# VIOLENCE AS A "GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCE" OF GROWING UP IN POST-WALL EAST GERMANY? FEMALE EXPERIENCES OF RACIST OTHERING AND ASSAULT IN EAST GERMANY 1989–2000

**LAURA MUES**
RUHR UNIVERSITY BOCHUM

## Abstract

As an often-overlooked period of conflict, the era of transformation after German re-unification represents a time of collective and individual identity crisis for East Germans, who experienced a loss of their *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld; Edmund Husserl) and a devaluation of their life achievements that often led to severe discontent, causing conflict both in and between East and West Germany. During this period, People of Colour experienced a discharge of the general tension through a sharp increase in violence directed against them by radical right-wing actors. Since then, their experiences have gone largely unnoticed in popular media and publications, having only recently found their way into a broader discourse of remembrance. This paper seeks to contribute to a shift away from a discussion about People of Colour and towards a position that focuses on their narratives, experiences and opinions. In doing so, it takes a firmly female-centred perspective, using written and video-recorded material from Women of Colour as a doubly marginalised group.

**Keywords:** German re-unification; German transformation; People of Colour; Women of Colour; violence; conflict

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## Introduction

*Das bisschen Totschlag bringt uns nicht gleich um, sagt mein Mann*
[That bit of murder won't kill us, my husband says]
*Ich kann den ganzen Scheiß einfach nicht mehr hör'n, sagt mein Mann*
[I just can't listen to all that shit anymore, my husband says]
*Ist ja gut jetzt, altes Haus, wir haben schon Schlimmeres geseh'n*
[It's all right now, old man, we've seen worse]
*Und ich sag noch: Lass uns endlich mal zur Tagesordnung übergeh'n*
[And I say: Let's finally get back to business as usual]

Die Goldenen Zitronen – Das bisschen Totschlag (1994)[1]

Every year on the anniversary of German re-unification, images of November 9, 1989 dominate the media and public commemorations, showing people beaming with joy, embracing each other and dancing on the Berlin Wall. Sometimes, these images are accompanied by footage of the preceding protest of the *Montagsdemonstrationen* (Monday Demonstrations), leaning into the symbol of an overwhelming collective force that succeeded in bringing down the well-established communist regime in the pursuit of freedom.[2] Together, they broadcast a series of events that is commonly referred to as the *Friedliche Revolution* (Peaceful Revolution). The choice of these images portrays all German citizens, both East and West, as the collective, driving force of this development, rather than emphasizing a single social group, such as the participants of the *Montagsdemonstrationen*, members of the notoriously anti-governmental church milieu or punk scene, or the political elites of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), who had to formally and legally set the re-unification process in motion. In this deliberately broad definition of the

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[1]  All translations from German into English are courtesy translations by the author.
[2]  For an in-depth analysis of the influences and impact of visual and linguistic images of re-unification in the memory discourse after 1990 compare Benjamin Nölting, Carolin Schröder, and Sören Marotz, "Von 'Blühenden Landschaften', dem 'Jammertal Ost' und 'Neuland': Der Einigungsprozess im Spiegel von Bildern und ihrer Diskurse," in *Diskurse der deutschen Einheit: Kritik und Alternativen*, ed. Raj Kollmorgen, Frank T. Koch, and Hans-Liudger Dienel (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011), 193–222; and Konrad Sziedat, "Die 'Friedliche Revolution' im Westen: Bundesrepublikanische DDR-Bilder 1989/1990 und die Erinnerung heute," in *(Ost)Deutschlands Weg 1989–2021*, ed. Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, Holger Kulick, and Frank Ebert (Berlin/Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2021), 237–249.

memory collective, the memory rhetoric and symbolism are almost exclusively positively occupied and strongly emotionalised.

What is missing from this, however, is two-fold: More broadly speaking, these images exclude the subsequent phase of a long period of transformation, which certainly saw its peak in the 1990s, but was also a major drive of influence on Germany's developments in the early twenty-first century as well as still being of tremendous political and social relevance today. It is certainly less attractive a narrative than that of communal effort, overarching consensus and sheer force of collective strife, which finally led to the toppling of the anti-democratic regime and the separation of the German people. Not only does it feature economic hardship with rising numbers of unemployment and labour mobility,[3] but it also represents a time of collective and individual identity crisis to East Germans, who experienced a loss of their *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld; Edmund Husserl) as well as a devaluation of their life achievements and a replacement of the security of a relatively certain future with the great unknown.[4] The major consequences of this were the disruption of a general sense of belonging and the destruction of East German communities, both on a level of family and close personal relationships as well as on a wider societal level. The cumulation of those circumstances have since led to a wide array of discontent, causing a rift of conflict both within East Germany and along an East-West German axis.[5] It is therefore necessary to complement the dominant images of joy over German re-unification with a perception of the 1990s and their comprehensive transformation claims as a time of crisis. Ambivalent feelings of belonging, individual and communal hopes and fears for the future as well as experiences of devaluation must be understood as the framework for social and personal action. As such, the East German society in the upheaval of the 1990s can rightfully be understood as a society of crisis and

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[3]  Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, "Woanders ist auch Scheiße! Die Auswirkungen der Transformation nach 1990 auf die Gesellschaft in Ostdeutschland. Ein Überblick," in *(Ost)Deutschlands Weg 1989–2021*, ed. Kowalczuk, Kulick, and Ebert, 33–35.

[4]  Steffen Mau, "Ostdeutsche Frakturen für immer? Zwischen Entwertungsgefühlen und Ohnmachtserfahrungen – Welche Wege führen heraus?," in *(Ost)Deutschlands Weg 1989–2021*, ed. Kowalczuk, Kulick, and Ebert, 363–375.

[5]  A few well-known examples include the protest against the social welfare reforms (Hartz IV) in 2004, the PEGIDA (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, i.e. Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) movement of 2014/2015 and the following widespread support for the EU-sceptical and right-wing liberal party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) as well as the protests during the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. For a more comprehensive overview, see Detlef Pollack, *Das unzufriedene Volk*: *Protest und Ressentiment in Ostdeutschland von der Friedlichen Revolution bis heute* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020).

conflict. With sociological studies as its starting point, this shift in the academic sphere began in the early 2000s and is now a long-established part of the canon in historical studies as well. In broader social contexts, especially in media and journalism, this change has lagged behind for a long time but has found its way into books, films and documentaries more recently. However, in everyday communication and remembrance these more challenging aspects of re-unification are still often glossed over, especially in West Germany.

More specifically, this narrative also excludes actors who either could not or did not want to identify themselves with a collective force for revolution arising from the people, or who were not externally perceived as part of it. On the one hand, this includes people who had either settled in with the existing system or who actively advocated for and supported it. On the other hand, it othered people who would not be recognised in the phrase *Wir sind das Volk* (We are the people) because of its inherent implication *Wir sind das deutsche Volk* (We are the German people): migrant workers and students (*Vertragsarbeiter:innen; Vertragsstudent:innen*) from allied socialist countries in the Global South as well as refugees from Cold War theatres that had often lived in the GDR for a long time and were an important part of everyday life. Großbölting has comprehensively explained the extent to which the call for re-unification is an inherently national interpretation that assumed citizenship as the requirement for access to participation in the restructuring of the state.[6] The inclusion of desires, fears and needs in the negotiation process of the conditions of the two German states was thus closely linked to citizenship, most often excluding the interests of immigrants entirely. Although their perspectives have finally started to be taken into account when discussing the impacts of re-unification, the discussion is still in its infancy both in academia and especially in broader social contexts.

This article centres the perspective of the second group by exploring the transformative period of post-wall East Germany as a period of conflict and violence by analysing the experiences of Women of Colour in East Germany in the 1990s.[7] While a lot of the current research focuses on people who have experi-

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[6] Thomas Großbölting, "Was Einheitsjubel und rassistische Gewalt miteinander zu tun haben: Nationale Identitätspolitik in der Wiedervereinigungsgesellschaft," in *Jahrbuch Deutsche Einheit 2021*, ed. Marcus Böick, Ralph Jessen, and Constantin Goschler (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2021), 13–30.

