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THE VISIBLY ABSENT CHILD: GENERATIONAL AND GENDERED REPRODUCTION  
AND CHILDLESSNESS IN REUNIFIED BERLIN

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Visibly Absent Child: Generational and Gendered Reproduction and Childlessness in

Reunified Berlin

by MEGHANA JOSHI

Dissertation Director:

Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi

This dissertation describes and interprets various articulations of ‘German child-unfriendliness and friendliness’ as they relate to a generation’s experience of gendered reproduction and childlessness in reunified Berlin in the context of a German demographic crisis. I focus on the narratives of the *Wende* or reunification generation, often represented in policy documents as producing a culture of childlessness in Germany. A 2015 report of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs states that 29% of this generation, i.e. those between the ages of 30 and 50, is childless. My work records and analyzes *experiences of living with low fertility* for those who often become demographic statistics. I show how reproduction has become hypervisible in the wake of this alarmist demographic discourse and post-reunification in-migration of former West German families with children and gentrification in Berlin. I do this through the lens of the hypervisible child and what she comes to stand in for at a particular moment in time in

Berlin. Reproduction emerges as a form of exclusion and simultaneously inclusion and often marks women as disinterested in having children or as performing an aggressive style of motherhood, while men as resisting their marginal reproductive status and potentially (re)defining their roles as fathers.

This dissertation then records shifting meanings of biological, social, and cultural reproduction from the perspective of the *Wende* generation in the short time period between the late 1980s and 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I draw on and contribute to literatures on anthropology of childhood, masculinity and fatherhood, reproductive technologies and kinship to explicate the relationship between forms of ‘child-unfriendliness,’ gendered reproductive practices, and individual and national anxieties and aspirations related to ‘Germanness.’ I argue that the unstable emplacement of the German child, animated through multiple national, local, and personal histories, and memories and narratives, signals on the one hand, a preoccupation with national belonging confirmed through biological reproduction. On the other hand, kinning practices established through care, produce divergent forms of social and familial belonging.

I used a range of qualitative research methods including interviews, focus group discussions and life history narratives. Other than these more structured methods, I also participated in and observed the everyday routines of mothers, fathers and childless men and women in the city. I took walks, bike rides and traveled in subways and buses, alone and with Berliners to get a sense of how the city has changed materially and otherwise after reunification. I spent many hours conversing over meals and at parties or in children’s playgrounds asking questions about German romanticism and fascination for

say barefoot playgrounds or the forest or hiking, or discussing politics in India, United States and Germany. Several hours of observations on streets and during travel as well as random conversations with strangers or participating in demonstrations against gentrification were less direct ways in which to learn about life in Berlin.

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

After all we live in a society where everything is loud. Berlin is not a safe place for children. There is not enough room to play. Some of the playgrounds are not in the best of condition. So children need to run around and expend their energy somewhere, right? We must absolutely tolerate children's noise. We don't have enough children!

Beate is almost 50 and has been living in Berlin since the early 1980s. She came to West Berlin from South West Germany to study; she found a job, a husband, and then had her children in the divided city. Separated from her spouse several years ago, she raises her children alone. Her son and daughter are in their late teens. Beate is a large woman, with red, frizzy hair and a soporific voice. She sighs every time she speaks, and walks slowly, dragging herself in an exhausted manner through the streets. She is tired and admits that she is.

I met Beate in May 2013, almost at the end of my field work. She works in one of Berlin districts' administrative offices responsible for managing citizen concerns about growing noise levels in the immediate neighborhood and in the city at large. One of the primary groups against whom Berliners have lodged complaints in the recent years has been children. Day care centers, children's playgrounds, schools and even apartment blocks where families with children stay, have had to confront and rationalize these demands on their use of social and acoustic space.

Beate explained to me that citizens have a right to reside in environments that are free of prolonged and intensive noise, which is a quality of life issue after all. She showed me how the process to lodge a complaint against noise is fairly simple: one can fill out an online form. Recently the state of Berlin through a revision of its noise laws excludes children's noise—produced through laughter, play or conversation—from the definition of illegal levels of noise. Beate says that tolerance for noise is naturally a subjective



experience. However, she admits that German society needs to value the presence of children, especially since Germany has such low fertility rates.

Then becoming a little quiet she said that no matter what children need, it is undeniable that they cause irritation. I was surprised at an immediate about face in her narrative. During the first part of our conversation she provided me details of her job, the noise law reforms that put children's rights central to the debate, and how as a mother she usually made space for what children needed and demanded. For the rest of our conversations till the end of my field work, I often heard Beate straddle two primary elements of my interlocutors' experiences with children: children as extremely valuable and children as intolerable. "Yes, I feel it too. When I finish my work and I sit in the subway on my way home, all I want is a little *Ruhe* (peace and quiet). I get very irritated if there are children in the same subway compartment. I can't tolerate it," continued Beate with an unusual vigor in her voice. I waited to hear more. I wanted to know what exactly about the noise became intolerable for Beate.

To a large extent, personally I am almost envious (*taucht ein Neidgefühl auf*). I too have children...yet when I see a child, so free...I must pull myself together (*ich muss mich zusammenreißen*)...I think this envy plays a role. People feel how they are trapped (in adulthood) in their work and in their limited possibilities...a child is free, still has a lot of opportunities...when I see my daughter, she will finish her studies, do some part time work, then travel...she has a lot more to look forward to (*noch alles vor sich hat*) ... at least for a while. Yeah, I am envious and I think that's how a lot of people feel when they see children.

As I discuss below, I recognized in Beate's expression of this personal and what she then extended to include collective emotion vis-a-vis children something very 'German.'

Treating children as sovereign, as persons in their own right, therefore respecting their feelings and what one says to them is a recent Euro-American phenomenon, historically traced back to the rise of industrial capitalism, child labor laws and the modern family during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Allen 2005, Aries 1962, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, Montgomery 2009, Siegel and Siegel 1983, Zelizer 1981). On the other hand, in India, where I come from, children are not necessarily seen as ‘persons in their own right.’ Social shaming of children, reprimanding them in public, or disciplining by adults other than parents or teachers is fairly common and largely acceptable. This is also because children often tend to have multiple care givers within and outside the family and disciplining is not solely the responsibility of the parent. I don’t claim at all that the structural, social, and emotional divisions between generations continue to be rigid and strict or the same everywhere in India. Yet, given the particular adult-child relations in India, this irritation towards children that Beate expressed would not be an anomaly where I come from. I had just not expected to encounter such open aggression towards children in Berlin! In India though, irritation towards children usually manifests in reprimanding them for overstepping their limits or for not listening to adult demands; it doesn’t take the ‘German’ form, which is often experienced by parents (read mothers) as oppressive.<sup>1</sup> One of my interlocutors, a 40-year-old mother of a toddler captured this relation to the child very provocatively, “it is like Berlin does not let you be a mother! I feel like everyone is watching me, like we are being judged for bringing our kids out in public!”

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<sup>1</sup> See chapters one and two for details on the ‘German’ form of irritation towards children. See conclusion chapter for more on ambivalence towards children.

I was initially taken aback when I so often heard negative commentary on children, not only in private conversations, but also expressed in body language and speech in public spaces. This irritation towards children in Berlin, often expressed by my interlocutors through the term “*Deutsche Kinderunfreundlichkeit*” (German child unfriendliness), does not correspond to the Indian conceptualization of the child as subordinate to the adult in thought, maturity, emotions and rights. If anything, my ethnography reveals otherwise. Children are often accorded ‘adult’ status especially in matters of self determination: choosing what to eat, wear, do, or not do, being just some of the many examples. This self determination is especially visible in speech, in that the child’s thought expressed through words is compared with considered opinion, and hence always worthy of attention and value.<sup>2</sup> Self determination as I observed in Berlin, is not consistent in most contexts with decision making processes in adult-child relations in India.<sup>3</sup>

Given that in my field site, the child appeared as sovereign, a person with rights, as a free individual with (real and imagined) countless possibilities, and as a precious entity, how can we understand the particularity of “German child unfriendliness?” If the German child does not structurally occupy a distinct position vis-a-vis the German adult, hence is not less of a person, or necessarily subordinate, how can we interpret the publicly expressed, permissive show of irritation and aggression towards the child? What

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter one for discussion on self determination in KITAs. KITA(s) is short for *Kindertagesstätte*. These are preschool facilities for 0-6 year olds, like the day care in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Of course this is a more liberal interpretation of the individual in general, adult or child. It also doesn’t stand in opposition to the child being a child. More choice doesn’t make the child more adult. She has choice, but very few responsibilities, whereas children in India might have less choice, but more responsibility. Having said that, I will also argue (see chapter one) that indeed these extended ‘choices’ reflect expanding rights and while children may not be responsible for their actions, choice can be

forms does it take? As Beate says, how is the ambivalence towards the child as not-yet formed both a source of possibility as well as a threat to Germans?

In this dissertation I explore various articulations of ‘German child-unfriendliness and –friendliness’ as they relate to a generation’s experience of reproduction and childlessness in reunified Berlin in the national context of a demographic crisis. When I started fieldwork in 2012 in an infertility clinic in Berlin—the scope soon expanded to include perspectives outside the clinic—I had not bargained for how palpable the discourse on the “culture of childlessness” (Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2007:78) in Germany would be. In managing the ‘crisis,’ Berlin as the capital city, is the stage on which the political experiment of shaping a child-friendly Germany unfolds. Thus, Berlin proved to be an ideal place to understand discourses and practices related to biological and cultural reproduction.<sup>4</sup>

A demographically marked generation is central to this dissertation. I focus on the narratives of the *Wende* generation that came of age at the time of German reunification, often represented in policy documents as producing a culture of childlessness in Germany.<sup>5</sup> A 2015 report of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs states that 29% of this generation, i.e. those between the ages of 30 and 50, is childless.<sup>6</sup> Statistically speaking,

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burdensome for them.

<sup>4</sup> The historical fact of Cold War division of Germany and the way in which the Berlin Wall characterizes the previously divided, and now reunified city, and its residents as East and/or West Berliners in contrast to other East or West Germans proved to be unexpectedly fortuitous in understanding a particular experience of reproduction. I discuss the intersections between reproductive ‘choice,’ childlessness, reunification, and gentrification in the following pages.

<sup>5</sup> *Wende* in German means, turn and refers to the end of the Cold War and German reunification. I discuss the concept of generation in detail in following sections.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/94130/bc0479bf5f54e5d798720b32f9987bf2/kinderlose-frauen-und-maenner-ungewollte-oder-gewollte-kinderlosigkeit-im-lebenslauf-und-nutzung-von-unterstuetzungsangeboten-studie-data.pdf>

such low fertility rates—according to state and local explanations— correspond to a ‘child-unfriendly’ social atmosphere (*Stimmung*) in Germany, and a lack of desire (*Unlust*) to relate to children. As an anthropological inquiry, my dissertation—while considering the discourse on low fertility—records *experiences of living with low fertility* and “...what tendencies toward fewer births means to the women and men who ultimately become demographic statistics.” (Douglass 2005:20) Thus, in this dissertation, I bring together individual and collective articulations of a generation’s life courses, intimate memories of family and youth, and spatial and social inclusion and exclusion, as well as influences of macro demographic discourse, family policy reforms, and effects of reunification to interpret meanings of gendered reproduction, childlessness, and the demographic crisis in Germany.

My ethnography elucidates the ‘hypervisibility’ of reproduction and childlessness in Berlin at a particular moment in time. Hypervisibility is best articulated in a July 2012 *Süddeutsche Zeitung* article: political concern about the German demographic crisis and heightened public consciousness about value of children, explains why citizens have the sense that in spite of low fertility, children appear to be visible everywhere.<sup>7</sup> My interlocutors’ sensitivity to this ‘hypervisibility’ of children intensifies as the debate on the demographic crisis, experience of reunification, and family gentrification intersect with generational constructions of reproductive choices and practices. Post reunification in- migration has changed the demographic, material and emotional atmosphere (*Stimmung*) of certain neighborhoods in the city. Berlin best described and experienced as

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/warum-wir-den-geburtenzahlen-misstrauen-sind-doch-so-viele-kinder-ueberall-1.1407868-2>

a bohemian, “poor” and “slow” city by many interlocutors, now demands more tolerance towards certain families, and children’s real and imagined presence. I show how reproduction emerges as a form of exclusion and simultaneously inclusion at a particular historical conjuncture in the city of Berlin and marks some of my interlocutors (read women) as those producing a culture of childlessness, as well as performing an aggressive style of motherhood, while others (read men) as those (re)defining German reproductive practices.

This ethnography then interprets the shifting meanings of biological, social and cultural reproduction from the perspective of the *Wende* generation in reunified Berlin, in the larger context of demographic anxieties related to the future composition of Germany. I do this through the lens of the hypervisible child and what she comes to stand in for at a particular moment in time in Berlin. I also examine how reproductive moralities and ideologies produce different expectations and experiences for men and women of the *Wende* generation. I draw on and contribute to literatures on anthropology of childhood, masculinity and fatherhood, reproductive technologies and kinship to explicate the relationship between forms of ‘child-unfriendliness,’ gendered reproductive practices, and individual and national anxieties and aspirations related to ‘Germanness.’ I argue that the unstable emplacement of the German child, animated through multiple national, local, and personal histories, and memories and narratives, signals on the one hand, a preoccupation with national belonging confirmed through biological reproduction. On the other hand, kinning practices established through care, produce divergent forms of social and familial belonging (see Borneman 2001 on relations of care).

After I left Berlin in 2013, within a year, German society went through (and continues to experience) a drastic economic, social and cultural upheaval in wake of the European refugee crisis. Termed the “largest global humanitarian crisis” today, it is likely to change German reproduction in unprecedented ways.<sup>8</sup> This crisis brings to bear “...an unknown future for Germany, with its tendencies towards both xenophobia and *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome),...” (Holmes and Castaneda 2016: 13) Given this, my ethnography highlights the intersections between German demography, low fertility, migration and generational experiences, and will potentially contribute to the unstable conceptualizations of insiders/outside, moral discourses around reproductive practices, and reimagining “German-ness” in light of refugee presence and integration.<sup>9</sup>

### **Macro Context and Concepts**

The larger contribution of this work to the anthropology of reproduction, gender and kinship is the analysis of the local-national arrangements— of demographic goals, gender relations, reproductive moralities, and kinning practices— within which biological, social and cultural reproduction is embedded. Reproduction then is not a single object, that is, it is not merely the biological production of individuals following sexual intercourse, conception, and parturition. Indeed, it is animated in my field site—a city undergoing rapid economic, social and cultural transformations—by *macro discourses, as well as intimate biographies*: on demography, gendered reproduction and belonging, experiences of reunification and confrontations with ‘outsiders,’ as well as memories and personal desires in making kin.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See conclusion

Thus, in this dissertation I contextualize and analyze two coinciding regimes that organize my interlocutors' relation(s) to reproduction: one corresponds to the "master narrative" (Borneman 1992:37-38) or the macro historical, national and local contexts that crystalize multiple identifications and life courses. Here I signal post war discourse on inter generational relations, feminist and anti-authoritarian movements of the 1970s, demography, reunification and gentrification. The other—and this is what I emphasize in my ethnography—refers to the micro, intimate, and personal stories and life courses that produce particular experiences of children or parents. While the chapters in the dissertation focus on the micro narratives or "life constructions" (Borneman 1992:37-38), my interlocutors often referred to, not always explicitly, the master narratives that make them 'Berliner' or 'German.' Life constructions and master narratives continually intersect to structure experiences with mothers, fathers, children, and those producing a 'culture of childlessness.' This ethnography thus records gendered and generational experiences of shifts in regimes of reproduction in post *Wende* Berlin.

***Master Narratives and 'Hypervisible' Reproduction***

***Generational Location and Identification***

This dissertation tells the story of a generation of men and women who came of age in the late 1980s. They witnessed life close to the Wall in divided Germany and Berlin; both within the timeless space of West Berlin, and in the dull, dilapidated neighborhoods of East Berlin. They had children or remained childless. A generation I call the reunification (*Wende*) generation in reference to the event that according to my



interlocutors most affected their lives and changed their economic chances and social milieu in significant ways.<sup>10</sup>

The stories that unfold discuss and interpret the lives of the *Wende* generation identifying as ethnic Germans. The term ethnic does not imply a homogenous group. Instead, I refer to those culturally identifying as, or identified as German. Germanness was often constructed in multiple ways and in opposition not only to ‘non-Germans,’ but also to people and groups conventionally considered culturally internal to Germany. Also in my field site, interlocutors first and foremost asserted their Berliner identity, before identifying as German.<sup>11</sup> For instance, a 45-year-old childless man who grew up in West Berlin remarked, “after reunification, it was common for people to confuse us with West

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<sup>10</sup> “*Was hat eure Generation am meisten geprägt?*” OR “What influenced or shaped your generation the most?”

I asked this question of almost all my interlocutors. The question does not assume a fixed definition or common understanding of the term generation. I was not interested in how an age cohort answered this question, rather intrigued by how people with different backgrounds in different age cohorts identified with similar events or moments in the past that formed part of their generational memory and experience. It is advantageous as well as disadvantageous to use the lens of generation in a field site like Berlin, for the simple reason that the discourse on generation as a defining analytic for social categorizations has become a part of common understandings for native explanations of difference; this has largely happened through the vibrant and pervasive discourse and literature on generational experiences, characteristics and personalities and their relation to historical events, especially traumatic events. The advantage is that my interlocutors were not perplexed by my question; the disadvantage being that they continue to operate within the idea of the generation as imparted to them in history lessons and through the memory culture in Germany. This disadvantage is minimized with ethnographic fieldwork that does not rely on a question-answer format, rather on living in one’s field site and learning from varied sources over a period of time that add thickness and depth to our interlocutors’ direct answers to us. Also ethnographic field work revealed the process by which interlocutors with sociologically varied characteristics became generational units through remembering and narrating the past from the point of view of contemporary experiences.

<sup>11</sup> Obviously the fact that I did my research in Berlin affected how people I spoke with identified themselves. Yet, especially those who were long term residents of Berlin or for whom the *Wende* had had a significant impact on their lives before and after 1989, asserted that I recognize that Berliners were very different from Germans. “Of course I am German. But its not an identity I really related to for a long time. Emotionally I feel like I belong to Berlin. For instance, West Berlin had a special status during the division of Germany. This meant for instance that one actually got incentives to move to West Berlin—you know in the middle of East Germany—also young men were spared compulsory military service if they were living in Berlin. Rents were so cheap and a lot of young people moved here. It was a city for the young. Also we lived sort of cut off from the rest of the world.” A 50-year-old female interlocutor who grew up in West Berlin said to me once. Such sentiments were shared with me often by West Berliners I met during field work.

Germans! Big difference there; I am a West Berliner, not a West German!’’ Again this identification as Berliner is not based on objectively identifiable characteristics, but is an internal relationship to other social groups constructed in varying ways at different points in time (see Alanen and Mayall 2001:20 on internal and external relations). These include time of residence in Berlin, participating in a specific social and political life, including decisions about family, household, employment, and procreation.

As such I have paid attention to emic categorizations of being German or Berliner. Important to note is that almost all who appear on the pages of this dissertation have parents and grandparents who were born and raised in former East or West Berlin or Germany. Identifying previous generations as culturally German is crucial in how some interlocutors interpreted their reproductive choices and practices. This is more explicitly stated for instance in chapters three and four; in chapter three, childless women draw a connection between childlessness and family history and memories of childhood. They speak about the role of German feminism and changing gender roles in reproductive decision making. In chapter four, men who strive to be actively involved in child care, bemoan the absence of adequate father figures for their generation; they discuss the depleted male or father construct in German national history to emphasize challenges they face in being active fathers today. My interlocutors are middle- and working-class, as well as unemployed men and women from former East and West Berlin and/or Germany. In terms of chronological age, I refer here to the cohort of 30-50-year-olds.

I use the term generation as a heuristic device and do not restrict its meaning to age or age cohort. Biological or chronological age is undoubtedly an important aspect of the idea of generation, but is not necessarily what defines why people feel a sense of

belonging to a particular group. Belonging or identification with a group is constructed through personal, lived, everyday experiences as well as through collective memories and narrations that bond people together. The *Wende* generation identified several experiences in their past which have shaped their collective attitudes, psyche and practices in the present. These include living in Cold War Berlin or moving to Berlin shortly after reunification, enjoying joint residence with friends and away from family, the sexual liberation that continued from their parent's generation into their own experimentation, and their memory of Berlin as a bohemian city. Most people (West Germans) I spoke to who moved to Berlin (either in the late 60s or late 1980s) were motivated to do so to experience an alternate social life (different from their middle-class heterosexual family structures), live cheap, study or meet new friends. Those born and brought up in Berlin, bemoaned the loss of a city that had previously kept life "slow." This was especially true for the few West Berliners who never left Berlin during the division or lived in *Wohngemeinschaften* i.e. shared residential units in the 'free,' walled-in city. These men and women identified as children of the 1968ers or the student revolutionaries and some continued to experiment with alternate households and kinship arrangements.<sup>12</sup>

East Berliners who I often met in neighborhoods like Marzahn (far East Berlin) had been forced to move out here as gentrification and rising rents made their apartments—previously located near the Wall and now in the city center—unaffordable. Especially in East Berlin, there was a dramatic investment in infrastructure and renovation of apartments following reunification, which has resulted in rising property

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance chapter three.

values and rents. Most of my interlocutors from East Berlin were men between 35-50, often unemployed or employed in low paying jobs. They said moving out was not only prompted by rising rents; socially and emotionally these neighborhoods no longer *felt* like home.<sup>13</sup> Too many families with children, too few pubs, too many accommodations towards children, and aggression towards those without children were some of the elements of the gentrified East Berlin neighborhoods that drove out a lot of the men I spoke to. On the other hand, many middle-class fathers who I met during their parental leave were able to enjoy the benefits of city spaces that were family-friendly. In their narratives of “active fatherhood,” men involved in childcare emphasized the material and social space that Berlin provided in encouraging and nurturing father-child relationships.<sup>14</sup>

Conceptualizing generation, Mannheim writes against a positivist notion of time that progresses in a unilinear direction through set objective stages determined by chronological age. Instead he conceives of generational identity as related to a common location (*Lagerung*) in the social and historical process that determines participation in “...a temporally limited section of the historical process.” (Mannheim 1952:292) Generational location in the objective sense then points to “...certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought” (Mannheim 1952:291). Early impression and childhood experiences according to Mannheim play a significant role in providing meaning to other events in the individual’s life. Yet people who share generational location may not *belong* to a generation. The sense of belonging is a process when a bond or some form of

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance chapters one and two.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance chapter four.

identification is created between members due to exposure to, and remembering of social changes in similar terms; this is when generational location can give rise to different generation units. I interpret my interlocutors' narrations from the point of view of generation units. *"Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units (Mannheim 1952:304).*

Comparing and interpreting legal discourse and subjective narratives of kinship and belonging across three generations in Germany, Borneman (1992) writes that while master narratives (like law) might unite a generation and reify national identities, belonging is also produced through life constructions which are in themselves reconstructions. Thus "...the significance of experience changes as it is reevaluated over time, and each recollection can produce a slightly or radically different retelling." (Borneman 1992: 46) It is not so much the 'truth' of statements that concern anthropological knowledge production as much as what these life constructions mean and signify to our interlocutors, especially how they structure contemporary lives of a generation. This is how generation as a construct became meaningful in my field site. While I did not enter the field with the purpose of studying generational experience of reproduction, my interlocutors produced generational units as they narrated their life stories and reproductive trajectories in specific ways. Thus, we can think of generation as

social generation contingent upon individual and group life transitions over time, rather than as fixed stages determined by age.<sup>15</sup>

I do not always explicitly state generational identification in the dissertation chapters. Some interlocutors were at pains to point out how and why they belonged to the *Wende* generation, others spoke about reunification and its effects on their lives but not necessarily through the use of analytic categories such as generation. The chapters then do not present data in the form of a sociological study where objective criteria of belonging to a generation correlate to a particular (set of) experience. Instead, I show how generational identification itself is a process of remembering, construction, and retelling of the past from the point of view of the present and vice versa.

For instance, the fall of the Berlin Wall affected Germans variously depending on: their physical presence in Berlin, their proximity to the event through narration, memorialization, discussion and repetition, through other people's experiences, media and political sensationalization, and through the real and imagined participation in one of the most triumphant historical moments after the horrors of the Second World War. Many would see their life courses change dramatically after 1989, for e.g. through economic

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<sup>15</sup> There is a tension between the quantitative or cohort specific concept of generation and the qualitative or subjective apprehension of passage of time. The former structures generation chronologically, for instance, the distinction between parent-child generations. My interlocutors too used such categorizations extensively to structure their narrations and conceptualize inter-generational relations, childhood memories or family history. Marking boundaries between social generations is thus productive especially when "...few incisive events...punctuate the flow of time and people" (Roscow 1978 as cited in Pilcher 1994:487), which was the case with German reunification. Yet these incisive events are highlighted or remembered as being incisive, not only because they have changed one's life course or affected one's life chances in particular ways but because, from the point of view of the present, these events structure subjective generational re-locations. Thus, while *Wende* generation constitutes a quantitative apprehension of time, it is subjectively experienced as a common identity expressed in how the contemporary context—be it the demographic crisis, gentrification, or childlessness—becomes meaningful through generational identifications and narrations.

deprivation or opportunity losses, change in residence, and belonging or exclusion experienced in Berlin at different points in time. Others would retain the event's imprint as information, as nostalgia or as something to be celebrated annually. Some others were not directly affected either in their day to day or long term. Yet, the effectiveness of this categorization—*Wende* generation—lies in how it is produced by and produces collective memory and experience. For West German childless women whose stories unfold in chapter three, reunification brought significant changes to their material and social lives. Sophie, Christine and Susanne's generational narratives emerge not only from the memory of an event in 1989, but the remembering of the event as reunification whose consequences involve among other things a drastic restructuring of the city and their lives—spatially and socially. Reunification meant the opening of East-West borders, migration of West Germans and Europeans into Berlin, gentrification, and a changing atmosphere in the city that accommodates more families with children. These transformations intersect with Sophie and others' contemporary lives without children and structure reunification as an event that crystallizes their generational identities. Thus experiences of childlessness cannot be separated from reunification and the confrontation with 'hypervisible' children, especially in light of these women's political and emotional investments in non biological forms of kinship.

Generational categorization slots individuals into a group and may be "...biased toward the mass...A generation is only constituted when a system of references has been retrospectively set up and accepted as a system of collective identification. (Kriegel and Hirsch 1978:29) However, my aim is not to make this a generational-centric narrative at the cost of individual diversity, rather to dig deeper into generational identification as a

means to understanding the ambivalence towards children, the experiences with, and without children in contemporary Berlin, and anxieties related to cultural reproduction.

A recurring master narratives that organizes belonging to East or West Berlin/Germany is the role of the state in managing reproduction. The significantly distinct family policies in East and West Germany impacted gender relations, productive labor, and life with or without children. The discourse around pre- and post Wall politics of reproduction contextualizes differences and transformations in East-West life stories. Contemporary family policy and demographic discourse—vis-à-vis female reproduction, fathers' renewed role, and involuntary childlessness—reflect gender ideologies, conceptualizations of the 'ideal' German family, and forms of reproductive inclusions and exclusions.

***Demographic Transition and Political Intervention: Building a “Child-Friendly” Germany***

Scholars mark three primary periods in European demography that show drastic fall in fertility rates. Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1920s, processes of urbanization, industrialization and individualization influenced changes in meanings of family, children and parenting. Children were no longer viewed primarily as labor force on whom household income was dependent. Work was separated from home, located instead in factories, and adults were primarily responsible for earning livelihood while children went to school. Child labor laws and educational institutions separated children's world from adult labor and emphasized instead children's physical, moral and intellectual development. Simultaneously, the rise of the nuclear family and an emphasis on parental responsibility toward the moral education of children, engendered a focused investment in existing children, rather than reproduction for the sake of economic security (Aries



1962:411, Douglass 2005:10-11). Thus, over time reproduction shifted in meaning, from one of economic to non-economic contemplation (Zelizer 1981). The second phase of a statistically significant dip in fertility rates in Europe corresponds to the end of the World Wars and the accompanying sense of desolation, insecurity, hunger, and death that deterred reproduction temporarily. Finally, the third phase, which provides a backdrop to my research, can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, a time of global youth and student revolts, anti-authoritarian organization, second wave of feminism and concomitant reorganization of gender roles in Germany and Europe.

For the last 40 years or more there has been a steady decline in fertility in Western Europe (and now increasingly in Eastern and Southern European states), reaching a plateau below replacement levels.<sup>16</sup> Largely associated with women's increasing control over education, work and reproduction, heightened emphasis on self-actualization, experimentation and freedom from normative family forms, this demographic transition specifically in Germany, presents a dual narrative in East and West, before and after reunification in 1989.

On average, between 1999 and 2009 fertility in Germany decreased 16%, East Germany recording a record low since after the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> This East German demographic transition has largely been associated with sudden unavailability of public child care, first experience of unemployment for a lot of men and women, and the general

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<sup>16</sup> Demographically speaking, replacement level fertility is defined as “the level at which a cohort of women, on the average, have only enough daughters to ‘replace’ themselves in the population.” (Haupt and Kane 1978)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/Bevoelkerung.html>. In the decade after reunification East German fertility rates plummeted to record low levels. The number of births per year fell 60%. By the end of the 1990s, the fertility in East Germany started to rise and current data points to an eventual similar total fertility in both East and West (Goldstein and Kreyenfeld 2011).

sense of insecurity associated with the dismantling of East German political systems and way of life. (Baerwolf 2013, 2014, Douglass 2005, Goldstein and Kreyenfeld 2011, Rosenbaum and Timm 2010) The 2011 census records 1.5 million fewer inhabitants than the anticipated 81.8 million.<sup>18</sup> According to the 2012 Microcensus data, 1 in every 5 women in Germany between 40-45 years of age is childless. This percentage was 23 in West Germany as compared to 15 in East. However, as compared to 2008, by 2012, the percentage increase in childlessness in former East Germany was 5%.<sup>19</sup> Most recently, a 2015 survey of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, reports that in Germany between the ages of 30 and 50, 29% (7.02 Million) of the population is childless, either voluntarily or involuntarily. 22% of these 7.02 Million are women and 36% are men. Qualitative surveys supplementing these numbers indicate that former West Germans prefer to have children within marriage and expect that a “good mother” is one who stays at home for the purpose of child care, while East Germans disassociate marital status from reproduction and are more willing to use day care services even for very small children.<sup>20</sup>

Low fertility in Germany has on the one hand sparked debates on aging population, shortage of labor and the need for more tolerant immigration policies. Often commentaries on Germany’s demographic transition refer to a “culture of childlessness,” described as a general acceptance that Germans do not want to have children (Dorbritz 2008, Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2007, Rosenbaum and Timm 2010). On the other hand, there is a push towards the creation of a child-friendly society (*kinderfreundliche*

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevölkerung/Bevölkerung.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/SocietyState/Population/Births/CurrentChildless.html>

<sup>20</sup> *bib-demografie.de* see *Keine Lust auf Kinder: Geburtenentwicklung in Deutschland, 2012* (No desire for

*Gesellschaft*) or atmosphere in Germany so that Germans feel like having children (*Lust haben auf Kinder*). Underlying these debates and dilemmas about Germany's 'end' or *Überfremdung*<sup>21</sup> is the question of the content of Germany: should it primarily comprise of children born to ethnic Germans or of children born in Germany who could be potential citizens and future labor force, but not necessarily ethnically Germans? These questions are further fuelled by the recent refugee crisis in Europe that threatens on the one hand, the reproduction of 'Germanness,' and on the other hand, provides the possibility for sustaining future German population.

This discourse of panic and anxiety about the viability of the German nation has had parallel effects in family or population policy. I would argue that quantitatively as well as qualitatively political intervention in matters of reproduction and population has taken on a bolder and more vocal form.<sup>22</sup> This "paradigm shift" (Henninger, Wimbauer, and Dombrowski 2008:289) is manifested in slogans such as "Germany needs more children" (*Deutschland braucht mehr Kinder*) or "Family brings profit/benefits" (*Familie bringt Gewinn*) popularized in 2005 by then family minister Ursula von der Leyen and accompanied by policy reforms. In wake of the publication of the 7<sup>th</sup> *Familienbericht* (2006),<sup>23</sup> a three-pronged approach to revitalize debate and action on population and

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children: Population developments in Germany, 2012). Also see Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *Fremd* means foreign, not one's own or stranger. *Über* means excessive. *Überfremdung* refers to excessive foreignness or strangeness in one's own home.

<sup>22</sup> The former family minister Kristina Schröder commented in 2011 on the need to establish a *kinderfreundliche Gesellschaft*, as one of the primary justifications of legal reforms that called for tolerating high levels of noise emanating from childcare institutions, schools and playgrounds (see chapter one).

<sup>23</sup> The federal government issues an annual report on specific family related themes based on scientific surveys every year to discuss current and pressing demographic and population issues. The 2006 report specifically emphasized the need for parents to better balance work and home and recommended putting in place mechanisms that increased infrastructural and financial support for families while also increasing scope to spend more time with their children.

reproduction is encouraged through: a) the redistribution of monetary support, b) building infrastructural apparatus for child care and c) labor market flexibility to increase parental time at home. This is inclusive of what has been termed “sustainable family policy...” and is considered to contribute significantly to “economic growth and competitiveness of German economy.” (Hübenthal and Ifland 2011:116) In the 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2013 show “log in”, aired on German national television (ZDF), the ruling coalition of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the social democratic party (SPD) representatives debated if the ‘father state’ is getting in the way of the ‘mother’s happiness’ (“*Verhindert Vaterstaat das Mutterglück?*”) indicating that political will to support women who want to have both careers and children may not be enough. The participants discussed the need to include men and fathers and not focus exclusively on women and their reproductive practices. Also, they raised concerns about the inadequate investment in institutional child care and a general *Unlust* (lack of interest) towards reproduction amongst individuals in Germany. The CDU representative especially emphasized the need to re-create in Germany a conducive atmosphere that makes it desirable to have children, “we only speak of pregnancy primarily as a burden. The message we give youth is that pregnancy and children tie you down. We need to change the connotation of reproduction, make it more positive to have children, otherwise people in our country will continue to not want to reproduce”.<sup>24</sup>

The national concern with demographic transition manifests in managing reproduction such that Germany can create an atmosphere or a social environment

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<sup>24</sup> “*Wir brauchen gesellschaftliches Umdenken; es muss wieder Spass machen, Kinder zu haben, sonst bleibt es genau so – keine Lust auf Kinder.*”

conducive to having children (*kinderfreundliche Gesellschaft*). These efforts are multi-pronged and implicitly and/or explicitly reinforce traditional gender norms and express moral ideologies of reproduction, parenting, kinship, and belonging.

### Gendered Reproduction

I discuss here few policy interventions, which have been critical in state led efforts to address the demographic crisis, and provide a backdrop to the following chapters. I show how reinforcement of ‘natural’ and heteronormative notions of family, interspersed with alternate visions of the role of the father in bolstering German reproduction parallel a process of (re) creating an interest in having children; the figure of the child saturated with ambivalence, emerges at once as precious and vulnerable, and ‘perfect’ and sovereign. Debates around the demographic crisis put reproduction central to political and social concern, making children and parenting public and ‘hypervisible.’<sup>25</sup> Simultaneously, those (especially women) who remain childless (for a variety of reasons) are marked morally, socially, and spatially in particular ways in the reunified city of Berlin. I show how ‘hypervisibility’ of reproduction in a) family policy and b) in gentrified Berlin neighborhoods make visible a particular ‘child-unfriendliness’ in the visibly ‘child-friendly’ capital of Germany. It is at this intersection that we gain deeper insight into the *Wende* generation’s experience of gendered reproduction and childlessness.

