because Radio Berlin International was linked together with the central committee and therefore it was a condition to be a member of the SED if you wanted to be a leader of a bigger department. / **Hannelore Steer**

Our respondents have several examples of how the control reached outside the editorial offices. As an example Bettina Erdmann says that as a journalist you were treated in a special way. In GDR journalists belonged to a particular group in society and did not have the same benefits as the working class. Due to the socialistic values of seeing the working class as the foundation of society, academically trained people such as journalists had lower status. Because of this it was sometimes hard to arrange practical things.

It was impossible to get a flat in Dresden. It was impossible for people like me- for people who were members of the so called intelligence. As a member of the working class, I would get a flat, but as a member of the intelligence I didn't. We had a very small, dirty and old flat. One and a half room, one room without heating, the bathroom without heating, the kitchen without heating and we had two children. / **Bettina Erdmann**

Even if this story witness about a pressure even outside the journalistic profession, our respondents says that their life in GDR was good and that they didn't suffer. They had enough to eat and drink and they all had jobs. But as Hannelore Steer declares, a moral oppression was always present. She gives an example of this about her brother who loved rock music:

Once my mother was called to come to school, I think this was when my brother was about 16 years old, and she had to talk to the principal. And the principal asked my mother, word by word: “Do you know what your son is called in school by the other pupils?” My mother said: “Yes, Elvis!” And the principal asked why this was and he said that he hated the music and so on. And my mother responded: “Shall I forbid the music that he loves? This I will never do.” / **Hannelore Steer**

In GDR people lived a relatively normal life; the respondents believe that they had about the same living conditions as in most other countries, with the difference that they constantly were exposed to this kind of moral oppression and influence from politics. However, for journalists it was obvious that the influence was manifested most clearly within the profession. As we saw in the previous chapter the journalists were forced to write between the lines to be able to express themselves about what they considered important and interesting. Helma Nehrlich tells us how the head of her department one day explained what things they couldn't write about and which words they weren't supposed to use. It did not matter if the journalists felt a certain theme was important to write about or if there was an interest from the public; decisions were made by the SED controlled editors:

Every time you thought this is not normal. It's not normal, it's stupid. But it was clear that some functionaries of the party had decided it in their own way or because the central committee had ordered it. And everyone noted that it is only stupid because people wanted to hear about these things and to read about them. People discussed news and events in their daily work but they couldn't read about it in the newspaper; this is only stupid. / **Helma Nehrlich**

The censorship was one of the most effective tools to force the journalists in the desired direction. Holger Wenk experienced this when he traveled to Poland in 1985 to cover the tumultuous encounters between the independent trade union “Solidarity” and the state. When he came back to Berlin and read the articles he written, he discovered that only 10-20 percent was his own words and sentences. The rest had been rewritten. When he later told his chief of department that he officially wanted to protest, he was subject to extortion; the chief said that there was a job available as an African correspondent, and if Holger wanted the job it was his, as long as he didn't go on with his protest.

When the wall came down Wenk was working as a correspondent in Namibia. He moved back to Berlin and experienced- as we saw in chapter 6.2: *A journalistic vacuum*- a period of what he thinks was real press freedom. Later when the media companies from west moved in to establish the liberal media system Wenk thinks that a new kind of pressure was forced upon the journalists:

Journalism under free market circumstances is also under pressure. Officially it's free, but unofficially and from time to time also officially, you are under pressure. Under political pressure, under the pressure of your editor in chief or under pressure of the owner of the magazine. If he is a conservative man or woman you have to write in a conservative way. From time to time you are also under economic pressure, especially as a freelance journalist. /**Holger Wenk**