[7] The term People of Colour is used in this article when referring to members of more than one ethnic minority. Going back to its use as self-designation in the USA, the term is used in Germany as well as the British variant BIPoC within the community itself. Despite its limitations, especially its tendency to paint with a very broad brush and the understanding of "white" as colourless, the term is currently the most widely spread self-referential term.

enced the impact of the transformation as adults, this case study aims to broaden this view with the perspective of adolescents and young adults. Understanding this stage of life as a major drive for the development of identity, the analysis is particularly interested in how experiences at a young age are remembered and interpreted as adults as well as in how they are integrated into the individual's self-perception. It will therefore first contextualise which institutional and social structures contributed to the racism experienced by People of Colour pre 1989 and how these structures of subliminal aggression escalated into an initial peak of violence in the early 1990s. Subsequently, the potentials and challenges of the available source corpus are examined paying special attention to the underrepresentation of reports created by both victims and perpetrators as well as the milieu dependency of the existing sources. Four case studies are then used to explore if and how racism experienced as children and adolescents is integrated into narratives of one's own identity in adult narration. Which strategies are used to contextualise the experiences of racist othering and violence in relation of their own identity formation processes? How are feelings of both belonging and marginalisation expressed? How do the narrators engage with claims to dominance over public space as well as the restriction of their own agency? And how is agency displayed in the way adolescent experiences are retold and reframed? Is the role of People of Colour in the public narrative of remembrance concerning re-unification and transformative period addressed? Are experiences of being East German, a Person of Colour and female interwoven?

Being a topic that has only recently started to be explored in the social, political and academic sphere in Germany, both the primary sources as well as the secondary literature still leave a lot to be desired. This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that English language research on the topic is still almost entirely missing, and translations of relevant sources are largely unavailable. To bridge this gap, courtesy translations of all quotes are provided. To keep the inherent subjectiveness of translation in check, the German originals are provided to allow for more transparency and accountability by enabling readers to review and verify the source material.

## The 1990s – Violent Climax of Racist Othering and Alienation

As People of Colour had long faced discrimination in the GDR, this othering experience of the protest in 1989 were hardly surprising. Despite being legally guaranteed equal rights with GDR citizens in many regards, immigrants were often confronted with situations of severe exclusion and discrimination in

everyday life.[8] For many of them, their everyday life pre-1989 was influenced by segregation from the white majority population. Some aspects of that segregation were shaped through social practices of exclusion, where many People of Colour felt essentially barred from publicly organised community activities such as sports and cultural associations and festivities.[9] Other aspects were organised by institutional structures. Financially, migrant workers found themselves affected by the fact that they not only usually supported their family at home, but also had to pay relatively high percentages of their salary to their states of origin as well as compulsory dues to unions and other organisations in the GDR. Socially, they were bound by restrictions that determined not only where they lived, but also who they shared their lives with. For example, many migrant workers lived in supervised boarding houses, often in shared rooms, and were subject to curfew and visitation restrictions. Marriages and familiar relationships of migrant workers and students were heavily regulated by the state. For instance, it was not permitted for spouses or children of migrant workers or students to enter the GDR to join them and live together. The regulations were particularly strict for female workers, whose residency permits were revoked if they became pregnant, leading to a situation where many women felt pressured to terminate their pregnancies.[10] Marriages with GDR citizens were also limited by legislation and everyday political practices, often even when couples already had children together. These regulations where most strictly applied to couples where the foreign partner was male, black and/or Muslim.[11] Legally and most importantly, their situation was in general overwhelmingly determined by precarious working conditions and easily-revoked residence permits. For many of them, re-unification meant immediate repatriation. Even those who were able to stay

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8   Patrice G. Poutrus and Katharina Warda, "Ostdeutsche of Color: Schwarze Geschichte(n) der DDR und Erfahrungen nach der deutschen Einheit," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 72, no. 12 (2022): 19–25.

9   Peggy Piesche, "Schwarz und deutsch? Eine ostdeutsche Jugend vor 1989 – Retrospektive auf ein 'nichtexistentes' Thema in der DDR," accessed April 14, 2023, https://heimatkunde.boell.de /de/2006/05/01/schwarz-und-deutsch-eine-ostdeutsche-jugend-vor-1989-retrospektive-auf-ein.

10  Maja Bogojević, "'Wenn wir schwanger werden, werden wir abgeschoben': Feministischer Zwischenrud," Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Gunda Werner Institut – Feminismus und Geschlechterdemokratie, accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2021/03/04/wenn-wir -schwanger-werden-werden-wir-abgeschoben; Seyda Kurt, "Vertragsarbeiter*innen in der DDR: 'Heute können sie keine Kinder mehr kriegen, weil sie kaputt sind'," *ze.tt*, October 16, 2018, https://www.zeit.de/zett/politik/2018-10/vertragsarbeiterinnen-in-der-ddr-heute-koennen-sie -keine-kinder-mehr-kriegen-weil-sie-kaputt-sind.

11  Christoph Lorke, "Verhandelte Grenzüberschreitungen: Binationale und interkulturelle Eheschließungen und Paarbeziehungen in der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv*, October 13, 2021, www .bpb.de/342017.

in Germany after 1990 were disproportionally affected by unemployment as well as the devaluation of qualifications and educational attainments. The lack of agency over physical and social space can therefore be understood as the shaping factor of the Other's quotidian life in the GDR.

The experience of othering, alienation and subliminal violence escalated in the transformation period of the 1990s, when overarching tension started to be vented in the form of a sharp increase of violence by radicalised right-wing actors. The target group of the facilitated attacks included everyone who visibly deviated from the majority society. First and foremost, this included People of Colour, especially (former) migrant students and workers as well as refugees. However, the hostility was also directed against punks and other visible politically left-wing groups, homeless people, people with disabilities, members of the queer and Jewish communities as well as members of other minorities in society.[12] One of the defining tipping points was the 2nd and 3rd October 1990. While millions of people were engaged in the grandiose celebrations of two German states becoming one, extreme right-wing actors used the opportunity to facilitate widespread, armed and coordinated attacks. The police were at best overwhelmed, at worst ignorant or even supportive of the violence.[13] The assaults that night included hooliganism, small-scale scuffles and lighter physical attacks on individuals, but also escalated to mobs and mass riots in city centres. Private homes of migrant worker and refugee accommodation as well as left-wing political centres and squats were subject to arson attacks and mass sieges, with some of these attacks escalating into physical assaults and violent trespassing.[14] Although some of the attacks were deliberately directed against celebrations of German re-unification, these acts of violence have received little public or academic attention and have not become part of the public discourse of remembrance of the year of unification. This is particularly concerning since an uptick in right-wing violence can be observed on the anniversary of reunification on the 2nd and 3rd October each year to this day.[15]

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[12] Till Kössler and Janosch Steuwer, "Einleitung," in Kössler and Steuwer, *Brandspuren* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2023), 9.

[13] zweiteroktober90, "Der 2. Oktober 1990: Ein Überblick," in zweiteroktober90, *Die Gewalt der Vereinigung* (n.p.: zweiteroktober90, 2021), 12–17.

[14] For an in-depth overview see: zweiteroktober90, ed., *Die Gewalt der Vereinigung* (n.p.: zweiteroktober90, 2021) as well as the accompanying online project zweiteroktober90, "Die Gewalt Der Vereinigung," accessed April 3, 2023, https://zweiteroktober90.de/.

[15] zweiteroktober90, "Chronik," in zweiteroktober90, *Die Gewalt der Vereinigung* (n.p.: zweiteroktober90, 2021), 42–45.

The attacks described here marked the beginning of an escalation of violence that reached its preliminary climax in 1991–1993. The commemorations of the pogroms of Hoyerswerda in September 1991 and Rostock-Lichthagen in August 1992 and the deadly arson attacks in Mölln in November 1992 and Solingen in May 1993 have become something of an annual ritual ever since. While those attacks on People of Colour were certainly the most visible, well-recorded and most widely known through their extensive media coverage as well as high number of active perpetrators and supportive bystanders, giving them an almost performative nature, Kössler and Steuwer have extensively explored how the implied uniqueness of these events through this almost mantra-like list is misleading and how these events must be seen as merely the tip of the iceberg in a larger context of all-out violence.[16] Instead, it is necessary to understand violence as one of the determining influences on everyday life that had to be taken into account at all times. A phrase commonly used by witnesses summarises the experience to the point: it can happen anytime and anywhere anyway, dismissing resistance and avoidance as pointless.