### *Mothers and Fathers in Family Policy*

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<sup>25</sup> See Süddeutsche Zeitung 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012, *Wie wenige Kinder viel präsenter wirken koennen*. [How few children can give an impression that there are too many (children)]  
<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/warum-wir-den-geburtenszahlen-misstrauen-sind-doch-so-viele-kinder-ueberall>-<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/angeblicher-babyboom-die-kinder-luege-vom-prenzlauer-berg-a-793619.html>

In 2007 the then family minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) introduced the *Elterngeld* (parental leave money), replacing the *Erziehungsgeld* or parenting allowance. The latter was primarily aimed at women and provided for a period of 36 months after the birth of the child; the assumption here being that the woman stays at home for three years after giving birth. *Elterngeld* on the other hand, is aimed at encouraging fathers to take part in child care and for mothers to return to work earlier. The period for which *Elterngeld* is provided is thus restricted to 12 months, with an additional two months provided, only if the other parent (usually the father) takes leave during this time. When availing *Elterngeld*, the parent may work but not more than 30 hours per week. 67% of net income but no more than Euros 1800 per month and no less than Euros 300 (for the low income or unemployed parent) are given to the parent as *Elterngeld*. Scholars have noted that since the introduction of *Elterngeld*, more fathers have been taking time off work to care for children, although majority still only stay at home for two months (Jurczyk and Klinkhardt 2014, Richter 2013). To encourage further participation of men, a 2014 reform to the *Elterngeld* aims to extend the allowance time period to 24 months, with compulsory four months for fathers (in this case the parent should not work more than 15 hours/week).

In a contrary move, the controversial *Betreuungsgeld* (caregiving money) was recently introduced. It refers to an amount paid to young parents (of children born on or after 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013) who keep their child out of public childcare institutions and provide care at home or in a private institution. The *Betreuungsgeld*, follows the *Elterngeld* i.e. the child must be between 15 to 36 months of age during which time a sum of 150 Euros per child, per month is paid. The Socialist Democratic Party (SPD) the

coalition partner of the current Christian Democratic Union (CDU) led government, views *Betreuungsgeld* critically and asserts that state investment in child care institutions can reach a wider cross section and also fulfill the goal of integration of immigrant children. *Betreuungsgeld*, they assert, is middle-class oriented and reinforces traditional gender roles. At 150 Euros per month per child this is a viable option for families where one member earns enough to support the household; usually this member is the male partner. Thus, in most cases the parent staying at home on *Betreuungsgeld* is the mother. The *Betreuungsgeld* will not overcome the challenge for most women of balancing home and career. This is reflected in increase in women's labor participation but in part time jobs. The percent of women employed part time increased from 56.6% to 75.9% in West Germany and from 32% to 50.3% in East Germany between 1996 and 2011. Spending on *Betreuungsgeld* instead of investing in child care institutions defeats the aim of gender equality in productive and reproductive roles forcing women (who continue to be paid less than men in Germany) to stay at home and fulfill child care responsibilities.

The *Betreuungsgeld* is also incompatible with yet another goal announced by the coalition government. Starting August 2013, all children between 0-3 years of age have a legal right to a place in a public day care. This too has been met with much skepticism; there are not enough child care institutions or personnel to provide 100% day-care coverage in Germany. These reforms abound with ideological and practical incompatibilities. Following the 7<sup>th</sup> *Familienbericht*, a commitment to investing in institutional child care should give women the opportunity to pursue their careers and also have children if they so desire. Also men should have a better chance through the introduction of *Elterngeld* and more flexible labor market organization, to opt for

parental leave. Government spending on *Betreuungsgeld* at the cost of investing in institutional care remains the crux of the conflict. These are some of the general trends that bring to bear larger goals around the organization of household and child care, the definition of family and gendered division of labor.

In an alternate move, in 2010 the “Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth,” rolled out a program to encourage more and more young men to train for and work in child care institutions or KITAs.<sup>26</sup> Instead of imagining men as providing ‘masculine’ role models, this program aims to expose children to more diverse, multiple, and variety of reference persons, thereby enriching the quality of environment in which children first learn to relate to a larger social group. Also this idea is guided by the principle of gender equality, i.e. equal opportunities for men to take on care taking roles and thereby discouraging the feminization of this profession. Over and above, fathers’ legal rights have expanded in the last few decades, challenging the assumed “naturalness” of the mother-child dyad.

Until 1998, children born in and out of wedlock had different legal status in Germany. Only after the 1998 reforms the rights and responsibilities of parents vis-à-vis their children—regardless of whether they were married to each other—have been recognized. While this reform affirmed the right of fathers and children to know each other and have contact with each other irrespective of parental marriage, the mother’s role was primary, especially if the status of the biological father was contested. Up until 2013, the father—if not the same man as married to the mother or legally recognized as such—did not have the right to contest paternity without the mother’s support (Peschel-



Gutzeit 2009, Pohl 2000). In May 2013, a revision in fathers' rights now enables men claiming paternity to appeal directly in family court for legal recognition. The mother's agreement is not required.<sup>27</sup>

In spite of continued reemphasis of the mother-child bond in family policy, these reforms provide men space to reimagine and enact multiple forms of engagement with their children.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, this reinvestment in the male family figure, has not led to revisions in the highly restrictive Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) law. Legal limitations expose moral economies of reproductive techno science. The "ideal German family"—the primary location of desire for children—continues to be the nuclear, heterosexual, marital unit, and men in general and infertile men in particular remain marginal to reproduction. These laws continue to reinforce the naturalness of motherhood and the uncertainty of fatherhood. Such contradictory ideologies of male reproductive role, highlight the German state's conflicted reconfiguration of gendered reproduction.

*Assisted Reproduction, Mothers and Fathers*

In a country where many men and women 'chose' not to have children (or delay childbearing into their 30s), most public discourse centers around state's investment in encouraging higher fertility, the general 'disinterest' (*Unlust*) in reproducing, and investigations into the economic, and socio-cultural aspects of this reproductive 'disavowal.' Demographic studies compare trends in East and West Germany, discuss labor shortage and immigration laws and geriatric economic vulnerability. There was little I heard or read about individuals or couples who want children but are unable to

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<sup>26</sup> See details on "Men in *KITAs*" in chapter four.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter four for more discussion.

<sup>28</sup> See chapter four.

biologically reproduce. State's role in supporting reproductive medicine and technology—as an additional means to achieving desired fertility—is secondary, in that it is discussed largely in medical circles in terms of the “highly restrictive” German Embryo Protection laws (*Embryonenschutzgesetz* 1990) that impede the doctor's scope of intervention and leave couples with little alternatives, especially when egg donation is required to achieve desired reproductive goals.<sup>29</sup> According to the Embryo Protection Law (EPL/*Embryonenschutzgesetz*), it is illegal to transfer embryos from one woman to another i.e. egg donation for the purpose of fertilization, implantation and carrying a baby to term, is not legal. Surrogacy is not legal in Germany.<sup>30</sup>

This means that the woman who bears a child is the mother of that child, irrespective of the genetic connection between woman and baby. Transfer of embryos from one woman to another is criminalized in Germany. When this law was put in place it was done with the purpose of protecting the potential egg donor. People argued that this could become a business and could also have health risks for the donor since repeated procedures would deplete her egg reserves. Also let's not forget the history of eugenics in Germany. I don't think the state wanted any role in the reproduction of “Aryan Kinder.” Sperm donation is legal, also because there is no invasive procedure involved, no hormonal stimulation, nothing that interferes with the donor's bodily processes. (Dr. Klaus, primary fertility specialist at an infertility clinic)

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<sup>29</sup> I am not debating here whether reproductive technologies promote ‘choice,’ reinforce biological relatedness or exploit women's bodies or do all simultaneously. What I want to highlight is how the legal framing of how reproduction can be ‘assisted,’ organizes kinship relations.

<sup>30</sup> Pre-implantation diagnosis (PID) is the testing of fertilized embryos (following an In Vitro Fertilization procedure) for genetic disorders before implanting them into the uterus. It has been a highly contested issue in German society and law. While it was criminalized at the time that the Embryo Protection Law was put in place (1990-91), over the last few years there have been certain modifications made, even though PID regulations continue to be extremely restrictive as compared to other European countries. Since 2011, PID is allowed in Germany only in certain clinics and under very specific conditions. In the event that either one or both potential parent could be genetically predisposed to cause risk of fatal disease or even death of the offspring, a test is carried out on the fertilized embryo before implantation. PID thus can be executed only when it is medically proven that the parent(s) has a genetic predisposition that might be a high risk to the baby. It cannot be done as a routine procedure to ensure ‘quality’ of implanted embryos. Some of my interlocutors opted for treatment outside Germany, primarily to “enhance chances of pregnancy because (there) PID is routine and we wanted to increase our chances of pregnancy and healthy live birth.”

Since 2004, for state insured couples, 50% of costs for three infertility treatment cycles are covered.<sup>31</sup> Additionally this coverage places specific restrictions on age of the couple seeking treatment (the woman and man must not be less than 25; the woman cannot be more than 39 years of age and the man not more than 49). Also the couple must be in a heterosexual, marital union and be HIV negative. Private insurance companies require significantly fewer pre conditions. Medical tourism is common when one cannot avail services that are illegal in Germany.

Taken together these laws and other restrictions reflect official ideas about the ideal “German” family, and parents’ relation to the offspring. Discourse about who or what is best suited for the positive development of the child, language of medical risk (age, invasive methods) and the history of the state managed reproduction (eugenics) also resonate and reinforce the process of crystallization of the ‘German family’ as one bound to the nuclear, heterosexual, marital unit.<sup>32</sup> The identity of the mother is central in its relation to the child. By making surrogacy and egg donation illegal, the gestational and social mother remain fused. The man who is married to the woman at the time of birth of the child, is recognized legally as the father of the child she bears (unless contested and proven otherwise). It is thus legal to separate social and genetic fatherhood, naturalizing the bond between women, their bodies and the children they bear.

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<sup>31</sup> Until 2004 the statutory health insurance paid 100% coverage of up to 4 IVF cycles. After the former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s massive welfare reform of 2003 that resulted in cuts in public spending, couples have to bear 50% of treatment costs.

<sup>32</sup> See von Wülfigen’s (2017) discussion on the particularly restrictive assisted reproduction technology laws in Germany. She explains how the specific German historical and cultural context—National Socialism, convergence of conservatism of Christian Democratic party and feminist arguments of the 1980s that deemed medical intervention as a form of exploitation of the woman by the male expert and a moral evaluation of surrogacy as commercialization of the female body—accounts for a highly cautious attitude towards reproductive technologies.

Often men diagnosed with infertility struggle to negotiate a contradictory terrain of assisted reproductive laws in Germany, the Euro-American primacy of genetic paternity, and subjective notions of achieving paternity. Sperm donation allows for male genetic material to be transposable and exchangeable, in that legally, sperm play an insignificant role in who the recognized father is. Irrespective of which body provides the sperm, as long as it is used for the purpose of achieving pregnancy legally, any other male body can substitute that of the legal father's. As against this, the gestational environment determines the legal and social mother, that is, motherhood is very much an embodied notion; the egg is inalienable according to the law. Paternity then is not as 'natural' as maternity. For men diagnosed with infertility, this lack enables certain fluidity to imagining and achieving paternity as social relatedness. Fragmentation of motherhood through in vitro fertilization techniques threatens the "inviolability of motherhood" (Melhuus 2012: 70) and the Embryo Protection Law criminalizes this attempt at separating biological, gestational and social motherhood; this reinforces the 'natural' mother-child bond, the uncertainty of paternity, yet provides men creative alternatives to achieving fatherhood.<sup>33</sup>

The family law master narrative thus illuminates various constructions of the mother, father, gendered parental roles and responsibilities, and reproductive moralities

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<sup>33</sup> See chapter five. It is also important to note that in 2015 German courts put the rights of the child to know her biological father above those of the right to privacy for the sperm donor. What this means is that children conceived using sperm donation can legally demand to know their genitor once they are 18 years of age. Such a reform underscores biogenetic relatedness between child and father. Whereas in European notions of parenthood, the father's identity is established through marriage to the woman who bears the child (the mother), biological proof of paternity (sperm donor cannot remain anonymous, the father's identity can be biologically determined through DNA testing) gains precedence. So could one argue that paternity is increasingly naturalized just like maternity? Also see Melhuus (2017) who makes an argument for the growing primacy of biogenetic paternity through a change in Norwegian reproductive technology laws that do not protect sperm donor anonymity in the interests of the child (who wants to know her sperm

in a culture of childlessness. What is ethnographically interesting is that these laws and reforms are geared towards creating a child-friendly atmosphere in Germany that includes “*development of positive social attitudes toward children and parenting.*” (Kohler, Billari, and Ortega 2006:100) On the one hand Berliners bemoaned “German child unfriendliness,” to describe a kind of mood, atmosphere or social space (*Stimmung*) that allows for public antagonism towards children. State intervention in reproduction is positioned to address this concern and create a *Lust* to having children i.e. make it not just practically possible, but also socially desirable to reproduce. On the other hand, many interlocutors also made explicit their aggression, for instance, towards the performance of entitled parenting (read mothering) in light of increasing presence of families with children in Berlin.

The “hypervisible” child indexes the heightened value of the child especially in her growing absence; yet this precious child is not experienced as perfect.<sup>34</sup> Children in Berlin arouse both anxious irritation and hope for a better Germany. This ambivalence is further fueled by the “...powerfully uncanny presence of the child, who is both uncomfortably strange and comfortably familiar. There is the fundamental indeterminacy of the child...The child itself, as well as the adult, does not know how it will “turn out.” (Borneman 2015:69) Such indeterminacy arouses envy as well as a performative intolerance towards the child, as we know from Beate’s evocative statements.<sup>35</sup>

I would argue that the emotional content of the legal and political interventions in reconstructing the ‘German family’ cannot be overemphasized. Increased attention to

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donor biological father).

<sup>34</sup> See chapters one, two and three.

family-friendly policies make the ‘absent’ child ‘hypervisible’ in a frenzy to create more *Lust* to reproduce. This hypervisibility is further animated specifically in Berlin, in the wake of post reunification spatial and demographic reconfigurations. Reproductive labor becomes an issue for Berliners precisely because of a palpable prominence of family gentrifiers in central neighborhoods of the city, enacting exclusionary and entitled parenting.

**Post-Wende Gentrification: Spatial and Social Reconfigurations in Berlin**

Gentrification has been defined in multiple ways. It is a process of transformation of a working class neighborhood—usually located in an inner city—to a middle-class one, primarily for residential or commercial purposes. Usually the change in class composition is accompanied by investment in real estate, increases in rent and value of property, and changes in businesses from manufacturing to service, the latter especially catering to the consumption needs of the new class of inner city residents.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See page four in Introduction.

<sup>36</sup> Referring to the definitions of gentrification as given in The Dictionary of Human Geography, Lees, Slater and Wyly (2010) point to its different elements. The 1994 definition described gentrification as a process of neighborhood regeneration, i.e. affluent incomers move into relatively run down homes in low income city areas that facilitates the investment of capital in housing renewal. The 2000 definition specifically highlights the reinvestment of capital in urban centers as the salient feature of gentrification. This means that capital investment spans across residential and commercial infrastructure, resulting in the increasing affluence of the residents and the displacement of poorer people. The 2009 edition recognizes the global nature of gentrification, affecting both big and small urban centers the world over. Thus, “...the process moves from being defined as a relatively insubstantial urban process affecting residential neighborhoods in 1994, to...include commercial redevelopment...that is part of the wider restructuring of urban geographical space in 2000, to the most recent 2009 definition...gentrification is now seen as a truly global urban process affecting big and small urban centers around the world.” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2010:4) Importantly, as Beauregard (2010 [1986]) points out, gentrification is a contingent process i.e. not only would it follow a different trajectory in different parts of cities, in different regions of the world, but would also hold different meanings for different parties: the “gentrifies”, those displaced, city boosters (those interested in increasing commercial value of space) and policy makers. This is an important aspect to attend to when referring to Berlin. For more on gentrification also see Becker-Cantarino 1996, Bernt, Grell, and Holm 2013, Häussermann, Holm, and Zunzer 2002, Lehmann and Surmann 2012, Maier 2011.

Most studies on gentrification and post-*Wende* developments in Berlin have focused on the frenzy of ‘catching up’ to global standards of urban development. The heightened enthusiasm about how Berlin—cordoned off from the rest of the world during the Cold War— could be developed led to some exaggerated speculation and investments, especially in East Berlin, where houses had been neglected and not renovated for almost the entire four decades of the division of Germany. Bernt, Grell and Holm (2013) show how gentrification in Berlin does not follow the pattern of other cities like New York, London, and Paris; it is in fact significantly different precisely because of its particular rent laws, geopolitics, and social characteristics. For one, we cannot ignore the unique position of Berlin as two socially and economically disparate states became one after reunification. Due to its special status during the Cold War, West Berlin was heavily subsidized. East Berlin’s socialist economy had crumbled long before reunification. In the last two decades Berlin has had to catch up with the rest of West Germany: “...the wealthiest and by now also most powerful country in the European Union has the relatively poorest capital.”(Bernt, Grell, and Holm 2013:16) Berlin is the only capital city in Europe that has a Gross Domestic Product less than the country’s national average and unemployment rates almost double the national average.

With specific reference to rising rents and gentrification, it is important to look at the drastic changes in housing and rent policies in the city after reunification that play a role in how urban development is advancing. Conditions peculiar to Berlin make the substance of gentrification different as compared to, say, the USA. For instance, in Berlin the comparatively lower ethnic segregation or income disparities at the national level combined with housing and rent laws have influenced the picture of urban development.

Traditionally urban planning always aimed on balancing socio-spatial disparities and applied large amounts of public money to prevent segregation. Also, zoning regulations and rent-laws did a great deal to level socio-spatial disparities. Social housing, as an example, was for a long time not predominantly directed on the urban poor, but on broad strata of the society. As a result, segregation in German cities is visibly smaller than in their American or British counterparts. (Bernt and Holm 2013:109)

Two major changes happened after reunification: privatization of state-owned housing stock<sup>37</sup> and sale of property en-bloc to large private investment firms making it improbable that individual renters bought their apartments. Once sold, property values increased drastically, making it harder for people with low to moderate income to continue living in the same neighborhoods. Previously, not only was most housing in Berlin state owned, renovation expenditure was tax-free. Thus owners could afford to spend on renovation without necessarily increasing rent.<sup>38</sup> While old rent contracts are protected against an indeterminate hiking, new renters are not protected by these rent policies.<sup>39</sup> Thus, most of the people who move into renovated apartments today are newcomers or new renters with a steady means of relatively high income. Until reunification and even as recently as a decade ago, housing in Berlin was not as prone to extreme market fluctuations as is common in other global cities.<sup>40</sup> But now,

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<sup>37</sup> “In 1991, after reunification, Berlin owned a total of 19 housing companies, and through them 28 percent of Berlin’s 1.72 million housing units (*Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung* 2002). Starting in 1995, Berlin’s government began to privatize the state-owned housing stock, reducing it to 15.8 percent by the end of 2008 (*Investitionsbank Berlin* 2010).” (see Uffer 2013:156)

<sup>38</sup> “These high indirect subsidies made refurbishing old housing extremely lucrative for investors with a large taxable income, especially if costs were high and rents low, since the “costs” of investment could be transformed into tax savings for the partners involved.” (Bernt and Holm 2013:113-114)

“...until 1996 the ratio between publically subsidized and privately financed refurbishment was about 2:1. Since then, public funding has been continuously reduced, and by 1999 the ratio had been reversed with only about a third of (extensive) refurbishment measures being supported by public subsidies, the rest being privately financed..., thanks to the large-scale public subsidies in the early 1990s, around a sixth of the entire housing stock was refurbished using direct public grants.” (Bernt and Holm 2013:113)

<sup>39</sup> Rent subjected to strict legal control and can be increased only gradually over a specific time period.

<sup>40</sup> This was mostly on account of rent regulation and public ownership of housing stock, tax exemptions for refurbishment and other government subsidies.



...since the turn of the millennium, subsidies for building and renovations provided by the city have been completely cut. Additionally, a serious decrease in construction of new properties, combined with a rising number of households, led to massive pressure on the housing market. With regard to the budgetary crisis of the city, more than 220,000 public housing units (or half of the public stock) were privatized, and the stock of social housing was reduced from 370,000 units in 1993 to less than 150,000 in 2012. At the same time, existing rent regulations and planning restrictions on new construction were lifted, and a broad array of planning procedures deregulated. (Holm 2013:172-173)

These phenomena—shifts in rent laws, stock ownership, renovation—have

significantly transformed the demographic composition in Berlin, especially palpable over the last decade. Berlin, previously a safe haven for students, leftists, house squatters, or West Germans escaping compulsory military service, is more attractive for many well earning professionals and/or families. I argue that this particular history of Berlin is central to the *emotional experience* of gentrification in specific neighborhoods and the ensuing displacement or exclusion of certain groups of Berliners. I examine the special case of Prenzlauer Berg, a former East Berlin neighborhood, where drastic changes in resident composition produce ‘hypervisible’ discourse on, and ‘conspicuous’ practices of reproduction. Thus—materially, socially and culturally—gentrification in Berlin comes with its local characteristics that color the experience of decreasing *Raum* (space) and increasingly elusive *Ruhe* (peace and quiet). Ironically, the absence of the Wall, while opening borders and encouraging mobility, also engenders an experience of disturbance (*Störung*) in the form of physical and social encroachment. This *Störung* is variously identified with different objects and social groups—children’s strollers, children, mothers, and child-friendly spaces—associated with family gentrification and ‘child-friendliness’ that render the experience of Berlin’s urban space exclusionary for many residents.

#### “Family Gentrifiers” and the Special Case of Prenzlauer Berg

While decline of the manufacturing sector and suburbanization have been the primary factors determining the household composition of inner city gentrifiers, in many of the global cities, there has been a counter movement of families with children into city centers in the recent years. Family gentrifiers “... combine the next step in their life cycle—having children—with continuing their career and their preference for an urban lifestyle.” (Karsten 2003:2573) Studies on family gentrification in European cities emphasize the need to engage with family gentrifiers and understand their use of neighborhood spaces, and their concerns and preferences so as to effect better urban planning. These studies highlight alternate forms of gendered labor enabled through parental leave policies; importantly scholars have shown how this reverse trend reduces social isolation otherwise experienced by suburban stay at home mothers (Bernt and Holm 2005, Kährik et al. 2016, Karsten 2003, Lilius 2015).

For instance, Lilius writes,

...,in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Nordic cities were introduced to the phenomenon of ‘latteparents’, referring to parents sitting in cafes with strollers drinking gourmet coffee.... ‘lattemum’ represents a modern mother who *takes her place, with her baby, her stroller and her friends on family leave*... ‘lattedad’, ..., is a father who *has a sense of style, sits in trendy cafes, strolls around with ‘status strollers’, owns design children’s ware, is on family leave for a long time and sees being a parent as a positive lifestyle choice.* (Lilius 2015:2)

The motivations of family gentrifiers and their life style choices in Finland, speaks to a similar theme in Berlin; yet it is only one side of the story. In this ethnography, I present the other side: an experience of family gentrification from the point of view of the *Wende* generation, specifically men and women who are excluded

from their former neighborhoods i.e. economically or emotionally displaced.<sup>41</sup> I look at the special case of Prenzlauer Berg—a former East Berlin working class neighborhood, transformed post reunification through capital investments, infrastructural renovations and family gentrification—to discuss exclusion and belonging through emic categories such as “stroller-mafia” (*Kinderwagenmafia*), “mothers from Mitte” (*Mitte Muttis*), “child-craziness” (*Kinderwahn*), and “Schwaben mothers” (*Schwäbische Mütter*), amongst others.<sup>42</sup>

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, household composition in Prenzlauer Berg changed drastically; previously a working class neighborhood, ethnically mixed and inhabited by singles, students, unemployed men and women, today Prenzlauer Berg is ethnically homogenous, composed of middle to high income families with children. More than half the residents are between the ages of 25-45 years. Detailed breakdown of numbers reveals that in the first half of the 1990s, the majority of the neighborhood population was single and between 25-35 years (Bernt and Holm 2013). Since 1997, the proportion of 30-40 year olds has been steadily increasing and has reached an all time high. “Eighty-five percent of new inhabitants are aged between 18 and 45. Older children

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<sup>41</sup> During the course of writing, I gave birth to a baby girl. Living the last two years in near complete social isolation—with the shifting of the parameters of time, routine, structure, priority, responsibility, access and proximity to a support network, — I would rather join the *Kinderwagenmafia*, than suffer continued isolation. I thus have a more sympathetic perspective on family gentrification than when I was doing field work. However, the stories in the dissertation present a different perspective (from mine or from the one cited in literature above). This is the perspective of those who encounter children, mothers, and discourses on demographic crisis even as they make space for the creation of a “child-friendly” Berlin. Often conflictual, this relationship between differently marked groups bring to fore the inconsistency of the categories of insider/outsider. For instance, identifying as (East/West) Berliner first (and not as German) is at once an assertion of one’s belonging to the city as also a manifestation of an experience of loss (of the city as home) for some (see chapters one and two); for others it is an attempt at legitimizing their reproductive ‘choices,’ (see chapter three) and for some fathers especially, belonging to Berlin allows them to use the child-friendly spaces appropriately to be ‘active’ (read good) fathers (see chapter four).

<sup>42</sup> I will be discussing the “Schwaben” (mothers) in detail in the following pages and especially in chapter two.

as well as seniors are practically non-existent in this group.” (Bernt and Holm 2013:117).<sup>43</sup>

Along with these changes, in the last decade yet another phenomenon has come to prominence in public debate in Berlin: Prenzlauer Berg, its children and families. Between 2005-2010, there was a 30% increase in number of births in Prenzlauer Berg, however the fertility rate of the neighborhood is still comparable with Berlin’s average. The Berlin Institute for Population and Development noted in 2004 that for every 1000 women, 35 children are born in Prenzlauer Berg, which is less than the Berlin average of 39, and the fertility rate of Cloppenburg in Lower Saxony, which is 48 children per 1000 women.<sup>44</sup> In 2008, in Prenzlauer Berg for every 1000 women 44 children were born; at that time the German average was 43 and Berlin average 42. It is, in fact, the high concentration of families in childbearing age group that explains the overwhelming presence of children in Prenzlauer Berg and not exceptionally high fertility rates.<sup>45</sup> Not only have some of the West German students who first squatted in the run down houses in Prenzlauer Berg, started families, but increasingly young, upwardly mobile, families with children, are moving into Berlin (see Becker-Cantarino 1996, Bernt, Grell, and Holm 2013, Holm 2013).

A lot of families who move to Prenzlauer Berg are identified as ethnically Swabian and geographically belonging to South West Germany.<sup>46</sup> They come to Berlin

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<sup>43</sup> Hardly 25% of the original residents live in the renovated apartments in Prenzlauer Berg (Holm 2013). Also see <http://www.zeit.de/2007/46/D18-PrenzlauerBerg-46>

<sup>44</sup> Newsletter Berlin Institut für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2004

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/angeblicher-babyboom-die-kinder-luege-vom-prenzlauer-berg-a-793619.html>

<sup>46</sup> See “Berlin’s Unstable Borders: The Choice of Field site” in Introduction for discussion on Swabian families.

because it is “cool”; they find well paying jobs mostly in advertising, media and event management. A lot of these individuals buy property in Berlin having inherited from grandparents who reaped the benefits of the economic miracle in Germany after the end of the Second World War.<sup>47</sup> Also Berlin has traditionally provided and continues to provide multiple options for child care; a lot of these services are available full day, enabling women—often the primary caregivers—to work full time. South West Germany (here referring to the states Bayern and Baden-Württemberg) has comparatively fewer child care options and not many full day child care services; these politically conservative West German states have supported family policy that reinforce traditional division of labor. Berlin provides alternatives to parents—both in terms of employment, lower cost of living, and better child care options—encouraging movement of family gentrifiers. These changes in demographic composition in Prenzlauer Berg have implications for economic and social displacement of various individuals and groups.

Other than economic and physical displacement, — which is largely at the individual level or affects low income groups—I argue that some Berliners experience what Peter Marcuse (1986 as cited in Brent and Holm 2009) calls exclusionary displacement and displacement pressure. The former refers to voluntary moving out of a particular type of housing unit, after which the neighborhood is increasingly gentrified and replaced by new forms of housing units. The latter refers to changes in the character of the neighborhood, which makes a place less livable, primarily because of loss of previously available resources, services, leisure options, and social networks. While

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<sup>47</sup> Buying apartments in Berlin is a recent phenomenon, triggered by the access to the city after the collapse of the East Block. Till the early 1990s the majority of people in Berlin rented their living spaces.

acknowledging the economic dimension of displacement in Berlin, I argue that my ethnographic data makes visible the exclusionary displacement pressure of family gentrification: household units comprising children displace singles, older folks, and the childless. These changes in demographic composition make social coexistence of heterogeneous households tedious and hostile.

The ‘hypervisible’ family in Prenzlauer Berg, continued gentrification in the city, national and local demographic discourse, and heightened political interests in creating a ‘child-friendly’ Germany, ironically structure reproduction as a form of social exclusion for some, and a means of belonging for others: I analyze in the following chapters, these inclusions/exclusions through the intimate, life constructions of my interlocutors: variously identifying as mothers, fathers, childless women, Berliners and East or West Germans. I argue that the category of the outsider—whether the childless woman who is marked as disinterested in reproduction, or the mother who experiences aggression in public places in Berlin, or men and women who must tolerate children—is an unstable one, continually shifting across generational, residential, and reproductive identifications. This instability is dramatized across different borders—physical and psychological—in Berlin.

### **Berlin’s Unstable Borders: The Choice of the Field site.**

Berlin proved to be an ideal field site for research on childlessness and reproduction. The post war division of Berlin, exemplified by a physical obstruction—the Berlin Wall— gave a certain character to the city, with each of the sides locked in a constant struggle to create distinct identities for the duration of the Cold War (see Borneman 1992, 1991). With the fall of the Wall, East and West spaces and sensibilities

have begun to co-exist. While some boundaries fade away, others emerge. In a changed city, old time Berliners claim ownership of places and spaces that new comers to the city encroach on. Interestingly, the changing demographic of Berlin creates further divisions between social categories such as Schwaben families with children and “Others.” It is through this unique history of Berlin as representative of larger divisions that I show how reproduction serves as a form of exclusion-inclusion in different sites and through multiple life stories.

Although borders are far more than, and often *not* physical demarcations, the presence of the Wall, a visible, physical border in Berlin, heightened differences between the East and West. Reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall brought down the physical and political divisions between West and East Berlin (and Germany), yet the symbolic or metaphorical borders constructed through everyday practices and discourses remained long standing. So even as physical borders between the two Germanys eroded, cultural borders were maintained and often invented, as the attempt to assimilate and integrate continued (see Berdahl 2010). The paradox of a border area like Berlin is that it is a space where distinctions and identities are particularly well articulated and at the same time fluid and ambiguous (see Berdahl 1999, Borneman 1992, 1991).

However, how does Berlin, 25 years after the fall of the Wall become integral to the discussion of borders? Why are neighborhoods like Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg central to the chapters that follow? How are these places constructed and described as child-friendly or unfriendly, and particularly, how are new boundaries and divisions between social groups imagined and articulated? In chapter one I discuss briefly how neighborhoods like Prenzlauer Berg while central located through the 1920s up until the

Second World War, transformed into a neglected, border area of East Berlin during the division of Germany. After reunification, this neighborhood is once again centrally located in the city. Such relocations—from geographically central to peripheral to central again—have influenced the investment of capital, the demographic, and the atmosphere (*Stimmung*) of these neighborhoods. Precisely these changes in the material, social, and cultural landscape of Berlin have facilitated the emergence of newer divisions and borders: to take but one example, the articulated differences between Schwaben from South-West Germany and “real Berliners” are visible in public discourse and in the experience and use of space.

Swabia or Schwaben was a medieval duchy in the area that is now southwestern Germany. People from Swabia referred to as Schwaben today largely hail from the state of Baden Württemberg and parts of Bavaria. There are approximately 300,000 Schwaben in Berlin according to a 2013 Spiegel article reporting on the *Schwabenhass* (hatred towards Schwaben) in the city, primarily attributed to gentrification in neighborhoods like Prenzlauer Berg.<sup>48</sup> The Swabian identity comes to stand in for all and every West German or European immigrant to Berlin who might be seen as responsible for displacement of former East Berlin residents out of this neighborhood. During field work in the summer of 2013 a *Spätzle* controversy erupted in Prenzlauer Berg accompanied by anti-Schwaben slogans scribbled on walls of stores and buildings, urging ‘non Berliners’ to go back home. The Swabian population responded by throwing Spätzle (a typical south west German dish) on a bust of the artist Käthe Kollwitz erected in a locality in

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/spaetzlekrieg-in-berlin-empoeerung-ueber-anti-schwaben-schmiererei-a-898123.html>



Prenzlauer Berg. “Schwabylon” is a pro-Swabian website where one can catch up on news, controversies, and personal stories about experiences of Schwaben in Berlin.<sup>49</sup>

As an ethnically identified group, Swabians take pride in being different (and better) from people living in Berlin. Cleanliness, hard work, thrift, management of resources, family owned businesses, traditional family structures, and wealth are some of the characteristics often associated with people from Swabia. These were set up in contradistinction to characteristics of a “typical Berliner” by many interlocutors. For several young Swabians who left their homes in the 1970s-1980s and moved to Berlin, the motivation to get away from precisely these “petty, middle class” ways of life and enjoy alternate and more flexible sociality in Berlin was strong. Most Berliners—whether long term residents or those who moved to Berlin before reunification—say that today Berlin, especially Prenzlauer Berg and neighboring areas feel more and more like Swabia! The cultural rift between the two groups is further dramatized by the difference in economic and social status set up in a relationship of hierarchy through the German federal financial transfer system. Starting in the 1950s this system aims to secure a certain standard of living for all its citizens irrespective of the performance of individual states. The three wealthiest states in Germany—Hessen, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg—transfer money to the remaining 13; Berlin is the largest recipient of these funds.

Taken together these historical conflicts are heightened and confronted on an on going basis with growing encounters between Berliners and Schwaben. While centrally

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<sup>49</sup> For instance the website reported that in June 2016 a café in Prenzlauer Berg, put up a notice prohibiting public breastfeeding, against which a counter petition has been issued by residents. In another interview

located neighborhoods of Berlin today are witnessing family gentrification, in general the woman with the stroller or child, or any white middle class family with children, stands to be identified as Schwaben. At first blush, child unfriendliness in Berlin may be directly connected to middle class Schwaben who are the controversial drivers of gentrification. Yet, the hypervisibility of the child in Berlin and the ambivalence surrounding this figure is fueled by multiple factors such as cultural nostalgia, i.e. loss of Berlin's 'original' atmosphere, individual and generational reproductive histories, and the political will to create *Lust auf Kinder* (desire to reproduce). These conflicts are reflected in an aggressive competition between adults and children, mothers and childless women, or mothers and fathers, and proved to be a germane context for enquiring about children, parenting, reproduction and fatherhood.