Wenk talks about a situation that is present today in Germany but also in many other European countries. Hallin and Mancini mean that even though the political influence on the media clearly has weakened over the last decades, a strong advocacy press still affects journalism and the media structures.⁶⁹ This means that politicians and other social groups still play a role in deciding which themes and events media should pay an interest to. But as Wenk points out, the biggest pressure for freelancers is about economical issues. Bettina Erdmann says that she feels free because she can always choose by herself what she wants to do. At the same time she doesn't feel free because she always has to consider the fact that she has to write in a profitable way. She has to think about her colleagues and is sometimes also forced to work in projects or for ideas that she doesn't like so much. But the biggest difference from GDR is that she never has to make compromises which she can't live with. As an example she says that she will never write for scandal press, a clear choice of direction in her career. In former times she couldn't make such decisions. Then it was just a question about following the paths chosen for her. Even though Erdmann is a freelance journalist, self employed and free to take on any jobs she wants, her attitude is according to Hallini and Mancini somewhat unique for German reporters. The level of autonomy is much higher among German journalists, at least compared to Britain, United States and Italy. By autonomy they mean that the freedom towards editors and managers is bigger and that hierarchy levels within the redactions is much less apparent. The study referred by Hallin and Mancini also show that the German reporters are less willing to let their material be edited and that they often seem to work as individuals with minimal supervision.⁷⁰ The conclusion they draw from this is that the culture of German journalism is strongly shaped by the experience of dictatorship and censorship and that they because of this is extra careful of their independence. This view is something that you should take in to consideration when discussing how the East German journalists experiences pressure. It's possible that pressure, both political and economical, is extra noticeable for them simply because they have experienced so much of it before.

⁶⁹ Hallin & Mancini. p. 144-145.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.174.

Bettina Erdmann also states that the economical factor is essential in the choices that she makes: she has to write interesting articles about “boring subjects” and declares that “not everything gets made with heart.” Erdmann’s colleague Helma Nehrlich also feels the economic pressure in the new media system. She thinks that it affects her way of writing and the quality of her work:

I think so, its normal. It’s always a struggle between time, management and quality I think. As a freelance journalist you can’t give the articles so much time that you think is necessary. It’s not like this in every case but afterwards I often feel that I should have done more research and given it more time. But I can’t because for 80 or 100 lines I will get 80 or 100 Euros and for this I can’t spare more time than a week. (...) It’s a petty because I like to do my work thoroughly. / **Helma Nehrlich**

That economical factors and the lack of time influence the journalistic work, is something that Boyer also points out. He asked his respondents if they believed that journalism in the West really was free. One of several similar answers he got was that money is the central thing today, and it leads to a pressure to produce quantity that is greater than it was in the GDR. A certain amount of pressure is positive but not too much because it affects the quality. One of the biggest existential challenges for this particular journalist was trying to maintain the quality of his work.⁷¹

For public service journalists like Hannelore Steer and Mathias Müller these kinds of pressures have not been as obvious and they have mostly felt free in their work. Both Steer and Müller says that the biggest difference today is that they really can express their own opinion, even in those cases when they don’t agree with the government. They can do investigations about themes that are of interest for the public and have the possibility to demand answers from those of responsibility. Müller thinks that the editorial freedom is much bigger today than it was in GDR. At the same time it is harder because the demands on the level of truth are much higher. The will to express himself creatively has always been present but the possibilities to realize this wish is much more extensive today.

The reason to why public service journalists don’t feel the economic pressure as much as the freelance journalists is because they work in an institution that is much more democratic. The guidelines for public service radio in Germany are constituted by councils where representatives from all parts of society are represented.⁷² Therefore has the idea of popular democracy, which was fully expressed in the transition years, managed to survive in public service to a greater extent than it has in rest of the German media. It is true that the German media today is politically free,

⁷¹ Boyer. p. 219-220.

⁷² Hallin & Mancini. p. 167-168.

but it is a part of a democracy where elite groups (much like in GDR) are organizing and negotiating in their own interest.⁷³ This means that the media still is controlled by a relatively small amount of people and in that sense it carries a lot of similarities with the GDR system, at least for the freelance journalists who are under strong economical pressure. The journalists working in the public service system is more protected from this pressure because the market economy is less present.