However, it is also important to emphasise that, although the 1990s were a peak period of right-wing violence, this was not a sudden or unforeseeable eruption. The actors were able to draw on well-established structures of racism and violence. In addition to the extensive everyday racism and exclusionary practices, Virchow has identified an emerging right-wing skinhead scene in the GDR since the 1970s that had become markedly politicised in the 1980s and radicalised in the 1990s.[17] Ideas that right-wing violence only emerged in East Germany with or because of re-unification are therefore clearly too short-sighted and it is more accurate to speak of a continuity of violence that reached a new level of escalation in the early 1990s.[18] However, similar structural characteristics

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[16] Kössler and Steuwer, "Einleitung," 9–12.

[17] Fabian Virchow, "Rechte Gewalt in Deutschland nach 1945. Eine Einordnung der 1990er Jahre," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 72, no. 49–50 (2022): 10–14. For further details, see also Harry Waibel, *Rechte Kontinuitäten: Rassismus und Neonazismus in Deutschland seit 1945* (Hamburg: Marta Press, 2022); Rainer Erices, "Hetzjagd im August 1975 in Erfurt: Wie Ausländerfeindlichkeit in der DDR verharmlost und verleugnet wurde," *Gerbargasse 18. Thüringer Vierteljahreszeitschrift für Zeitgeschichte und Politik* 23, no. 4 (2018): 22–25; Walter Süß, *Zur Wahrnehmung und Interpretation des Rechtsextremismus in der DDR durch das MfS* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftrage für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 2000); and Bernd Wagner, *Rechtsradikalismus in der Spät-DDR: Zur militant-nazistischen Radikalisierung – Wirkungen und Reaktionen in der DDR-Gesellschaft* (Berlin: edition widerschein, 2014).

[18] For a statistical evaluation and overview, see Janosch Steuwer and Till Kössler, "Gewalttaten, Gewaltdeutungen: Historische Perspektiven auf die rechte Gewalt der frühen 1990er Jahre," in Kössler and Steuwer, *Brandspuren*.

can also be identified for the FRG and West Germany. For instance, Manthe illustrates that the 1980s in the FRG was also a time in which right-wing action started to possess a new quality of potentials, dynamics and practices of violence.[19] Both Herbert and Zeppenfeld demonstrate that right-wing violence was continuously linked to migration and directed against people who did not conform to the image of the majority society, in the sense of a primarily white-presenting one.[20] In both East and West Germany, People of Colour were particularly exposed through their visible otherness and were subsequently often the primary targets of right-wing attacks, as opposed to other target groups such as left-wing agents who at least theoretically were able to blend in through conforming to the visible, social standards expected by right-wing aggressors.[21] The frequently-held theory that right-wing extremism and violence boiled up in the GDR or East Germany and spilled over into the West is therefore not tenable. Consequently, two of the most common narratives about radicalised right-wing violence must therefore be questioned, if not discarded entirely: It is neither a sudden nor an exclusively East German development we are confronted with but rather a continuing, state-wide issue. However, the magnitude of the attacks and the high spatial dominance neo-nazi and other extreme right-wing actors were able to exert is specific to East Germany. This was clearly linked to a

> claim of not only implementing isolated acts of intimidation and punishment, but to exert a lasting influence on the social order by controlling the space through their own presence and targeted violence. [...] Right-wing extremists [attempted] to shape public space and everyday life and decide on permitted or non-permitted behaviour.[22]

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[19] Barbara Manthe, "Vom Rechtsterrorismus zur rechtsradikalen Gewalt: Die Bundesrepublik in den 1980er- und frühen 1990er-Jahren," in Kössler and Steuwer, *Brandspuren*, here in particular 107.

[20] Ulrich Herbert, "Migration und rechte Gewalt: Deutschland 1980 bis 1993," in Kössler a Steuwer, *Brandspuren*; Stefan Zeppenfeld, "Feuerlöscher, Revolver und der Kampf um Anerkennung: Migrantische Reaktionen auf die rechte Gewalt der frühen 1990er Jahre," in Kössler and Steuwer, *Brandspuren*.

[21] Christian Bangel, "#Baseballschlägerjahre," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 72, no. 49–50 (2022), 6. For a comparison between xenophobic violence in East and West Germany see Michael Kohlstruck, "Maskuline Jugendszenen und fremdenfeindliche Gewalt in den 1980er und frühen 1990er-Jahren in Ost und West," in Kössler and Steuwer, *Brandspuren*.

[22] Virchow, "Rechte Gewalt in Deutschland nach 1945," 14: "Anspruch, nicht nur vereinzelt Akte der Einschüchterung und Bestrafung umzusetzen, sondern mittels Kontrolle des Raumes durch eigene Präsenz und gezielte Gewalt möglichst nachhaltig Einfluss auf die soziale Ordnung zu nehmen. [...] Rechtsextreme [versuchten] den öffentlichen Raum und das Alltagsleben prägen und über erlaubtes beziehungsweise nicht-erlaubtes Verhalten entscheiden."

Friedemann Schwenzer explored the effectiveness of these claims of dominance in his analysis of the Twitter hashtag *#baseballschlägerjahre* (#baseballbatyears), in which those affected describe the everyday influence of right-wing dominance and violence.[23] The baseball bat quickly became a social and academic symbol of the 1990s after the emergence of this hashtag.

Drawing on the above, a number of central points emerge. East Germany in the upheaval of the 1990s constitutes a society of economic and social crisis that led to a heightened potential for conflict, which must be understood as the framework for the escalation of violence examined in this article. Both the GDR and the FDR portrayed long-term structures of racist discrimination that found a relatively wide-spread support beyond the borders of radical right-wing groups. Since the 1970s at the latest, both German states faced an increase of racially motivated violence, especially in the form of street attacks on individuals and arson attacks on residences. Therefore, the 1990s must be recognised as the preliminary peak of the escalation of extreme right-wing violence. Although extreme right-wing violence during this period was directed against all those who did not outwardly correspond to the conforming image defined by right-wing actors – including punks and other politically left-wing activists, homeless people, people with disabilities and members of other minorities in society – People of Colour were affected with particular severity and frequency of attacks. Furthermore, the attacks on People of Colour differed from those on other groups in that they found a broader understanding of the motives for the crime in society, even if such violent enforcement was not met with approval. This is a phenomenon in both East and West Germany that draws on a long history of right-wing violence and racism. The commonly referred to narrative that extreme right-wing radicalisation was able to be fostered on the ruins of the GDR and then spread to the west can therefore not be upheld. However, structural differences between East and West Germany need to be taken into account. Eastern Germany stands out due to the high spatial dominance of extreme right-wing acts of violence as well as due to the much wider spread support the motives found in society, even if the violence itself did not. Bangel even goes so far as to describe these conditions as specifically East German generational experiences of children and young adults of the 1990s.[24] In doing so, he takes up strategies of communalisation used by young East Germans to form boundaries of belonging and origin, which have

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[23] Friedemann Schwenzer, "#baseballschlägerjahre: Ostdeutschland erinnern" (Master's Thesis, Universität Potsdam, 2021), https://www.academia.edu/92378684/Baseballschl%C3%A4gerjahre_Ostdeutschland_erinnern.

[24] Bangel, "#Baseballschlägerjahre," 7.

seen an influx of use in the last couple of years.[25] This tendency ties into a development that has been booming for more than twenty years in the academic, political, media and cultural spheres.[26] The term "generation" aims to order history and, in particular, to break down the complexity of historical upheavals such as revolutions and system changes as well as the heterogeneity of political and social developments.[27] With these considerations in mind, it is not surprising that the term has been claimed by various groups after the re-unification to make sense of their situations and to claim an impact on their own identity formation that is perceived as unique, non-replicable and non-recurring.

## Confronting the Limitations of the Source Corpus whilst Accessing Underrepresented Narratives

In terms of research, we are faced with the great difficulty that many of the violent acts were not recorded at all or were not distinctively categorised as racially or politically motivated. Furthermore, there are few records of the perpetrators and victims themselves. Consequently, the available evidence instead consists predominantly of secondary reports by the police and media.[28] Direct access is therefore mostly not possible and the perspective of those affected is often lost from view. This is particularly true for the age group examined here because they have only recently begun to deal with their own life story in public and through the media, demanding that their experiences be integrated into the narrative of memory. First attempts to focus on the experiences of People of Colour and their perspectives on right-wing attacks are finally beginning to spread into public and academic discourse.[29] Women of Colour constitute a doubly marginalised group, as female perspectives are also often overlooked and

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[25] For an initial insight see the collection of contributions in Corinne Orlowski, ed., *Metamorphosen 28*: *Nachwendekinder* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2020). For a more in-depth exploration see Johannes Nichelmann, *Nachwendekinder*: *Die DDR, unsere Eltern und das große Schweigen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2019) and Valerie Schönian, *Ostbewusstsein*: *Warum Nachwendekinder für den Osten streiten und was das für die Deutsche Einheit bedeutet* (München: Piper, 2020).