As the city undergoes changes, neighborhoods are identified with different characteristics, such that these become ways of identifying with, or distancing oneself from different places and therefore social groups. In this dissertation I focus on how centrally located Prenzlauer Berg (amongst others) comes to be identified as an island of children (*Kinderinsel*), as a place where the stroller-mafia (*Kinderwagenmafia*) roams the streets, as a place that has robbed Berlin of its 'original charm.' These idioms are connected to specific practices of reproduction and parenting, often described as traditional, conservative and over indulgent, i.e. people, read Schwaben, living in heterosexual unions move to Berlin to have children. The man is the primary bread winner; mothers stay at home and perform their roles conspicuously and the child is a mini-adult who can make independent decisions. On the other hand—I heard such

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from 2016 a 'typical' Swabian speaks about the culture shock he experienced after he moved to Berlin.

comments often, although I don't analyze these in the dissertation—places like Wedding, a West Berlin largely working class, immigrant neighborhood is associated with Turkish mothers who are strict disciplinarians not hesitating to spank their children if necessary. Neukölln another West Berlin predominantly Turkish neighborhood is associated with mothers who let their children grow wild like a wild flower (*wie eine wilde Blume*). I argue that none of these characteristics describe the people or places mentioned in totality; often animated discussions blur distinctions between reality and imagination and reinforce such stereotypical renderings. *Schwabe* then becomes a classificatory or an aggregate category through which antagonisms between social groups are expressed.

Writing about the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, Ghassem-Fachandi (2012) discusses how the materiality of the city of Ahmedabad i.e. its physical structures like bridges, police posts, interstitial spaces or border areas are potentially those spaces that highlight the difference between communities while collapsing heterogeneity between groups. There is little distinction made in these spaces between Muslim individuals; they all appear to belong to the category “Muslim” described variously as dangerous, meat-eating, impure, or disgusting. Thus, “In the spatial grammar of the city, the border area inclusive of a police post defines that space which carries the potential to reduce human encounter to that between communities, irrespective of demographic particularities.” (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012:233) Following this, I argue that there are certain physical spaces in the city, which prioritize or stress real or imagined differences between categorical groups. Built environment in turn influences use of that space just as the construction of a material environment represents social divisions (see Bourdieu 2003, Durkheim and Mauss 2009 [1903], Kuper 1972, Lawrence and Low 1990, Low

1996, Pellow 2003). Thus physical structures such as signs that keep strollers out of children's cafes; embodied and sensual experiences, for instance walk through the city, noticing absence of a favorite pub; and the externalization of these antagonisms through "child-friendly" or "unfriendly" gestures or comments create new divisions and reinforce existing ones. Inclusion or exclusion in space here dramatized through reproduction is produced and produces material and social divisions. While in the early years after reunification identity struggles emphasized the differences between *Ossis* (East Germans) and *Wessis* (West Germans), 25 years after the fall of the Wall, other effects of reunification now color the experience of Berliners. Changes in demography and the *Stimmung* of localities brings to bear encounters between social categories previously not representing cultural divisions. As I will show "meaning is not inherent in boundaries but is invested in them through cultural practices" (Berdahl 1999:155) and the boundaries in Berlin continue to be redrawn.<sup>50</sup>

## Chapter Overview

### *Life Constructions of Reproductive Inclusions and Exclusions*

**Chapter One** entitled *Raum and Ruhe: Creating 'Child-Friendly' Spaces in 'Child-Unfriendly' Berlin* examines multiple experiences of loss for former residents of East Berlin. These are men and women of the *Wende* generation who have been negatively affected by post reunification changes in their political, social, and material environments. They narrate their own, as well as sometimes their parent's experience of the *Wende*, and the disorientations that this upheaval brought, including reorganization of livelihood, social identity, and notions of parent-child relationships. Even as the

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<sup>50</sup> Already these borders have been redrawn multiple times now since the influx of more than a million

landscape of some neighborhoods in Berlin changes rapidly to accommodate more children and push out adults, children are kept out of certain other spaces. As the child gains in value, she often disturbs. Attempts at physically separating this source of disturbance (keep children out) as well as creating exclusive children's spaces (keep adults out) in fact makes children more visible: they continue to encroach public consciousness. I discuss how children encroach not just adult spaces but "Berlin's spaces," i.e. spaces that are marked as being "essentially Berlin," or "true Berlin" or after reunification are "no longer like Berlin;"<sup>51</sup> this speaks to the experience of the loss of a certain atmosphere, sociality and space in the city (*Stimmung*). The first chapter discusses the emplacement of the child—literally and figuratively—and analyzes how reproduction organizes material space and inter-generational relations in Berlin.

**Chapter Two** entitled "*Kinderwagenmafia*" and the Tyranny of the Stroller: Anxieties Around Conspicuous Reproduction in Reunified Berlin interprets the native category *Kinderwagenmafia*, which describes a form of child unfriendliness directed against Swabian mothers. These mothers publicly perform motherhood in an entitled and 'hypervisible' manner moving through Berlin's public spaces with their children in tow.

Political attention to child-friendliness combined with family gentrification is dramatized in Berlin through the conspicuous presence of children in city spaces.

*Kinderwagenmafia* thus indexes anxieties related to the performance of motherhood that

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refuges into Germany starting 2015.

<sup>51</sup> This was described in the following ways: *echtes Berlin* (the real or true Berlin) or *Berlin wie früher* (original Berlin) or as *nicht mehr Berlin* (no longer Berlin), when referring to changes in the city.

transposes reproductive practices from the “private” to the “public” realm.<sup>52</sup> I argue that a political climate that encourages German reproduction tinges procreation with a flavor of social and moral responsibility. Hence this public performance is also a form of defensive aggression on part of mothers against the ‘child-unfriendly’ social milieu in Berlin that is often emphatically permissive in the display of irritation and aversion towards children. Mutual aggression further creates and sustains divisions and distinctions between social groups such as ‘Schwabens’ and ‘Berliner’ and manifest in curious hostility towards inanimate objects such as strollers.

Continuing with the theme of hypervisibility of reproduction and confrontation between ‘Swabian mothers’ and ‘Berliners,’ **Chapter three** entitled *Ich bin das Objekt deiner Forschung*:<sup>53</sup> Generational memory, gender, and place in confronting ‘voluntary’ childlessness examines the experience of living without children for women. I use the life histories of West German women in Berlin who came of age at the time of *Wende* to illustrate a generation’s relation to reproduction, as the spatial, material, demographic and social landscape in Berlin is transformed.

Here, I show how the experience of childlessness is intimately tied to memories of family life, youth, and experiences of reunification. Thus what is relevant to understanding childlessness is how interlocutors reflect on the past, given Berlin’s gentrification, demographic changes, their own changing ideas on reproduction, and confrontation with the public display of the German family in the city. I argue that the

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<sup>52</sup> I discuss the feminist critique of the distinctions between “private” and “public” in chapter two. I emphasize that while theoretically we have achieved a certain sophistication in understanding how these two realms overlap, intersect and influence agency of subjects, I operationalize these distinctions to interpret local articulations of anxieties associated with the hypervisibility of reproduction.

experience of loss of a ‘safe space’ that the Wall and divided Berlin provided, sustained the *Wende* generation’s ideas of gender relations, passage of time and life course choices, which are delegitimized in the contemporary climate. This chapter highlights how practices of reproduction embedded in city spaces and colored through personal and collective histories, mark a generation of women as producing Germany’s *Unlust* towards children.

**Chapter Four** entitled *Aktive Vaterschaft*<sup>54</sup> and the Demographic Crisis:

Production and Expression of a new German Masculinity discusses the emergence of new elements in German masculinity in light of the politicized concern with the nation’s low fertility and ensuing demographic ‘crisis.’ Specifically looking at men of the *Wende* generation, personal experiences with their fathers, and the dominant discourse on German fatherhood, I provide ethnographic evidence of a shift in orientation in relation to the category of “father” in Berlin.

I argue that this reinstatement of the father in a revised, more positive form is part of the larger project of (re) building a ‘child-friendly society’ and alludes to the nation’s fears related to the demographic crisis. Today at the confluence of specific transformations in Germany—passage of time and an emotional distance from the Nazi legacy, Germany’s largely positive global image as an economically powerful and culturally vibrant nation, persistent low fertility, and a more vocal political interest and intervention in the previously ‘private’ family domain— fertile ground for the creation of responsible fathers is in sight. My ethnographic data records these ongoing changes in

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<sup>53</sup> Translated as: I am the object of your research.

<sup>54</sup> Translated as: Active Fatherhood.

practices and discourses around *aktive Vaterschaft* in Berlin that interestingly provide men with more room to relate in multiple and varying ways to their children.

In continuation with the theme on being and becoming fathers, **Chapter Five**, entitled Invisible Sperm, Visible Men: Male Infertility and Achieving Paternity through Couvade draws on data from extended interviews, conversations and observations at and outside an infertility clinic in Berlin, Germany. I discuss how the medical diagnosis of male infertility curiously opens a possible route for men to seek visibility in matters of reproduction and express their wish to become fathers. Being named the *Verursacher* (cause) of infertility is also a moment of recognition, of not just the sperm's diminished role in fertilization, but also men's experience of reproductive marginality and their desire to start a family. Male infertility diagnosis thus enables the achievement of paternity through alternate relationality.

This chapter illustrates how paternity is a social achievement, a process of kinning (Howell 2006) constituted over time, and in multiple ways that do not emphasize genetic relatedness, rather involve diverse investments of physical, sexual, emotional and imaginative labor. I analyze this process of kinning examining how paternity is produced. I show this specifically drawing on the concept of couvade. Couvade refers to ritual behavior undertaken by the expectant father around the birth of a child, that mimics for instance the mother's pre and/or post partum behavior, diet and mobility restrictions. I argue that my male interlocutors exhibited these 'couvade' practices symbolizing their wish to be salient to reproduction and assert their (potential) paternity.



***Organization of Chapters: Reproduction, Belonging, and Exclusion***

The chapters in this dissertation are organized thematically in two separate and related sections. In the first section, I focus on how the (shifting) place of the child in Berlin relates to experiences of inclusion and exclusion for different social groups at different points in time and in multiple places. Thus, chapters one to three discuss the emplacement and appearance of children, mothers and childless women for instance, in legal debates, material sites and social, emotional and acoustic spaces. As the value of the child increases and her presence in public is dramatized, life without a child is delegitimized through various forms of exclusion. On the other hand, those with children must negotiate a backlash and confront ‘child-unfriendly’ Berliners, and discourses on badly brought up children (*verzogene Kinder*) and entitled parenting. Demographic anxieties, national agendas, and personal memories and biographies organize biological and cultural reproduction, produce moral discourses on parenting and expose gender ideologies that organize the *Wende* generation’s possibilities for belonging.

Chapters four and five discuss the micro contexts in which men engage in different forms of labor to achieve paternity. I argue that these micro practices are closely related to the larger context of low fertility in Germany, the potential role of the father (in family policy) in creating interest in reproducing, and the resignification of the German man: from one who was absent or made irrelevant to the child’s identity, to one who is conspicuous, not just in political debates, but also on the streets and in homes caring for and raising children. While the father-child dyad increasingly takes on a positive form characterized by an engaged and active father who the child needs as well as has a right to, the figure of the father continues to encounter old and new forms of negative male representations. These reinforce for instance, male inability to care for offspring or

diminished male significance in biological (especially with advancement in reproductive technologies) and cultural reproduction (primarily the mother continues to play this role) and/ or male threat towards the child in the form of abuse and/or violence. (see for instance Borneman 2015, Ferguson 1995, Hearn et al. 2002, Hearn and Pringle 2006) The labor of paternity involves multiple resignifications that counter these diminished representations. This is so not only in the lives of fathers directly engaging with the care of their children or attempting to establish continuous contact in case of separation from children (chapter four); most definitely this labor involved the attempts at being salient to reproduction in the context of infertility treatments and male biological infertility. The desire to be a father, the quest for conception, the owning of infertility diagnosis, and the different forms of male participation in conceiving a child all constitute the labor of paternity.

There is an implicit connection between these two chapters that I want to draw attention to. This relates to how men who confront infertility, experience the image of, and the real life “active” father. Writing about men’s experiences of infertility in a Danish infertility clinic, Tjornhoj-Thomsen (2009) discusses the differences in how men and women talk about and experience childlessness day to day. While on the one hand, infertility is described as a constant burden for women—a reminder of their incompleteness—men can lose themselves in their work. My data presents similar gendered accounts. Female interlocutors in the infertility clinic where I conducted interviews, spoke very openly about the daily and intensive pain of being in treatment and yearning for a child. They also reported that their male partners could compartmentalize and lose themselves in work or in other physical activities. Often men

taking infertility treatments said to me that going for a run was a great way to forget the pain of infertility temporarily. Yet, interestingly, I also heard voices that echoed sentiments similar to those of female partners; infertile or childless men told me of the “pain in the chest,” “jealousy” and “longing” that they experienced when they saw other fathers with their children on Berlin’s streets. *Aktive Vaterschaft* is becoming more visible and I speculate that the public appearance of the active father, excludes men without children “These striking representations of young fathers with their children, and their fellowship with other fathers, suggest other dimensions of manhood..., in which infertile and childless men could not immediately partake.” (Tjornhoj-Thomsen 2009: 237-238) . Given the enthusiasm towards the ‘new father’ and increased access for men to “communities based on the exchange of procreative experiences” (Tjornhoj-Thomsen 2009:237), those who cannot participate in these new masculine practices, experience infertility as social exclusion.

Taken together these chapters integrate shifting discourses and practices of reproduction that socially, legally, and structurally regulate, moralize, include and exclude individual and generational life courses and ‘choices’ concerning the bearing and rearing of children. The ‘hypervisible’ child disturbs and encroaches, the “Swabian mother” whose ‘conspicuous’ performance excludes, is simultaneously deemed ‘obsessive,’ childless women confront a delegitimization of their ‘choices,’ and are marked as producing a culture of childlessness, and the German man—both as father and the infertile partner—experience their marginality, even as they legitimize their partnership in biological and cultural reproduction. It is precisely at the site of ‘disrupted’ reproduction (here infertility or childlessness) that alternate kinship is possible: with

friends, with non-biological children, and through practices of care. Recording these transformations in the short period between the late 1980s and 25 years after the reunification of Berlin, I show how regimes of reproduction, both reinforce older, and create new social divisions. Thus, ‘good,’ or ‘irrational’ reproductive subjects, ‘insiders,’ i.e. those representing Germanness, and ‘outsiders’ or those producing a culture of childlessness, remain unstable social categories.

## **Contributions**

### ***The Child in my Field site***

If the child is a symbol of the future, what becomes of her in a country where consistent low fertility charges the question of reproduction—biological, national, and cultural—with anxiety? In the current German regime of reproduction, what encourages the keeping out of children from certain spaces and the encroachment of ‘adult’ spaces by children? How are children excluded, either through gestures and body language, legal complaints against children’s noise or by creating formal and physical obstructions in front of cafes to prevent entry of strollers? On the other hand, amidst debates on the impending end of ethnic Germans, legally, politically, socially, and materially, children occupy more room, making their presence “obnoxious” and “unbearable” for many. Continually confronted with complex and contradictory responses to the child, children, and childhood in contemporary Berlin, I observed, asked questions about, and took part in a variety of adult-child interactions that could variously be labeled as friendly, indifferent, involved, or un-friendly.

Drawing upon anthropological scholarship on childhood as a cultural construct and children as “polyvalent symbols” (Huberman 2012:3) this dissertation brings to light the range of positive and/or negative emotions, both hopes and anxieties that children

aroused in my interlocutors. For the German state, its continuation, provision of labor force and the care of its elderly depends on the continued and even enhanced desire for men and women in Germany to have children. The demographic ‘crisis’ is a moment in the history of the German nation to redefine its role in encouraging reproduction as well as in integrating foreign labor, both productive and reproductive. For interlocutors of the *Wende* generation children come to represent encroachment on their physical space, expose ideologies of family and kinship, and also arouse a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to do something different or better than their parent’s generation. My ethnography shows how child-unfriendliness/friendliness is the product of a generation-specific understanding of life course and the relation between productive and reproductive labor in post-reunification Berlin. It signals what the child has come to represent: both in her immediacy as she is encountered on the streets of Berlin, and now in relation to immigration and the current European migration crisis. The mother-child dyad conjures up personal and national anxieties and hopes about reproductive choices, cultural reproduction, integration of outsiders, and the future of Germany. To some, the figure of the child signifies the history of racial homogenization; to others it suggests an almost mystical vitality attributed to youth and a coherent future. Germany’s vanguard position in debates on immigration and multiculturalism in Europe today dramatizes the ambivalent personal desires for children and the conflicting national attempts to create a ‘pure’ but also open and multi-ethnic Germany, one that has departed from its past once and for all. The child then stands at the center of responses to Berliner’s experiences of reunification, loss, and shifting reproductive moralities, in the context of the low fertility crisis, and the recent refugee and immigration crisis in Germany. Through the lens of the

child as construct, my scholarship connects generational and gendered reproduction and childlessness to anxieties and aspirations about kinship and belonging, and contributes to our understanding of how reproduction ideologies exclude and include in the process of constructing a multicultural Germany.

When speaking of the child, I refer to the pre-school child, encountered in the streets and public places in Berlin, accompanied by some adult (parents or day care personnel). The presence of the child in these encounters brings to fore multiple emotional and ideological investments in the figure of the child. These investments are (further) animated by individual and collective past and contemporary experiences of family and social life, discourses and practices surrounding Germany's demographic crisis and the "sacralization" of children (Zelizer 1981:11), especially the changing value of the "European" child. The child under six has a special quality to her appearance. She is likely to be imagined more easily as innocent, vulnerable and also serves to stimulate thought and discussion on desire to have or not have children. Infants are closer (in age and appearance) to the reality of pregnancy and birth and tended to stir amongst my interlocutors, reflections on what the child represents for them, for Germany, how she appears to them in private and public contexts, what concerns German politicians today to combat low fertility, whether or not immigration is a solution to the 'disappearing' German nation, and how child-friendly or unfriendly their society is. I recorded these perspectives and observed how adults encountered the child—rather the multiple imaginations and forms of the child—in city spaces, through identifications with personal desires, social expectations and conceptions of reproductive and productive labor.

The child then is not a single object but appears in different forms and is thick with multiple material and emotional investments. Thus, the figure of the child, coupled with everyday encounters with children serve as a fundamental axis along which to understand local and national aspirations and anxieties around reproduction in Germany. ‘German child-unfriendliness’ represents “...a cluster of discourses and practices surrounding...” (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998: 2) reproductive desire, generational identity, and morality and politics of exclusion and belonging. I argue that the child stands for something specific within individual biographies, and animates collective histories and memories of childhood, of youth in the divided and reunified city, of loss and exclusion as well as celebration and inclusion. “German child-friendliness” or “unfriendliness” is then an experience of an intimacy with what the child stands for at a moment in time in reunified Berlin.

### ***The Child as Cultural Construct***

Since the publication of Aries’ (Aries 1962) account of the historical development of the concept of childhood, several scholars have advanced our understanding about childhood as a socio-cultural construct both through an account of changing definitions of childhood and its relation to larger social worlds, as well as by recording direct experiences of children living in diverse environments (Allerton 2016, Frones 1994, Froerer 2009, Holloway and Valentine 2000, James and James 2001, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, Näsman 1994, Valentine 1996b, Zeiher 1983). Aries showed how children in the Middle Ages were thought to be miniature adults. Over time, and through changes in productive labor, family forms, educational and legal influences on defining rights of children, children were seen as a separate class of people. Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, historians have argued that the child was conceptualized primarily as a savage, as evil; in

the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of the original innocence of the child was developed through a revaluation of childhood especially in educational institutions and literature on childhood, for example Rousseau's *Emile* (see Lancy 2015, Montgomery 2009, Valentine 1996a) Liljeström (1983) analysis of the rise of the modern family in Sweden shows the relation between the breakdown of the agrarian economy and the separation of domestic and productive lives, which created stark distinctions between role of the homemaker mother, the wage earner father the innocent child needed protection and care. (see Liljeström 1983:130)

James, Jenks and Prout (1998) theorize multiple conceptualizations of the child. Each category (although not exclusive), expresses the varying interactions between socio-structural boundaries that define the child (e.g. biology, law) and the practice and experience of children as they shape and define their own realities. The social structural child is a universal structural form like age groups and remains clearly defined even as its members change. As a social form it can be compared to other forms within the social system; it is fixed in how it is defined (age, rights, responsibilities) and also makes cross-cultural comparison possible. I would argue that in part this category of the social structural child is disintegrating in my field site arousing much consternation. Direct encounters with children, the categorization of the child as a menace or a nuisance, yet also perfect and invaluable is a product of a specific time, place and discourse around reproduction, as I argue in this dissertation. The challenges to defining who a child is and how to relate to this social category have been discussed especially through the contradictory characteristic of the 'European child.'

#### The Construction of the 'European Child'



While there is no such thing as the ‘European Child,’ several authors in the field of childhood studies, anthropology and geography have identified key common experiences of children negotiating everyday life, and the structural status and meaning of the child/childhood in Western European societies. These societies share similar trends in how families and household, gender and generational relationships, fertility trends, institutionalization of child care and access to non-family spaces of leisure and exchange have altered parameters of childhood. Multiple and diverse family forms, women’s participation in labor market, increased demand for institutionalized child care and child-friendly service and spaces, play a role in who is identified as a child and when, what childhood means, who are good and/or bad children and where they belong.

Starting around the 1980s, Europe experienced a rising concern regarding the vulnerability of the child to outside dangers and risks, be they in the form of traffic, strangers, abusers or other morally bad influences such as other children (Blakely 1994, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, Matthews, Lamb, and Taylor 2000, McNeish and Roberts 1995, Preuss-Lausitz 1995, Valentine 1996a, b). The perception of the child as vulnerable and in need of protection, has over time led to a withdrawal of children from the outside, from the “public” arena, from the street space, to the indoors, institutionalized and “private” space, where the environment is child-friendly and controlled and insulated from the dangerous world. Thus, “...public space is being produced as a space that is “naturally” or “normally” an adult space.” (Valentine 1996b: 205) Comparing the use of public space, specifically neighborhood streets by children in the 1950s and 1960s and children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Valentine (1996b) argues that increasingly children are relegated to the private, home space and streets remain for the use of adults. Accordingly,

there is a stark decrease in outdoor play by children and an increase in adult supervision. These controls that are put in place for the safety of the child are in fact subtle forms of control that replace the authoritative intergenerational relations in the wake of a general informalisation of relations between family and historic generations, a redistribution of power and control and more self-determination for children. (Büchner 1990, Büchner, Bois-Reymond, and Krüger 1995, Frones 1994, Näsman 1994) Institutionalized care or the creation of ‘child-friendly’ spaces for children manifests in the increasing division or separation of children and adult lives and contexts. In response to the dangers mentioned above, children have been locked into spaces, restricted in their mobility, hedged in, insulated and separated to keep them safe, leading to what Zinnecker (1990) calls the “domestication” of childhood. This domestication implies that children are taken from one site (safe for children) to another (child-friendly place) with little contiguity between the adult and child world or the larger society in which children live (Olwig and Gullov 2003, Qvortrup et al. 1994, Zeiher 1983,). Thus places “...specifically geared toward children’s needs – often toward the needs of children of a particular age – are scattered like islands in the functionally differentiated urban landscape.” (Zeiher 2001: 146)

On the other hand, authors have argued that the phase of childhood in European societies is shorter and the division between children’s and adult’s worlds is not so stark (Büchner 1990, Hengst 1987, 2001, Postman 1982); children have more and more control and access over spaces that are not managed by adults, especially through the “...child’s earlier acquisition of independence across an ever wider range of fields” (Büchner, Bois-Reymond, and Krüger 1995: 45); children are primary consumers of electronic media and

popular culture and central to the information revolution, thereby challenging traditional notions of what adults know and thus teach their offspring. (Steinberg 2011:25-37)

These contradictory, often unstable conceptualizations of the ‘European child’ have been integral to the practice of inter-generational relationships and conflicts over space in a growing atmosphere of demographic (and refugee related) anxieties in my field site. This ambivalence toward the figure of the child animates the presence of ‘hypervisible’ children. A growing concern with low fertility, changing value and place of the child, and the discourse on ‘child-(un)friendliness,’ hold my interlocutors in a steady confrontation with an object that at once promises vitality and also disturbs.

The child as a cultural construct (see Aries 1962, Froerer 2009, Fronès 1994, James and James 2001, Lancy 2015, Montgomery 2009), a reflection of larger political and ideological histories (see Büchner, and Fischer-Kowalski 1983, Näsman 1994, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998), and as a symbolic substitute (see Borneman 2015) reveals its particularity in “the everyday practices embedded in the micro-level interactions” (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998:2) of my interlocutors in contemporary Berlin. This ethnography shows how the figure of the child then comes to stand in for national anxieties related to the composition of Germany, individual reproductive desires, memories and ‘choices,’ experiences of gendered and generational inclusion/exclusion in reunified Berlin.

### ***Reproduction, Childlessness, and Men***

In conversation with the literature on anthropology of gender, fatherhood, and reproductive technologies, this work explicates male perspectives on being and becoming fathers through the lens of men as marginal to reproduction. I discuss male involvement

in multiple processes of achieving fatherhood: expressing reproductive desire, imagining an intimate and long term relationship with an offspring, and choosing and practicing specific forms of (medical or legal) intervention and/or direct care. Paternal involvement then is a process of doing kinship by employing different strategies such as direct and indirect care of child, sustaining the desire to care, or mirroring the female partner's physical and emotional experience of childlessness. As active fathers, the 'new' German man participates in redefining through positive resignification of the hitherto largely negatively apprehended father figure. For infertile men, the diagnosis of infertility is deemed irrelevant to achieving fatherhood.

I argue that a social and legal investment in the reinstatement of the father in a revised, more positive form in Berlin is part of the larger project of (re) building a "*kinderfreundliche Gesellschaft*" (child-friendly society). Today at the confluence of specific transformations in Germany—passage of time and an emotional distance from the Nazi legacy, Germany's largely positive global image as an economically powerful and culturally vibrant nation, persistent low fertility, and a more vocal political interest and intervention in the previously "private" family domain—fertile ground for the creation of responsible fathers or responsible men is in sight. Interestingly, alternate routes to achieving paternity, signal possibilities for belonging, irrespective of ethnic identification and in a time of refugee presence in Germany.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> In the 1970s the conjuncture between feminist scholarship and anthropology engendered the subsequent rise of a now well-established theoretical and methodological approach to understanding gendered reproduction. Women's reproductive experiences were seen as both an expression of patriarchal, oppressive structures and relations, as well as analyzed as sources of power. Scholars interrogated the biological determinism in explaining conception, procreation and reproduction (Ardener 2006 [1968], diLeonardo 1991, Lewin 2006, Moore 1989, Reiter 1975, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, Scott 1986). Placing reproduction and gender central to anthropological analysis has illuminated the relation between

**Demographic Anxieties, Active Fatherhood and German Masculinity**

In general, in Europe (and the USA), from the 1990s onwards there has been increasing academic interest in the multiple forms of family involvement and engagement practiced by men as fathers. There is a corresponding shift in family policy, and infrastructural and cultural investments in supporting this idea of the “new man,” participating in the direct care and upbringing of his children (see Gregory and Milner 2011). Transformations in gender relations, family structure and forms, increase in women’s participation in the labor market, at the same time continued gender discrimination in pay, inadequate child care options and demographic transition, all play a role in shaping the extent of actual male involvement and challenges to involvement.

In Germany, post war family forms and anti-authoritarian movements of the late 1960s, define male marginality in reproduction in particular ways.<sup>56</sup> German masculinity

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reproduction and gender as produced and constructed through state institutions and ideologies (Das 1995, Gal and Kligman 2000, Ginsburg and Rapp 1995, Kanaaneh 2002), dominant local demographic, economic and cultural models (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997, Douglass 2005, Ivry 2010, Scheper-Hughes 1992, vanHollen 2003), reproductive technologies (Birenbaum and Inhorn 2009, Franklin and Ragone 1998, Franklin 1997, Inhorn 2007, 2003, 1996, Strathern 1992a, b) as well as how men and women strategically manipulate available discourses, tools and resources to create, sustain or transform ideas of masculinity and/or femininity. This scholarship points to the manner in which discourses around motherhood, child birth, pregnancy, and child care have been ‘naturalized,’ and expose the various local and global actors that shape how we differently conceptualize ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reproduction. Research in the field of reproductive technologies has not only separated biogenetic kinship from family or relatedness, but also destabilized the connection between procreation and reproduction or the making of new persons, or the next generation. Most studies in this field have made women their center of analysis and only recently have men’s account been added to this literature. It is towards this growing scholarship that I pay attention to in my own work. While seemingly skewed in its focus on men and reproduction, this was a choice I made in order to be able to make a dent in the scant (but growing) literature on men, masculinity, reproduction and reproductive disruptions. Also while my chapters (especially chapters two and three) highlight narratives of women—mothers and childless—they examine these narratives from the point of view of a marginalized group of Berliners who experience several forms of loss. In these individual chapters I thus focus on conceptualizing these losses and not so much on the substance of motherhood or women’s experiences reproductive disruptions. These are some of the reasons for my extensive focus on men and reproduction.

<sup>56</sup> Masculinity has been theorized within the broader framework of anthropology of gender and has borrowed and built on the latter’s insights. Starting in the 1980s (see Brandes 1980, Godelier 1986, Herdt 1981, Herzfeld 1985), anthropological research on masculinity has theoretically conceptualized men as engendered and engendering subjects (Gutmann 1997). Masculinity, or masculinities (Connell 2005) are co-constructed along and in interaction with femininities (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, Lancaster 1992)

has historically been inflected by first, the crystallization of a certain ideal of the German male in the last quarter of the 19th century: militant, aggressive, and valued. Second, there has been a rapid fragmentation of this crystallized image during and after the World Wars, in the wake of feminist and anti-authoritarian movements in 1970s, the disintegration of traditional gender roles, and the ongoing post-socialist and post-unification transitions. I would argue that in the context of specific changes in German demography and society—dying out of the war generation, increased importance of male reproductive participation in a low fertility context, Germany’s leadership position during European economic crisis and humanitarian interventions in the wake of the European refugee crisis—the attenuated male and father figure is undergoing reconstruction. Such reconstruction is part of the process of rebuilding the ‘German family.’

Susan Jeffords (1998) analysis of post war remasculization of German men—as responsible and cleansed fathers—sheds light on another form of remasculization in process in Berlin today. Jeffords argues that around a decade after the end of the Second World War, the reconstruction of German masculinity was attempted through the deployment of varying political, legal and cultural strategies. This moment in time was significant for the emergence of a new idea of the German male, a man who was not necessarily cast as a lost and defeated figure, unable to procreate or provide and/or protect families, rather someone who could be seen as a restructured version of the pre-war or war father. Jeffords writes of a dark time in the history of the German nation in which such strategies become necessary for imagining a positive construction of

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as well as other masculinities (Herzfeld 1985). They are historically contingent (Hodgson 1999) and respond to structural, social and cultural changes (Connell 2005, Kimmel 1987). Masculinity and its idioms

manhood and Germany; "..., rather than situate a reconstructed Germanness in what might logically seem to be less "tainted" subjectivities—non-combatant women, mothers, young children, and so forth—it was imperative that particularly those subjectivities most at risk in the transition from an ordered to a 'disordered' world would be the focal points for cultural anxieties." (Jeffords 1998:166) Jeffords thus shows how "German manhood was a question of German fatherhood" at a time of post war crisis of German nationhood (1998:164)

In a similar vein, I argue that the demographic crisis parallels a process of remasculization through a positive construction of the father in and outside the family.<sup>57</sup> I discuss and describe a moment in time in Berlin, where the production of men who will play a vital role in rebuilding the German family, has become urgent and visible in many forms. I explicate these different forms of male involvement and responsibility by analyzing practices of achieving paternity.

### **Paternal Involvement: Direct and Indirect Care**

There are different ways in which paternal involvement has been conceptualized in fatherhood research. One of the dominant discourses puts emphasis on the actual time fathers spend on face-to-face contact and interactions with children. Indirect paternal involvement considers non-residential or non-custodial fathers who often are structurally and legally impeded from spending time everyday with their children, but may be engaged in other ways that strengthens the father-child bond or the child's social capital.

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change over time, and meanings and stereotypes are transient rather than essential qualities (Gutmann 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Also the increasing presence of Muslim refugees and rise in right wing fundamentalism in Europe adds fuel to this fire: the 'German' man must in a way be constructed in opposition to the Arab and/or Muslim refugee.

Lamb, Pleck and Charnov (1987) for instance, write about fatherhood involvement as a. engagement, i.e. direct engagement in caregiving, leisure and play; b. accessibility, i.e. how available the father is when the child needs him and; c. responsibility, for instance, knowing the needs of the child and planning accordingly to meet those needs. Pleck (1997) discusses four interacting factors that aid or impede such direct/indirect fatherhood involvement. These include personal motivation, skills and self confidence, social support, and institutional practices. The conflict between the role of the man as breadwinner and the man as caregiver is central to these notions of paternal responsibility and demands some degree of balance in productive and reproductive responsibilities. Social policy and family law in Germany and other European countries often directs itself towards helping men balance these demands. While Scandinavian countries have had state paternity leave policies in place since the 1970s, Germany is only recently following in the footsteps of these countries.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> In Norway for instance, father's have had right to paternity leave i.e. a non-transferable father's quota of parental leave of four weeks since the 1970s. This was extended to 10 weeks since 2009. When fathers take their share of paid leave, mothers have the option of staying at home or returning to work full or part time. So not all fathers always experience a continuous period of fathering alone. Talking to men who were on parental leave (in the absence of mothers who went back to full time work) for a period of 8 weeks, Brandth and Kvande (2016) delineate the direct care work of these 12 men. These men spoke of care work as "hard work," something they thought would be easier than what it turned out to be; yet the care of baby and home while the mother was at work only help with increasing self confidence and relational competence. These men felt that the intimacy they had achieved by being there for their children will be a stepping stone to a longer lasting bond. While caring work was characterized as "feminine" by some men in that it made them more empathetic, often this work was integrated into masculine identities and practices. (Brandth and Kvande 2016:15) As early as 1917 Swedish law enabled the establishment of paternity for children born out of wedlock. What this meant that every child was entitled to a father and mother and it was then the responsibility of the father to pay child custody. At this time the welfare of the child was more important than establishing "true" paternity. Any man who could potentially have been the father, would have to take on the financial responsibility of the child in the court of law. Towards the end of the 1930s the establishment of the biological father grew in importance and it became mandatory to prove that a couple had had sexual intercourse in a certain period of time before conception and birth of child. In the 1970s a radical shift in the conception of the father and his responsibilities ensued through the passing of the compulsory joint custody law irrespective of marital status of the couple. This meant that "...fathering a child entitles a man to contact with the child, visitation rights and even custody, regardless of whether the child was born in marriage or whether there is another man in the house who is the



In most of these accounts fatherhood involvement tends towards involvement that can be empirically observed and quantified in some way or the other. However, my interlocutors were often also those who did not live with their children or were legally seeking joint child custody. Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999) argue for a more nuanced understanding of fatherhood involvement that takes more concretely into consideration non-residential or non-custodial fathers. In their conceptualization of involvement they focus less on actual time fathers and children spend together and more on the nature of activities themselves such as "...instrumental, affective, social, cognitive, ethical, and spiritual..." (Hawkins and Palkovitz 1999:13) They draw attention to frameworks such as generative father work, which describe father's non-direct engagement as ethical work (ensure secure environment for the child and respond to those needs); stewardship work (working creatively to provide resources and opportunities for their children); development work (maintain supporting conditions for the care and development of children and respond to changing needs) and; relationship work (build lasting attachments and relations between themselves and their children and also encourage

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breadwinner for his child (Bergman and Hobson 2002:97). The commitment to shared responsibility of the child and equal opportunity to work and care for the family is viewed extremely positively in countries like Sweden, across a cross section of men in different age groups and professions (Johansson and Klinth 2008); in spite of this, statistical surveys and sociological studies show that women continue to take on the larger share of house work and child care responsibilities. While social policies as progressive as the ones in Sweden prove to be a powerful medium through which to decrease structural, legal and social barriers to active fatherhood (also see Johansson and Klinth 2008, Plantin 2015), the primary barriers to men's involvement is the organization of productive labor (see Allard, Haas, and Hwang 2007 on role of gender ideology and flexitime in involved fatherhood). Men continue to earn more than women and face inflexibility from employers when trying to balance work hours with care of children. Many parents feel like they must choose between working or having a family. These facts are congruent with the experiences of fathers and couples in Berlin I interviewed.

children to build such relations with others (Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson 1997:27-29).<sup>59</sup>

In conversation with the above literature, this work explicates forms of direct and indirect paternal involvement, which play a role in the resignification of the German father in Berlin today. I expand further on the notion of paternal involvement by attending to the practices of infertile men seeking treatment. I discuss how these men's experiences shed light on continued male marginalization in the context of assisted reproduction, even as the male infertility opens up new routes to achieving kinship.