Now we belong to ARD⁷⁴ and the transition phase wasn't so difficult for us. I have to say that there of course were some things similar to the situation in GDR. There were hierarchical structures and a large bureaucracy but the journalistic work was to a little extent affected by this. / **Mathias Müller**

7. Conclusion and discussion

First of all we would like to say that we are sincerely impressed by the East German journalist's ability to survive the things they gone through. To meet these persons and try to get a grip of what's going on in their heads has really been a great experience for us. While studying theory and literature about this subject we have often come across a demeaning attitude towards these journalists. Even though we can understand that some people, especially the former East Germans, still feel mistrust against them, we don't share these feelings. We are very modest towards the oppression and suffering they have gone through to be able to fulfill their journalistic dreams. As future journalists we both feel that we have much to learn from them.

What we have been trying to shine a light on in this study is the development and changes in the minds of these journalists. Our opinion is that these journalists are very idealistic and has that they have a strong and clear vision of what they want. We find it remarkable that their values have managed to survive through all this oppression. Pragmatism has been a key for them to survive practically in their profession, and many of them say that they certainly were no heroes. The visions and true ideals were kept alive through discussions with open minded families, friends, colleagues and teachers. What these journalists clearly show is that an inner opposition towards totalitarianism has a great value. If the East German journalists hadn't had their critical minds and their decisive vision on how things really should have been, they would with most certainty not have been able to continue their journalist careers. Even after the wall had broken

⁷³ Curran & Park. p. 46-47.

⁷⁴ Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Public broadcasting Service of Germany).

down and the new realities in working life started to show, this inner opposition was useful to the journalists. Their past experiences of oppression and later the total freedom during *Die Wende* have made them particularly aware of the demands from outside interest that also exists in liberal media. Especially the freelancers that we interviewed talks about the economical pressure of the new system and how this challenges them in the struggle to contain their values. This shows that in all kind of societies, both totalitarian and democratic, there are discourses that limit the freedom of journalists. We think that this relation between inner opposition, media systems and society is a subject for further research.

The ability to express values, by writing between the lines and choosing certain angles, was also very important because it kept the ideals alive. Like Curry states in her study about the Polish journalists, the journalistic profession finds it way around censorship and political influence. She argues that this leads to a professionalization of the journalists and that the political oppression just makes it more urgent to reach a state of autonomy. In many ways you can say that this is a failed professionalization because the everyday life as a journalist in the communistic bloc meant dealing with regulations and censorship and should therefore had stopped them from conceiving a professional conception of the role. But this didn't happen, and the Polish journalist truly did have such ideas about their role. We mean that our study also shows this about our interviewees. They didn't reform and change their profession in the same way the Polish journalists did, but they managed to keep and nourish their ideals so that they were ready to fully use them when the *Die Wende* finally came. Our study concerns these six individual reporters, and as we previously said, it is only their stories we draw conclusions from. Not everyone managed to move on and complete their professionalization. In fact, most of the East German journalists didn't. But the ones we interviewed did. These journalists are the winners; they are the ones from GDR who were able to successfully work in the new system and to continue their professional development. From a liberal media perspective this is impossible. Journalists can, according to these ideas, not develop their values and become professionals when the political influence is oppressive and strong. Hallin & Mancini rejects this and believes that professionalization and political influence can coexist, at least to some extent. Our study, despite its small range, strengthens their argument in this area.