[26] Bernd Weisbrod, "Generation und Generationalität in der Neueren Geschichte," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* no. 8 (2005): 3.

[27] Ulrike Jureit, "Einleitung zu Karl Mannheims 'Das Problem der Generationen'," 2, accessed April 7, 2023, https://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0100 _gen&object=sources&st=&l=d.

[28] Steuwer and Kössler, "Gewalttaten, Gewaltdeutungen," 24–25.

[29] For instance, see Steuwer and Kössler, "Gewalttaten, Gewaltdeutungen," zweiteroktober90, "Die Gewalt der Vereinigung" and Massimo Perinelli and Lydia Lierke, eds., *Erinnern stören*: *Der Mauerfall aus migrantischer und jüdischer Perspektive* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2020).

remain unheard, both when discussing the present and the past. As such, this essay attempts to widen the nascent discussion by bringing female perspectives on racist othering and violence in the 1990s to the fore. However, it is important to emphasise that women form a double void in the current state of research: Decidedly female perspectives on being a victim *and* being a perpetrator are both still overwhelmingly missing. For, although the radical right-wing scene is still dominated by male claims to power, the perspective of an exclusively male right-wing extremism and perpetration of violence is certainly outdated.[30] Beate Zschäpe, member of the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (National Socialist Underground; NSU) serves as the most prominent example. Another one is the far-right and ultranationalist political party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD) that has always had female representatives and supporters which often acted and spoke publicly in support of its extremist views.

While a lot of the existing research focuses on people who experienced the violence of the 1990s as adults, the conditions portrayed above also provided the framework for growing up and finding one's own identity for people who experienced this time as children or adolescents. This group has so far not been taken into consideration on a wider scale. This essay tries to bridge this gap by linking the female perspective to that of youth. The aim is not and cannot be to historically reconstruct the reality of the 1990s, but to categorise and classify the memory of that time according to perception of those affected. Special focus is given to the role of personal experiences in influencing self-construction and social location, and in making this influence tangible by taking into account the perception of *space.*

The specificity of this question is inherent in the fact that the source corpus here is small, especially since the source situation, as already explained, is generally rather unsatisfactory. The case studies examined here therefore by no means claim to be exhaustive but are intended to offer a first insight into an intersectionality that has received little attention so far, forging a path for further research. This essay will use works of four women from East Germany who experienced the 1990s as children or teenagers. Nhi Le, born 1995 in Thuringia, is a journalist, speaker and spoken word poet. Working on topics centred around

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[30] The Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus (Research Network Women and Right-Wing Extremism) headed by Prof. Dr Michaela Köttig has been trying to close this gap for some time. Their research can be found here: Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus, "Forschungsnetzwerk Frauen und Rechtsextremismus," accessed April 7, 2023, http://frauen-und-rechtsextremismus.de/.

feminism, anti-racism and media culture, she has received the Juliane-Bartels-Prize for her work in 2017 as well as being named part of the top 30 journalists under the age of 30 by the *Medium Magazine* in 2021.[31] Thembi Wolf, born 1990 in Jena, is a journalist and information managing editor at the online magazine *krautreporter*, after having left her position as editor-in-chief at VICE Germany. She has received numerous journalistic fellowships, working on ethics and diversity in journalism as well as the topic of East Germany.[32] Katharina Warda, born 1985 in Wernigerode, is a sociologist, literary scholar and doctoral student writing a dissertation on diary blogs and marginalised identities in Berlin and Princeton. She works as a freelance writer and journalist focusing on East Germany, marginalised identities, racism, classism and punk.[33] Olivia Wenzel, born 1985 in Weimar, is an author and musician that primarily writes and produces theatre plays. Besides writing, she organises workshops with children, teenagers and young adults. Her debut novel *1000 Serpentinen Angst*[34] received wide-spread recognition and was honoured with multiple literary awards.[35]

Three things are worth noting in this context. First, working with existing sources instead of deriving a sample by structuring and conducting interviews relies on the information the narrators themselves provide about their regional and social background information. The narrators also present this information in a way that has a specific aim, structure and intention. This essay has repurposed this information, and so some questions remain unanswered. Who were the narrators' parents, where were they from? Why, when and how did they come to the GDR or East Germany? Because this information is lacking, we also do not know about the legal status of the parents and children in Germany. Hand in hand with this goes the lack of information about the narrators' legal status in Germany, which is tightly interlinked to questions of security, precariousness and available resources. Are the narrators German or dual citizens, do they rely on permanent or temporary residence permits? Which specific educational and linguistic background do they have? Which political affiliations do they have? Some of this information can be inferred but is not directly addressed. This lack of sociological background information is particularly unsatisfactory because

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[31] Nhi Le, "About Me," accessed April 11, 2023, https://nhi-le.de/about-me/.

[32] Thembi Wolf, "Über mich," accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.thembiwolf.de/ueber-mich/.

[33] Krautreporter, "Katharina Warda," accessed April 11, 2023, https://krautreporter.de/57331-katharina-warda.

[34] Originally published Olivia Wenzel, *1000 Serpentinen Angst* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2020), English edition *1000 Coils of Fear* (London: Dialogue Books, 2022).

[35] S. Fischer Verlag, "Autor*innen: Olivia Wenzel," accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.fischerverlage.de/autor/olivia-wenzel-1009108.

it makes it hard to take into account the social capital available to the narrators when considering the experience of racism as well as their reaction to and interpretation of it.

Second, it is significant that three out of the four individuals are from Thuringia and are therefore far from providing a meaningful picture of East Germany in terms of regional distribution. In further research, questions of regionality should find a more prominent role. Do the experiences differ between different federal states? Which role does the difference between urban and rural regions play?

Third, all the narrators studied here have an educated, journalistic and artistic background. All of them are well educated, all of them are journalists, artists and activists, many of them are academics. As such they are not representative of the average East German and the multiplicity of their roles blurs the line between oral history reports and academic discourse, especially because the sources consist of mix of articles, essays as well as written and video-recorded interviews. However, the perspectives of people from these backgrounds often take a pioneering role in expressing their experiences and opinions publicly. Hopefully the study of a more extensive and representative corpus will be possible as the field spreads into the public eye, more open discussions are had, and more people are willing to publicly share their experiences. A larger and more diverse range of sources can be accessed through approaches of oral and digital history, for example by conducting larger-scale interview studies, as well as analysing the large corpora available through social media.

## Racist Othering, Marginalisation and Exclusion as a Quotidian Experience

In all the case studies examined here, the narrators foreground the everyday nature of the racist discrimination they experience(d). This means that they did not perceive racist othering, marginalisation and exclusion as an exceptional situation, but rather as something that permanently accompanies them and frames their lives. For instance, Le uses the term *Alltagsrassismus* (everyday racism) implying an almost mundane experience.[36] Wolf explicitly rejects the idea of racism as an occasional experience by saying "The idea that racism is a singular event [...] is nonsense. It is quotidian", centring the omnipresence of

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[36] Nhi Le, "Think Tank: Immer wieder das Gleiche," in *Ost Deutsch Now*, ed. Sebastian Jung ( Jena: Kerber Verlag, 2019), 16.

marginalisation.[37] For the 1990s, Warda mentions "stories of everyday fear and violence", while Wenzel goes one step further assessing the time period as everyday terror.[38] The terms "everyday life" and "quotidian" is thus not only an analytical tool used to examine racism through an academic lens but also a source term used by those affected. Even though the German terms *Alltag* (everyday life) and *alltäglich* (quotidian) have a less formal and academic connotation than the English terms, it remains to be seen whether this duality is found in the sources analysed here due to the educational background of the narrators or whether a more widespread use can be found in research with larger sample groups. However, the emotional statements in the source corpus examined here correspond to those of other studies such as that of Schwenzer.[39] Therefore, it seems likely that the emotion communicated here will also be found in other sources, even if the language used to verbalise them might differ.