**Male Reproductive Marginalization, Infertility and Paternity**

Anthropological research on gender and reproduction has placed women central to reproduction and the reproductive process as central to women's experiences, inadvertently diminishing narratives of men, especially those of reproductive disruptions such as infertility (Inhorn 2007b, Inhorn 1994). Men are often seen as mere providers of sperm who either impede or support the female reproductive and nurturing role (see Dudgeon and Inhorn 2004); they have been further marginalized with the emergence of medical technologies that treat the female body as the primary site of intervention for infertility treatment (Dudgeon and Inhorn 2004, Inhorn et al. 2009, Inhorn 2007b, Knecht et al. 2010, Thompson 2005).

In the German context too, reproductive marginalization of men, especially since the birth of the first German child using in-vitro fertilization in 1982, is noted; thus, disruption in the reproductive process continues to be conceptualized mainly as a women's health issue (Knecht et al. 2010). As already discussed, here inattention towards

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<sup>59</sup> Also see Doherty, Kouneski and Erikson (1998) on responsible fathering.

male medical infertility is further complicated through restrictive assisted reproduction laws. Furthermore, Germany's demographic transition, elaborated locally and in public discourse as a trend towards voluntary childlessness, implies that voluntary and involuntary childlessness could be conflated in demographic and social discourse (see Inhorn and van Balen 2002 on voluntary and involuntary childlessness). Consequently, the experiences of those who wish to have children and are unable to, receive peripheral attention. It is in this context that my ethnography discusses male factor infertility and the varied practices related to becoming fathers.

To my knowledge, there is little to no ethnographic account of the experiences of infertile men (culturally identifying as) German. One anthropological study on infertility in Germany (Vanderlinden 2009) investigates experiences of Turkish-German childless couples in Berlin, their marginal status as immigrants and non-citizens and how they negotiate their identities as outsiders to the German nation, even as they seek infertility treatment. Other ethnographic studies on men and reproduction have paid attention to male experiences of infertility, relations with partners, and ideas of personhood and social stigma mostly in the North American or Middle-Eastern regions (Becker 2000, Birenbaum-Carmeli 2009, Inhorn 2007a, Inhorn et al. 2009, Inhorn 2004,). My work will thus contribute to, and expand anthropological work on men and reproduction in the context of a Western European, low fertility "culture of childlessness" (Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2007:78).

I draw upon scholarship on new reproductive technologies and kinship to explicate how men attempt to become fathers. Achievement of paternity relies on creative formulations of father-child bond and relationship, and not necessarily on 'repairing' the

medical condition of male infertility to attain genetic kinship. Further, my work departs from previous studies that have focused on male shame and stigma and their relation to male infertility, i.e. studies that show the often-undifferentiated connection between (dominant forms of) masculinity, biological sex, and reproduction.<sup>60</sup> Instead, I discuss how for some German men diagnosed as medically infertile, masculinity is a secondary concern, i.e. they don't necessarily relate infertility to being "unmanly" (Tjornhoj-Thomsen 2009:226). I don't claim that biological reproduction is distinct from these men's ideas about personal and/or socially hegemonic masculinity. However, in the infertility clinic, paradoxically, this connection is suspended in favor of another one: male medical infertility provides possibilities to achieving a form of engaged and involved fatherhood not dependent on genetic or blood relations. Just as for some men, separation from their children, was the first conscious experience of fatherhood (see chapter four), for infertile men, diagnosis provides means to proclaim their desire to father, in this case, care for a child. Medical infertility makes explicit alternate routes to achieving paternity. It is fatherhood or being a parent to a child that matters, not so much virility or fecundity, neither the conflation of infertility with impotency.

In the last 20 years, the growing influence of reproductive technologies has resulted in both a rekindling of anthropological interest in kinship (and how it's forms and practices change or remain the same) and the merging of the biological and social realms of reproduction.<sup>61</sup> Hence the distinction between biological and social kinship is increasingly difficult to maintain (Strathern 1992b). Understanding relatedness then

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<sup>60</sup> On conflation of male infertility and impotency see Inhorn et al. 2009.

<sup>61</sup> These studies explore the ways in which biology may be socially constructed and how the biological is constitutive of the social and cultural meanings of family and kin. Also see Edwards and Salazar 2009,

requires paying attention to how “social ties are forged and sustained through, for example, feeding, caring and proximity.” (Edwards and Salazar 2009: 4) Relatedness also involves establishing a connection not just with the past (where you come from) but also with the present and future (what your identity can be, who your kin are, who you relate to in your lifetime); this often enables couples unable to have biological children a sense of discontinuity with their genetic histories and the possibility to imagine relatedness in a new way (see Bestard 2009, Carsten 2000, Edwards and Salazar 2009, Weston 1991 on relatedness, and see Howell 2006 on adoption and assisted conception laws in Norway).

Looking at specific cases studies in an infertility clinic in the US, Thompson (2006) discusses how all parties involved in the assisted reproduction procedure use strategies to either undermine or emphasize biological and/or social forms of defining kin, thus conferring ‘real’ parenthood to couples/individuals seeking infertility treatment. These strategies of naturalizing deploy both biological as well as cultural resources to establish relationship of descent between the child born (in successful attempts) and its ‘parents’. Thompson highlights the differentiation between custodial and relational forms of doing or making kinship. The former refers to the intermediate stage (egg donation or surrogacy) which is essential (biologically) for reproduction but does not necessarily imply kinship; the latter refers to often legal, socio-economic and familial explanations that imply motherhood/parenthood/kinship, i.e. who is paying for the procedure, who is legally the future parent and responsible for long term child care, whose name does the child get, and so on. Using this logic, the child-parent descent line is determined, while the person providing the genetic material is only assisting in reproduction but not kin. In

a similar fashion, men in Berlin's infertility clinic claimed kinship through multiple acts of physical, emotional and imaginative labor; such practices, I argue suspend the hegemonic relation between sex, procreation, masculinity, and kinship.

**Male Infertility, Couvade and Achieving Paternity**

Most studies on men and infertility discuss the intimate connection between being a man and virility, sexual reproduction and genetic offspring. Thus, a man is 'masculine' if he can perform sexually, produce the required biological substance (sperm) in order to impregnate such that there is no doubt about the potential child's biological father. In the infertility clinic, the relationship between these practices and the category of male or masculine identity is destabilized even as the diagnosis of male infertility is acknowledged. The men I spoke to were concerned about becoming and being fathers, i.e. doing kinship separated from the biological facts of reproduction. Thus biological substance, intercourse and impregnation did not organize masculine gender identity in the clinic. Being a father was separated from the 'natural' relation between sex-gender-kinship categories.

My ethnography departs from most studies on male infertility in that infertile men in Berlin's clinic were not necessarily relating infertility to masculine ideals, nor were they performing hypermasculinity to restore spoiled gender identity.<sup>62</sup> Instead what I

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<sup>62</sup> See Tjornhoj-Thomsen's (2009) account of Danish men's experiences of male factor infertility and the association between sperm quality and masculinity. For men diagnosed with poor sperm quantity, morphology or motility, popular and scientific representations of sperm as active, fast and competitive create a cognitive and emotional dissonance. Feeling "unmanly" on account of the diagnosis, the author's male interlocutors associated their medical condition with virility and impotence and also the ability to provide for their families. For a lot of women, it was a relief to be the infertile partner, because infertility was judged as being worse for men. Also see Goldberg's (2009) work on male infertility in Jewish-Israeli infertility clinics. She shows how tropes of "military men and reproductive women" are dominant in Israeli understandings of masculinity and femininity. While sperm carry notions of military masculinity and sexual capability, reproductive technologies challenge these notions through clinical testing and

observed is that they were identifying with a “feminine” infertile identity: they spoke at length about their bodies and how infertility felt embodied to them especially in the case where men underwent invasive procedures. Often these men openly expressed their opinions about treatment, took active part in group meetings or cried in the company of others. They were also open to alternate forms of treatment. I don’t attempt to essentialize “male” and “female” responses to infertility, but differences in socially acceptable and acquired gendered responses to infertility are undeniable and have also been noted by other scholars. I draw upon on the concept of couvade from the anthropological record to analyze this social achievement of paternity (through imitation), as a male desire to be salient to reproduction. Couvade refers to ritual behavior undertaken by the expectant father around the birth of a child, that mimics for instance the mother’s pre-and/or post partum behavior, diet and mobility restrictions. *Male performance in this case then, is not to restore masculinity, but primarily a means to attaining paternity.* Here I deemphasize hegemonic forms of masculinity and their intimacy to virility, fertility, the normative relation between socially identifiable masculine role and the ability to father.

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visualization. Man or the masculine persona as a high quality sperm producing (virile and fertile) body that can reproduce through sexual intercourse is destabilized through the diagnosis of male infertility. Inhorn (2004) writes of her work in Egypt and Lebanon with medically infertile men. She shows how men associate male infertility with feelings of diminished masculinity and discusses how, paradoxically, male infertility treatments have in some ways exacerbated secrecy and stigma surrounding male infertility. American men interviewed by Becker (2000) speak of male infertility diagnosis in connection with a “sense of shame,” a feeling of being “less than a man” or seeing oneself as being “disabled” (Becker 2000:44), those who undergo infertility treatments over many years, eventually ‘normalize’ the disruption of dominant masculine identities. Using Butler’s concept of gender performativity, Thompson (2005) interprets the hypermasculine or parodied performance of masculinity in infertility clinics as a means to restore spoiled male identity especially in the case of male factor infertility. These performances then are crucial for the restoration of virility, fertility and masculinity and in turn men’s status as (potential) fathers.

Taken together, the preceding discussion shows how socio-cultural reproduction (through desired biological reproduction of ethnic Germans) emerges as urgent in the wake of personal and national demographic anxieties. I show how reproductive ideologies, practices and experiences of my interlocutors weave through historical and contemporary narratives about generational and gendered identities 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Idioms such as *Kinderwagenmafia*, *Schwaben Mutter*, *Rabenmutter*, *aktive Vaterschaft*, *Kinderunfreundlichkeit*, signal a moral register in which women's and men's reproductive behavior is evaluated, at times valued and rewarded, at other times devalued and delegitimized. While women (in a specific age group and those living out alternate life courses) are marked as primary drivers of the demographic crisis, men—largely marginal to reproduction—are drawn into focus and invited to take equal part in reproducing Germany. Paradoxically, male practices of active fatherhood and visibility in the face of male infertility diagnosis, reaffirm men's marginal status in biological and cultural reproduction.

Dramatized in the object of the child, and through reconfigurations in the German father figure, reproduction in Berlin for the *Wende* generation makes visible national demographic anxieties, that are simultaneously reinforced or contested through personal narratives and trajectories. So, while, an investment in the active father and a heightened consciousness about the aggressive mother and the hypervisible child signal Germany's 'child-friendliness,' childless women and infertile men sustain and create new forms of sociality and kinship that do not involve genetic relatedness.

## **Methodology**



I conducted 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Berlin, Germany, living for a year between 2012-13 in former East Berlin and in the summers of 2010 and 2011 in former West Berlin. My research participants were short- (five to ten years) and long-term (ten to 30 years) residents of Berlin, identifying variously as Berliner, East Berliner, West Berliner or German. I spoke with a wide cross-section of residents including unemployed men, men and women in low income or unsteady jobs, and those with a steady job and secure future – both in academic and non-academic settings. Most of my interlocutors lived in a few of the geographically central neighborhoods of Mitte, Kreuzberg, Prenzlauer Berg, Freidrichshain and Tiergarten. However, I also traveled to and spoke with residents of far West and East neighborhoods like Spandau, Charlottenburg (West) and Marzahn (East). I was able to reach this latter population through my contacts at an infertility clinic in West Berlin, through the day care centers I visited over the city, and through snowball sampling, when primary informants led me to different parts of the city and people who lived there. As mentioned, the stories of the *Wende* generation emerged as significant to understanding a very particular relationship of the residents of Berlin to reproduction, colored by the experiences of both a divided, and reunified city, family and national history and personal biographies.

I used a range of qualitative research methods including interviews, focus group discussions and life history narratives during the period of fieldwork to elicit responses on issues related to children, feminism, work, relationships, current affairs, immigration, old age, the welfare state, food, Germany's landscape and the winter in Berlin amongst many other eclectic topics of conversation. Other than these more structured methods, I also participated in and observed the everyday routines of mothers, fathers and childless

men and women in the city. I took walks, bike rides and traveled in subways and buses, alone and with Berliners to get a sense of how the city has changed materially and otherwise after reunification. I spent many hours conversing over meals and at parties or in children's playgrounds asking questions about German romanticism and fascination for say barefoot playgrounds or the forest or hiking, or discussing politics in India, United States and Germany. Several hours of observations on streets and during travel as well as random conversations with strangers or participating in demonstrations against gentrification were less direct ways in which to learn about life in Berlin.

After the initial three months of more open-ended data collection, I had narrowed down on primary sources to answer my research questions. I spoke to three groups of fathers. One was on paternity leave, taking advantage of the 2007 parental leave policy that encouraged fathers to stay at home after the birth of a child. The second was involved in bitter child custody battles over months or even years. I interviewed about 20 fathers from both groups over several sessions and attended biweekly meetings for ten months with the latter group. Other than fathers, I also spoke with men desiring to father. At an infertility clinic I collected ten life histories of men diagnosed as medically infertile and undergoing treatment. Access to these three groups of men, provided insights into the historical changes in ideas of German reproduction, masculinity and the emergent ideal of the "active father." I interviewed ten mothers and grandmothers and collected life histories of ten childless men and women. Data generated among this group uncovered particular life choices, experience of the Wall, and reunification that has made reproduction into a conspicuous task and childlessness into a peculiar burden. I visited eight day care centers spread over both former East and West Berlin to observe the

institutional care of children (this I was able to do in four different places) and interview staff members (this I was able to do in all centers). I conducted interviews with day care staff (both former East and West Berliners) to learn about pedagogy and childcare ideologies before and after reunification. Most of the staff I spoke to had over 30 years of experience and often pointed to particular East-West differences in approaches to education and styles of working.

Besides the wealth of data that these tried and tested methods in our discipline afforded me, I learnt a lot so to say passively: in repose, during sleep or through “aaha” moments, when I sometimes had an experience of alienation from my body, or was struck by my own acquired socially competent responses. These moments of alienation usually became apparent to me *after* I had done or said something ‘very German.’ Often seemingly unrelated experiences brought me in touch with what my interlocutors were saying and feeling.

For instance, a central experience of the *Wende* generation was one of loss: loss of the Berlin they knew; they lamented that the city had a different feel to it after reunification. This feel, mood, atmosphere, or *Stimmung* (as the various chapters elucidate) restricts movement in certain spaces, excludes or displaces from others, and for some interlocutors emphasizes the devaluation of their reproductive trajectories, in other spaces. However, in order to really feel this loss, I had to first feel a sense of belonging. Unexpectedly this came to my consciousness in the moment that I had the ill-famed bicycle accident that Berliners always warn you about.

Field note, May 15, 2013

I have come a long way from not being able to walk without fear—of all the different markings on the street for cycles, people, trams and cars—to conquering

this space by being here, by living, by walking, by traveling, by getting in and off trains, buses, trams, running between stations, absentmindedly, moving up and down compartments; I know exactly where to stand so that when the doors open, the station stairs or elevators lead to exactly the next transportation connection that I want to get to. I know now how to walk and to travel in Berlin, it is a part of me, these set of connections, they are internal to the point that I mouth the words of the train announcements. And then of course there is the freedom of the bicycle, the spatial digestion of a city that's possible because of the strength in your legs; you move and the city moves along, besides, behind and looms in front of you. You see, you smell, you feel and you eat it up, making it internal to you in a manner you can't do when you take the public transport. A sense of confidence, a feeling of having conquered something, a little bit of overconfidence, a little bit of scorn, carelessness and a feeling that I can't be touched, I have it under control....and in that split second as I whizzed like a pro along the cycle path, the light reddish strip that belongs to me, on which I am the legitimate traveler (fiercely ringing my bell if pedestrians come in my way, forgetting that I use to be this lost, that I would often scamper out of the way of manic bicyclists because I had no clue where to walk!), I hit the curve at a break neck speed and I was down, my palms crushed and bleeding, my head and legs miraculously unhurt.

Three months before I left the field, the accident was a culmination of the process of learning how to enact a form of spatial incorporation and digestion that comes from walking and cycling through Berlin, not possible by travel in public transport. This excerpt from field notes reveals my sense of (embodied) belonging to Berlin, that has played a definitive role in gaining deeper insight into why the material and social changes in the city anger and sadden my interlocutors. It is this feeling that *your* city is no longer yours; your space is vanishing, which animates my interlocutors' narrations about hypervisible children, both real and imagined. Practices of 'child-unfriendliness' then elucidate experiences of loss and exclusion.

Ethnographic evidence that we provide as anthropologists thus does not rely on large-scale survey data or aim for trend analysis to predict future outcomes. Rather, its strength lies in the collection of intensive, micro data that is largely qualitative in nature and arrived at not through statistical testing but through fieldwork that draws heavily on

“being there” and on immersion in the context of one’s research participants. Learning about a culture comes from ‘doing’ the culture, participating in mundane, everyday activities and interpreting the words and practices of one’s interlocutors. Interpretation leads to uncovering cultural meanings as inflected through the specific positionality of the anthropologist, especially significant in the context of cross cultural research such as the project I, a woman born and raised in India, conducted in Berlin. While the starting point for my research was a demographic fact—a statistical analysis that characterizes Germany as a low fertility context—I did not collect large-scale quantitative data that *explained* low fertility. Rather, I stayed close to native experiences and categories such as *Deutsche Kinderundfreundlichkeit* to interpret meanings of reproduction in a micro context (reunified and gentrifying Berlin) for a specific group (*Wende* generation) and its relation to the larger context (Germany and the demographic crisis). Thus, I present exemplary cases that don’t serve as a representative sample, rather shed light on different perspectives about changing life in the city of Berlin, its relation to personal and collective histories, and the experience of being parents or childless. I focus on stories of loss, exclusion, and also inclusion that are organized through discourses and practices of reproduction. Unexpectedly then, these experiences of the *Wende* generation point to the presence of children as a disturbance (*Störung*) and their absence as a dramatized reminder of children’s heightened value in Germany.

On account of the stories that became relevant in my field site, this research does not primarily explicate the meaning of motherhood or the pain of childlessness. Rather, I show how the figure of the child comes to stand in for both a hopeful and untainted German future as well as indexes cultural loss stemming from over four decades of low

fertility in Germany (and an overwhelming presence of “outsiders,” in the wake of the refugee crisis). Indeed, Berlin’s hypervisible children arouse, and are saturated with these ambivalent hopes and desires.

### **My Location in the Field**

In 2009, I joined the PhD program in Cultural Anthropology at Rutgers. Having previously worked in the development sector in India and experienced the inadequacy of behavior change models in addressing reproductive health concerns, I was more inclined to understanding cultural practices that frame and destabilize experiences of reproduction and/or its disruption. It was indeed my immigrant status in the United States that drew me to anthropology. Here, I encountered difference, as was to be expected. However, what I hadn’t anticipated was the hesitation to acknowledge cultural difference, especially in a university context that encourages discourse on, and practices of equality. So, the prospect of understanding cultural difference excited me.

At the same time this desire to encounter difference also questioned a tacit assumption in our discipline that I as a South Asian anthropologist would return to India to do my fieldwork. I do not claim that India is all familiar to me or that any place outside India is only always strange. Yet, I would argue that familiarity that comes from being native to a place potentially places the burden on the anthropologist to make the familiar strange. Ethnographic fieldwork as the process of making the strange familiar and intelligible is first and foremost an encounter with cultural difference—a moment, a word, a narrative, an explanation, a scenario, a person—something that is odd, that makes little sense to the anthropologist in terms of her own conceptual categories.

In seeking this oddity, I traveled to Berlin, Germany in the summers of 2010 and 2011 and then for a year of fieldwork between 2012-2013. In India, I had done research with childless women in urban slums. My interest had been to look at a marginal experience, marginal in a country where demographically and culturally women without children were stigmatized. Germany's demographic transition on the other hand is often described as a "culture of childlessness." (Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2007:78) I wanted to understand childlessness in this very differently apprehended context, as an experience that was not characterized in the German context as marginal, rather as normative.

So, childlessness while not a new topic of research was conceptually and experientially different in Germany, and while German was familiar, Germany and its relationship to reproduction were new to me. Doing research in India, I worked with a group that had limited economic and social access to biomedical treatment and discussed in my thesis how these women and men negotiated a life without children in a largely pro-natalist social milieu. These couples were all married (in India, as a norm reproduction follows marriage, so infertility and childlessness would not be socially or legally recognized in unmarried individuals), and had during the period of my research, never undergone any medical procedures like in-vitro fertilization (IVF) or Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI).<sup>63</sup> Also, the social experience of childlessness, especially in their slum neighborhoods, where multiple houses share walls and privacy is

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<sup>63</sup> IVF or in vitro fertilization refers to the process of fertilization of the female egg and male sperm outside the human body. Following hormonal stimulation and extraction of mature eggs through an invasive procedure, good quality sperms (i.e. those considered having the best chance for fertilizing the female egg) collected from the male partner through masturbation are used to fertilize the extracted eggs in a laboratory. The embryo(s) that are better developed are then placed back in the woman's uterus after a couple of days of maturation. ICSI (or intracytoplasmic sperm injection) involves a similar procedure except that a single sperm is drawn into a pipette and injected directly into an egg. This procedure is used most effectively in

a luxury, was particularly burdensome. With little scope to escape family and other pressures to reproduce, men and women had to find creative ways to continue to coexist as a married couple. Behavioral practices related to poor hygiene and nutrition, infrequent condom use, multiple and closely spaced childbirths, and resistance towards regular gynecological checkups play a role in high frequency of reproductive tract infections, which in turn are primary causes of medical infertility in slum communities in India, such as the one where I did research.

In Germany on the other hand, infertility was categorized as an unwanted medical condition often related to the advanced age of women or to a biological condition in men and/or women. Childlessness (following infertility or otherwise) was classified very distinctly into voluntary and involuntary (in medical, demographic and political discourse).<sup>64</sup> Thus the idea that one might choose to not have children was not surprising or tabooed as it would be in India. Also, childlessness had a direct connection to a personal desire to have children and was not associated with being married (as it is normatively in India, even though legally single women and men can adopt). I don't mean to imply that personal desire is missing from the practice of reproduction in India, but what I want to highlight is the stark difference in how much emphasis is placed on reproduction as individual decision versus social norm in these two settings. This I believe has implications for how reproduction is contemplated (or not) and how childlessness is experienced differently in India and in Germany.

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cases of male infertility.

<sup>64</sup> I problematize this distinction in chapter three.



The doing of fieldwork and the writing of this dissertation has truly been an experience of painful and liberating transformations. Born and brought up in India in a privileged, middle-class and upper caste family, I belong to a generation of urban youth who sought life courses different from those of their parents. Yet, I encountered the German critique of the family with initial shock. This critique, unlike what I was used to practicing in India, went beyond the desire to do things differently from one's parents. Historically, culturally, and socially the German manner of coming to terms with, and analyzing and seeking distance from the past holds a significantly different emotional weightage (than my personal attempts). To a large extent, Germany's international status as the guilty party post Second World War, plays a role in how subsequent generations came to terms with national and family histories.<sup>65</sup>

The generation of Germans I write about and those I spoke to (even though many of their stories don't appear here), gave me the language to look at my self as a part of, and formed through the history of my family, and the intimate interactions and emotional investments and sensuous communication between the parent figure and child. This insight gave me the tools to look at intergenerational relations in a format different from mine. The *Wende* generation and their parents (who I had access to) are removed from the history of fascism by only two or one generations respectively, and are very deeply affected by the experience of Cold war division of Germany and subsequent reunification. My interlocutors' emphasis on family history was not merely a matter of distancing oneself from and coming to terms with the national past, but also an attempt at making a *break* from that history (although they acknowledged it was not possible to do

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<sup>65</sup> I return to this cultural difference in the conclusion of the dissertation.

so). This in turn had multiple implications for reproductive “choices.” Disavowal of reproduction was for some then a political decision to make this break from the past. For some others “doing something differently” with their own children was a way out of the entanglement of family history. For me, as a married, childless woman in her mid-thirties, this intimate engagement of field work, provided a unique language and therefore insight into my own desire to have children in terms previously unfamiliar to me.

Over the course of fieldwork and later, I started to ask myself the very questions I asked of my interlocutors; they talked back too. Berliners and Germans wanted to know me and understand my desire to understand them. Immersion, allowing myself to get carried away, and often incorporation of “otherness,” gave me a language to express my own relation to reproduction. I got access to categories that exposed my *Kinderwunsch*; as an ethnographer of Germany, I recognize these categories as very ‘German.’ I am referring here to the discourse on the conflictual history of inter-generational and gender relations in post war Germany that have enabled a public discussion on parental responsibility during the Second World War, sparked anti-authoritarian movements in the 60s and 70s and a continued commitment in the *Wende* generation to work through past experiences in order to make sense of contemporary dilemmas. This particular history of Germany weakens the taboo associated with expressing and admitting ambivalent feelings towards kin. These are some life skills I received from my interlocutors, which enabled me to examine my desire or lack thereof to have children and its relation to my own history.

A year after the end of my stay in Berlin, I was pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Such is the transformative power of fieldwork.

# CHAPTER ONE

## ***Raum and Ruhe: Creating ‘Child-Friendly’ Spaces in ‘Child-Unfriendly’ Berlin***<sup>66</sup>

In February 2013, on the border between Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain, I found an unusual sign outside a café and on the door of a restaurant around the corner—a stroller drawn in a circle with a diagonal line across it.<sup>67</sup> The bold white line announced without words that strollers (*Kinderwagen*) were not allowed inside these premises. Furthermore, the café had a large, oblong stone obstruction in front of the door to prevent anyone ignoring or missing the sign and bringing strollers in.

On another border street between Prenzlauer Berg and Mauer Park, the proprietors of a café, one with a child-friendly environment (“*kinderfreundliche Atmosphäre*”), came up with a rather inventive alternative to avoid the merging of adult and non-adult spaces.<sup>68</sup> They closed off two rooms behind the serving counter for *Ältern ohne Kinder*,<sup>69</sup> leaving the large room in front of the main entrance for strollers, running and screaming children, and parents drinking coffee and eating a snack.

### **German Child-Unfriendliness**

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<sup>66</sup> *Raum* means room or space and *Ruhe* means peace and quiet.

<sup>67</sup> Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain (former East Berlin) are two central neighborhoods in the reunified city. Prior to 1989, these were located along the border skirting the Wall. Then, a geographically marginal district, Prenzlauer Berg was characterized by its population of artists, students, squatters, unemployed and the working class. Today, as a neighborhood of family gentrifiers, it will come to play a significant role in the following pages.

<sup>68</sup> Mauer Park literally means Wall Park. This public park was no-man’s land during the division of Berlin and a section of the Wall ran through its grounds. Today its open to all, often frequented by young folk who visit the many music concerts organized here during summer or watch soccer at the stadium bordering the park.

<sup>69</sup> *Ältern* is not a word in the German language. It is pronounced exactly like the German word for parents *Eltern*. The word *alt* means old or in this case adults. So the sign signifies “For Adults without children” but when spoken out loud it sounds like “For parents without children”. I venture a guess that indicating that childless individuals (often considered not “adult” enough because they don’t have children) are literally (at least in how one pronounces the word) the same as parents (i.e. *Ältern* = *Eltern*), the café owners declare of equal status those who have and those who don’t have children. The rooms in this café attempt to provide contiguous child- and adult-friendly spaces. I would argue this in turn dramatizes the inter-generational social incompatibility.

Starting fieldwork in Berlin in the summer of 2012, I wanted to understand the “culture of childlessness” (Konietzka and Kreyenfeld 2007:78) that frames the discourse around the demographic crisis and low fertility in Germany. Berliners often told me that Germany and Berlin were very child-unfriendly and did not cultivate a social atmosphere that encouraged people to have children. The city of Berlin especially, I was told, did not have a very tolerant attitude towards children.

German child-unfriendliness is elaborated in national and local narratives. Child-unfriendliness indexes a legacy of post-World War II West German reproductive policies that established the woman as primary caregiver and distanced the state from private reproductive lives of its citizens. This in turn rendered full employment of women after childbirth near impossible. On the other hand, after reunification, women from former East Germany had to choose between working and having children due to shortage of childcare options for the first time. Given this context, creating a child-friendly society today entails a political commitment towards enabling both reproductive and productive labor for women. The hope is that this will stimulate desire to reproduce.<sup>70</sup>

Today, Berliners speak of the phenomenon of child-unfriendliness in idiomatic ways, which I recorded in practices of keeping children out. Signs and barriers in front of cafés that restricted entry of strollers, angry hissing and loud statements directed at parents to keep their children under control in public places, legal complaints about excessive noise emanating from playgrounds or crèches, and incidents of setting strollers on fire are some of these mechanisms of separation or withdrawal.<sup>71</sup> My ethnography

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<sup>70</sup> For more on stimulating the desire to reproduce, see Introduction.

<sup>71</sup> For more on stroller burnings see chapter two.

shows how these local manifestations are closely connected to the *Wende* generation's experience of reunification, which reconfigured urban space and reorganized access to Berlin internally, and from the outside. The migration of West Germans and other Europeans into the city and ensuing gentrification have significantly changed Berlin's composition, especially in the last decade. Prenzlauer Berg, where stroller burnings were often reported, is a former working class East Berlin neighborhood now largely inhabited by 25-45 year olds, i.e. those in their reproductive years and married couples with children. Single men and women who lived in Prenzlauer Berg before and immediately after reunification in alternative family forms and unconventional household arrangements find little room today, amidst children's cafés, playgrounds and strollers, to live out life courses that often included not marrying or having children. Indeed, many single Berliners are moving out as rent prices become unaffordable; yet for many others, leaving has more to do with an increased sense of social exclusion from the place that was once home.<sup>72</sup> In the wake of family-driven gentrification and the legal and policy interventions to combat low fertility rates, the hypervisible child provokes resentment.

The use of the term "*Deutsche Kinderunfreundlichkeit*" (German child-unfriendliness) was ubiquitous in my field site. I heard it in numerous interviews and informal discussions with parents as well as those without children, school teachers, day care personnel and on talk shows on national television. The term was also used in policy and research documents such as demographic studies and state mandated surveys on family values. In this official acknowledgement was embedded the impetus to address Germany's demographic concerns. Particularly in the last decade, one witnesses ever

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<sup>72</sup> See introduction for a brief discussion on "exclusionary displacement" and "displacement pressure."

increasing political and community based efforts to create a ‘child-friendly’ Germany, especially spaces in Berlin that accommodate families’ and children’s needs. Depending on how tolerance towards children was described, my interlocutors characterized Berlin in these two extreme registers—child friendly or child-unfriendly.

In this chapter I show how these native descriptions of child-friendliness and child-unfriendliness parallel material and social schisms between generations, through an increased demarcation of spaces defined as exclusively “adult only” or “for children,” or “for adults accompanied by children,” and occasionally as in the case of the café near Mauer Park, “for parents, as well as adults without children.” Conflict over who occupies public space continually reconfigures how Berlin is experienced through the presence and absence of children. Renewed political, emotional, and social investment in German reproduction conjures a dynamic figure of the child: at once precious, vulnerable, and sovereign, but also as encroaching, hypervisible and arousing irritation. Even as the landscape of some neighborhoods in Berlin changes rapidly to accommodate more children and push out adults through infrastructural interventions and reforms in law that give precedence to children's rights, children are kept out of certain other spaces.

Further, I discuss how the figure of the child and real life children are apprehended and experienced by certain residents in contemporary Berlin. I argue that ‘child-unfriendly’ gestures, discourses and practices articulate an experience of loss—of one’s home in the city, of stable economic prospects and personal and collective ideas about reproductive norms and practices—especially for a group of men and women identifying as East Berliners. Their stories of loss are intimately tied to the experience of

the *Wende* (reunification) and its aftermath.<sup>73</sup> Through the lens of encounters between children and adults, as well as adults with and without children, I show how reproduction organizes social relations in Berlin and acts as a form of exclusion and inclusion in multiple sites and through diverse life trajectories.

“Every boundary is a mental, more exactly, a sociological occurrence; however, by its investment in a border in space the mutual relationship acquires, from its positive and negative sides, a clarity and security...” (Simmel 2009 [1908]:552) A variety of practices set up separations between children and adult worlds. These appear in the form of restricted access, or access to exclusive space, conflict over boundaries between adult space and children’s playgrounds, tolerance of children’s noise by adults, and debates on ‘extreme’ child self determination encouraged through educational efforts in day care centers. Through processes of psychological boundary-making and self referencing in relation to the “Other,” (internal) unity and (external) alterity are produced and symbolized in material divisions. I argue that these material and psychological divisions in fact *unify* the different groups or categories more dramatically by emphasizing and affecting the social interactions between them. Attempts to separate the child and the adult, or adult with child and adult without child fail; in fact, these categorical divisions (both physical and psychological) lock the social groups in consistent (often antagonistic) confrontations. Yet, practices of separation, also index an instability of the categories “child” and “adult.” It is increasingly difficult, (even unacceptable) to keep children in place.

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<sup>73</sup> Categories such as “East Berliner,” “West German,” or “Schwabens” emerge in relation to the discourses, practices and experiences around displacement, value of children, styles of parenting, rights of adults versus rights of the child, and the demographic crisis and are not based on fixed, objective characteristics.



**All we need is a bit of *Raum* and *Ruhe*!**

Berlin is a city of parks and lakes. It is a city that carefully guards its green spaces. Berlin makes room in and around the hubbub of traffic, the rattling of trains, cars and buses, whizzing cyclists and worried people, to provide an escape from the noise. Berliners often told me that they sought peace and quiet in nature (*Ruhe in Natur*), in the outdoors, in long contemplative walks. When the grey months of winter leave the city and present the gift of a short summer, city residents spill out and fill the spaces that were denied to them for a good part of the year: streets, green lawns, parks, outdoor cafes, children's playgrounds and water bodies. The river Spree runs through the city on the east and the Havel borders the west. The two water bodies frame the city and demarcate its boundary from the neighboring state of Brandenburg.

Summer means the outdoors, a turning out and display of the body, an emotional unwinding and disentanglement from heavy clothes, grey skies and the infectious bad winter-mood of Berliners. People are out for walks that last hours, on cycles, picnicking in public parks, meeting for coffee and cake in countless cafes that one can choose from, and of course, sunbathing naked in green spaces or around the lakes. Really old, old, not so young, young, children, infants and the ubiquitous dogs overwhelm the landscape. "Summer truly is the best time to be in Berlin." I heard that statement so often. However, one has to plan the day out well and choose wisely to find a little *Raum* to indeed find relaxation and *Ruhe*.