The period of journalistic vacuum that we talk about is also something that we feel can be presented as a result, or at least to the extent that it is something truly unique and exclusive in the history of mass media. We believe that the journalistic vacuum that our respondents experienced

is an example, or an incitement, that another; more democratic organization of the press is possible to arrange. Boyer talks about that *Die Wende* was a period of *Spirit* without *System*. Maybe that is true, because in many ways it was a journalism driven by the journalist's inner visions which led to a euphoric situation where journalism was practiced without any regulations. In Estonia it caused many journalists to write about things that was too sensitive and that led to public disappointment. But if you consider Colin Sparks argument that in order to talk about real independent journalism, focus must be shifted away from state and market towards the relations between media and people, then the journalistic vacuum can be seen as an attempt or starting point for a more democratic press system. This is of extra relevance since many of the journalists in East Germany argued for another arrangement, a *third way*. They wanted this journalistic vacuum to continue and nourish under true democratic influence, without any form of restrictions. Nor from party politics or the demands of the market. If their opinions and will to execute this third way vision would have been respected, we think this could have been an interesting start to a different way of organizing the traditional western media system.

If you see past the academically formed questions and formulations we simply wanted our paper to say something about these persons, to let them be seen as the unique human beings that they are. It is unmistakably not so that only media workers and journalist students have something to learn from these people, everyone who has the slightest interest in democracy, press freedom and human behavior under oppression has.

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Question template

We begin with general questions about your background and why you chose to become a journalist. Then we go into more detailed questions about the situation in the GDR and how you perceive that the professional role has changed.

Theme 1: Why a journalist? Education and ideals.

How did you become a journalist?

- Is there any specific event that influenced you in your career choice?
- Is there any journalist who you admired (mention anyone)?
- Describe your way into journalism

Tell us about your education

- What was good in your education?
- What was bad with the education?
- Did you feel well prepared for professional life after graduation?

What were the basic journalistic values that you got with you from the education?

- Were they different from how you looked at journalism before the education?
- What qualities do you feel you possess that your colleagues from West Germany lacks?

Theme 2: Biography and living in the GDR

Tell us about your childhood

- Where did you grow up?
- Tell us about your parental home
- How would you say your childhood was?

Tell us about your life after the education

- Where did you live after the education?
- Did you have a family?
- What did you work with (with journalism or something else)?
- What did your financial situation look like?
- What did you do on your spare time?

Theme 3: Thoughts on life in the GDR

How did you feel about your life in the GDR?

- Would you say that you lived a good life?
- What was good?
- What was bad?

What opportunities did society give you as a journalist?

What opportunities did society give you as an individual?

In what way did society limit you as a journalist?

In what way did society limit you as an individual?

Tell us, as a journalist, your view on:

- The Party
- Socialism
- The Wall

Tell us, as an individual, your view on:

- The Party
- Socialism
- The Wall

Theme 4: The Work as a journalist today

Are you working as a journalist today?

- What do you work with?
- Where do you work?
- What does a typical day look like for you?

Do you feel free in your work?

- How far do you feel that you are controlled by economic conditions?
- How do you look at the working conditions in the 'Western' journalism in general?

How are you as a journalist?

- What are your good sides?
- What are your bad sides?
- What are your ideals of how a journalist should be?
- What was it that might have prevented you from being that ideal?
- What is a journalist most important task?

Theme 5: The work as a journalist then

How was your work situation in the GDR?

- What did you work with?
- Where did you work?
- How did a typical day look like for you?

How free were you in your work?

- In which extent did you feel that you were a voice for the system / the party?
- How do you look at the working conditions in the "socialist" journalism in general?

How were you then as a journalist?

- What were your good sides?
- What were your bad sides?
- What were your ideals of how a journalist should be?
- What was it that might have prevented you from being that ideal?
- What did you think a journalist most important task was?

Theme 6: Transition Phase

How did you experience the transition?

- As a private person
- As a journalist

What happened in your life, practically?

- Where did you work after the Wall fell?
- How were you received on your new job?

What did you feel was the biggest difference in terms of employment?

- Stylistically?
- Orderly?
- Research
- Workplace?

Concluding questions:

What do you think is the biggest and most important difference of working as a journalist in the GDR and the work as a journalist today?

The relationship with the GDR as a country that no longer exists. Patriotism? Rootlessness?

Is there anything you feel that we have missed that you would add to the interview?