The description of everyday terror reveals the special significance of the 1990s as a time in which violence is experienced as transgressional and all-encompassing. The emotions felt by the narrators during this time are mirrored by Schwenzer's findings in his social media analysis, indicating that this was a very common phenomenon. The feeling of constant fear is also the defining emotion Wenzel links to this time period, who strongly identifies with the symbol of the baseball bat for the time she spent growing up:

> What some like to call the "baseball bat years" today, I perceive the same way in retrospect – as this terrifying everyday terror in the 90s, when neo-Nazis aggressively performed their neo-Naziness in public. These images of youths in bomber jackets with shaved heads and baseball bats ambushing me and my friends from time to time, this raw, blunt threat they posed, their unconditional will to spread fear – these images are still far too present for me. [...] [I] was [...] really scared when I was young.[40]

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[37] Elsa Köster, "'Was kostet ein rassistischer Tweet?': Interview mit Thembi Wolf," *der Freitag*, no. 42 (2020), https://www.freitag.de/autoren/elsa-koester/was-kostet-ein-rassistischer-tweet: "Die Vorstellung, dass Rassismus ein singuläres Event ist, [...] ist Unsinn. Er ist Alltag."

[38] Katharina Warda, "'Der Ort, aus dem ich komme, heißt Dunkeldeutschland'", *Krautreporter*, October 1, 2020, https://krautreporter.de/3521-der-ort-aus-dem-ich-komme-heisst-dunkeldeutschland; "Geschichten von alltäglicher Angst und Gewalt"; Corinne Orlowski and Olivia Wenzel, "Interview mit Olivia Wenzel," *Metamorphosen 28*, ed. Orlowski, 66: "Alltagsterror".

[39] Schwenzer, "#baseballschlägerjahre."

[40] Orlowski and Wenzel, "Interview mit Olivia Wenzel," 66–67: "Was manche heute gern die 'Baseballschlägerjahre' nennen, empfinde ich rückblickend genauso – als gruseligen Alltagsterror in den 90ern, als die Neonazis ihr Neonazidasein aggressiv in Öffentlichkeiten performten. Diese Bilder von glatzköpfigen Jugendlichen in Bomberjacken mit Baseballschlägern, die mir und meinen Freunden ab und zu auflauern, diese rohe, stumpfe Bedrohung, die von ihnen ausging, ihr

This description illustrates that the violence experienced is such a regular occurrence, exerted by so many perpetrators that it is centred less on the individual aggressors and more on the general phenomenon. In her description of an unconditional will to spread fear, Wenzel portrays herself as powerless in comparison to the omnipotence of her attackers. They are presented as a monolithic force, a movement rather than a group of individuals, acting according to values that find widespread social support. This description is linked to the media portrayal of pogroms as mass events in which actors from the openly and visibly radical right-wing milieu appear together with those who superficially seem to belong to a more moderate political milieu, suggesting support that reaches beyond social fringe groups. To understand the feeling of transgressional and all-encompassing aggression and threat, it is less important in how far those emotions are statistically anchored. Instead, the way the aggressions themselves are mirrored by media portrayals of attacks directed against others makes it the narrators' emotional reality and therefore lived experience.

The powerlessness expressed here is underlined through the enormous age gap between the aggressors and the victims, as evident in Warda's description of her childhood:

> 1992, I am seven years old and attend the second grade of primary school. On the way home my real lessons begin: running, hiding, not showing fear. I learn to dash away when the group of girls from the vocational college hurls stones at me while calling me the N-word. I learn to hide in time when groups of men in bomber jackets come towards me, and to slowly become numb because there is no way out of this hell that is home.[41]

The aggression is so high and so excessive that it transgresses a boundary that is traditionally seen as universal. Children of Colour are excluded from the social contract that defines children as a vulnerable part of society that must be protected by all its members.

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unbedingter Wille, Angst zu verbreiten – diese Bilder sind mir immer noch viel zu präsent. [...] [Ich] hatte [...] richtig viel Angst in meiner Jugend."

[41] Warda, "'Der Ort, aus dem ich komme, heißt Dunkeldeutschland'": "1992, ich bin sieben Jahre alt und besuche die zweite Klasse einer Plattenbaugrundschule. Auf dem Weg nach Hause beginnt mein eigentlicher Unterricht: wegrennen, verstecken, keine Angst zeigen. Ich lerne zu flitzen, wenn die Mädchengruppe aus der Berufsschule mich mit dem N-Wort beschimpfend mit Steinen bewirft. Lerne mich rechtzeitig zu verstecken, wenn Männergruppen in Bomberjacken auf mich zu kommen, und langsam abzustumpfen, weil es aus dieser Hölle Heimat keinen Ausweg gibt."

This explains why a lot of space in the narratives is also given to the feeling of exclusion and violence as a component of earliest childhood memories. Their experiences differ especially from the narratives of first generation immigrants because a time before racist violence moulds their lives and actions is unknown to them as it has accompanied them "from the beginning".[42] The specificity of their experience as children and adolescents of the 1990s, especially for the younger actors studied here, lies in the fact that they were often not yet able to categorise and express their feelings and experiences themselves. For example, Wenzel says that as a child and young teenager she was "very angry about the conditions and the everyday racism" but while she could clearly feel "injustices and inequalities" she was not yet able to find words to voice her experiences.[43] This feeling is shared by Warda, who explains, "I realised very early on that I am seen as different. And that this is not a good thing. I don't understand why, but I understand that my life is potentially in danger".[44] However, the experience of this violence does not end in the wake of the new millennium and can therefore not be regarded as a phenomenon of the past. For instance, Le links her experience as a child closely to a systemic and systematic marginalisation and the constant fear of verbal and physical racist violence she still experiences as an adult today. The violence directed against her personally throughout her life and the pogroms she was exposed to in the 1990s through the media and the narration of others can therefore be understood as a multilayered trauma that is being reinforced through ongoing and regular exposure to threats or acts of violence.[45]

## Dominance and Agency in Public Space

Consequently, a central point of the narratives is the high spatial dominance of extreme right-wing and neo-nazi groups in combination with the ignorance or support of the majority society. For instance, this perceived dominance

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[42] Thomas Grimme, *Katharina Warda – Dunkeldeutschland* (2020), accessed April 8, 2023, https://www.grimmchronik.com/katharina-warda-dunkeldeutschland/, 00:09:14–00:09:48: "von Anfang an." All video transcripts were created by the author and linguistically adapted to the requirements of written standard German.

[43] Orlowski and Wenzel, "Interview mit Olivia Wenzel," 66–67: "sehr wütend auf die Zustände und den alltäglichen Rassismus"; "Ungerechtigkeiten und Ungleichbehandlungen."

[44] Warda, "'Der Ort, aus dem ich komme, heißt Dunkeldeutschland'": "Mir wird sehr früh klar, dass ich als anders angesehen werde. Und dass das nichts Gutes ist. Ich verstehe nicht, warum, aber ich verstehe, dass mein Leben potenziell in Gefahr ist."

[45] Corinne Orlowski and Nhi Le, "Interview Mit Nhi Le," in *Metamorphosen 28*, ed. Orlowski, 72.

becomes very clear through the unimpeded neo-nazi marches witnessed by Warda as a child:

> 1990, Wernigerode. I am five years old. My mother's hand tightens around mine. On my right, against a backdrop of half-timbered houses, a gathering in rank and file, a march of neo-Nazis. My mother's grip tightens even more, nearly hurting now. She takes to her heels and disappears into the next alleyway with me.[46]

The scene displays that People of Colour felt unprotected in the public sphere and felt the need to avoid potential dangers by fleeing, because they were unable to trust executive powers such as police or the moral courage of bystanders to guarantee their protection. The inaction and lack of support even extends to situations that go beyond the potential for violence, as evident in the teenage memory Warda shares next. Here, she and her friends are threatened with a loaded gun to their head in a shopping centre. Meanwhile, "indifferent shoppers walk past as if we're invisible".[47] Even a situation that would normally fall completely out of any and all social and legal norms almost becomes mundane in this description. Thus, People of Colour felt like they had to give up their right to public space in an act of self-preservation, fearing for their physical safety and even life. This often came at great emotional loss as evident in Wenzel's comment on a situation where she herself left instead of helping a family subjected to racist slurs and intimidation by neo-Nazis:

> [...] because we were both unsettled and you can't really behave properly either way in a situation like this. So if you run away, you feel like a coward, like I did. [...] If you stay you involuntarily provoke more tension und then people might get seriously hurt. [...] No matter what we did I felt like we couldn't get it right.[48]

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[46] Warda, "'Der Ort, aus dem ich komme, heißt Dunkeldeutschland'": "1990, Wernigerode. Ich bin fünf Jahre alt. Der Griff meiner Mutter um meine Hand wird fester. [...] Zu meiner Rechten, in der Kulisse der Fachwerkhäuser eine Versammlung in Reih und Glied, ein Aufmarsch von Neonazis. Der Griff meiner Mutter wird noch fester, tut fast schon weh. Sie nimmt die Beine in Hand und verschwindet mit mir in der nächsten Gasse."