I don't go to Cafes in Prenzlauer Berg when I want to relax with my book. I mean I can't hear the words that I am reading above the noise of the children. The parents want to have nothing to do with keeping the children quiet. So I have to choose well and avoid such child-full places. (43-year-old woman, single and childless)

I do not like going to Alexanderplatz or even Potsdamerplatz. Before the German reunification these were border areas, either vacant or guarded by soldiers. As part of Berlin's reconstruction plan after 1990 we feel the need to keep up with American metropolis like New York. These two spaces especially, have developed at a tremendous speed but without much taste. It is so irritating in summer. The tourists cannot distinguish between the road and the bike lanes and always stroll into the bike lanes making it impossible for one to enjoy a ride. So I just take my cycle, avoid the tourists and ride outside Berlin center. (30-year-old woman on the street)

During the six weeks of summer school break, one can find some peace here because most German families—especially with children—are on vacation. Of course there is the problem of tourists; there are so many in Berlin. Well we do want them here for economic reasons, but I have to say they get on my nerves. They fill up the city, there is not enough place and one can't have *Ruhe*. (30-year-old male friend on overcrowding in Berlin)

In the midst of post reunification reconfigurations over the last two decades, my interlocutors sought *Ruhe* and looked for spaces in the city to do so, spaces they could temporarily transform into a quiet haven. I have translated *Ruhe* as peace or quiet. It also connotes stillness, a stopping, a winding down of the body and mind. This winding down usually refers to the end of a work day, when one only wants to be alone, block all other noises and reflect. As Berliners told me, this kind of *Ruhe* cannot be separated from the availability (or non-availability) of *Raum*, present in material form but also socially conducive to establishing and maintaining some stillness. “Honestly, when I finish my work here and travel back home in the subway, I want neither screaming children nor musicians near me. I just want quiet.” (Beate, the 50-year-old government employee, working in the noise-law department in Berlin).

*Ruhe* also references seeking relaxation at the end of the work year, when one welcomes summer and takes a break from the rhythm of the city; this space and stillness seems to be sacred. I have rarely met people as passionate as Berliners about taking a time-out (*Auszeit*) from the routine and enjoying it, shutting off and recharging energies.

They let go with a passion, everything they have held together when they work or go through the motions of daily life. The release of tension that builds up during the winter is visible in the opening of faces and bodies and in the throwing out and off of clothes. However, in order to open up everyone needs his or her room. And this room is shrinking, while also filling up increasingly with little, playful, unruly and loud bodies.

During 16 months of fieldwork, regardless of the topic of conversation, two words that Berliners used quite frequently were *Raum* and *Ruhe*. Without me looking for or asking about it, these themes were discussed as part of one's narration of everyday life, changes in the city, desires, hopes or even banal complaints (they often said they do not have enough *Raum* and *Ruhe*). These statements always struck me. Even by the end of fieldwork such conversations, although routinized, did not become normal to my ears.

Berlin has a population of 3.5 million (and growing). Mumbai, where I lived for several years before moving out of India, has 19 million residents (and growing). Area wise Berlin (344 square miles) is a larger city than Mumbai (233 square miles), yet I had memorized Berlin's span—on the map and through subway travel and on my legs, both by walking and cycling—in just about three months. This would be near impossible to do for Mumbai in that short time period, primarily because of the inability to walk or cycle through the overcrowded city. In Berlin at the turn of almost every street corner there is a park or a green patch of land; larger parks and innumerable lakes are spread across the city. Such spaces (especially without the noise of traffic) are a luxury in Mumbai. From my perspective, one thing you cannot complain about (and Berliners do complain about a lot of things), is lack of space or the possibility of quiet and stillness in the forests and wooded areas surrounding Berlin. There seemed, perhaps only to my eyes, something

provincial in these complaints, a lack of understanding of how much greenery, open space and quiet characterizes the capital when compared to other places. Yet, and significantly, there is also a relation to the nostalgia of the ‘original’ charm of the city in the wake of the recent spatial and social reconfigurations following post-reunification gentrification, which give residents an ever-increasing sense of shrinking *Raum* and increasing *din*. In their desire for *Raum* and *Ruhe*, Berliners often identify migrants, traffic, tourists, and the presence of a growing population of families with children as a major impediment to what they miss about the divided city: its slower pace and the possibility to find relaxation.

### **Remembering Divided Berlin**

City residents often remembered Berlin as being “slower” and “calmer.” Especially West Berliners of the *Wende* generation spoke of a feeling of “timelessness.” Surrounded by the Wall, they felt both stuck in time (as though nothing ever moved forward and there was a feeling that things had long since come to a stand still), as well as liberated from the cycle of time (one felt like one did not have to follow a set rhythm). “I could really enjoy life at a slower pace. I studied for many years at the university. Took many extra classes and then decided that I wanted to travel outside Germany for a year before I started work officially. I didn’t really find a steady job for a while. I didn’t feel the pressure to settle down you know, like the younger generation does today,” said a 40-year old female interlocutor. She had lived all her life in West Berlin and worked as a school teacher. She recently separated from her live-in boy friend and has no children. At the time of reunification, she was in her late teens.

East Berliners also spoke about how drastically things had changed in the city that they once called home. A 45-year-old unemployed interlocutor and former resident of Prenzlauer Berg said to me,

First it was reunification. Initially things were changing slowly; a lot of West Berliners and West Germans moved into these vacant and crumbling homes that stood in Prenzlauer Berg. Some of us also just squatted not paying any rent and getting by like that. Then suddenly things moved faster. There is a lot of money being invested in places like Prenzlauer Berg to improve infrastructure. With that, rents started to rise and people like me moved out.

Another 45-year-old unemployed man added, “you see when I lived in Prenzlauer Berg, there was a pub around each corner and no one asked us to keep it down. The music never stopped playing. But now of course we can’t make any noise anymore because the children are sleeping.” Grimacing, he whispered the word children. A friend reported to me that one of his ex-professors and former residents of the neighborhood Mitte (in former East Berlin and centrally located after the fall of the Wall), commented pejoratively about the population of West German women migrating to Berlin and settling down in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. I asked my 35-year-old friend who was hesitating to quote his professor what the latter had said. “Well its not very gender sensitive...he said, that in Prenzlauer Berg he has to constantly jump over the puddles of birth water left behind by Swabian mothers!”<sup>74</sup>

It is not that Prenzlauer Berg or Mitte represent Berlin totally. However, they come to stand in for the experience of loss and change that former residents find challenging to confront, not just economically but also existentially. It is also not true that central neighborhoods in the city such as Prenzlauer Berg are only full of Swabians.

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<sup>74</sup> *Ich muss hier immer über die Fruchtwasserpflützchen der schwäbischen Mütter steigen!* On the face of it simply misogynist, this observation also indexes aggression towards the loss of one’s place in the city and

People from other countries of Europe and other West-German states buy property and have families here too. However, the Berliner-Swabian conflict has a history of internal demarcations—economic and cultural—, which is palpable, and on display here.<sup>75</sup>

Having said that, Prenzlauer Berg, often referred to by many interlocutors as the *Kinderinsel* (island of children), is indeed full of children. Many a streets are dotted with cozy cafes, children's playgrounds, day care centers, stores for children's clothes, strewn strollers, and speeding *Laufträder*,<sup>76</sup> yoga classes for “sexy moms,” infant-parent sport and swimming courses and multi-language training for children. While gentrification in Berlin continues in waves throughout the city, nowhere is it as tangible as in Prenzlauer Berg.

### **Berlin's Spaces: From Center to Periphery to Center**

In 1920 the Greater Berlin Act extended the administrative borders of the city of Berlin, combining old Berlin (Altes Berlin) with seven neighboring independent towns and seven other villages. Taken together in 1920, Berlin had a total of 20 boroughs or neighborhoods.<sup>77</sup> These administrative divisions remained more or less stable up until 1945. Post war divisions sorted the West and East boroughs across the four allied sectors

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the feeling of belonging that ensued from it.

<sup>75</sup> See Introduction and chapter two.

<sup>76</sup> These are small cycles without pedals on which children can sit and move ahead by pushing with their legs. These are usually used by children before they learn to ride and help the child learn to balance before sitting on a regular bicycle.

<sup>77</sup> “Altes Berlin” constituted the following neighborhoods: Tiergarten, Wedding, Kreuzberg (former West Berlin), Prenzlauer Berg, Mitte and Friedrichshain (former East Berlin). The seven independent towns consisted of Charlottenburg, Schöneberg, Spandau, Wilmersdorf, Neukölln (former West Berlin), Lichtenberg and Köpenick (former East Berlin). Into these were included seven other villages in the area: Zehlendorf, Reinickendorf, Steglitz, Tempelhof (former West Berlin), Pankow, Treptow and Weissensee (former East Berlin).

(British, French, American and Soviet) and there was some shuffling of smaller settlements at this time.<sup>78</sup>

In 1961, the Berlin Wall cut through East and West Berlin; the Wall ran along those very neighborhoods that were centrally located since the 1920s. For example, with the redrawing of boundaries after 1945 and again in 1961 when the Berlin Wall was constructed, neighborhoods like Mitte, Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain, and Prenzlauer Berg became peripheral to the city and remained so for more than 25 years till 1989. Now after reunification, these neighborhoods are Berlin's central districts. These shifts—from being central to peripheral to central again— weave through life histories of different generations of Berliners as they confront the realities of displacement and exclusion from spaces they once called home. Areas around the Wall in West Berlin were often spots for “adventure” or “hanging out with friends;” on the East side, they were unapproachable, guarded by barbed wire.<sup>79</sup> Ironically, post reunification, the absence of the Wall, while opening space and making more room and mobility possible, also engenders an experience of disturbance (*Störung*) associated with a feeling of encroachment. New physical and social boundaries and divisions erupt. While some families (here identified as Schwaben) affect the way in which one relates to children, children themselves seem to change the “essence” of Berlin. Their presence interferes with how my interlocutors

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<sup>78</sup> To name just a few, Reinickendorf, for instance, was in the French sector, Charlottenburg, Spandau were part of the British sector and Neukölln, Steglitz, Zehlendorf were part of the American zone. The rest of the former East Berlin boroughs as indicated above in brackets were part of the Soviet controlled sector.

<sup>79</sup> After the fall of the wall and between 1990-2000 Berlin was divided into 23 boroughs: Pankow, Weissensee, Hohenschönhausen, Marzahn, Hellersdorf, Köpenick, Treptow, Friedrichshain, Lichtenberg, Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg (former East Berlin), Reinickendorf, Wedding, Tiergarten, Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Tempelhof, Steglitz, Zehlendorf, Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg, Charlottenburg and Spandau (former West Berlin). After reunification in 2001 through an administrative reform Berlin was divided into 12 boroughs: Treptow-Köpenick, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, Lichtenberg, Pankow, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Tempelhof-Schöneberg, Mitte, Reinickendorf, Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Steglitz-Zehlendorf,

come to identify with, or distance themselves from particular neighborhoods, social groups, reproductive choices, and child care options.

### **Making Room for ‘Non-Berliners’ and their Children**

*“Ich kann dir heute etwas über die Osis erzählen. Meine Mutter war die letzte Ossi,”*<sup>80</sup> said Max, as I dismounted my cycle having ridden across the Oberbaum bridge from Friedrichshain (former East Berlin) into Kreuzberg (former West Berlin). Max and I were meeting at Kotti or Kotbusser Tor, one of the central subway stations in Kreuzberg to participate in a protest march against rising rents and gentrification, especially affecting a large cross section of the immigrant population in this neighborhood. Max, a 40-year old unemployed East Berliner and a good friend of mine often asked me what I thought distinguished East from West Berliners. Not waiting too long for me to reply, he would then list three characteristics of East Berliners: “we combine productivity and social rights, we have always supported women’s work and their desire to have families, and religion doesn’t play a big role in our lives.” Max repeated himself so often that I would at times get irritated and say to him, “but you are not telling me anything new!” He would laugh; yet I saw in his attempts to assert his identity as an East Berliner, his membership in the democratic socialist party (*Die Linke*) and his engagement with anti-gentrification protests, an attempt to come to terms with his, his mother’s and his friends’ losses in wake of the “terrible” German reunification. Max and a lot of other East Berliners he knew had lost—their jobs, their homes, and the Berlin they called home—

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Spandau. This is what Berlin’s map looks like today.

<sup>80</sup> Translated as: I can tell you something about the East Germans today. My mother was the last East German.



initially to the event of reunification and in its wake to a form of social stratification that Max is at pains to point out was not a East German phenomenon:

In East Berlin doctors and janitors lived in the same apartment block. Housing was not segregated according to income or class status. Now of course we have to move out of our homes because we can't afford them any more! Honestly, even if we could afford them, we don't recognize Berlin anymore; the people here are different.

Max was born in Dresden and at age four his family moved to East Berlin. Max's mother Karla is a PhD in Social Sciences and worked as a philosophy professor in East Berlin. Max and his younger brother threw their father out of the house; they could not tolerate their father berating their mother. After reunification, Karla who was then in her mid forties proved not competitive enough in the new and ever changing job market. For the 25 years since reunification, she has only held temporary jobs; she was often unemployed and a recipient of welfare (Hartz IV). While Max has an apartment in Friedrichshain (his unemployment benefits cover 75% of the cost), Karla lives on the outskirts, in the eastern neighborhood of Marzahn. She cannot afford a home closer to the city center. Marzahn's landscape is desolate and depressing especially in winter. Between mid 1970s till end of 1980s the East German government invested in the construction of high rise apartments made out of prefabricated cement blocks, what in German is called *Plattenbau*, like the ones in Marzahn. Initially conceived as modern private homes for its citizens, the buildings look identical everywhere, drab and broken down. Marzahn is home to a very high percentage of Berlin's immigrant population and also ethnic Germans from former Soviet Union. It is not a very attractive place for young people, especially those with families.

Max's friends, Helmut and Peter, who joined us at Kotti on that day, are in their mid 30s and employed as caregivers for elderly and handicapped people. While Helmut

works with several senior citizens, visiting them at home, administering medication, making routine checks and helping with food preparation, Peter assists full-time a young man who is quadriplegic. Both Helmut and Peter lived for 30 years in the former East Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg. They moved out about five years ago when neither of them could afford to pay the rising rents. They vehemently oppose gentrification in Kreuzberg because they don't "want to see it (Kreuzberg) end up like Prenzlauer Berg," said Peter. Helmut added as we took a walk in his former neighborhood, "at least Kreuzberg is still recognizable as part of Berlin, here (pointing to the new constructions in Prenzlauer Berg), I neither recognize the place nor the people. The other day I was trying hard to recall if there is any building left in Prenzlauer Berg in the condition that it was in prior to reunification. No, I don't think so."

Just like Kreuzberg (in former West), Prenzlauer Berg located along the Wall in former East Berlin has been associated with East Germany's diverse counter culture. This space to produce alternate artistic work however has been gradually eroding since the 1990s. The cost of living has risen and former East German urban neighborhoods no longer offer affordable work and meeting places for alternate and creative projects (Gröschner 2001 in Whitmore 2004:94). Immediately after the reunification, West Germany invested in the former East, especially to improve infrastructure. The condition of houses in former East Berlin was so poor that many residents had abandoned buildings due to fear of them collapsing. I learnt that before and after reunification students, unemployed, and artists often occupied these abandoned houses, without having to pay rent. These occupations became part of the second phase of the squatter movement in Berlin. Today debates and protests against gentrification and rising rent prices continue in

the city. I witnessed many local street protests: Two streets away from where I lived in Friedrichshain was a group of squatters, occupying a piece of land on which they had their make-shift trailers. They called their home “*Rummelplatz*.” *Rummel* is the giant wheel that one sits on at a circus or in an entertainment park; metaphorically this is a place where one can have fun and be free. I spoke often to some of the youngsters at *Rummelplatz*. They too are fighting for their space in the city; they want to stay, just as many others in neighboring Kreuzberg; they repeatedly invoke the “*Wir bleiben alle*”<sup>81</sup> slogan borrowed from the anti-gentrification marches in Berlin in the early 1990s. Today this slogan is often used during protest marches, chanted, put up on banners or painted across buildings in some of these neighborhoods experiencing gentrification.

As these aforementioned neighborhoods become geographically central and families with children move in, people like Helmut, Peter and Karla move out. There is a general disdain for the way in which adults relate to children here. Pejorative terms categorize a form of West German specifically Schwaben reproduction as being indulgently child focused.<sup>82</sup> This disdain is in fact indicative of the ever changing relationship to the child in Germany, dramatized in Berlin, through the performance of entitled parenting and practices of child-friendly policies, educational instruction and upbringing.<sup>83</sup>

### ***‘Non-Berliner’ Mothers and Children***

Karla remembers how different her life in Berlin was. She finds that reunification brought not only material and social changes to East Berlin but also mothers and children

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<sup>81</sup> Translated as: We will all stay!

<sup>82</sup> See Introduction for discussion on Berliner-Schwaben conflict. Also see chapter two on Schwaben mothers.

into a new kind of focus. Karla finds this discourse very odd, recalling that having children in East Germany was “very different.” For one, “reproduction today involves too much contemplation” (*zu viel nachdenken*) and makes children seem like more vulnerable than they are. People here think you will damage the child if you send them too early into day care!” Karla continued,

I would any way not be able to tolerate staying with those West German women with their crazy focus on children (*Kinderwahnsinn*); in a way its good I live in Marzahn. Our time was very different. We didn’t think so much about having children...well we did plan, but you know children were not as big a consideration at least for me. Well at least as an East German I would say this. And if I told these crazy mothers from today’s generation how I felt very little connection with my son and refused to breast feed him or how I smoked during pregnancy or how I would go drinking with my friends to the pubs located below my apartment, leaving my sleeping child in the crib, they would probably call the police on me! It is like today children have become so vulnerable somehow. These women think twice before considering day care! I say stop all this nonsense about *Betreuungsgeld* and put all that money in day care centers! Max often laughed at his mother’s descriptions of child care and vehemently

insisted how he wasn’t “damaged” in any way by what would today seem like neglect on part of his mother. “We loved the day care; my brother and I would really enjoy it. Also it gave my mother a chance to work, earn for the family and do well as a career woman. After reunification, she hasn’t had that sense of self worth.” Helena, in her mid thirties and a friend of Max’s, lived in the neighboring state of Brandenburg before moving to Berlin as a child. She often shared with me the challenges of being a single parent. “The only other mothers I seem to hang out with or meet are West Germans. It a lot of pressure trying to perform like them. I cannot make my child my whole universe; currently my

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<sup>83</sup> Also see chapter two.

daughter goes to a certified baby sitter (*Tagesmutter*); soon she will start day care. I don't have the luxury of being a full time mother.”<sup>84</sup>

Baerwolf (2012) in her ethnography on transitions in family models—from work centered to child centered—during, and after reunification, compares and contrasts mothering styles across three generations of East German mothers in Berlin. She records experiences of women who had children in the late 60s and 70s (i.e. the German Democratic Republic or GDR generation), those who have children just at the time of, or closely after reunification (reunification mothers) and the post-reunification generation who have children in the 2000s. The first generation born and raised in a socialist state tended to follow a predictable pattern of reproduction: normatively young age at first pregnancy, multiple births, early use of day care services and continued full-time employment after birth of one or more children. These women considered the upbringing of children as a joint responsibility of both state and home and did not feel the pressure to make children “...an exclusively motherly project.” (Baerwolf 2012:225) The reunification generation while socialized in the way of their mothers and expecting to share child care responsibilities with state institutions, confronted the unexpected: end of the Cold War, reunification and political takeover of East Germany. This had a severe impact on their assessment of past and possible future decisions to have children. Also having children could no longer be taken for granted. The expectation in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) that matters of reproduction be restricted to private sphere further changed GDR women's professional trajectories. “... children...were now

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<sup>84</sup> This was not always a luxury for East German women either who ended up having to carry the double burden of house work and professional work. There were definitely some who would have preferred to stay at home and not work!

considered a social risk on the one hand and an investment project of a very different quality on the other.” (Baerwolf 2012:227)

Baerwolf found that for the women who had their children in the 2000s (post reunification generation) the expectation of greater responsibility for social and moral education of their children as well as more rights as parents to intervene in how child care institutions educated their young was accepted as norm. The author argues that over time children’s responsibility has become solely the mothers; expert opinions on pedagogy, literature on best child rearing practices and a continued stress in social policy on care at home rather than institutional care all engender the breed of professional mothers.

The standards of mothering are set higher and children are perceived as “tasks” and mothers as absolute authorities on parenting. These ideals make it difficult for women to combine mothering with other responsibilities, such as full-time employment, and also make alternative forms of childcare (those not involving the mother) a problem. (Baerwolf 2012:232)

These changes point to the relation between mother and child, to changing meanings of reproduction in post socialist Berlin and the reinforcement of values associated with the post war West German model of gender roles. For East German women if having children and sending them to the day care was normative (as Karla points out), it was also not necessarily associated with anxieties related to moral discourses on who should raise the child; in East Germany this was a joint responsibility or the state and home. However, for the the next generation of former East Germans, socialized into the West German model of reproduction and child care, children become an economic contemplation as also a substitute for the sense of purpose that came from

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employment. For people like Helena, this is a constant struggle to make the most desired choice, which she thinks often involves a complete focus on the needs of the child.<sup>85</sup>

### *Coexistence or Encroachment?*

While post reunification opening of Berlin has certainly changed the demographic of the city, spatial reconfigurations come to stand in for loss, change in the city's 'essence' or atmosphere (*Stimmung*), and one's relation to children, reproductive choices and moralities. Continuing along these experiences of some of my interlocutors, I discuss how the figure of the child is charged with ambivalence. While on the one hand, the value of the child increases and materializes in greater physical, social and legal room for the child, there is a palpable tolerance to express *intolerance* towards children, that is, being child-unfriendly is not necessarily socially disapproved. I describe these material and social tensions and argue that spaces that variously include, exclude, or separate adult-child encounters, signal the child's unstable emplacement in contemporary Berlin.

I discuss the planning and construction of a barefoot playground in a section of a public park, largely frequented by "asocial elements," as residents often described unemployed youth or drug dealers hanging out in this park. Idealistically conceived by the local parks and recreation office, this playground would conceivably enable members of different strata to coexist and even interact. More importantly it would make child and adult spaces contiguous and not exclusive. Yet, these goals are met with many challenges and conflicting ideas about who should make place for whom. Next, I describe a different kind of encroachment; it is one that cannot always be cordoned off by physical barriers; I refer here to the encroachment of children's noise into adult routine or social lives.

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<sup>85</sup> Also see chapter two for more on representation of mothers and *Kinderwahn* or child-obsession.

Recent changes in noise laws in favor of children promote child-friendliness such that Berlin tolerates, even celebrates children's presence in the middle of society. On the other hand, 'child-unfriendly' residents complain against intolerable and illegal levels of noise from a neighboring playground.

Following this, I discuss the possibility of limitless freedom for children, contained in confined spaces that are exclusively constructed for children. In children's cafes in Berlin, freedom implies unrestricted access to play, shout and be children; no one checks the child's behavior. Echoing similar sentiments, in a number of day care centers the teaching philosophy focusses on self determination by the child (*Selbstbestimmung*). This is often translated as the opportunity to learn through experimentation and not through disciplining or boundary setting. This also means that often children are expected to take decisions in an adult-like manner.

Where then do children belong socially and materially? Are they vulnerable and therefore need protection hence 'child-friendly' environments? Or are they persons in their own rights, quasi citizens who participate in self learning?<sup>86</sup> How do different conceptualizations of the child relate to where they belong and when they are out of place? I discuss some of these issues in the conclusion of the chapter.

### **Children's playground in *Görlitzer Park***

A week before I left Berlin in August 2013, I was in *Görlitzer Park* (GP) again. GP is one of the smaller parks in Berlin (Area: 14 hectares). It is shaped like a rectangle bordered by Wiener street on one side and Görlitzer street on the other. The park is undulated, has several open green lawns and towards one end a crater-like dip in the



ground. Here you often see families, or groups of university students and friends reading, chatting, enjoying the sun, cycling or playing Frisbee or football. The other end of this crater is a *Kinderbauernhof*,<sup>87</sup> a children's attraction; the park's west side has a public swimming pool. Strewn all over this park are big and small, well-used and abandoned, and clean and dirty children's playgrounds.

During fieldwork I had contacted the district office of the neighborhood Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg to discuss how children's playgrounds in Berlin are planned and constructed. The office staff had invited me once before to inaugurate the first *Barfuss* (bare-foot) children's playground in GP. Barefoot playground is ambitious in its ideology: these are planned so as to give city children an experience that one has access to in rural Germany. "This way children can feel the sand, run around without shoes," said a passer by in GP. Most parents I spoke to though, were skeptical that this idea would take off.

GP is always crowded. As you skirt its boundaries, groups of young black men selling drugs approach you.<sup>88</sup> They hang out in broad daylight; they have occupied these fringes; they are safe here. Most of them are in Germany illegally or are asylum seekers. Illegality, asylum and expulsion are historically loaded and sensitive issues for Berliners. It is common to see protests against Germany's intolerant position on people crossing borders to enjoy better economic conditions in this country. On the one hand, is the

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<sup>86</sup> See Kjørholt (2003) on children as citizens or co-citizens.

<sup>87</sup> A farmstead like space with animals for children to experience something 'rural' in the city. This obsession with getting away from the city, going to nature, to the forest continues to echo German romanticism, the turning away from city life and industrial development to find a common community/Germanness in the forest/nature (see Elias 1996, Mosse 1964, Wilson 2012)

<sup>88</sup> On Görlitzer Park see: <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/umziehen-nach-berlin/goerlitzer-park-struppiger-strassenkoeter/6809972.html> and <http://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/friedrichshain->

question of how to integrate non-Germans, especially those from war-torn regions in Europe. On the other hand, there is a general acceptance of the fact that Germany's labor shortage could be compensated through better immigration policies. Also for a lot of Berliners I spoke to, Germany's strong economy makes it a matter of "moral" responsibility to accommodate refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>89</sup> The presence of these men selling drugs evokes these national debates. Indeed, if GP is open—to people grilling, drinking, and partying; to the homeless, drug addicts, alcoholics, poor, students, tourists, dogs and ethnographers—it seems closed to German families and children.

It is becoming difficult now, everywhere dogs roam around freely not on a leash, there is the smell of urine, there is so much of filth and garbage, open bottles, broken glass, alcohol and the whole park fringed and infiltrated by the black drug dealers. It is a paradise for young people, tourists, unemployed or anyone who wants to have access to alcohol and drugs. This is in turn becoming a problem for families – more and more German families are unable to spend time with their children here. The playgrounds are not really used by children (especially if they are in bad condition) rather for grilling by large groups of Turkish families as you see today. [40-year-old mother of two, amongst group of parents passing through GP]

That day in August 2013, I arrived in GP for a community meeting for the planning of a second barefoot playground. The members of the local district office accompanied a team from *Unsere Görli* or our *Görli* (UG), a citizen's initiative started around 2010 with the aim to make GP "open and accessible for all". The task of the day was to get votes of children and parents on how the playground could be built, what kind of activities could be included and whether or not there should be an enclosure around the area so that one could prevent regular grilling and keep the place free of dog's excreta,

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[kreuzberg/article207541681/Was-der-Kampf-gegen-Dealer-im-Goerlitzer-Park-bringt.html](http://kreuzberg/article207541681/Was-der-Kampf-gegen-Dealer-im-Goerlitzer-Park-bringt.html)

<sup>89</sup> These tensions and debates continue in light of the current European refugee crisis, where Germany in fact had an open door policy for refugees (at least in 2015), even as right wing sentiments and movements grow across Europe.

glass from broken alcohol bottles and trash from grilling. As far as the district office and UG staff were concerned they had to remain positive and also determined about the near impossible task they had set for themselves.

I arrived early at the *Rodelhügel* i.e. the site in GP where the playground was planned and saw some familiar and some new faces of team members. The team had cordoned off a large area around a smaller broken down playground with red tape. “This could be the possible *Zaun* (fence, boundary),” explained Stefan, one of the UG members. He continued,

Well you don’t want to restrict or push out one set of people, but by their very presence they are pushing out another set of people. For instance, because there is open sale of drugs and drinking without restrictions, additionally lot of tourists coming here, the park gets filthy and has gained a *ruppig* (harsh, coarse, rough) character. So in a way these otherwise marginal groups are keeping out children and seniors – we want this park to be used again as a place for all. There is too much party here, too many people with dogs, I mean they can all be here, but there should be room for all. It’s not the best thing to build the *Zaun* but maybe this is the only way we can keep the dogs out, keep the place clean and have it safe for children to run bare feet.

Stefan and his team fight with and for the children. Now it is time for the adults to make room for the children in the park. The construction of the first *Barfuss* playground took time even after the budget was approved. Andrea, the district office director for playground planning discussed with me –

We faced some problems with the first *Barfuss* playground. Regular visitors to the park and residents living close by did not necessarily want the children’s play area to be extended beyond a certain parameter, because the playground would then be crossing over into their grilling area. Well, we managed to extend the space for the playground and now no grilling is allowed where children play. The park is big, there are so many places to grill, but people want to grill exactly where we want the children’s playground.

That day’s planning discussion for the second barefoot playground was preceded by weeks of activities with children in several schools and day care centers

(*Kindertagesstätten*, henceforth KITAs).<sup>90</sup> Along with the help of KITA personnel, the district office team worked with groups of four to five children at a time.<sup>91</sup> First the primary benefactors cast their votes. The children's groups visited the proposed site and were asked to survey the land and provide ideas about which play activities were well suited for which section of the proposed playground. The children demanded the following: sandpit, water-play, structures for climbing and running, balancing and swinging, etc.<sup>92</sup> Based on children's ideas, maps of possible playgrounds were drawn out and were supplemented by play dough models that school and KITA children had made. All these were displayed on tables set up under trees around the red tape that marked the possible boundary of the future playground.

At around noon, the area marked out for the *Barfuss* playground looked peaceful and inviting. An expectant planning team stood around colorful charts and playground models, set out tables with blank sheets for children to draw more ideas on, and handed voting stickers to passers-by, parents and children. Slowly the scene became hectic. On

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<sup>90</sup> KITAs (*Kindertagesstätte*) are pre-school facilities for children between the ages of zero to six before they start first grade at age seven. School is compulsory, but the choice of sending a child to KITA is left to parents, although recently there have been many inconclusive debates in Germany about introducing KITA-*Pflicht* (compulsory KITA) so that all children who enter school, enter at a similar level of socialization. There are generally three kinds of KITAs in Berlin: state run, private initiatives (salaries are paid privately but the room or the individual KITA spots are state managed through the distribution of coupons, which determine subsidies based on salary) and parent's initiatives (run by parent groups but state approved). In the last five years a large number of state run KITAs have been handed over to private funders (*freie Träger*).

<sup>91</sup> KITA personnel are known as *Erzieher* (male) or *Erzieherin* (female); they have the responsibility of preparing children for school between the age of 0-6. *Erziehung/erziehen* loosely mean to educate, train, discipline, socialize, in matters of moral, intellectual, emotional, social and physical development.

<sup>92</sup> The children were introduced to four fictional animated characters to help indicate what activities they would like to see on the new playground: *Plitschi-platschi* (the blue character who likes water), *Rennrum* (the red figure, who likes to move about, be physically active, spring and jump), *Neugiernase* (yellow figure, who likes to snoop around, look for hidden material under bushes) and finally *Fühlfuss* (a green figure, who likes to go natural, feel with bare feet). *Plitschi-platschi* is not a word, rather imitates the sound of splashing and thrashing about in water. *Rennrum* consists of the verb *rennen* (to run) and the preposition *rum* (around) and indicates a character that is active and runs around a lot. *Neugiernase* consists of two

the fringes of this red tape (the area where the possible fence may be constructed the following year) some families started to set up tables, picnic cloths and grill stations. By the time it was two in the afternoon, there were groups all over the grassy lawns till most of the playground planning activities receded into the background and the smoke from the grilling reached the charts. What started out as a discussion on a new children's playground quickly turned into a commentary on GP mirroring the borders in the city of Berlin— between its neighborhoods, ghettos and its population. Stefan explained,

Turkish families love to grill, well they don't have as much space at home so they use the only park in Berlin that allows such rampant grilling. Legally there are two large lawns in the park that are meant for grilling, however grilling is done by people all over the park; the signs indicating where grilling is allowed or not, either absent or defaced by the left leaning population of *Kreuzberg*, mostly Berliners or Germans who believe that rules on how to use a public park are oppressive. Now Turkish or other non-German families do not come in groups of 3 or 4, they have large families and there is at any time about 20 people grilling. This causes fire hazards and there is trash, which is often left behind.

Few other co-workers added their insights:

Germans traditionally don't grill – not in such large numbers – well we also have smaller families! Perhaps we grill privately in our homes. Also Germans have more money or prefer to be outdoors –hiking or going to the beach – you see the people who are here (at least 100 of non-German families), they have come from all over Berlin – also as far as *Spandau* – because this little Görlitzer Park of ours gives them the room to grill.<sup>93</sup>

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nouns *Neugier* meaning curiosity and *Nase* meaning nose. This character is curious and explores his/her surroundings. Finally, *Fühlfuss* consists of the verb *fühlen* (to feel/touch) and the noun *Fuss*, meaning foot.

<sup>93</sup> Spandau is a neighborhood far West from Kreuzberg where GP is located. By bus or subway, it would be at least a 45-minute journey. While I was not able to inquire in-depth on such contrasts between “German” and “non-German” families or children, there were many times that my interlocutors indicated stark differences in how Turkish families related to their children. For instance, Turkish fathers were identified as being very expressive in their affection. “They hold the child close, kiss it, squeeze them and cuddle with them more than German fathers do. There is a physical closeness between fathers and their children.” Turkish mothers as disciplinarians were known to use different, often severe methods to check their children's behavior. This included spanking. Such practices were not necessarily judged negatively, rather set up in contrast to the “limitless” freedom that German families seem to provide their children. In this instance, large Turkish families, with their many children and relatives grilling in GP were identified as a possible impediment to the smooth running of the barefoot playground imagined primarily for middle-class German children. I speculate that such contrasts and comparisons are likely to be dramatized in the presence of refugee families in Germany. Syrian children are likely to arouse greater sympathy and

As the crowd of grilling families started assembling, the red boundary tape became redundant and the district office team became agitated. Renate, a young member of UG said, “perhaps we should invite them and have a discussion, set up tents, have something to eat and talk to them about this plan, (but maybe) right now in the middle of the grilling, they are not going to be interested in what we are doing.”

I saw how the sea of people—men setting up the small coal grills, women laying mats on the grass or benches, pulling out folding chairs, plates, cups and cutlery and children in strollers or running around between the grills and in general having a wonderful Sunday afternoon—broke down the order of the day making the district office team increasingly helpless and angry. Some of the UG folks did speak to the men who were grilling. There was an attempt made to explain what was happening and that their children could vote on the activities in the proposed playground. The charts did get quite a few votes from children and adults alike and the team had done their job for that day. The process of release of budget and starting the actual construction is a matter of another year.

At the end of the afternoon as I walked back with Andrea through the park to catch my train, we saw that within the boundaries of the first *Barfuss* playground (I had attended its inauguration) some grills had been set up, ironically right next to the colorful sketch of a bare foot hanging from the fence of the playground with the inscription: “*hier laufe ich Barfuss*” (Here I walk bare feet).

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accorded care; how would the relation between parents and children in Syrian families affect German ideas of *Erziehung* and relation to reproduction? These are future areas of research. Also see conclusion for more.