[47] Warda, "'Der Ort, aus dem ich komme, heißt Dunkeldeutschland'": "unbeteiligte Einkäufer laufen an uns vorbei, als wären wir Luft."

[48] Nico Gutjahr, *Olivia Wenzel: „Rechter Terror macht wenigen Angst in Deutschland!"* YouTube video. #Webtalkshow, February 28, 2021, 00:14:11–00:16:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMOKQGRsEN4: "[...] weil wir beide verunsichert waren und man sich in so einer Situation nicht richtig verhalten kann. Also wenn man abhaut, fühlt man sich feige, so wie ich dann. [...] Wenn man dableibt, provoziert man unfreiwillig vielleicht mehr Stress und dann kom-

She feels ashamed of herself and guilty, having outwardly succumbed to the same pattern of behaviour she condemns in the majority society. The choice of her own role as either a bystander or a victim seems to be perceived as binary and is closely linked to a lack of agency. While the narrators examined here do not see options outside of this binary scope, Zeppenfeld has started to explore other reactions such as community-based self-defence campaigns.[49] Further insight can be gained by Farin and Seidel's interviews with radicalised and violent groups of young adult People of Colour.[50] Those examples offer initial evidence that reactions centring loss and reclaiming of agency might be much wider spread then often claimed. In the future, it would be vital to broaden the current research not only by centring perspectives of differences between regions, ethnicities, and gender. How do the reactions differ between East and West Germany, and can those differences be linked to regionally different circumstances? Do responses vary between communities of different ethnicities? Are there gender-specific ways of dealing with racially motivated violence?

Furthermore, not only did these events and the permanent state of insecurity inflict primary trauma on the narrators examined here but the way those experiences are excluded from society's communal and public remembrance of the re-unification and its aftermath are a constant source of secondary trauma as well. It is exactly the recurring images of the *Friedliche Revolution*, which contradict their own experiences so directly and completely that often make them feel alienated:

> First of all, all the disparaging remarks on all sides are not peaceful, and then there was all the violence during reunification. As I said, stories of People of Colour from that time are so seldom told; instead, especially on anniversaries, people always [...] try to bring back such a very positively overloaded narrative in which nothing else, no criticism, no other experiences have any place. And that is difficult. In my experience, that has nothing to do with reunification, with the experience of many others I know who come from East Germany.[51]

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men richtig Leute zu schaden. [...] Also egal wie hatte ich das Gefühl, wir können das nicht richtig machen."

[49] Zeppenfeld, "Feuerlöscher, Revolver und der Kampf um Anerkennung."

[50] Klaus Farin and Eberhard Seidel, *Wendejugend*: *14 Interviews* (Hirnkost: Berlin, 2019).

[51] Grimme, *Katharina Warda – Dunkeldeutschland*, 00:16:10–00:16:57: "Die ganzen Abwertungen allen Seiten sind erst mal nicht friedlich, dann die ganze Gewalt während der Wiedervereinigung. Wie gesagt, es werden so selten Geschichten von People of Colour aus der Zeit erzählt, sondern gerade zu den Jubiläen wird immer [...] wieder ein so sehr positiv überladenes Narrativ zu bringen [versucht], in dem nichts anderes, keine Kritik, keine anderen Erfahrungen irgendwie Platz haben.

This assessment illuminates the feeling that the opinion and experiences of People of Colour are unappreciated. According to Warda, they feel like they have to edit their experiences and outlook to suit what they see as an artificial perspective on the transformational era. Subsequently, they feel left out and dismissed in the majority society. The feeling is shared by Wolf, who comments sarcastically: "If you want to tell a story as an East German, [...] you do well by telling a fable. A nice round fable, with a clever punch line that stands *pars par toto* for the essence of the East German of a certain generation. [...] A nice, standardised story [...]."[52]

Her own story of a white GDR mother and a black, South African father whose family is wealthy and so politically influential that they include some of the "most prominent black exiles [...], future MPs, CEOs and female bankers" does not fit this expected mould.[53] She therefore often feels like she has to justify her own experiences and life story, to make it more palatable to the majority society, which she understands as both white and West German. Wenzel and Le go even further by assessing not only the lack of violence against People of Colour in the dominant narratives but even the ignorance of their existence at all. Both criticise the fact that East Germans are equated with exclusively white people and that the stories of People of Colour therefore remain untold.[54] Furthermore, in her poem for the 2022 anniversary festivities of the re-unification, Le especially stresses that People of Colour who came to Germany as migrant workers are doubly marginalised:

> With chapped hands, on bent backs
> In factories and in combines
> Uncountable stories
> often unheard, even untold

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Und das ist schwierig. Das spricht überhaupt nicht aus meiner Erfahrung mit der Wiedervereinigung, aus der Erfahrung von ganz vielen anderen die ich kenne, die aus Ostdeutschland kommen."

[52] Thembi Wolf, "Eine ganz klassische, ostdeutsche Geschichte, in der zwei Diktaturen untergehen und ein Brummi-Fahrer heult," in *Metamorphosen 28*, ed. Orlowski, 46: "Wenn man als Ossi eine Geschichte erzählen möchte, [...] tut man gut daran, eine Fabel zu erzählen. Eine schöne runde Formel, mit einer gescheiten Pointe, die Pars par Toto steht, für das Wesen des Ostdeutschen einer beliebigen Generation. [...] Eine nette, normierte Story [...]."

[53] Wolf, "Eine ganz klassische, ostdeutsche Geschichte," 47: "einige der prominentesten, schwarzen Exilanten [...], zukünftige Abgeordnete, CEOs und Bankerinnen."

[54] Madlen Geidel, *Olivia Wenzel über das Leben als schwarze Frau in Deutschland* (arte.tv, 2020), accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/099109-000-A/olivia-wenzel-ueber-das-leben-als-schwarze-frau-in-deutschland/, 00:00:21–00:00:37; Orlowski and Le, "Interview mit Nhi Le," 72.

When we talk about German Unification
I ask myself:
Who are we actually talking about?
And who is left out?

Who felt growing pains?
And who suffered massive fractures?

Is there room?
Between blossoming landscapes and
burning houses.

What's tangible and what's an act?

And who's going to say that I divide,
when I only point out gaps.[55]

Not only is their contribution in factories and combines at the cost of their physical and mental health not appreciated, but they are also subjected to a low social status. Consequently, they remain invisible in the public discourse about re-unification. The choice of the word "unification" instead of "re-unification" also signifies that the perspective of a national framework that Großbölting has illustrated does not emotionally resonate with migrant workers. Partially due to their lack of either GDR or FRG citizenship but even more so because of their lack of connection to a return to the historical idea of a united Germany, they are excluded from this narrative. This also contributes to migrant workers not sharing their experiences so they remain "untold". However, even when they find the courage to share those experiences, the majority society ignores their narratives so they remain "unheard". Hence, in Le's interpretation, migrant workers are not

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[55] "Festakt zum Tag der Deutschen Einheit: ARD Sondersendung," October 3, 2022, ARD Mediathek, 00:34:08–00:34:48 https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/ard-sondersendung/festakt -zum-tag-der-deutschen-einheit/das-erste/Y3JpZDovL2Rhc2Vyc3RlLmRlL2FyZC1zb25 kZXJzZW5kdW5nL2NiOWI4NDUxLWZmNzgtNDJiMi05YjE2LWM5NGFmNTAyMzlhMw: "Mit rauen Händen, auf derben Rücken./ In Fabriken und in Kombinaten / Unzählige Geschichten, / Oft ungehört, gar unerzählt. // Wenn wir über deutsche Einheit sprechen, / dann frag ich mich: / Wer ist da eigentlich mitgemeint? / Und wer wird außen vorgelassen? // Wer empfand wohl Wachstumsschmerzen? / Und wer erlitt massive Brüche? // Wo ist Platz? / Zwischen blühenden Landschaften und / brennenden Häusern. // Was ist Fest und was Theater? // Und wer wird sagen, dass ich spalte, / obwohl ich nur auf Lücken hinweise."