Children's rights advocates struggle to make Görlitzer park child friendly, while also striving to not drive out "asocial elements," and create possibilities for coexistence. Often though children themselves are apprehended as asocial, especially when they are loud. The sensual experience of children as they were encountered face to face, spoken with, or heard and observed, played a vital role in the emotional investments that my interlocutors made in conceptualizing the 'German child' today. In the attempts to create a 'child-friendly' society, children come to occupy increasingly privileged positions in relation to other social groups. There is a constant struggle underway to ward off this experience of encroachment. I would argue that Görlitzer park is one of some other physical and social spaces where the real and imagined differences between categorical groups—here the *ruppig*, asocial elements in the park and children who need places to experience natural play in a safe environment—becomes explicit. Physical structures (grills, or signs indicating the borders of the playground), embodied and sensual experiences (walk through the "stinking, dirty park with broken glass") and verbalization of these conflicts (e.g. parental doubt about the success of barefoot playgrounds) mirror antagonisms. Inclusion or exclusion in space is thus produced materially, emotionally and socially. Encroachment then is experienced in multiple ways, particularly heightened by an intolerance for children's noise in a climate that demands ever increasing tolerance for the same.

***Kinderlärm ist kein Lärm – doch!*<sup>94</sup> : Children encroaching acoustic space**

On a cold afternoon in December 2012 while entering my apartment building, I found the following note stuck to the common notice board for all residents to read –

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<sup>94</sup> Translated as: The noise of children is not noisy – oh yes it is!

Dear Neighbors,

We are celebrating the 5<sup>th</sup> birthday of our daughter on Saturday. We apologize in advance for the impending noise and chaos. Of course you can ring our doorbell at any time if it gets too loud or *unerträglich* (unbearable). We thank you for your understanding. Wishing you a good 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent. Frau P, 4th Floor.

I read the note two times and then took a photo of it, chuckling to myself. What

seemed like a bit of an exaggerated consideration for one's neighbors, over the next year,

became a central theme in my conversations with people. I observed how my

interlocutors often desired *Ruhe* (quiet) and asked for it in varying ways:

“Can you stop that, wasn't it enough that we had the musician playing so loudly for us just minutes ago?” a middle-aged lady to a young boy who cracked his knuckles while sitting next to her in the subway.

“God they are so loud!” a 30-year-old female friend, crinkling her nose at a group of playing children, in the middle of a boisterous carnival parade in Berlin!

“Where is the music coming from? This is the *Wald* (forest), if they want to play music they should go into the city. I come here for silence and to hear nothing but the trees. Ahhh I want to go tell them exactly what I think!” a 30-year-old male friend, on a walk through *Grünwald* (large expanse of forest area in West Berlin).

“Well our building residents –including I – voted for a *Bioladen* (organic store) in the neighboring street over a children's playground”, a 38-year-old pregnant friend told me.

“Parents should not automatically consider themselves free of the responsibility of teaching their children to be considerate and not so loud in public places. I think it is *schrecklich* (terrible) that children are so loud!” A 50-year-old father of a teenager, who I



interviewed often for his work with fathers and expectant fathers in Berlin, declared rather emphatically.

Miriam, a 65-year-old woman without children summed up this general feeling of *Schreck* (fear) vis-à-vis children's behavior –

I was once in France visiting a friend. We decided to spend the day at the beach. When I arrived at the beach I saw a host of families. Each beach towel had two to three children and I thought to myself, that's it I can kiss my day of relaxation goodbye. But Meghana I was so surprised, you did not know that there were children there. They were so well behaved! You go to any public place anywhere in Europe and the children who run around the fastest and scream the loudest are German! I have nothing against the children but our kids are *verzogen* (badly brought up) and parents don't know how to teach them to be considerate.

I began to gather that noise in general and children's noise in particular was an impediment to the *Ruhe* that my interlocutors sought. In 2011, Berlin was the first German state to revise a section of its noise laws (*Immissionsschutzgesetz*) declaring that children's noise produced through play, laughter and physical activity in playgrounds, day care centers and other such children's spaces was not equivalent to industrial noise. That the state had to pass this legal reform meant that children's noise above a certain decibel or perceived as such was legally equated with industrial noise i.e. socially not tolerated (*unerträglich*). This revision in turn meant that citizens could no longer make complaints demanding for the re-location of day care centers, nor could they hinder the construction of playgrounds around residential areas, nor justify their actions by stating that playing children were unbearably loud and the noise levels harmful for one's health and peace of mind.

The state of Berlin explained this revision: “this is how we can be a more child-friendly society”, “how do you suppose our children will feel if we have them believe

that they are a disturbance”, “children laughing, shouting, running and the resulting noise is a necessary condition for children’s normal growth and development”<sup>95</sup>

The then family minister Kristina Schröder, told *Die Zeit* in 2011,

Children belong in the middle of our society and day care centers should not be pushed to the edges of the city, instead be built where families live. Naturally, children are loud, make lot of noise, cry, scream and laugh. These are the sounds that are part of life – and none of us were different as children. We want a child-friendly society (*kinderfreundliche Gesellschaft*) and that means we cant have pin-drop silence all the time.<sup>96</sup>

During fieldwork, I heard about many legal battles around the demand for *Ruhe*. Here specifically I refer to *Ruhe* that was sought through the absence of children, to be more precise, the absence of the sound of screaming, running feet and playing children. While this revision to noise laws restrict to a large extent legal complaints, citizens continue to demand *Ruhe* when it gets too loud.<sup>97</sup>

In May 2013, a children’s playground came under the line of fire because it was deemed *zu schön, zu gross, zu laut* i.e. too beautiful, too big and too loud.<sup>98</sup> In 2011 this particular playground had been enlarged almost four times its original size. In 2011 the families living in the playground’s vicinity had protested this increase in size. That did not stop the extension. Finally, in May 2013 a group of ten families (residents between

<sup>95</sup> “Berlin stellt Kinderlärm unter Schutz”, 16th Feb 2010, [www.stern.de](http://www.stern.de)

“Kinder dürfen toben und schreien”, 16th Feb 2011, [www.zeit.de](http://www.zeit.de)

“Wie Anwohner gegen KITAs kämpfen”, April 2012, [www.swr.de](http://www.swr.de)

<sup>96</sup> *Kinder gehören in die Mitte unserer Gesellschaft und Kindertagesstätten nicht an die Randgebiete verdrängt, sondern da hin, wo die Familien wohnen. Klar seien Kinder laut, machten Krach, weinten, schrien, lachten. Das sind die Geräusche, die das Leben macht und niemand von uns war als Kind anders... Wir wollen eine kinderfreundliche Gesellschaft und dazu gehört eben auch, dass es nicht immer mucksmäuschenstill sein kann.*

<sup>97</sup> Some of the more creative way of doing so is to lodge a legal complaint against the noise pollution that the constant traffic of cars creates: cars of parents dropping off their children at a nearby residential KITA (since the complaint is officially against vehicle noise, it must be considered).

<sup>98</sup> Berliner Zeitung, May 6th, 2013.

the ages of 40 to 60) went to court because the sound of children especially on weekends when families from different parts of Berlin visited the playground became unbearable. A resident measured the decibel levels (which was comparable to continuous traffic on a busy street) and presented this as evidence in court.

Government officials investigating the case visited the playground at different times in the week (although newspaper reports state that they stayed away on weekends). According to law, in Berlin, the maximum area that playgrounds can occupy is calculated according to the following allocation: one square meter per resident. In *Lankwitz* (the site of the contested playground) the playground was indeed bigger than legally acceptable. Instead of the one square meter per resident allocation, the area of the playground was extended to 1.7 square meter per resident. Ultimately though the ruling went “in favor of the children” (*im Sinne der Kinder*). The *Berliner Zeitung* article from 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013 showed the picture of a wooden figure of a dog (located on the playground) with the following caption: “Thankfully this dog doesn’t bark, else the residents in *Lankwitz* would have complained about that too.”<sup>99</sup>

I did not speak to the residents of *Lankwitz* but I did speak with many others in other parts of Berlin who had either lodged legal complaints against a day care center or voted in favor of a grocery store over a small playground around their home. Most of my interlocutors irrespective of age, whether parents or childless, men and women clarified: “It is not that we do not like children” or “I, too, have children” or “Naturally children must scream and shout and run around and discover their environment and develop, but it

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<sup>99</sup> *Zum Glück bellt dieser Hund nicht, sonst hätten sich die Lankwitzer Anwohner wohl auch darüber beschwert.*

is like they can do all of this without restraint, without boundaries.” Other than gathering verbal accounts, I observed people’s expressions and body language in confined spaces or on streets around children, especially when children made noise. I noticed people screwing up their noses or staring blankly at children especially if they were shouting. I saw this in both regular cafes as well as children’s cafes (*Kindercafe*) and often-overheard male and female staff muttering, “One can’t deal with this the whole day!” Once I caught the eye of a young female server at a children’s cafe who noticed I was alone, saw me as an ally, shook her head and said in reference to the growing din, “I have to find my inner peace when they get like this.” She indicated that there was nothing she could do to intervene but had to find strength in herself to not be agitated by the noise.

What people seemed to fear was the seemingly impossible task of controlling the behavior of children, such that the ideal or desired way of living with one another was through a strict division of intergenerational experience of everyday space. It seemed like there were few avenues to restrict children’s rights over space and therefore encroachment on other citizen’s *Ruhe*.

I think it is absolutely ridiculous that you can’t tell a parent that he/she needs to teach the child to consider that there are other people around sharing the same environment! I think it important that there are restrictions. This new law that forces us to tolerate children’s noise at all times, only takes away parents’ responsibility from teaching their children to be with others!” [Uta, 60-year-old East Berliner, mother of two teenagers]

Experienced as encroachment, noise emanating from children produces debate, conflict and a reassignment of authority over the physical and social space in question. Is children’s noise as an impediment to *Ruhe*, tolerable within closed, designated spaces such as the special children’s cafes? Does this noise enter the experience of “intolerable” outside these discursive and physical sites? These boundaries between shared and

exclusive space are constantly collapsing: adults work in children's cafes, playgrounds are constructed in residential areas, signs that keep children and adults in or out, objects such as strollers and children's toys can potentially encroach emotional boundaries.<sup>100</sup>

While specially designed cafes for children (a very popular enterprise in Berlin) as material manifestations of social divisions, tolerate children's "asocial" activities, they do not necessarily contain the spillage of children into adult spaces. In fact, these cafes intensify the adult loss of authority to discipline the child.

### ***Kindercafes as exclusive space***

*Kindercafes* (KC) as the name suggests are Cafés specifically meant for children and accompanying adults.<sup>101</sup> In Berlin, over the last decade, in a move to build a more child-friendly environment, there has been a growing investment in such spaces exclusively for and of children.

A typical KC has a conspicuous sign to attract one's attention: a brightly colored door or a large placard with the letters of the alphabet in different colors, or placards with animals around them, or an empty, chic, cane stroller covered with embroidered cloth and the sign "Open" hung from it. The sight of cafés' entrances blocked with parked strollers indexes the presence of a child-friendly space even before one sees the café itself. The strollers seem to have an uncanny aliveness to them, all looking very earnest, serious and somewhat arrogantly posed, next to each other, the brake on the wheels pulled down, the

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<sup>100</sup> See discussion on the burning of strollers in chapter two.

<sup>101</sup> Berlin has the largest number of these cafes in Germany (this estimation is based on anecdotal evidence, reports in newspapers and narratives of café managers in Berlin) and Prenzlauer Berg the most in Berlin (this I gauge from having lived in Berlin for a year and moved through different neighborhoods to visit KCs). I often met mothers and/or entrepreneurs from other German cities who were visiting Berlin to understand the concept of a KC in the hope that they could open one in their hometown. I spoke to many women in these cafes who visited from former East German cities close by as well as people as far away from Cologne in West Germany.

locks fastened; the strollers stand in neat rows on the pavement outside the *Kindercafes*.<sup>102</sup>

A KC usually has a large room, with tables, chairs and toys all around the walls and on the floor. There are numerous sit cushions for parents and thick carpets for infants to crawl on. A toy gas stove, a small slide, lots of wooden blocks, colorful toys that roll, spring up, make a noise and stuffed animals some big enough to sit on are commonly scattered around the cafes. Behind this first room is usually another, smaller room with more toys. This room is often converted into the place where different infant-parent activities are conducted. I observed how infants (between six to ten months) were entertained with singing, yoga, story telling and puppet shows. Often there are activities for just mothers or the mother-child or father-child dyad. Talking to parents who were always surprised to see me in a KC without a child, I learnt that they saw themselves as the generation that emphasized physical contact with their children.<sup>103</sup> “You will see that a lot of mothers these days use a carrying cloth tying the baby close to their bodies instead of always pushing a stroller,” said a 30-year-old mother. “Breast feeding is encouraged more than before I think,” my friend Lene who was then breast-feeding her infant daughter told me. Speaking to some grandparents I learnt that they did not necessarily have this “*körperliche Enge*” (physically close) relationship to their children, since “we were quite busy setting our children free”, Hilda a 72-year-old West Berliner told me. “Or we sent our infants to day care and continued working”, Petra a 65-year-old

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<sup>102</sup> See more on strollers in chapter two.

<sup>103</sup> I discuss this idea of the sensual (*sinnlich*) experience of parenting (specifically fathering) in greater detail in chapter four.

East Berliner added. Petra personally finds it positive that the younger parents seek more physical contact with their children.

I often visited several *Kindercafes* in different neighborhoods at different times during the day. As anticipated these places were chaotic, especially after 4pm when parents pick up children from the day care and walked into the cafes. I also met fathers (who were on parental leave) and conducted interviews while their children played. By the end of half an hour I could not tolerate the noise levels, which could be staggering. Older children often sat with their mothers, eating and participating in conversations, or reading and chatting with each other. The younger one's crawled, walked and ran all over around toys, tables, other children and adults. These cafés are usually managed by women either college students or mothers themselves, who often struggle to “find their *Ruhe*” in the midst of all the noise.<sup>104</sup> A 22-year-old student who works part time in a KC described a regular day and added some of her reflections –

Well I work in a Café here in *Wedding* – so this is not even *Prenzlauer Berg* – but as you can see the craziness is spreading to other parts of the city! Although not designated a KC, this café is very “child friendly.” On a regular day, I am constantly trying to negotiate how or whether at all to manage the kids. There are some regulars and I have observed three very distinct styles of parenting. Some women come there with their children and just LET GO. I can understand that they need a break but I am not the day care center, there is absolutely no supervision to the point where it is dangerous. I mean I have kids hanging on to my leg, they have climbed over and reached me and I have hot coffee in my hands. I have to be so careful. I have tried telling the children to be careful. I have also tried to hand over the kids back to the parents and say something...but the

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<sup>104</sup> The café at a infertility clinic where I met and conducted interviews with childless couples always had a steady flow of customers, mostly patients who are hospitalized and their visitors. I spent a lot of time hanging out at this café between my appointments. During the course of weekly visits over the whole year I rarely saw children here. Probably adults leave them behind when visiting sick people. So this wasn't a typical ‘child-full’ café that many of my interlocutors refer to. Yet on occasion when one of the visitors' child was intermittently squealing in delight (not crying or screaming), the lady server collecting and stacking used plates shook her head, exasperated and muttered loud enough for people near her to hear: “*Tja das kann man nicht den ganzen Tag hören!*” (One can't listen to this the whole day long!)

parents don't respond like I would in their place. I would say something like I am sorry, or I would feel sorry, but instead I seem to get defensive reactions, you know like I am challenging them as a parent. Some even ask me to talk to the kid as though the kid can have a logical conversation. Or they are simply irritated. Other parenting styles include a little bit of direction and control and still others complete dictatorship and control over what the kids are doing. You can tell that sometimes when it gets too crazy and loud, other people in the café get disturbed, the older folks sometimes tell the kids to be quiet or calm down. I am constantly negotiating and thinking of strategies for maintaining some semblance of order in the room!

This experience of the “out of control” children was echoed most often in the words of West German women and mothers who had been a part of the anti-authoritarian 1968er movement in West Berlin as well as their East German contemporaries who raised their children in partnership with the socialist state in East Berlin. The two significantly different experiences and perspectives on raising and disciplining children led to interestingly similar conclusions about changing mother's role and value of children today (also see discussion above on Baerwolf).<sup>105</sup>

Rita a 75-year-old interlocutor recalled her time in Berlin in the late 1960s when she was 20. The anti-authoritarian movement of which she was a part effected changes in gender ideals, family forms, female reproductive rights, pedagogy and disciplining of children. As the first generation questioning the role of their parents in the national socialist past, the 1968er generation was especially passionate about the informalisation of inter-generational relationships and a radical approach to relating to children. Rita recalled,

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<sup>105</sup> These transitions play a significant role on how the *Wende* generation in this dissertation experiences parenting, encounters children, and relates to changing reproductive ideologies in contemporary Berlin. I discuss this further by examining the figure of the Schwaben mother and the childless woman in chapters two and three. Also I discuss the changing role of fathers and alternate routes to achieving paternity in chapters four and five.



It was a time young people today cannot imagine. The atmosphere here in Berlin was pulsating and infectious. I came from a tiny village in West Germany from a working class background and suddenly I could be part of something big; I could effect change. The society we lived in then was very much strict, brutal and authoritarian. After all, our elders had been part of our Nazi legacy. But suddenly it was like we started talking about and making changes in how things were organized. For instance, it was like everyone could go to college, could take part, could express their opinions. We had meetings, demonstrations; we wanted to teach ourselves and not have teachers do that for us. So we had a strike. We started preparing syllabi and experimented with different pedagogies. We did a lot for women's rights. For example, we reversed the meaning of a bad mother (*Rabenmutter*). She is not someone who neglects her reproductive role, rather someone who refuses to extend herself beyond the home to make a career for herself. In fact, the over obsessive mother could be a *Rabenmutter*! Also children needed to be freer. I was part of a parents run day care center – we called them *Kinderladen* (children's stores) where they would be free to explore and learn a lot on their own. A lot is better today because of what happened then. But I have to admit we might have gone too far. I see how today parents struggle to discipline their children. Actually, not disciplining seems to be the trend these days. This exaggerated permissiveness is a part of the 1968er legacy no doubt. We were always *gegen die Eltern* (against parents). Yes, it was extreme what we did, but sometimes things have to be extreme when long established structures are challenged for the very first time, which is what we were doing in our youth. But now kids are really out of control.

As Rita remembers the euphoric atmosphere during her youth in Berlin, she also admits rather regretfully that the anti-authoritarian movement that their generation in West Germany initiated has had some extreme and negative consequences for the disciplining of children today. While the idea of autonomy (*Selbstbestimmung*) of the child, the pedagogic tenet in today's educational institutions, has its roots in the particular history of National Socialism, contemporary Germany is far removed from the concept of child as imperfect or deficient adults. Instead as many West Berliners admitted, the concept of the child itself is closer to who we would define as an adult—a sovereign individual, capable of decision making and autonomy.

For East German women of Rita's generation, the annoyance towards these "West Berlin educational models" is all the more dramatic. East German post war

reconceptualization of gender roles have resulted in a different development of the public experience of children. As mentioned earlier, women were viewed as labor force participating equally in the economy and hence childcare services were provided for all children enabling mothers to continue working. Reproductive policy and pronatalist interventions in East Germany were a reflection of the perceived and imagined distance between the socialist and Nazi state, through an identification with the USSR, the victorious and virtuous nation that defeated the Nazis. Also reproduction then became the reproduction of socialist citizens. Having children was a matter between women and the state. 100% coverage of childcare services and the role of progeny in maintaining and strengthening socialist ideals enabled women to have children, more frequently and at an earlier age than their West German contemporaries. Children were by and large not a matter of prolonged contemplation.

In the German Democratic Republic, we didn't contemplate having children so much as today's generation. It was easier in the sense for us, because we could still go back to work and our children were taken care of in the public day care centers. I feel bad for today's mothers. They feel entitled because they know that children are precious from the point of view of the "dying" German nation. Yet they are overburdened and must do everything for their children; even Berlin does not have enough public day cares for all its children! (65-year-old East Berliner, mother of two)

Something is different about these mothers and children. There is a sense of self-importance at the same time tremendous anxiety. I think they are so obsessed with their children because these children are truly their self-identity. After having finally taken the decision to have children, these mothers show a sense of entitlement thanks to an inability to discipline the child and the mother here in Berlin. It almost like these mothers are saying—leave me alone and let me be a mother, don't disturb me. And we just tolerate everything children do because after all God forbid anyone calls our country child-unfriendly! (55-year-old East Berliner, mother and director of a child care institution in former East Berlin)  
How can one make sense of this overwhelming need to contain the disturbance

that children (and mothers) arouse? Children encountered on the streets in Berlin on the

one hand represent Germany's future labor force and hope for cultural reproduction and on the other hand disturb the peace, quiet, order and status quo. Children contained in 'child-friendly' spaces are in fact a dramatized presence; sites such as *Kindercafes* come to stand in for the lack of discipline and the boundary-less upbringing of today's toddlers; they arouse disdain, irritation and commentary on the shifting boundaries between the categories "child" and "adult." An illustration of how children take and are accorded an almost adult status in institutions of early childhood education makes the final argument that advocating for children's rights and the fear (*Schreck*) associated with children's presence in adult spaces are of a piece. The ambivalence indexes the instability of the category of "child" or "childhood" and the emplacement of children in Berlin, Germany.

### **The Child Learns Independently**

The anxiety associated with maintaining control and discipline over children's behavior was reinforced in institutional settings of primary care where the purpose of child-adult interaction is in fact disciplining and *Erziehung*.<sup>106</sup> Having heard and observed these inter-generational dynamics over public space, I was keen to learn more

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<sup>106</sup> *Erziehung* (verb: *erziehen*) means to educate, train, discipline: physically, emotionally, intellectually, morally in a systematic manner. As many interlocutors insisted, it is important to note the difference between the German words *Erziehung* and *Bildung* (education). *Erziehung* can be translated as upbringing. It refers to moral upbringing. It teaches values of polite conduct, hard work, concentration and willingness to help others. When a child is badly brought up, one says he doesn't know how to behave himself or conduct himself socially (he is *verzogen*). *Bildung* is building character too, but has more to do with transmission of knowledge (in school, academics) There is ongoing debate around how much *Erziehung* is the responsibility of the school and how much is that of parents. Historically linked to the idea of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) and the development of *Sekundäretugenden* (secondary virtues i.e. personality characteristics and habits associated with hard work, discipline, order, honesty, integrity among others) these very ideas were severely criticized during the 1970s especially in West Berlin and West Germany as modes of hierarchical and brutal disciplining techniques. Many interlocutors of the 1969 generation who were present in Berlin and participated in these movements were conflicted about what they had achieved: on the one hand freedom from authoritative and brutal disciplining and on the other hand a celebration of 'free' education of children at the cost of setting boundaries as well as burdening children with too much choice.

about how children were taught to behave, to interact socially, and prepared for school—all goals of pre school education or the day care centers I visited during fieldwork. What was the adult-child relation to disciplining within these institutional set ups?

I was first introduced to the idea of children teaching themselves how to write while on a walk with Lene a dear friend and recent mother. Lene has finished her PhD in German studies and after the birth of her daughter was trying out different teaching jobs in Berlin. She was interested in starting a school for dyslexic children and wanted to be trained for this.

I don't know if you have heard of this, but Germany is creating a problem for itself in its school system. A lot of schools for several years have adopted a system of teaching children how to write such that it frees them from the drill of monotonous rote learning and senseless repetitive writing. The children teach themselves to write; they hear sounds, say them out loud and write them down. They are not corrected even if the spelling is incorrect, rather encouraged to develop their own creativity. Teachers or the schools I guess believe that eventually children will learn the correct way. But that is not happening and now suddenly we are faced with an Orthography-Disaster.

Early on in my fieldwork, I made a mental note of this, even a little skeptical about what I was being told. I wondered how schools could expect that children teach themselves to write. Also I questioned whether one could call this dyslexia; after all these are writing problems that any child would have because he/she was never taught how to spell.<sup>107</sup> This phenomenon was curious and with continued time in Berlin I realized that

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<sup>107</sup> See “Die Recht schreip- Katerstropfe: Warum unsere Kinder nicht mehr richtig schreiben”, The Orthography Catastrophe: Why are children cannot write correctly anymore, Der Spiegel, June 17th, 2013. This article traces the concept of free writing i.e. children teaching themselves to write (*Lesen durch Schreiben*) to Swiss Reformpädagogue Jürgen Reichen who wanted to introduce creativity and get rid of drill in schools. Reichen believed that children could teach themselves to write just as they learnt to walk and talk. Hans Brügelmann popularized this idea in Germany and it found fertile ground in schools during the 1980s and is today causing alarm in many educational circles. Several studies conducted in Frankfurt, Munich amongst others clearly prove that Reichen's method has devastating results and children cannot choose letters of the alphabet on their own will and teach themselves to write; it is not like making a

the ideology of autonomy of the child (*Selbstbestimmung des Kindes*) was reflected in various methods of instruction, for instance, in day care centers as I was to learn, children could decide when to eat or nap, or what to play.<sup>108</sup> The right and authority of *Erziehung* is now not only a matter of public (institutional) or private (family) responsibility, but is increasingly determined by the subjects of *Erziehung* themselves.

### Visiting KITAs

I decided I had to go where it all starts.<sup>109</sup> Over a period of a few months after Christmas in 2012 I visited a total of ten KITAs. I spread my visits over the different neighborhoods in Berlin: these varied in population of 0 to 6-year-old children, socio-economic status, and were located both in former East and West neighborhoods. In some

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decision between chocolate or vanilla ice cream. There is much debate in schools in Germany about this disastrous outcome of free writing. Those who are convinced that writing has to be taught to children urge that this can be done without the horrific memories of drill and discipline in schools that the reform educators refer to when offering children this 'limitless' freedom.

<sup>108</sup> During my visits to KITAs I often met senior staff. Most KITA staff in Berlin and Germany actually are above the age of 40. There are not just more children and less KITA spots but also overworked and understaffed KITA personnel. I learnt that this is not a lucrative career option and most young people do not see themselves working with children for hours at a time; also this job doesn't require a university degree, does not have very high social worth in addition to not being very well paid. "People think we just play with children and don't recognize the hard work that goes into preparing them for school. Do you know when the chain of *Schlecker* stores closed down two years ago, the state suggested that the women workers from *Schlecker* who had been laid off, i.e. women whose competence was restricted to sitting at the checkout counter, be retrained to work as *Erzieher* in the KITAs!" reported one KITA director. Many KITA staff were horrified by this idea (which eventually did not materialize). In fact, there has been much debate on the adequate training of *Erzieher* in Germany. Also men's role in KITAs is discussed and encouraged (see chapter four). The advantage of meeting older staff was of course the possibility of asking them about differences in former East and West KITAs. In general the KITAs in East Berlin/Germany were portrayed as institutions that created a social group, where individuality was suppressed – "well when you have practically all children in the city going to a KITA you have to discipline them so that it works, so that their mothers can go to work too and not have to take care of them at home; that was the state's job. And then children follow group routines not individual routines. So we would have a fixed time when all kids would sit in a line on their *Töpfe* (potty), and eat at a fixed time as well as sleep at a fixed time. *Heute werden die Kinder nicht mehr getöpft* (today we don't force the children to sit on a potty). We believe when a child is ready, he or she will stop using the diaper and start telling the adult that he/she needs to use the bathroom," a former East Berlin KITA director told me emphatically. A lot of the KITAs I visited in Berlin had this policy of not "forcibly" toilet training the child.

<sup>109</sup> See [http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_3\\_No\\_21\\_November\\_2012/11.pdf](http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_3_No_21_November_2012/11.pdf) and International Journal of Business and Social Science, KITAs, Quoten und Karriere: The F-Word in German Boardrooms, Heiko Wiggers, Vol 3, No 21, November 2012 for a discussion on scarcity of KITAs or public child care institutional care in Germany.

cases, I received a lukewarm and perhaps even a suspicious reception, so was able to only interview the head teacher at the KITA for an hour. In other places I was able to visit multiple times, either to participate in sessions with children or observe activities or even be part of parent-teacher meetings. I observed and interviewed and gathered the general impression across these diverse KITAs that permissive disciplining was a primary pedagogical tool. Yet on the other hand, there was a show of weak faith in this method by many who dealt with children. Grandparents often complained about their grandchildren being too ‘free’ to do what pleased them, teachers in schools and KITAs about the need for parents to learn rules of setting boundaries, parents and childless expressed exasperation over children’s social behavior. Many told me, “children don’t follow basic rules of social etiquette like talking and greeting adults, or respecting adults other than one’s own parents and teachers; children haven’t learnt restraint.” What was becoming clear during fieldwork was a general distrust in the *Erziehungs* philosophy of the generation of parents or teachers.

I visited KITAs that were very small with just 20 children and four teachers and also very large facilities spread over three floors in a building with close to 200 children in different age groups and almost 25 teachers. A typical KITA has three to four activity rooms, bathrooms and small cupboards for children’s clothes and shoes, a kitchen where the meals are prepared, a common room with all work material such as books, colors, paper and toys. Every KITA premise has a playground or they have an agreement with a local playground nearby which the children can use. Additionally, there is a room to cuddle (*Kuschelraum*), which is a small corner in a quieter area of the KITA with pillows and drapes where a child can retreat to or sit with one of his favorite teachers if he/she is

upset.<sup>110</sup> Inside the KITA there are smaller sized slides and balls, but most *toben* (jumping, running, letting steam off) is done outdoors. Boards across walls are covered with children's craft, photos and their quotes. "Sometimes children say something really insightful or funny when they are involved in a new activity or just in the daily interaction with others. We write these down and put up their words on the board for their parents to see later," informed many teachers. Each child goes through a three weeks acclimatization or adjustment phase (*Eingewöhnung*), where the child comes in with the parent and spends time in the KITA before he/she is ready to join full time. All KITAs have a digital camera (to record children's activities) and large wheelbarrow like wagons with tiny benches or seats in which up to six toddlers fit. These wagons are used to push children in during outings, either to the park, to the sauna or for outdoor play. The older children walk.

The day starts with the morning circle, which is the time when all children and teachers are together; they greet each other and sing songs and begin the day. After about half an hour of this first activity, children above two or three years of age are divided into groups in different rooms according to the activities they choose to do on that day: this is the philosophy of the *Angebote* i.e. the child can choose an activity from a few different ones that are presented. "We tell the kids, in this room we are painting, in the other doing experiments with water and in the third playing with blocks, then they choose which room they want to be in. Most of the times it works and children make their choices and we get on with the day."

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<sup>110</sup> Even children need *Ruhe* and the space for it! Often teachers told me that the only way they could calm an upset child was by separating her from the group, sitting with her in the cuddle room and that made the

Across the KITAs I visited, I listened about the benefits of autonomous learning along with challenges teachers faced. What I found interesting is how often the ideology of “autonomy of the child” was emphasized to me. I wondered if it was for effect, or to convince me that they are convinced of it themselves, or to highlight the difference between me and them, or portray no separation between ideology and practice, between what they think may be right and therefore what they must do; or it is something they are indeed convinced about? Is this aggressive propaganda some kind of attempt to convince oneself that the child can indeed take over part of the responsibility of *Erziehung*?

Other conversations I had in KITAs pertained to the “uncontrollable behavior of children and the inability of the parents to control their children.” Parents don’t know how to lay down limits (*Die Eltern wissen nicht wie man Grenzen setzt*).<sup>111</sup> Katrin a director at one of the KITAs I visited, in her late 30s and childless explained that even simple things like greeting others are not learnt or taught. “There are times when we are saying bye to the children and the child will not look back at us and the mother will not discipline the child, instead will say, let me say bye on her behalf because the child doesn’t want to!”

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child feel secure. Especially the many cushions and the drapes that enclosed the child and her favorite teacher in the corner of a room, gave her a sense that she was in a peaceful and safe place.

<sup>111</sup> The director of a neighborhood Family Center (i.e. a publically funded institution housing different forms of services for children and families) told me that in the recent past they have begun to conduct courses on boundary setting or *Grenzen setzen* i.e. giving parents tools to lay down rules for their children. She added, “and it doesn’t matter if these are poor or rich families, educated or less educated, German or immigrants, the inability to discipline is I think a general problem that parents face today.” This Family Center was also the place where I interviewed staff about their work with families from different backgrounds and also participated in self help group meetings of fathers seeking custody of, or visiting rights with children.



I sit in the morning circle with 12 children and three teachers. There has been a spate of flu cases and many children are sick on this grey, cold winter day. We try to get organized and get the children to settle down so that the songs can be sung. Some children are extremely orderly, sit and wait for instructions, others fight over who will sit next to which teacher and it is indeed difficult to satisfy all of them. The four-year-old who sits next to me starts to kick the teacher on his right. While trying to sing along the teacher holds his feet and tells him not to hurt her. For the entire 15 minutes as we sing songs, the little boy continues to kick his teacher and the only thing I hear from her is, “stop doing that, you are hurting me, do you want to do that?” That intervention does not change his behavior. I sit horrified at what I just witnessed, not because this is so out of the ordinary, that a child has a tantrum, but because I saw no effective way of stopping the child from doing what he did. In India kicking another person is taboo; I remember the striking manner in which my otherwise extremely gentle, yet firm mother disciplined me about this; the message was clear, “you do not kick another person” and I never did.

At another KITA the teachers do a little play-acting for first time parents, to show them how the day generally looks for children when they come to the KITA. They start with the morning circle and reach the point where the children are presented with the choices of activities for the day. One of the teachers presents a ‘difficult’ scenario: a child refuses to choose from the various activities available and instead wants to play outside. The teachers said that in such a case one of them would take the child outdoors. Later I asked the KITA director why they would consider a fourth choice (going out to play), when the child already has three offered him. I also wanted to know what they would do

if no teacher is able to spare time and take the child outdoors. The director vigorously shook her head, smiled a little and said,

It is self-determination. There are no boundaries to that. (*Es ist Selbstbestimmung, es gibt keine Grenzen*). Either we as teachers make sure that it is so very interesting for the child indoors that he feels like choosing from the three rooms or then he doesn't. And sometimes the child just needs to be outdoors and he feels better and concentrates better indoors; if you don't let him go out then he will be more of a nuisance in the room. So the child creates his own fourth choice as you say, probably because the choices were in the first place not that well thought out, not suitable to excite the child. We have to start with what the child wants to start with and support his/her development not direct it. And all the games, tools, projects that we do most of the times engage our children very well and we don't have much problem with discipline.

What I learnt from all the KITA visits is that children need to be provided enough so that they would be satisfied with the choices they have. Based on the starting point children choose for themselves, the KITAs support their development. The day care centers I visited present the idea of the child as sovereign, as enjoying an 'adult' status in a rather exaggerated way. This has to do with the fact that as institutions of pre-school instruction directed towards a teaching philosophy that lets the child lead *Erziehung*, these sites exemplify one extreme conceptualization of the child in Berlin, Germany. I do not claim that this is the only way in which adult-child relations in Berlin are organized. However, even as Berliners contemplate on upbringing and education of children and the changes across generations in how much social value children enjoy, there is an experience of the child as encroaching material, emotional and social boundaries.

## Conclusion

Why does children's presence disturb? Do their noise levels and ever-increasing encroachment into adult spaces necessitate or justify a physical separation from adults, or from those without children? What is the logic of this separation as in the case of the café with separate child and adult sections (*Ältern ohne Kinder*)? Is *Ruhe* impossible in the

presence of parents and children or do the latter already occupy enough space such that guarding of other spaces becomes the right of the more vulnerable (for instance people without children)?

This chapter has illustrated several attempts at keeping children at bay in the city of reunified Berlin, even as increasingly innovative city spaces (material, social and legal) open up to accommodate the needs of children. As Berlin strives to make itself ‘child-friendly’ by creating an atmosphere that allows for children to not only be present everywhere, but also make their presence heard, the encounter between generations is not always peaceful. The fear of the weakening of adult authority or possibilities of peaceful coexistence is countered by signs such as “No Strollers Allowed” and attempts to ward off discomfort experienced in the presence of children.

Berliners bemoan changes in the city and the waning of its ‘original’ charm as the in-migration of family gentrifiers creates a disquieting atmosphere (*Stimmung*) in the city. Gentrification has engendered class and ethnic conflicts over space; its trajectory in Berlin, puts generations, and parents and the childless, in somewhat incompatible relations with each other. I have shown how the separation of material and social environments of children and adults relates to the country’s demographic future and increasing value given to (internal) reproduction. I argue further that the physical separation of adult/child spaces is also a process of stylization of the child in that it strengthens a certain relationship to the ‘perfect’ child.<sup>112</sup> “Perfect” refers variously to

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<sup>112</sup> The child as a resource (social, cultural and economic), as an invaluable contemplation and an undeniable desire is characterized and constructed as such in an exaggerated, almost non-realistic manner. This is what I mean by stylization of the child. Such a portrayal treats the figure of the child as a superior preoccupation and investment (*erhobenes Wesen*). I use the example of Prenzlauer Berg as a physical site

children not needing control, discipline or too much directed *Erziehung*; a child is perfect in that she is valuable because she is a child and her presence is deemed a necessary and sufficient condition for creating desire to have children (*Lust auf Kinder*).<sup>113</sup> Expanding material, legal and social space is made available in which the child and family can once again hope to thrive in Germany, a country facing a demographic ‘crisis.’ ‘Child-friendly’ spaces then are a way of presenting, displaying and stylizing the child, an invaluable resource that nurtures the future of the nation. This stylization is a source of anxiety over changing meaning and value of children. The child is on the one hand, vulnerable (because of its feared absence) and therefore needs protection (*schonen*). On the other hand, the child is sovereign or expected to be independent and capable of self-determination. The experience of this perfect child as hypervisible points to a generational fear related to the possible collapse of categories “child” and “adult.” While separating oneself from children, may be a way of managing and maintaining *Raum* and *Ruhe*, the very creation of child-friendly or child-exclusive spaces bring into stark relief the child’s perfection and the fear of indifference (*Unlust*) towards this invaluable resource.<sup>114</sup>

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where the staging and relating to this object of desire unfolds.

<sup>113</sup> bib-demografie.de see *Keine Lust auf Kinder: Geburtenentwicklung in Deutschland, 2012* (No desire for children: Population developments in Germany, 2012). Also see Kohler, Billari, and Ortega (2006) on attitudes towards private versus institutional child care and its relation to fertility rates.

<sup>114</sup> While the attempts at stimulating internal reproduction gain ground, the current migration crisis across Europe is likely to change German demography in unexpected ways. People who enter Germany today are not temporary guest workers of the 1950s; rather there is an expectation of permanent integration into German society. Their children will potentially compensate for the low fertility amongst Germans. The presence of immigrant populations is both a reminder of what Germans have failed to do well (reproduce), and a harbinger of the future German nation that is riven with ambivalence and ambiguity.

### *Children In and Out of Place*

In the week before I left Berlin in August 2013, I attended yet another opening ceremony of a children's playground in a corner of Görlitzer Park. The theme of the playground is "Pirates," and it is equipped with a large pirate ship in the center for children to explore and clamber over. This playground was not constructed anew, rather its old boundaries had been extended into an area of the park that was originally a grilling spot. The playground has been designated "barefoot," idealizing German romanticism in the image of children in sync with nature as they play in sand with sticks and stones.

As I have noted earlier, there is much skepticism about the goals of the "barefoot playgrounds" project. Parents expressed concern about physical safety and risk of infection (from glass or nails lying around in Görlitzer Park). The conspicuous presence of drug dealers, unemployed men, youth drinking alcohol is incongruous with a children's play area in this park especially. Also there is no physical separation between the "Pirates" playground and the rest of the park. Yet a sign that prohibits grilling confirms that this space is for children. The local parks and recreation office representative Andrea told me that the absence of a fence around this playground is a commitment to keeping adult and child spaces contiguous, rather than pretending that one can always protect children from the outside world: "It is also necessary for children to see this reality; I believe children should be able to play everywhere, hence *be* everywhere. That is not possible today and that's why we have playgrounds!"

Scholars have proposed that the place of children in societies is expressed materially (i.e. places where they can be physically present or not) and structurally or socially i.e. in their relationship with other social categories such as parent, adult, older

children (see for instance Holloway and Valentine 2000b, a, James and James 2008, Olwig and Gullov 2003). Both social position, as well as physical location, and the relation between the two, reflect adult-child interactions, ideas of good parenting, and processes of socialization best suited to integrate children into the adult world. In some societies, children can be everywhere so to say (Olwig and Gullov 2003). This may be because children have not yet found their positions in the social order. Spatial contiguity with adults does not necessarily mean that children are considered mini adults or part of the adult social order. Writing of Shuar children in the Ecuadorian Amazonian Buitron-Arias notes that in spite of the proximity between children and adult spaces, “...generational distance was invariably emphasized through comportment and discourse.” (Buitron-Arias 2016:50) This would be true in my experience of growing up in India too. Often we were around adults and participated in their everyday lives; yet we were painfully aware of what boundaries we could not cross, for instance when we had to leave the room, when we needed to not participate in a conversation and when to make ourselves available for running errands! Thus in most societies there is some form of spatial segregation between adults and children (Nieuwenhuys 2003: 100). But this spatial segregation is expressed differently and carries multiple cultural meanings for adult-child relations. The question then is where do children belong in Berlin. What spaces do, can, and may they occupy, both physically and socially? And how is the emplacement of children related to the multiple and changing conceptualizations of the child in contemporary Berlin and Germany?

***Emplacement of the ‘European Child’: The child disturbs***

While there is no such thing as the “European Child,” several authors in the field of childhood studies, anthropology and geography have identified key common

experiences of children negotiating everyday life, and the structural status and meaning of the child/childhood in Western European societies. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, European scholars have on the one hand, studied the rising concern about children's vulnerabilities in a growing climate of risk and dangers: from strangers, traffic, other pernicious and external influences, such that the child's presence from the outside public places has moved into institutionalized, private spaces (Blakely 1994, James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, Karsten 2003, Matthews, Lamb, and Taylor 2000, McNeish and Roberts 1995, Preuss-Lausitz 1995, Valentine 1996a, b). On the other hand, authors have argued that the phase of childhood in European societies is shorter and the division between children's and adult's worlds is not so stark (Büchner 1990, Hengst 1987, 2001, Postman 1982); children have more and more control and access over spaces that are not managed by adults (Büchner, Bois-Reymond, and Krüger 1995).

Author and child psychiatrist Michael Winterhof in his 2009 book "Warum unsere Kinder Tyrannen werden" (Why are children are becoming tyrants) draws from over 20 years of clinical experience to comment on how children in Germany today are overburdened with the responsibility of choosing, something that adults (whether parents or teachers) around them have traditionally been responsible for. Children are turned into adults or forced to take on adult responsibilities according to Winterhof. Winterhof claims that this tendency to overburden the child with responsibility is partly a legacy of the 1968er generation that sought to break the tyranny of past authoritative disciplining. I would argue that there is something more to the story than the continued legacy of the 1968er. This self determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) is publicly displayed and seems to spill out of all places in Berlin as discussion around the demographic crisis, population

policies, immigration laws, and German child-(un)friendliness gains momentum in reunified Berlin. I argue that the child in Berlin very conspicuously transgresses the unstable boundaries between children's, and adults place arousing much consternation, even as her value as a social resource increases exponentially. Children in Berlin encroach public (read adult) spaces even as they are increasingly confined to private (read protected and institutionalized) spaces.

My ethnographic data shows that while children are removed from the dangerous outside world of adults and separated into safe spaces so they can grow and experiment and develop their personalities through individual choice and a little guidance, in the privacy of home or within smaller social groups, children participate in social intercourse between parents/adults. They are prepared for social integration by including them in conversations that they may not be able to comprehend, consequences of which they may not be able to understand and often end of aping the language of the adult. Similarly in KITAs there is an expectation that children will teach themselves many aspects of self care and choice, previously determined by the educators.<sup>115</sup> I would argue that there is evidence of the child's reentry into 'public' spaces;<sup>116</sup> while children are still monitored and supervised by adults, this space is becoming more and more open to, and traveled through by children. Children are on the one hand restricted to the different islands of children's spaces (Qvortrup et al. 1994, Zaiher 2001). On the other hand, the boundaries around these secure islands are expanding and the conflict over who belongs where continues between generations. The physical and social separation between specific

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<sup>115</sup> Often, it means too much pressure on the child to decide for himself, effectively cutting out adults as possible guides or mentors (also see Kjørholt 2003:209).

<sup>116</sup> See discussion on private-public in chapter two.



groups that I recorded is at one level related to the sense of physical and emotional encroachment that some groups experience; these practices of separation however index a deeper fear—the fear of an instability of the categories “child” and “adult”—even as children seem to enjoy increasingly more *Raum* in the social group identifying as “adult.”

Thus the social and structural emplacement of the German child is refracted through multiple factors: the national history of state intervention in reproduction, the demographic crisis and attempts to make Germany child-friendly, post reunification restructuring of Berlin, individual life stories of loss in wake of the *Wende* and (although not explicit) the presence of ‘non-German’ children (often as a contrast to the ‘German child’). The hypervisible child disturbs as does her indeterminacy; the intrusion of the category of “adult” by that of the “child” is exemplified in political and legal discourse and on streets and in cafes in Berlin. Children appear to be out of place.

Continuing with the theme of hypervisible reproduction, the next chapter discusses how low fertility, and experiences of reunification and gentrification produce the category of the “Swabian mother.” Mothers identified with particular class and ethnic backgrounds, and residence and parenting ideologies come to be characterized as the drivers of the stylization of the ‘perfect’ child, even as their mothering practices are apprehended as ‘conspicuous’ by some groups of Berliners.

# CHAPTER TWO

## **“*Kinderwagenmafia*” and the Tyranny of the Stroller: Anxieties Around ‘Conspicuous’ Reproduction in Reunified Berlin**

### **Let me Through, I am the *Kinderwagenmafia*!**

Heidi stood up from behind her desk and came around so I could see the entire length of her body. Then squatting slightly, her knees out, her legs forming a diamond, she raised her arms in front of her and balled her fists, her elbows out on both sides, imitating the grip of a stroller (*Kinderwagen*). Then baring her teeth, she snarled like a dog; the aggressive mother pushing the stroller had turned into a menacing dog or perhaps the other way around. She exclaimed, “yes this is how they are; these “fight mothers,” almost comparable to “fight dogs!” (*ja so sind die Kampfütter, vergleichbar mit Kampfhunden*).<sup>117</sup> She continued,

I have no idea why they have all this fear. They are constantly exhausted – well first and foremost they are older mothers, so they don’t have energy.<sup>118</sup> Their entire day is centered around the child. I would say take one or more days to yourself where you have nothing to do with the child, but they are afraid to do that because that would involve someone else playing this role for them. They are not even willing to give the reins to the father for a while!

Reflecting on mothers with small children (some of whom she considers friends),

Heidi, 50 years old, a physiotherapist and resident of West Berlin since the 1970s told me her theory on “fight-mothers” (*Kampfütter*). Heidi lives with her partner of ten years; he is an architect and has two children from previous relationships. Heidi is childless.

<sup>117</sup> She refers to dog fighting and the fierceness of the dogs who are trained to fight and kill!

<sup>118</sup> In a comic series entitled *Mütter vom Kollwitzplatz* or “Mothers of Kollwitzplatz” a very popular residential area in Prenzlauer Berg where one finds an overabundance of children’s stores, cafes, playgrounds and families with children, the cartoonist Ol depicts interactions between “Berliners” and *Zugezogene* or those who migrated to Berlin. Here is one in reference to older mothers. A boy of about four asks his mother (they are the Berliners) as he sees a woman pushing her stroller in the park, “Mom, what are the grandmothers doing with the strollers?” (*Mama. Was machen denn die Omas mit den Kinderwagen?*). The mother frantically hushes the boy and says, “Keep quiet! They are aged mothers (*Bist du still! Das sind Spätgebärende*) referring to the *Zugezogene*. The average age of women at first pregnancy is 29 years in Germany (*Statistisches Bundesamt* 2015). For details see: [https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/StatistischesJahrbuch/StatistischesJahrbuch2015.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/StatistischesJahrbuch/StatistischesJahrbuch2015.pdf?__blob=publicationFile)

Herself a child of refugees from Silesia, she has always been on the look out for a “home” where she could feel at peace, not in limbo, not insecure. “Some of these aspects of my personal biography did play a role in me not having children. I had much to work through emotionally and neither felt the intense desire, nor had the time to have children.” Now commenting on how she experienced mothers in Berlin, she admitted that she prefers not to engage with them as far as possible. Heidi lives a 40-minute subway ride from the city center and insists that it is not just the Prenzlauer Berg mothers that she refers to when speaking of *Kampfmütter*; she is referring to mothers in general in Berlin.

Something is changing, there is some kind of protection mothers get from being mothers today and they don’t want to experience any encroachment of this right. Suddenly it is important again to have children! It is a life goal that wasn’t necessarily taken for granted (*war nicht selbstverständlich*) in my generation.

Lotte, a 40-year-old businesswoman and friend of Heidi’s added her commentary to our conversation in the summer of 2013.

I agree with what Heidi says about a newfound pride and sense of entitlement that mothers in Berlin feel. Of course you know I don’t mean all of them are like that! But take this example. I was traveling in the *Deutsche Bahn* (regional train service). There was another man in a business suit in the compartment and then a woman – obviously not very well off, as her clothes and stroller indicated – entered the compartment. The child in the stroller was screaming at the top of his lungs; my ears were strained because of it. The man finally spoke up after about ten minutes and said, “can you please try and calm the baby?” The woman flipped out at that request and said, that people in Germany who have children, are discriminated against (*Die Frau flippte aus und sagte, wenn man in Deutschland Kinder hat, würde man diskriminiert!*). In fact, *Deutsche Bahn* (DB) has a special children’s compartment where children have more room and toys to play with and can be with other kids. The woman’s reaction indicates, she doesn’t care if the child has fun; it is about the mother and her ego and she feels she must fight all the time!

After Lotte mentioned this to me, I looked for the children’s compartment the next couple of times I had an opportunity to travel by DB. It is indeed a cozy corner, a

couple of seats are missing and the floor is thickly carpeted, so that infants can crawl around. Additionally, DB provides toys, and the windows in the compartment are painted with bright animal figures or have attractive stickers on them. I had the opportunity to ask some parents (mostly mothers) why they preferred to travel in that compartment. Most I spoke to had similar motivations: “because we can be free, we feel like the children can be loud and no one will tell us to keep them quiet.” One of the mothers laughed and said, “yeah you get that a lot in Germany, people need their peace and quiet and I can understand that; when I am not traveling with my children, I don’t want children in the compartment where I am sitting!” The mothers I spoke to, were often very aware of how the presence of children disturbed fellow passengers in trains or subways or in other public places.

Vera a successful businesswoman in her early 40s met me in a far West Berlin café. She listened quietly as I spoke about my research. The first thing she said to me after I finished speaking came as a shock to me, especially since I had only just started my extended fieldwork in the fall of 2012:

I hate children! (*Ich hasse Kinder!*) Well, its not really the children as much as the stroller mafia (*Kindergartenmafia*). These Swabian mothers in Prenzlauer Berg! They and their children are a menace on the street. Have you seen how proudly they strut around, aggressively pushing those large, bulky and expensive strollers? They are entitled and occupy the streets of Berlin with their toddlers in tow. And if anyone gets in the way of them or their little ones, they turn into these angry and grim figures.

Vera has been in Berlin since her student years and worked her way up in her job.

She is especially critical of the social expectation for women of a certain age; everyone assumes that at some point they want and will have children. She speaks out especially when colleagues or friends equate having children, especially in today’s Berlin, with

some kind of crucial life goal, which one must work towards, achieve and then be praised for.

Birgit in her mid-fifties and a mother of two was born and raised in East Berlin. She currently heads a Family Welfare Center in one of the central neighborhoods of Berlin and spoke with much disdain about West German mothers and the determined look they carry about themselves when pushing *Kinderwagen*. She reminisced that in East Berlin, children were not a matter of discussion or contemplation as much as it seems to be today. “We did not always have a plan. Sometimes the child was just there!” (*Wir hatten nicht immer einen Plan. Es war oft so, ach jetzt bin ich schwanger!*)

In East Germany of course public childcare institutions ensured that women could have children and also very soon go back to work. Birgit added that from her perspective she found some of the struggles of West German feminists she met after 1989 ridiculous:

They demanded the kind of gender equality – at work and in public life – which we already had. Now we all are in this together; we are all demanding for adequate public child care services, so that a woman too can pursue her career! Given that reunification obliterated the East German state, Birgit experiences how

today the younger generation faces a greater dilemma than their mothers did, yet her sympathy for the Swabian mother doesn’t last too long:

In a country that has seen stark differences in how reproduction was, or was not state supported, the younger generation might be confused more than we were. And you see this in the way in which those who do become mothers project that dilemma (choosing between work and family), which still continues after having children. Look at what is happening in places like Prenzlauer Berg – the Swabian mothers – god, I never ride my bicycle down there. I always get off and walk with my cycle for fear of running into a mother pushing her *Kinderwagen* and staring accusatorially at me for putting her child at risk! I start this chapter with the section entitled “Let me through, I am the

*Kinderwagenmafia*,” a slightly modified title from the original book title “*Lassen Sie*

*mich durch, ich bin Mutter: Von Edel-Eltern und ihren Bestimmerkindern*”<sup>119</sup> to briefly describe how in different contexts and places in contemporary Berlin, mothers with children, and strollers were experienced: as entitled, prominent, strutting and displaying the products of their much contemplated labor. Written by Anja Maier, and published by Bastei Luebbe Gmbh & Co. KG, Koeln in 2011, the author, a mother and former resident of Prenzlauer Berg now in her mid-40s reminisces in the book about the neighborhood before reunification. She cleverly and sarcastically portrays the Swabian mother describing her as chic, thin, rich, drinking Latte Macchiatos and asking her two year olds’ opinions on which shoes to buy. This hilarious and scathing account comes out of three months of stay in Prenzlauer Berg, where the author returned as a now former resident to live and experience the public performance of mothers. I attended a book reading by the author while doing fieldwork in Berlin in the winter of 2012. The room was full of men and women between their mid 40s to mid 70s, mostly from former East Berlin, laughing practically at every sentence that Ms. Maier read out. Scorn and delight— at the fact that finally someone put down on paper what those present in the room have had to put up with in Berlin—flowed through the audiences’ peals of laughter. Ms. Maier was careful to clarify that under no circumstances is she child-unfriendly (*kinderunfreundlich*), only dismayed at how drastically her home town has changed after reunification. She asserted that what she is critiquing is not reproduction, but the manner in which it is put on display.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Translated as: Let me through, I am the mother: ‘Noble’ parents and ‘Sovereign’ children. The verb *bestimmen* means to decide or determine.

<sup>120</sup> I have discussed in detail the ethnic identification of Schwaben in the Introduction and continue to do so in the chapters that follow. Here, I refer at various points to my interlocutors’ descriptions of the Swabian mother: “married”, “in her mid to late 30s” “with a husband who had a high paying job”, “lives in

As stated in the narratives of some interlocutors, women both from former East and West Berlin display a distinct style of mothering, and themselves confront some old, and some new dilemmas of reproductive decision making. What sets mothers apart in Berlin today according to these interlocutors—parents, as well as childless—is a certain aggressive entitlement that demands social space and legal rights. At the same time there is a recognition that these “aggressive,” “angry,” and “grim” visages reflect collective and personal anxieties associated with reproducing the nation through the performance of a singular role that demands child-centeredness and renunciation of career goals (if any).

In short, this is the lay of the land: While West Germany considered reproduction a private matter, the East German state supported women as both mothers and laborers. After reunification—in addition to other gender discriminatory family policies—the conservative government of the Christian Democratic Union continues to fall short on providing adequate child care services. As discussed in the introduction chapter, a paradigm shift in political intervention in family affairs, has also produced moral discourse with respect to reproductive ‘choices.’ This macro context fuels the everyday performance of entitled mothering. For some of the men and women belonging to the *Wende* generation, their emotional relation to the city and reproductive choices and practices evoke memories of a more inclusive Berlin and turn possibly every mother with

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Prenzlauer Berg” or other central city neighborhoods, “has inherited money and bought her home in Berlin”, “with one or two children”, “lets her kids do what they please”, including infiltrate space through boisterous behavior, and “moves through the city with a hard-to-miss appendage – the *Kinderwagen*.” These stereotypes receive confirmation through experience and narration and potentially categorize all mothers as Schwaben or Schwaben-like. For instance, the woman who Lotte encountered in the train is described as probably not having enough money (this was identified through the kind of clothes the woman wore and the stroller she pushed). Or Heidi’s assertion that “all mothers” seem to feel entitled and need protection in their role as mothers. She states emphatically that even though geographically removed from the notorious Schwaben neighborhood, she experiences a certain aggression in the performance of mothers in Berlin today.



a *Kinderwagen* into a Swabian and possibly every *Kinderwagen* into an object occupying space, causing consternation, and reflecting the changing role of mothers in Berlin.

## Introduction

In this chapter I interpret the native category “*Kinderwagenmafia*,” that characterizes a form of child unfriendliness directed against mothers who move through Berlin’s public spaces with their strollers and children in tow. *Kinderwagenmafia* indexes anxieties related to the performance of motherhood that is apprehended as ‘conspicuous.’ Maternal labor is traditionally associated with forging emotional and kinship ties and occurs primarily at home. I argue that in the experience of the interlocutors who appear on these pages, mothers and children disturb (*stören*) because the latter are transposed from the private (*Intimsphäre*) to the public realm (*in die Öffentlichkeit gebracht*). Mothers then appear out of place. An increasingly alarmist discourse on low fertility in Germany has heightened public awareness that children are crucial for the future of German society. This creates a sense of entitlement for parents who are sometimes blatantly offensive in their conduct in public. Combined with family driven in-migration and consequent gentrification, these national discourses and parental public practices are dramatized in Berlin through the conspicuous presence of children in varied city spaces. While mothers embody these spatial and demographic changes, their presence also evokes, in my interlocutors, personal memories and desires related to reproductive choices and practices.

I expand on the idea of ‘conspicuous’ reproduction through the use of the terms ‘private’ and ‘public’ appearance in concluding sections. It is important to note here that while the distinctions and strict definitions of private and public have been thoroughly

criticized and re theorized by feminists, feminist geographers and other social scientists, “...many mothering subjects have an abiding experience of ideologies that rest on just this distinction, an experience that has not necessarily dissolved in the face of theoretical sophistication.” (Hardy and Wiedmer 2005:4) Also for those who encounter mothers—be it Vera or Birgit—these ideologies divide their own material, social and psychological world and are reflected through the gestures and idioms that this chapter elucidates.

This chapter then describes and interprets a form of mutual aggression between Berliners and mothers in Berlin. In using the term Berliner, I rely on my interlocutors’ identifications as Berliners. There is naturally a wide variation in this idea of belonging to Berlin. I spoke to people born and brought up in the city, never having lived anywhere else, people who for generations live in Berlin but have roots in other parts of Germany and those who moved to Berlin at the time of, or just prior to reunification. Depending on the manner in which they narrated their life stories, all of these groups could and would identify as Berliners. In fact, this multiplicity to the idea of belonging is ethnographically salient in identifying relations between emerging social categories in one’s field site.

Here, I recount experiences of both former West and East Berliners who relate to the *Wende* as an event that has shaped contemporary Berlin’s reproductive categorizations. More specifically, Berliners are those men and women who mark their identity distinctions through moments of distancing from a particular kind of mother stereotype, and seeking identity with those who experience loss after the *Wende* or those who value a less entitled style of mothering.<sup>121</sup> It is through such processes of seeking

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<sup>121</sup> Thus, “Berliners” can be mothers, mothers from Swabia, fathers, and childless men and women. What unifies their experience of the stereotype “Swabian mother,” is their memory and experience of Berlin and

intimacy and distance that the classificatory category of the *Kinderwagenmafia* (read “Swabian mother”) emerges, substituting the encounter with *any* mother with that of the stereotype of the Swabian mother.<sup>122</sup> The performance of motherhood is not without props. The stroller is a significant material appendage that defines this encounter. I discuss the multiple objectifications of the *Kinderwagen* as sign, and contextualize its presence in different places and confrontation with multiple social groups to argue that the stroller is a metonym of changing spatial practices (mobility, access, restrictions to access) and reproductive experiences and ideologies in contemporary Berlin (see discussion on Peirce by Colapietro 1950, Kockelman 2007, Valentine 1984 in concluding sections).

I argue further that the category of “Swabian mother” and the object of the *Kinderwagen* emerge as collective representations that are produced in, and signify a specific moment in time in Berlin and Germany’s socio-political-demographic landscape.<sup>123</sup> The spatial order, or the marking of space by material objects or through conceptual categories has no meaning independent of social practice. Yet the larger system of meaning as inscribed by the history and generational memory and experience of the divided city play a generative role in producing boundaries between different social identities (see introduction, and chapters one and three). The “Swabian mother” and the *Kinderwagen* signify something over and above their materiality; they evoke

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its relationship to children both pre- and post- *Wende*.

<sup>122</sup> *Schwäbische Mütter* (Swabian mother) is a classificatory category in that it evokes relations between social groups that are distinguished from each other based on specific aggregate characteristics. Individuals are placed in groups because they are identified with group characteristics and less with individual traits and practices. In this chapter, I show how this process of social classification creates divisions between “Swabian mothers” and “all others,” and crystallizes ideas around contemporary forms of reproduction in Berlin. I will discuss this more in concluding sections

particular emotions and practices in the context of Berliners' past and contemporary experiences of reproduction, parenting and belonging.

Collective representations are the product of a vast cooperative effort that extends not only through space but over time; their creation has involved a multitude of different minds associating, mingling, combining their ideas and feelings – the accumulations of generations of experience and knowledge. A very special intellectuality, infinitely richer and more complex than that of the individual, is concentrated in them. We can understand, then, how reason has the power to go beyond the range of empirical knowledge. (Durkheim 2001[1912]: 18)

These collective representations mark boundaries between groups (here between “Swabian mothers” and those identifying as “Berliners”) that are produced through specific utterances and practices in city spaces. Such externalizations reinforce momentarily a sense of belonging, a feeling of identification with, and an expression of an emotional experience of the city of Berlin, for some men and women of the *Wende* generation. This experience is now marked by the tyranny of the stroller.<sup>124</sup>

### **Identifying the “Swabian Mother”**

The “Swabian mother” was identified in various ways through different qualities or demographic features; she was also located in specific neighborhoods such as in Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg and places (playgrounds or cafes) in the city and most critically evaluated on the basis of her ‘obsession’ with her child. Berliners animated this stereotype in some of the following ways: “She is from Swabia;” “she is married;” “in her mid-thirties;” “her husband is the primary bread winner;” “they are recent migrants to the city;” “they have one to two children;” “have bought a home in the city center with

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<sup>123</sup> On collective representation see Bourdieu 1977, 2003, Durkheim 2001[1912], Durkheim and Mauss 2009 [1903], Giddens 1979, Moore 1986.

<sup>124</sup> In chapter three, I carry forward this argument, albeit from a different perspective. Using the stories of childless women in their late 30s-late 40s (the *Wende* generation) and their experiences of exclusion from city spaces and social life in Berlin, I provide ethnographic evidence of the marking of boundaries between

inherited money;” “compete with each other in buying expensive strollers;” and “let their children do as they please.” The presence of the “Swabian mother” was an experience of the post reunification years in that the *Kinderwagenmafia* was indicative of a specific moment in time and history of the city. This category then was also an expression of personal loss or loss of home, loss of city spaces or changes in Berlin’s *Stimmung*, as well as experience of shifting ideologies of mother-child relations.

### ***Mitte Muttis Occupying Playgrounds and Cafes***

Children’s playgrounds in Berlin are fascinating in their colors, variety, material and structure. The most common material used to construct playgrounds is wood: long sticks in different shapes, twisted logs, tunnels, gates, swings and bouncing seats, a canoe, paddles, wagons or slides fill the playgrounds. Sometimes there is a variety of construction material used in one structure itself. For instance, the slide is made of metal but the way up to the slide and the steps leading to it are logs of wood nailed together. Pathways on the playgrounds are not clear-cut, purposefully designed for children to climb over, negotiate and reach across small obstacles before accessing the spot they want to get to. Thick rope nets sprawl over mounds of earth or hang over poles for climbing and getting entangled in. Often playgrounds have small sections not necessarily in the corner but even in the center or as an extended part of the play area where one finds natural material to play with: a cluster of trees or shrubs, earth, stones, bushes, leaves, grass. This material is considered essential for providing variety in sense of touch, an experience most parents told me children in the city don’t have. I observed how important this contact with the physical surroundings was in the manner in which adults

let children play: infants crawling and children lying and rolling in the sand, playing on their own with different materials like stones and sticks without constant supervision, swinging from trees and ropes and jumping from ladders leaning against trees. When watching children, I was amazed at their agility and the encouragement (by way of non-supervision) that they received to explore the lengths of the playground.

“That’s where the *Mitte Muttis* spend most of their time, on these playgrounds,” scoffed Andreas. Andreas, Peter, Jürgen and Richard are East Berliners; they are in their 50s and have been residents of the neighborhoods of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg since childhood. They meet every other afternoon near the park Volkspark am Weinberg around the city center. Prior to 1989 this park was found along the border between East and West Berlin, and some section of the Wall could be seen from the park where we met and spoke in the summer of 2013. Due to rent protection laws, all these former East Berliners have not yet been evicted from their apartments. Remembering the city as children and then as young men, the four of them spoke to me about the drastic changes they see in the roads, buildings, people, clothes and atmosphere. They said, they did not recognize the city, and especially this part of the city anymore: “and to think this has been our home for the last 30 years, if not more,” exclaimed Jürgen.

I often asked mothers about the sequence of activities parents engaged in with their children on a regular basis. Men or women on parental leave usually set out for long walks (lasting anywhere from an hour to three) after the morning ritual of breakfast and change of clothes. Lunch would be taken outside in a park in summers or inside in cafes when it was colder. Often mothers also met in children’s cafes, where they could chat with others, drink a coffee while their children crawled around and played with others.

Some of these cafes also organized different activities or workshops for mothers and infants. If the child was in day care, the average pick up time was around 4pm. After pick up mothers, children and the strollers moved straight on to a playground. After some physical activity, the children would be led to a café for a soup before heading home for bath, dinner and bedtime. I was often in many cafes around playgrounds where I would witness children filthy from playing in sand and mud eating their bread and drinking soup. Andreas broke my reverie, “Now we no longer have the street corner pubs where we would hang out from night till next morning.” “Now we have cafes for the *Mitte Muttis* who are quite obsessed with their children. *Die Kinder und Mütter stehen immer im Mittelpunkt!* (The children and mothers always stand in the limelight, or they are the center of attention)” Peter chuckled at his clever use of the word *mitte* (translated as center or in the middle). Peter refers to *mitte* not only as the neighborhood Mitte in Berlin—with very high real estates prices and many family-friendly spaces—, but also to the emplacement of the mothers and children vis-à-vis men like them. Increasingly the needs of families are replacing the material, structural and social content of their former home. Children’s playgrounds and cafes replace local pubs as former residents—artists, unemployed, singles and students—make way for families with children. These families are further marked through specific ideologies of what is considered good or bad mothering by my interlocutors, both mothers and others.

### ***Ideologies of maternal work: Good and Bad Mothers***

Regina is 38 and was born and brought up in East Germany and had been living in Berlin for five years in 2013. She remembers that she and her brother went to the day care as infants because both her parents were always at work. “I didn’t mind the day care; it was the food that I hated and they would force us to eat. There were fixed meal times

and everyone had to eat. I remember even as a three-year-old howling because they made me eat hard, cold, flavorless scrambled eggs and I just simply couldn't keep them down."

Regina shrugged and explained that going to the day care very young was not only a common experience for most children of working parents but also a socially acceptable and unquestioned practice in East Germany. "You were not a bad mother because you sent your child to the day care!" On account of the history of the post war development of reproductive and productive relations in West Germany, West German mothers continue to face dilemmas about who could best take care of a child; day care is looked at with some judgment, especially if the mothers can opt to stay at home.<sup>125</sup> Regina often said she felt out of place with West German mothers who according to her were too obsessed with their children.

They don't have a life other than their children; these kids are their obsession – although it works the other way around too, when you don't have much time with your children i.e. when you are weekend parents whatever time you have becomes obsessive time. These mothers always ask and comment on my daughter's weight and I kept insisting, she is a healthy baby, does not have any intake other than breast milk, but all these mothers, they want their babies to be fit and thin at that age!

It is precisely with mothers such as these that Regina does not want to be

identified. On an occasion when Regina was over for dinner at my place she put her

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<sup>125</sup> See discussion on *Betreuungsgeld* in Introduction.

I do not imply that all West German women face this "moral" dilemma while East German mothers would always opt for day care over care at home. I do want to highlight though that division of Germany and diametrically opposed ideas of the nuclear family, gender, productive and reproductive roles in the capitalist and socialist post war societies created a structure, morality and normativity to the experience of and choices about marriage, reproduction, work and child care. I have already discussed in detail in chapter one, the study by Astrid Baerwolf (2012) that shows how these established state-family relations were especially disrupted for East German women who had children around the time or a little after the *Wende*. Socialized in the socialist model of child rearing they had to come to terms with the fact that the states role in child care was attenuated. Baerwolf, shows further how East German women who grew up in reunified Berlin, and had children in the new millennium were socialized in to the West German model of child care and in fact began to aggressively and competitively find meaning in child rearing (especially if unable to pursue careers).



daughter to bed at a fixed hour. The child fussed and cried a little for almost ten whole minutes, but Regina continued to stay seated at the dining table. Finally, the child fell asleep. Regina was at pains to explain what she did to the bunch of us who were gathered together for dinner, “She (the child) is fussing because she thinks she can do this when we are not at home. But this is her bed time and she must sleep and so if she cries a little longer than usual, I need to not give in to her will.” I remember being very impressed with Regina’s discipline, having found it quite unbearable to listen to the cries of the child for ten whole minutes! On another occasion when Regina invited me and a few other friends over for Christmas’ her daughter was too excited to go to bed at the appointed hour. This time Regina picked her out of bed and let her stay with the guests long after the child’s bed time. She sighed, a little frustrated with herself and said, “if my parents had seen this, they would have remarked, the child disciplines the parent (*Das Kind erzieht die Eltern*). That’s what I say about the parenting style of West German Swabian mothers!” As a former East German, Regina comfortably makes this distinction between herself and other West German women. Additionally, local and state discourses on differences between East and West German reproductive policies feed into such expressions of inclusion in, and exclusion from the category of the “Swabian mother.”

Lene is 33, a PhD in German studies who moved back to Berlin in 2012. She raises her year-old-daughter single handedly. Her husband works in another country. Her parents belong to the former East-German state of Mecklenburg Vorpommern and visit occasionally to help with childcare. She lives in Charlottenburg, an affluent neighborhood in West Berlin, in an apartment built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for factory workers. While inhabited largely by a middle-aged, retired population, Lene says she

does see some families with children around where she lives, “but not too many.” She speaks of a feeling of exclusion, both within, and outside the group of German mothers she interacts with. As an East Berliner, she claims that adjusting to West German parents’ consumption practices is stressful, and as a mother in Berlin, she knows that she is not excluded from the category of the “obsessive” mothers, she herself finds difficult to tolerate.