"included" when talking about the impacts of the German re-unification and the subsequent transformation. Furthermore, East Germans of Colour were politically double disappointed. Like all East Germans they were promised "blossoming landscapes" (*Blühende Landschaften*) by Helmut Kohl, i.e. the promise of a future in prosperity and contentment, but instead experience depreciation of their financial, social and cultural capital. However, other than the white majority of East Germans, People of Colour also received "burning houses", i.e. an escalation of racist violence and a threat to their safety.

## Continuity in the Experience of Racism

Within this critique, the narrators draw a connection to continuity of the racism experience(d) both in the past and in the presence. They are still constantly confronted with racist slurs in their everyday lives as well as often being subjected to verbal or physical threats to their safety.[56] They still plan their day-to-day lives according to right-wing presence, for instance staying at home at times of AfD demonstrations.[57] They still avoid certain public spaces, like specific streets or neighbourhoods, sometimes even entire regions and federal states altogether.[58] Wenzel even goes so far as to assess, "If I were a teenager now and grew up there, I would very probably have to write the same book again in ten years' time", implying that the situation in East Germany has barely changed in the last thirty years.[59] Through their high-profile and media presence, the narrators are now additionally subjected to a high level of online abuse that is strongly linked to far-right ideology and rhetoric, deeming them less worthy and even less human as People of Colour and women.[60] Additionally, some of them express worry about their journalistic or artistic work outing them to the organised and well-connected far-right movement, putting them on a death list.[61]

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[56] Le, "Think Tank."

[57] Thembi Wolf, "Wir Kanarienvögel," *Der Spiegel*, June 19, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/fall-walter-luebcke-thembi-wolf-a-1273168.html.

[58] Wolf, "Wir Kanarienvögel"; Orlowski and Wenzel, "Interview mit Olivia Wenzel," 65.

[59] Geidel, *Olivia Wenzel über das Leben als schwarze Frau in Deutschland*, 00:01:08–00:01:20: "würde ich jetzt jugendlich sein und da aufwachsen, würde ich sehr wahrscheinlich noch mal das gleiche Buch schreiben müssen in zehn Jahren."

[60] Nhi Le, "TEDxUniHalle: The Offline Origins of Online Hate and What to Do About It," YouTube video, #TEDx, September 4, 2019, 00:01:50–00:05:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbQkVXU5ELY; Wolf, "Wir Kanarienvögel."

[61] Gutjahr, *Olivia Wenzel: "Rechter Terror macht wenigen Angst in Deutschland!"*, 00:21:25–00:25:20.

Furthermore, almost all of the narrators notice a strong uptick in the public exertion of violence after 2015 with the rising influence of the PEGIDA and AfD movements and tightly link this back to their experience in the 1990s. This is particularly present in Le's account who, unlike the three black narrators, locates the escalation of violence in the 1990s on a general level, while on a personal level she identifies 2015 as the starting point of an increased violence directed against herself:

> With the emergence of the Leipzig Pegida offshoot in 2015, the mood intensified: the initial everyday racism developed into open hostility, while jibes and othering became outright racism and willingness to use violence. For all those who, unlike Asians, were not perceived as "hardworking foreigners", this had long been a reality.[62]

This is also one of the few instances where the sources examined here explicitly name differences in perception and treatment between members of different minority groups. For the future, it seems promising to expand the corpus of sources and to focus on the specifics of minority groups and the influence of community building. In a wider context, the narratives assessed here make it possible to identify two upticks of violence, one after 1990 and a second one after 2015. This observation is in line with the data collected by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, which records a sharp increase in fatalities of right-wing violence in 2016 after years of declining cases since 2000 as well as more than double the number of cases of anti-refugee incidents between the beginning of the records in 2015 (1248 cases) and the following year 2016 (3767 cases).[63] In addition, the data does not take into account the changing language in political discourse, which has sharpened with the emergence of the AfD in 2015 as well as the change of government in 2022.

While the narrators see a stronger societal interest in their experiences now than they did in the 1990s, many of them feel like this interest remains superficial and normally short-lived, normally linked to events like elections with relatively

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[62] Le, "Think Tank": Mit Aufkommen des Leipziger Pegida-Ablegers im Jahr 2015 hat sich die Stimmung verschärft: "Der anfängliche Alltagsrassismus entwickelte sich zu offener Feindseligkeit, Sticheleien und Othering wurden zu blankem Rassismus und Gewaltbereitschaft. Für all jene, die anders als Asiat*innen nicht als 'zumindest fleißige Ausländer' wahrgenommen wurden, war dies längst Realität."

[63] Amadeu Antonio Stiftung and Pro Asyl, "Chronik Flüchtlingsfeindlicher Vorfälle," accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.mut-gegen-rechte-gewalt.de/service/chronik-vorfaelle; Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, "Todesopfer Rechter Gewalt," accessed August 31, 2023, https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/todesopfer-rechter-gewalt/.

high outcomes for right-wing parties or particularly prominent attacks on People of Colour.[64] In addition, they perceive that interest remains almost exclusively on a level of debate, with little to no political and social action.[65] Wenzel attributes this to the lack of emotional affect, meaning that the majority society only recognises far-right populist and extremist movements and action as a problem on a cognitive level, failing to take the affectional reaction into account because they "still think they are not meant by it," i.e. they do not identify as a target of right-wing and neo-nazi actions.[66]

## The Influence of Intersectionality in Identity Formation

Finally, the public discourse about racism and right-wing violence affects many of the narrators particularly through the way it addresses East Germany. This perception relates primarily to the portrayal of racism and right-wing violence as an exclusively East German problem in predominant media and societal narratives. While all of the narrators identify this as a commonly made argument, its impact on them personally depends on how strongly they identify as East German. For example, Le completely rejects a reference of the regional identity categories Thuringia or East Germany, instead exclusively choosing the labels "German" or "Viet-German" for herself.[67] Hence, her comment on the specificity of East German right-wing violence remains almost completely analytical, stating the necessity to identify the structures that strengthen right-wing networks in East Germany in particular, while not losing sight of racism and right-wing violence as a problem that affects and always has affected Germany on a national, not just a regional level.[68] Wenzel and Wolf, who both take a somewhat ambivalent role of anchoring their identity between being East German and black, tend to discuss both problems mostly separately. While they point out problems with the portrayal of East Germany and East Germany and the

64 Le, "Think Tank"; Petra Köpping, Le Nhi, and Christian Schwochow, "Ostdeutsche Perspektiven nach der Wende: Worüber müssen wir reden?," *Berliner Tageszeitung*, November 2, 2019, https://taz.de/Ostdeutsche-Perspektiven-nach-der-Wende/!5636189/; Wolf, "Wir Kanarienvögel."

65 Geidel, *Olivia Wenzel über das Leben als schwarze Frau in Deutschland*, 00:01:50–00:02:10; Michaela Pichler, "Autorin Olivia Wenzel im Interview," *Radio FM4*, September 23, 2020, https://fm4.orf.at/stories/3007423/; Köpping, Nhi and Schwochow, "Ostdeutsche Perspektiven nach der Wende."

66 Gutjahr, *Olivia Wenzel: "Rechter Terror macht wenigen Angst in Deutschland!"*, 00:18:36–00:19:49: "immer noch denken sie sind damit nicht gemeint."

67 Orlowski and Le, "Interview mit Nhi Le," 73.

68 Köpping, Nhi and Schwochow, "Ostdeutsche Perspektiven nach der Wende"; Le, "Think Tank."

regional influences on their own lives and identity, they tend to not link those narratives to their experience as People of Colour.[69] However, Warda strongly identifies with her East German origin and specifically links this experience to her experience of being black in a white majority society:

> On the one hand, I was East German, which I shouldn't be any more, but on the other hand, among East Germans I wasn't really East German either, because I'm not white. To put it bluntly, it was just twice as annoying all the time. Because you fight on one front and say, "Hey guys, there's a devaluation happening here against us East Germans." And then you fight on the other front and somehow have to discuss it and say, "Hey, I'm also really East German and what's happening here is racist."[70]

The devaluation she experiences therefore happens on different levels according to the context and the audience of her discussion. Consequently, the narrators that identify strongly with their identity as East Germans feel doubly marginalised as East Germans of Colour. Interestingly enough, only Wenzel establishes a direct relationship between her experience of identity and marginalisation as black, East German and female, when offhandedly sharing:

> Let me explain:
> 1. Eating a banana in public as a black person: racist monkey analogies, uga uga uga. Ouch.
> 2. Eating a banana as an East German – the banana as a symbol of the inferiority of beige East Germany in comparison to the golden West. The banana as a bridge to prosperity, exotic southern fruits as a symbol of economic superiority. And those stupid East Germans stood in line for hours for 'em after the Wall fell, amirite?

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[69] Orlowski and Wenzel, "Interview mit Olivia Wenzel"; Gutjahr, *Olivia Wenzel: "Rechter Terror macht wenigen Angst in Deutschland!"*; Wolf, "Eine ganz klassische, ostdeutsche Geschichte"; Thembi Wolf, "O-Lennials: Was die Generation der Ost-Millennials ausmacht: Wer sie sind und was sie wollen," *Der Spiegel*, April 1, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/millennials-aus-ostdeutschland-was-diese-generation-ausmacht-a-ec93004c-df35-4000-94c6-ec57275c5001.

[70] Grimme, *Katharina Warda – Dunkeldeutschland*, 00:12:36–00:13:15: "Auf der einen Seite war ich Ostdeutsche, was ich nicht mehr sein sollte, auf der anderen Seite, unter Ostdeutschen war ich dann aber auch keine richtige Ostdeutsche, weil ich nicht weiß bin. Um es jetzt platt zu sagen, es ist einfach doppelt nervig gewesen, die ganze Zeit. Weil man kämpft auf der einen Front und sagt: 'Hey Leute, hier passiert eine Abwertung gegen uns Ostdeutsche.' Und dann kämpft man auf der anderen Front und muss irgendwie darüber diskutieren und sagen 'Hey, ich bin aber auch wirklich auch Ostdeutsche und das ist rassistisch, was hier passiert.'"

3. Eating a banana as a woman – blowjob, this, that. The banana as penis analogy and tool of sexism. Insecure, pubescent teenagers traumatise other insecure, pubescent teenagers. Why don't you give it a deepthroat, hee hee. Haa haa.[71]

However, she does not go into more detail about the intersectionality at those three parts of her identity after the initial quote. The other narrators also do not include the intersectionality between their experiences as People of Colour, East Germans and Women despite all identifying publicly as feminist and therefore using the quality of being female as a distinct marker of their identities. This tendency not to or to only partially present themselves through an intersectional lens is especially surprising, given the work environment and the activism the narrators are part of. Here also it would be interesting to compare these results to a wider sample of sources to explore how the identity markers "women" and "East German" are discussed in a wider discourse as well as how those markers are integrated with that of "race". Is the way the case studies analysed here exceptional in the way they discuss those identity markers or can a similar tendency to sectionalising and localising be found in a wider sample of sources as well? Are strategies of dealing with the overlap of gender, race and being East German gender specific? Do West Germans of Colour link their experiences of race and racism to regionality?

## Conclusion

The case studies examined here strongly support claims of a drastic escalation of violence in the early 1990s as well as highlighting how this development was neither unprecedented and unexpected for those affected by it, nor did it end after the initial surge of attacks on People of Colour. The feeling of a transgressional and all-encompassing violence as well as the lack of support from state forces and private individuals provided a framework for the narrators' youth that is tightly linked to fear for their physical and emotional well-being. While the data also suggests a sharp increase of violence directed against People

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[71] Wenzel, *1000 Serpentinen Angst*, 49–50: "Let me explain: / 1. Öffentlich eine Banane essen als schwarze Person: Rassistische Affenanalogien, uga uga uga. Aua. / 2. Eine Banane essen als Ossi – die Banane als Sinnbild für die Unterlegenheit des beigen Ostens gegenüber dem goldenen Westen. Die Banane als Brücke in den Wohlstand, exotische Südfrüchte als Symbol wirtschaftlicher Übermacht. Boah und die blöden Ossis standen da nach'm Mauerfall stundenlang für an, ey. / 3. Eine Banane essen als Frau – Blowjob, dies das. Die Banane als Penisanalogie und Werkzeug des Sexismus. Unsichere, pubertierende Teenager traumatisieren andere unsichere, pubertierende Teenager. Mach doch mal Deepthroat, hähähä. Hähähä."

of Colour, the more important factor is that their own experiences mirrored by media portrayals of attacks against others make this the framework of their emotional reality and lived experience. As such, the everydayness of the racism they experience becomes almost mundane in its terror. In this, the experiences of othering and violence are presented as an integral part of their identity formation process, especially as they are so deeply ingrained that it is impossible for them to remember a time "before racism" and subsequently imagine the person they could have become had things been different. Therefore, racism and the violence linked to it have to be seen as a rite of passage, and an inseparable part of growing up in East Germany as a Person of Colour. However, all of the narratives analysed here stress the continuity of their experience of othering as well as the threat of racially motivated violence beyond the 1990s. As such, Christian Bangel's statement of radical right-wing violence as a "generational" experience in the sense of a unique, irreplicable or singular experience does not hold up to the assessment of the narrators. Nevertheless, it raises the question whether and to what extent racism and right-wing extremist violence are integrated into collective concepts of identity in which *generation* serves as self-description of both a marker of belonging and a boundary to the perceived outsider. Are People of Colour part of the designed category of a *Generation Ost* (Generation East Germany) after the fall of the Wall? Are their experiences of the re-unification and the transformative period of the 1990s integrated into collective memory?

And while their accounts are voiced in adult words, the violence and overwhelming insecurity described was experienced by children's bodies and had to be processed by children's minds, who often were not able to make themselves heard and understood at a time they were often left unprotected by legal and moral codes. Consequently, it is not only the threat and experience of violence directed against them that is an integral part of their own identity forming process but even more so the loss of agency they were subjected to. From their earliest memory, being marked as different is perceived as one of the most prominent characteristics of their interactions with(in) society. An important part of their coming of age lies in the growing grasp of the reasons, strategies and impact of their othering. Only with the strong uptick of violence they experienced after 2015, now as adults, were the narrators able to share those experiences through their political, artistic and journalist work and platform. It is not surprising that many of the narrators examined here, who do not remember a time in which they were not subjected to omnipresent racist othering and violence, found that race became a central part of their identities. However, the strategies used to verbalise this feeling and perception differ between the

individual narrators by how tightly they are linked to individual and collective experiences and identities as well as by how explicitly they share personal experiences. While Wenzel and Warda share intimate memories of their childhood and adolescence, Le choses to argue with collective and as such general examples, and Wolf takes an ambivalent role between those two positions. In this context it is important to note that in the narrators' assessment, the persistent omission of the experience of People of Colour in the remembrance of reunification and transformation constitutes a retraumatising experience. This emphasises the importance of advancing the discussion of the topic both in academic research and in social discourse.

Especially considering their background, the narrators' tendency to not or to only partly take intersectional approaches in their strategies to deal with the ubiquity of othering is particularly noteworthy. A specifically female perspective on racism and violence remains largely unaddressed by the narrators. Future research must therefore stress gender approaches to both the way violence is exercised and perceived. Furthermore, it remains to be explored why the varying identities of being People of Colour, being East German and being female are often not interwoven in the narratives. Is it that the lack of a cohesive, social, identity-defining space means that identity issues are dealt with sporadically and individually? Were the experienced acts of violence directed only against individual elements of their identity at different times and in different spaces so that the narrators' processing of them is separate? Does it take into account an attempt to externalise the acts of violence from a sense of self that does not centre those elements of identity?

Importantly, all narrators examined in this case study share similar educational and professional paths. While the information about their sociological background and subsequently the social capital available to them is limited, their shared work environment in journalism on topics of feminism and anti-racism suggests the navigation of and identification with a similar social milieu. Consequently, all four individuals are likely to be similar in terms of their world views as well as the language and terminology used to contextualise their experiences and opinions. Despite these limitations, the case studies examined here raise important questions and hypotheses that have not yet been adequately addressed in the current research. Therefore, it seems crucial to explore the questions raised here with a much broader and more representative sample size. Promising sources include oral history material such as larger-scale interview studies as well as the large corpora available in the form of social media networks, which can be made available using methods of digital history. Using

such a large corpus allows special attention to be paid to the regional and social milieu of the narrators when selecting the sample, in contrast to the small-scale cases studies selected here. The conclusions drawn in this analysis can serve as a stepping-stone when composing both the research questions and the design of such a study.