You know I do a lot of activities with other mothers – some are single, some separated, and a lot of the West German women are married and not working. I always feel like I am not doing enough or to be precise, not *buying* enough for my daughter. I feel the need to shop, every time I get back from swimming classes with my daughter. For instance, you know the brand Maxi Cosi? There’s a new stroller bedding that they have on the market. The bedding can be converted into a car seat. It costs 1000 Euros! A lot of the cloth slings for carrying infants come with an attached blanket, which you can wrap around the child securely even when carrying her in the sling. Now that is an additional cost. I just take a blanket from home and cover my daughter with it when I am walking with her in the sling!

Lene is unemployed and only takes on part time teaching gigs for the time that she can find a baby sitter for her daughter. Her husband is the primary breadwinner. As a German citizen, Lene also receives *Betreuungsgeld* (Euros 300) and some other benefits for childcare. She resents being identified as *Schwabe* from Prenzlauer Berg, yet having little access to the professional world, often finds that the easiest way to fight isolation is to interact with other stay-at-home mothers. Maintaining two households on a single income is an economic challenge and Lene tries hard to not equate her comparably lower consumption of children’s goods and services with her ability to be a good or good enough mother.

Vera who we met earlier, is a West Berliner in her mid 40s; she runs a successful advertising business with a friend, lives with her partner of many years and decided consciously not to have any children.

They tell me that I don't want children because I want to fulfill myself, but it is exactly the opposite, they who have children want to do that and also compensate for something that they missed in their childhood (*weil ich mich verwirklichen will, aber das ist genau das Gegenteil – sie wollen sich verwirklichen und etwas nachmachen was ihnen in ihrer Kindheit fehlte!*).

Vera always has a stern expression approaching disgust or anger on her face when she talks about children and especially mothers. Referring to women who make having children into a personal life- project she used words like arrogance (*Arroganz*), self-actualization (*Verwirklichung*) and self-importance when describing them.

I don't know what it is about them? So many of my friends were perfectly normal and then after they had a child, things just change, perhaps it's hormonal, I don't know...and the entire focus is on the child. Perhaps there is a lot of frustration because they want the child but they also want their careers and since they have to take a step back in their careers they drive all their attention into the child. I know of so many couples who split up when the child was around three or four, because the man would continue to be the primary breadwinner, the woman would be at home and her entire day would be framed around the child and then the 'couple' ceased to exist. People change, they behave in public as though they have made a big sacrifice to society by reproducing. And then the child of course must achieve everything that the mother could not. Have you observed the parents on the playgrounds? What do they do? Forming these little sand castles with small buckets; these women are reliving their childhood, all their wishes projected onto the children. These women damage their children!

Vera is vehemently negative about the tremendous attention that the mothers she encounters give their children. The precise and calculated attempts at forming these "little persons in their own right" just like the sand castles mothers make in the playgrounds, speak to a certain celebration of the woman as mother, which Vera thinks borders on a euphoria about bearing children that she'd rather not associate with Germany again.

While I did think that Vera was very extreme in her own judgment of why women had children, I did not ask her if as a successful business woman without children, she too was singularly focused on what she believed was her role as a career woman. I recognized in her frustration though similar commentaries on the mother-child dyad, which were often accompanied by phrases or idioms describing a performance of

(obsessive) motherhood or (obsessively) desired motherhood, both of which were evaluated negatively and associated with a “new” style of mothering in Berlin.

For instance, the term *Rabenmutter* (lit. raven mother, connotation bad mother) was evoked several times to express frustration or even disgust (as in Vera’s case) at mothers’ tunnel vision on their children. The word *Rabenmutter* first appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is derived from the image of the raven whose young ones are pushed out of the nest before they can fly i.e. left to fend for themselves in a vulnerable state. Thus it referred primarily to a mother who neglects to care for her child. In the 70s especially, as indicated by the older generation of West Berlin women, they reversed the use of this word to encourage women to not neglect their own professional and personal desires and to divert their attention away from the three Ks: *Kinder* (children), *Küche* (kitchen) and *Kirche* (church). So a *Rabenmutter* was one who focused too much of her attention on the child and neglected herself and her work. Many East German women and men scoffed at the idea that it was harmful for the child’s development to go to day care at a very young age; on the other hand, *Betreuungsgeld* as a ‘happy’ alternative for mothers who stay at home and care for their children was often disputed and debated in print and visual media (see introduction chapter). *Rabenmutter* as used by many of my interlocutors (both West and East Berliners like Vera or Regina and Lene who distanced themselves from either motherhood itself or ‘obsessive motherhood’ in particular), here refers to the obsessive investment in (“children are the only focus of their lives”) and irrational exuberance related to (“look at them displaying their trophies”) children. With the increasing vocalization of creating a child friendly German society, my interlocutors described a sense of triumph in the way in which families with children display the products of their

reproductive labor. “This celebration...it stinks a bit of our (fascist) past, um...I’d rather not say,” Vera often whispered to me, lowering her voice regardless of whether or not there were other people within earshot. For Vera, Regina and Lene, for instance, the “Swabian mother” is also identified as *Rabenmutter* through her obsessive parenting.

Interestingly I learnt of another phrase that Berliners made in connection with the hypervisibility of Germany’s demographic crisis and the facilitating environment this provided in which to express desire for having children and performing this desire in a conspicuous manner. Around the end of a year in Berlin, I sat with a group of women and men in their early to late 30s, all West Berliners. I had known all of them very well for the past year. The majority had no children but two of the women did. They were all laughing about the “*Frauen mit Kinderwagenblick*” (lit. women with a stroller-look or stroller-glance) i.e. women on the prowl for men who would fertilize them. As one of the mothers in the group crudely put it. “They have this look about them. They are on the look out for sperm!” And everyone laughed.

*Kinderwagen* refers to the stroller and *Blick* can be translated as a glance, a scanning look, or to watch carefully. Here the *Blick* refers primarily to the *Blick* of women in their late 30s who search for men to fulfill their one desire: procreate. This search is often also one for love, closeness, intimacy, the need for one’s own family, but described more sarcastically as the panic related to the ticking of the biological clock. One of the mothers in the group, a woman in her mid-thirties with two children spoke of her own sister who she characterized as having a *Kinderwagenblick*: “She had one child from one guy and now wants to sleep with her colleague just to get pregnant. She only wants men for the sperm. I don’t think that’s a great way to bring children into this

world!” The men in the group admitted being frustrated by these overzealous women, while at the same time were sensitive to the fact that for men it was easier because biologically, they could afford to wait longer than women to even consider having children. “It’s a little scary. These women have a look about them. It’s very determined and goal-oriented. I can’t think of having a relationship with women who are in it with the sole purpose of screening me as a potential father. Yet, I can see that if they are in their late 30s, and single, they probably want a man and have children as soon as possible.” (Klaus is 38, single and childless)

The presence of children “in the limelight” is then not only an experience of the political concern with the demographic crisis and the image of the mother pushing *Kinderwagen* through Berlin’s streets. It is also registered in more implicit personal desires, here, through a look (*Blick*), in a specific female body (women in their late 30s) and presents anxieties arising from Berlin’s concern with changing the city’s “child-unfriendly” atmosphere. Thus the “Swabian mother” embodies not just the demographic and spatial reconfigurations in Berlin, but also personal projections and fears related to political discourse on demographic crisis, hypervisible children, and reproductive decisions and possibilities.

### **Mothers Speak on German Child-Unfriendliness**

What then is the experience of some of the mothers from Swabia or mothers stereotyped as Swabian? I met and spoke with many mothers between the ages of 30-45, with children between ages 0-6 years. Some lived in the city center while others not

necessarily in the infamous family-gentrified neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg.<sup>126</sup>

Accused of enjoying “too much space” or being “out of place” in Berlin, how do mothers negotiate these characterizations? Some participate in this aggression in order to distance themselves from a stereotype as we have already seen. Others talk about the benefits of living where they do, reinforcing for themselves their reproductive choices as a way to counter negative commentary on their performance of motherhood. Some oscillate between both. Some don’t necessarily seem affected in their daily lives by these stereotypes; others’ behavior is infected visibly by these stereotypes, such that there is an unease associated with appearing in certain public places with their children. While my concern in this chapter is the experience of Berliners as they encounter conspicuous motherhood, mothers responses to these commentaries, show how public discourse circumscribes mothering experience, such that mothers discipline their own behavior (also see Hardy and Wiedmer 2005); in some cases they may actively fuel the stereotype of the “Swabian mother” as a form of aggression. Women and mothers continue to inhabit and invoke reproductive ideologies, moralities and dilemmas—and conspicuously so—given Berlin’s changing material, political, demographic, and social *Stimmung*.

Caro a 30-year-old freelance journalist from West Germany exclaimed to me:

Child-unfriendliness starts with body language. There are the stares or subtle gazes in your direction if your child is crying in confined public spaces like the train or subway or a café. I can feel people staring or looking away. Of course people also make very direct statements. Now let’s take the example of the café around the corner where I live where strollers are not allowed inside. On a cold winter morning, pushing my sleeping son in the stroller, I wanted to get in and

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<sup>126</sup>This demographic was significant to understanding adult-child interactions, intergenerational relations; this group was also most readily available because these children are not yet in school and if not in full time day care, are most likely to be with their mothers at home. See explanation for what I mean by “child” in Introduction.

have a coffee. I explained to the café manager why I couldn't leave the stroller outside – first there was no one to watch my child, second it was freezing and third there was enough space in the empty café for the stroller! Finally, I had to go elsewhere to have my coffee. There is a certain uncertainty around children. I, for instance, did not have anything to do with a child, till I had my own. That's not the case in many other countries, where children are tolerated and not shunned! Caro moved to Prenzlauer Berg five years ago. Her husband works in a publishing

house and they have a one-year-old son. She manages and writes a blog on “mothers in cities”, writing from the Berliner perspective, while her friend, a mother of three, writes about the West German city of Cologne where she currently lives. Caro wants to be part of the conversation about mothers in Berlin:

Why should only other people have the right to commentary. People should also hear about the child unfriendly aspects of the city from our perspective. As you know my blog too makes fun of obsessive, overly ambitious mothers who flaunt their children in public. But I also want people to read about the aggression that we face as mothers – these stares, the stiffening of the body in the subway, the looking away... you feel excluded!

Most aggravated by how mothers in Berlin are disparaged, she appropriates the category of the “Prenzlauer Berg mother,” and enjoys its advantages. By emphasizing how as a mother in Berlin she can enjoy the child-friendly services that render her life with a young child less complicated, she echoes the less vehemently expressed sentiments of other mothers who told me that they moved to Berlin after they became pregnant or decided to have children precisely to avoid isolation of suburbia. (also see Kährik et al. 2016, Karsten 2014, 2003, Lilius 2015)

Yes, I am a Prenzlauer Berg mother! Well no one wants our perspective because it is so easy to be critical of children in Germany, especially in Berlin! But this is what I say; I find it wonderful that I have a space like Prenzlauer Berg where I can continue to live as I want, as a mother with all the necessary infrastructure for children. There are two big playgrounds just in front of my house door and a supermarket few paces away. I can go to the playground; if it rains I can visit a children's café or a toy store. The pediatrician and dentist are within walking distance as are the various family-friendly cafes. Compared to my mother's life in West Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, this is great. To be surrounded by other parents who want similar things and so many resources for children is great I say!



Maren is 37, has 2 boys, aged 4 and 6. Her husband is a very successful photographer. Maren comes from South-West Germany and moved to Prenzlauer Berg before the birth of her children. She inherited money from her grandparents and bought a pent house in this neighborhood. Maren is unemployed and spends her time with the boys, does yoga, kickboxing and writes her diaries on “power and truth”, a lot of which she claims has to do with resolving her antagonistic relationship with her parents. She says she is very aware how she and others living in her neighborhood appear in public.

What troubles me most is that from outside it all looks homogenous. You see no older folks here, very little migrant population; almost everyone has two or three children. There is no contradiction, I mean of course there are internal contradictions but here it appears like there are no external contradictions and that everyone here must only have to think about their own stroller or their own café....that’s how it looks from outside. Well it is also true if you look at age, ethnicity, class factors, but at the same time, we are all not the same!

Even as Maren said these words, I managed to not show surprise on my face. In every way as described by Berliners she was indeed a Swabian mother. Not only was she from Swabia, she ticked all the other boxes in the category: very rich, had inherited money, was at home with her children, her husband was the primary bread winner and they owned a pent house (which I visited a few times) in the city center. For Maren, it was possible to intellectualize her inclusion in this group of mothers. She belonged here, from the perspective of those who stood outside i.e. those who spoke negatively about mothers like Maren. Yet, personally she distanced herself from the status conscious, consumption driven, obsessive mother by pursuing her own hobbies and finding time to think through a difficult personal history with her parents and write about what she wanted to do differently with her children. The primary goals of her writings on “power and truth” as she called it, were a struggle to not exercise power in bringing up her

children: to influence them and to watch what they might become instead of shaping them through discipline, “I think that is what we are all scared of today here. Children out of control are actually children with potential. The inability to contain this potential is what adults are scared of. But we must go through this chaotic period as a society. That is a sign of transition. We have to give our children space to be different from us.”

Ulla is 43, she had her first child at 40, second at 42. Both she and her husband are medical doctors. Ulla lived most of her life in Bonn, West Germany and after finishing her medical studies traveled around Europe working in different hospitals. She settled in Prenzlauer Berg in 2008; her mother too bought an apartment in the same neighborhood to help with childcare. Ulla doesn't really experience the neighborhood in the manner in which she knows people and the media represents it,

...mostly sarcastically, making harsh commentary on the Schwaben and mothers who shamelessly parade around with their kids. I guess I am too busy for that. I work long hours and its only once or two times in the week that I get a whole day out with my children. Thankfully I have my mother around and the day care is good.

When I asked her why she thinks there is so much negative commentary on mothers, she had one definitive explanation: German child-unfriendliness.

I think Germany in general is not very child friendly. Germans don't know how to handle children. They can make good cars and manage that well. But children – they can neither have them, nor bring them up. Germans have no feel (*Gespür*) for child rearing. We complain that children make noise, every car makes noise, more than children, pubs make more noise than day care centers, children need to run, they don't go for walks. For an outsider, Berlin looks very child friendly, but it is not at all the case. Germany is good for cars, yes, for children? No!<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> *Ich finde Deutschland allgemein nicht so kinderfreundlich, ich finde die Deutschen können mit Kindern überhaupt nicht umgehen und ich finde Deutschen können gute Autos bauen und sind in Verkehr und mit Autos super aber Kinder können sie weder erziehen noch haben. Sie haben keine Gespür für Kinder ...also wir klagen darüber dass Kinder Lärm machen...jedes Auto macht Lärm, Kinder machen weniger Lärm als Autos, Kneipen machen mehr Lärm als eine KITA...Kinder haben aber Laufbedürfnis, Kinder rennen, sie gehen nicht spazieren...für nicht-Berliner sieht die Stadt kinderfreundlich aus, aber ist gar nicht*

For Ulla, her neighborhood is a place to bring up her children with minimum practical difficulties. She is least affected personally by the stereotype of the obsessive mother, though she does have a theory on why one hears so much negative commentary on mothers. As far as Ulla is concerned, she would experience some form of ‘German child-unfriendliness’ no matter where she lived.

On the other hand, for Lene and Nicola, Berlin’s child-unfriendliness is infectious in strange ways. It doesn’t necessarily make these two women join in the commentary on “Swabian mothers,” but it infects them in that they are caught up in cycles of self-disciplining behavior associated with social awkwardness and guilt.

Lene, who we met earlier mentioned to me how heavy she felt when traveling in Berlin with her daughter:

And I don’t mean just because I am carrying my daughter! I feel heavy (*schweres Gefühl*) because I am so conscious of pushing the stroller into subways and cafes. I can feel people eyes on me. I feel handicapped with the child (*Ich fühle mich behindert mit Kind*). When I leave my daughter at the babysitters and travel alone through the city it’s like I have more room, not just literally!”

Lene stretched her arms on either side, rising from her chair and standing on her toes to emphasize a sense of mobility she acquires without her daughter, before making her final statement on the matter, “It is easy to belong in public places without a child. No one stares at you in a stern and disapproving manner.” I personally witnessed on many occasions the watchfulness on Lene’s part as she tried to push her stroller into a café, always choosing a table at the back of the restaurant or a corner where there was not much light. She would scan the room and crinkle her nose at me indicating that she had

(in spite of all attempts) won stares from fellow patrons. Nicola is in her early 40s, a university teacher and mother of a three-year-old. She moved to Berlin at the time of reunification from Northwest Germany. She recalls how her student days then were spent in pubs and libraries, building networks with friends and squatting in abandoned houses in East Berlin, before “getting serious about professional life”. She said that when she returned to Berlin shortly after having a child, “the urge to pretend to be single and childless was very strong. It is like Berlin doesn’t allow you to be a parent.” She said this without sarcasm, without even anger, almost with an understanding of how Berlin as she knew it was charming precisely because it had accommodated people like her, and not women who only talked about their children, schools and homes.

I remember when my husband and I took our then year-old-son to a café I was so embarrassed when my son made any noise. I kept shushing him, looking around to see if anyone noticed us, and tried to keep a low profile. I kind of felt like I was encroaching and did not want my son to disturb people here who had stepped out to enjoy a chat and a cup of coffee!

Nicola told me that she often visits the café in Prenzlauer Berg that has an

obstruction in front of it to prevent strollers from entering. She wants to belong to Berlin again and the *Kinderwagen* potentially gets in the way of that.<sup>128</sup>

### **Strollers in Berlin**

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<sup>128</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the dilemmas mothers face in balancing personal, social, ideological and moral commentaries on how they perform or should perform their roles. The data however clearly shows the continued conflation of reproduction with motherhood. It is primarily women, their choices, practices and disavowals that frame local and national demographic agendas. Women continue to be interpellated as responsible for producing and sustaining rational and/or irrational practices of reproducing the family and the larger social body. This marks women as primary reproductive agents, both providing them the resources to achieve reproductive goals, as well as imposing moral, ideological and demographic agendas on their bodies, practices and subjectivities. Such framings give men and women in public office, in medical institutions, and families the power to control female reproduction. On the other hand, stereotypical representations and practices reflect men’s continued marginal position in reproduction, family and demographic agendas.

Mothers pushing strollers as part of city traffic is now a normal sight to my eyes and what I consider a routine Berlin landscape. I have to remind myself that about ten years ago when I moved to the United States and a few years before that when I first visited Europe, I found it extremely odd to associate moving infants or children with strollers. To my mind and in my experience from India, children who can't walk are always carried. Those who can walk, walk, and if tired may be indulgently carried by a parent or other adults. Children on one's lap or crook of one's arm in crowded buses and trains or private vehicles is an experience most parents in Indian cities would have had at some point in time. In fact, while using public transportation, children even as old as ten, sit on parents' laps, making room for other travelers to take a seat. I have a childhood memory of being handed over by my uncle who came to see us off at the bus station, to strangers and fellow passengers already present in the crowded bus, who transferred me one by one to where my mother was seated. She had pushed her way in and reserved a seat for us and I was carried over to her. To see mothers (and fathers) push children in strollers for hours through the city of Berlin was a fantastic and fascinating experience for me; in India using strollers in the landscape of the tremendous crowd of vehicles and people in cities like Mumbai for instance, would be near impossible; I have never seen a stroller in a crowded street in any of the Indian cities I have lived in.

These contrasts I point to also speak to a qualitatively different form of sociality that parents, specifically mothers achieve during the period that their children are very small. Mothers in India, even in urban centers, if not working, spend most of their time at home and in the neighborhood taking care of their children. Mobility is restricted in the sense of how far and where women might be able to move out with children in tow.

Leisure, or exclusive time with children is also differently conceptualized. Children often hang out with each other (when not in a crèche, which is still the least used form of child care), or at homes of neighbors or play at home, while mothers do the household tasks. In urban India, when women work, there may be the possibility of hiring help at home for the child, using family networks such as grandparents or even non working friends for care of child. Increasingly, in families where spending potential is higher, parents enroll children in activity centers for a few hours in the day. Given these contrasts in life style and possibilities for mobility, indeed children in strollers with parents out for long walks, was truly a cultural oddity for me.

In Berlin, I saw mothers or fathers and strollers everywhere. Of course these figures drew my attention because I wanted to learn more about them. But it would be safe to say, irrespective of focus of research, they were hard to miss. Subways, streets, buses, cafes, playgrounds, stores would sometimes become sites for contestation, with the strollers' motion restricted in certain places and enabled in others. I became increasingly attentive to how the stroller's presence in public evoked personal and collective desires and repulsions. While *Kinderwagen* or the material object of the *Kinderwagen* draws our attention to how the stroller looks or to its functionality—this is a carriage for babies, so that they can move outside their homes along with their caregivers (or something to this effect)—the *Kinderwagen* as sign failed many times to cohere with or show its object, i.e. that which is indexically connected to the sign.

### *Tyranny of the Stroller*



In January 2012, the police apprehended a 29-year-old newspaper deliveryman in Prenzlauer Berg. He was accused of being a serial arsonist. By the time he was caught he had set on fire a dozen *Kinderwagen*. A former resident of this neighborhood, the young man had moved out, as he could no longer afford his rent. He actively sought out a job in his former residential area and when asked by police about his activities, said he was sorry, yet very frustrated with the class differences that are so starkly visible in Berlin today. He also added, “I have no idea why I choose only *Kinderwagen* to burn.” He was sentenced with six years imprisonment. It is important to note that these various incidences of stroller-burning are not necessarily concentrated in Prenzlauer Berg, although newspaper reports sensationalize these more because of the very visible demographic contrasts between this former East-Berlin neighborhood and others in

Berlin. There is evidence of similar incidences in Moabit (closer to city center and Prenzlauer Berg), Oberschöneweide (south-east border of Berlin, with low socio economic residents) and Steglitz-Zehlendorf (south-west border of Berlin with high income families).<sup>129</sup>

The illustration of the mother with the stroller represents the angry, overworked and obsessive mother from a comic series called *Mütter vom Kollwitzplatz* or mothers from Kollwitzplatz. Kollwitzplatz is a square in Prenzlauer Berg that exemplifies the practices of conspicuous reproduction. At the intersection of a couple of streets, one sees abundant playgrounds, children's cafes, clothing stores for mothers and children, cycles with children's seats parked outside restaurants and innumerable children, parents and *Kinderwagen*. Early on in fieldwork, I heard of what to my mind were bizarre incidences of (theft and) burning of *Kinderwagen*. I started asking Berliners (people I knew for a while or even random strangers on the street) what they thought were motivations behind setting strollers on fire. At first, most (especially government servants like the police or a local bureaucrat) shrugged and told me this was a phenomenon of vandalism and that it had less to do with a stroller than with an object that could be set on fire. Others

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<sup>129</sup> See Online Focus, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012, [http://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/urteil-gegen-schwabenhasser-haftstrafe-fuer-kinderwagen-brandstifter\\_aid\\_708742.html](http://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/urteil-gegen-schwabenhasser-haftstrafe-fuer-kinderwagen-brandstifter_aid_708742.html), Spiegel 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/kinderwagen-brandstiftung-fast-sechs-jahre-haft-fuer-zeitungsboten-a-812324.html> and Hamburger Abendblatt, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, <http://www.abendblatt.de/ratgeber/wissen/article2170621/Kinderwagen-angezuendet-Berliner-gesteht-Brandserie.html>

Also see: Berliner Kurier, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2013 <http://www.berliner-kurier.de/polizei-justiz/kinderwagen-angesteckt-berlin--fuenf-verletzte-bei-brand-in-oberschoeneweide,7169126,21492362.html>, Berliner Morgenpost, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012, <http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/polizeibericht/article110493275/Kinderwagen-in-Hausflur-angezuendet.html>, Tagesspiegel, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2011, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/polizei-justiz/brandstiftung-wieder-kinderwagen-angezuendet/4546598.html> and Police report from 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2013, <http://polizeinewsberlin.de/6189/201302/kinderwagen-angezuendet-steglitz-zehlendorf/>



(residents in my neighborhood) explained arson as envy, “not only do the West German migrants have more money, on top of that they flaunt their children.” Various newspaper reports about the 29-year-old man’s arrest provide similar narratives about class-envy, felt more powerfully today because of gentrification, demographic changes, and rising rent prices that push former residents of the city from the center to its periphery.

I argue however, that while class differences are the starkest and visible articulation of exclusion, idioms like *Kinderwagenmafia*, *Kinderwagenblick* or *Kampfmitter* signify multiple aspects of change and loss for some residents of Berlin. In this chapter (and dissertation) I exemplify the relation between cultural nostalgia, value of reproduction, the hypervisible child, and experience of inclusion and exclusion. Here I discuss the social weight of the figure of the mother and the object of the *Kinderwagen* that makes Berlin simultaneously child-friendly and unfriendly, depending on who is speaking.

### **The Bulky Kinderwagen**

Strollers occupy a lot of space. Most of these strollers are very bulky, the handle bars reaching the adult waist or stomach. The width of a regular carriage for infants or toddlers is about a foot and a half. Wheels have a diameter of anywhere between 8-15 inches (estimates from photos, narrations and first-hand experience).

There are three different parts to a regular *Kinderwagen* and three different locks to prevent theft. 1) The Hood: This is the top covering of the stroller with a large back pocket to put food or water or any other baby supplies in, often supplemented by plastic sheets (to protect against rain) or an umbrella stuck into one side (to avoid the sun). Other than the plastic sheet, there is a large cloth that often spreads over the hood to the legs of

the sleeping baby, such that the child is invisible; the *Kinderwagen* could very well be transporting groceries. 2) The Bed: The second part of the carriage is the bed, where the child sleeps. Long and severe winters mean that the insides of the bed are often lined with small sleeping bags. These sleeping bags can be lifted with the means of two cloth handles sewed on to them, even as the baby sleeps inside. 3) The Bottom Sack: The third part is the bottom sack-like bag below the bed and just above the wheels. Often this is the storage for the day's groceries. Walking is a part of city life and a routine leisure activity for many residents. Mothers and fathers often push *Kinderwagen* for hours through the city. On the way one stops for groceries and these are slid into the bottom sack. Just above the back wheels is a small rectangular platform for the older sibling to stand (if they get tired walking or cycling). Often the older child's cycle or *Lauftrad* is hung over one of the carriage handlebars. In short, these carriages can get heavy, parents estimate sometimes as much as 10 pounds with baby, groceries, the second child and his/her bike hung over the *Kinderwagen*. Now imagine trying to negotiate one's way into a café or the subway with this massive stroller.

### **Practical but Socially Heavy**

For most parents who were at home with their infants, strollers afforded extended time in public places. Strollers are designed and chosen such that mobility is facilitated for parents. This is then the possibility of a social life, especially for stay-at-home mothers. A large part of the morning especially in summer is spent outdoors, taking walks which end up in cafes for a meal or drink with other mothers or fathers. Winter does not deter the walking parent. Berliners often told me that there was no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing. Going outdoors to take in the fresh air (*an die frische Luft*

*gehen*) is important for good health. Also getting out brings the possibility of meeting other parents in places like children's cafes, playgrounds or even public gardens.<sup>130</sup>

The most popular strollers were ones that allowed for maneuverability in tight spots especially while turning corners or when indoors. "I chose a stroller with large wheels. It seems impractical but see how they [wheels] turn? I never get stuck when trying to move," a mother in a stroller store told me. Another, with an infant son had a stroller which was higher above the ground than regular ones. She explained to me, "this is so when I push, I don't have to bend and put pressure on my stomach. When I recover from my C-Section, I will probably get a bigger stroller with more storage in the bottom." A father of a ten-month old told me that for him, any stroller that had room for a water bottle, his phone, a few snacks for the child and some wet wipes within reach (i.e. around the handle of the stroller) was good enough for him. Thus, parents prepare their strollers with all they need to be outdoors walking and visiting cafes or playgrounds (depending on age of child) for a greater part of the morning. For most parents I spoke with ease of mobility was the primary factor in choosing their strollers. Some did admit that there were always "better" versions on the market that made them feel that there was always something missing in their current strollers. Depending on income and willingness to spend, strollers were a priority item in the list of essentials for managing one's activities with infants or small children.

Another challenge that mothers often described when pushing strollers was negotiating the whole load in and out of the subway and up and down stairs (not all

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<sup>130</sup> I discuss social networks of fathers on paternity leave in chapter four.

stations have accessible elevators in Berlin's subway); I often witnessed mothers or fathers lift the entire stroller with child and walk up and down stairs to get their next connection. Sometimes others waiting or walking along would extend a hand, but most times parents managed this on their own. "Oh it can get very heavy. Then train travel becomes a problem. And here you can't easily turn to someone for help." I have often seen people offer help to a mother struggling with the stroller (sometimes its accepted, sometimes politely declined). I have often helped too. Fathers rarely ask for help and are rarely offered help in these transit spaces. Once inside the subway, most parents take a spot near the door or if the seats are empty then find some time to rest from all the hefting and carrying they have done. But then the real challenge begins. "Warding off stares is hard. I ignore people who get disturbed by the stroller. I cant always be at the exact spot on the platform to enter the compartment that has extra space for strollers," a 35 year old mother of an infant told me when qualifying what she meant when she said, "Strollers can be heavy, in terms of how they make you feel."

For parents then, strollers are means to achieving mobility through city spaces and establishing networks, friends, overcoming isolation and enjoying the outdoors. However, strollers also burden and draw attention to the parent and child and restrict one's inclusion in some public places.

I can count the number of times during that year that I saw someone helping a woman pushing a *Kinderwagen*, that is how rare it was. Often adults (30-80 years) stared blankly at children; younger people were largely uninterested in them. Loud babies or children were tolerated with demonstrative grimacing and intakes and exhalations of breath. I often heard from mothers that they had been asked to keep their children quiet in

public places like a train, on the street or even in a regular café. A West Berliner mother of two in her mid thirties said, “once my three-year-old was laughing really loud. I don’t even remember what he found so funny. But after a few minutes, I was asked to move up the subway compartment because the man next to me was reading and did not want to be disturbed!” Another West Berliner in her late thirties added,

Forget about helping when I am with my children, instead people just get irritated with them. Once I was pushing the *Kinderwagen* with my baby girl in it, my shopping bags hanging from the carriage, plus bags in my hand and my two-year-old clasping my skirt, trying to negotiate the slick, icy steps in December and I hear from behind me: can’t you hurry up a little.

On some days, subway compartments overflow and it is hard for the doors to shut, so negotiating a stroller into the crowded space can be a hazard for the mother. On one such occasion, I along with a bunch of travelers squashed together at the back of the train compartment heard a man hiss loudly when a lady tried to push in a stroller into the already full compartment, “*Das ist Scheisse*” (this is shit). Shocked and stirred by his comment as we all were, most people looked away, until an elderly woman directly addressed the man, “*Das ist kein Scheisse, das ist ein Kinderwagen*” (this is not shit, it’s a stroller).

While *Kinderwagen* appear to occupy too much space, Berliners accommodate dogs almost everywhere. The Berliners’ love for their dogs is a well known part of local knowledge (see Ndonko 2002). Running or walking along with their masters, often not on a leash, dogs wait patiently outside grocery stores, sit in the train or subway and walk into department stores to enjoy the experience of shopping. They are part of the crowd. They sit between legs, strangers touch them or look at them and smile, speak to them and don’t move if the dog brushes past them in the trains. The *Kinderwagen* on the other hand creates much consternation. Just like the dogs they are part of the pedestrian traffic on

Berlin's wide and expansive footpaths or in transit. Yet, they get in the way, they are unwieldy and bulky, they are must be parked with brakes pulled down. They don't move on their own and certainly don't attract others to them. A dog is a living being and moves between people, the *Kinderwagen* are like small vehicles, the babies are barely visible under their thick jackets and blankets as the parents push them along.

While the aliveness and movement of, and the possibility of quiet coexistence with dogs, contrasts with the unwieldy, inanimate character of the *Kinderwagen*, it is precisely the experience of the stroller as something animate, something threatening that produces its social weight. How is the presence of the strollers apprehended; how is it evaluated in relation to one's own position in the same socio-cultural landscape?

**Other Residents (without Strollers)**

Speaking to residents, shop owners and pedestrians around Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, I often initiated discussion on stroller burning in their neighborhood and in different parts of the city. While some responded directly to these questions, others began to relate their own encounters with strollers in the street space or in apartments where they lived. "I must say it is very disrespectful. Toys and cycles strewn on footpaths and strollers parked all over the common areas in the apartment building," a resident of Prenzlauer Berg angrily exclaimed. She said she had tried to talk to the mothers who lived in her apartment (she herself is childless) and requested them to carry their respective strollers into their apartments. "They looked at me as if I had done something wrong! As if my request was unreasonable." Other residents too mentioned that often the standing strollers in the apartment lobby can be a fire hazard but no one often says anything to the owners of the strollers. A friend and interlocutor who had been living in

Prenzlauer Berg for over 15 years moved out because she could not bear the encroachment of space by the strollers; she is in her mid 40s and childless and always commented on the “naturalness” with which mothers and children were given priority when there was a conflict over space in her apartment block. Another female interlocutor in her late 40s who had been trying unsuccessfully to have a child and had undergone several treatments moved into a West Berlin neighborhood because she could not “bear to trip over *Kinderwagen* every morning and be reminded of my own problems.” Harmut a 38-year-old Berliner, entrepreneur and long term resident of Prenzlauer Berg prefers to provoke in the presence of strollers. Once on a walk with him through the neighborhood, he pointed to the various children’s cafes and day care centers that are marked with row of strollers lined up at their entrances. He asked me to peep into the cafes and look at the “Latte Macchiato drinking mothers,” while he surreptitiously photographed the parked strollers. He was most triumphant when one of the care givers from a local day care center came outside to drive him away.

Most of these childless interlocutors I mention have now moved out of their former homes. The presence of strollers is intolerable for them as they say. The strollers are the objective manifestation of their feeling of exclusion and in turn become sites for projecting anger and frustration. Thus meaning or meaningfulness of the *Kinderwagen* does not stem from its relation as sign to an object, rather the sign represents its object to someone, to an interpretant. Thus the object itself is dynamic and not always represented in a straightforward manner by its sign.

### **Caught Up**

I share here with readers a field note. It describes an encounter with *Kinderwagen*.

*Field note February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013*

Yesterday, when I saw yet another row of *Kinderwagen* parked in front of a children's café in my neighborhood, I was struck by how contented, yet purposeful even in repose, these strollers looked to me. Suddenly I was feeling sick and checked the impulse to throw up. I had a physical reaction to these objects of scorn. Contagion works in dizzying ways. To what extent was I the ethnographer taken over and caught up by what the *Kinderwagen* evoked in some of my interlocutors: an old time, unemployed East Berliner who distinguished this style of mothering by the term *Mitte Muttis*, the single, unmarried, childless woman who moved out of Prenzlauer Berg because she could not deal with mothers' claim over her space, the childless woman undergoing infertility treatments for ten years who moved out because the only thing she saw when she stepped out of her apartment every morning were parked strollers, and the director of a neighboring day care center who avoided walking on the same side of the sidewalk as women pushing strollers. I suddenly had the freedom to speak and feel negativity towards children and strollers and I seem to have been infected too. I often wondered: who could possibly scowl at a woman entering a café or a train with a stroller, who could stare blankly at a child in a stroller, who could request a hassled mother with a screaming child to get the child to settle down so one could read the newspaper, who could sit stoic and silent while a three-year-old goes berserk in the train testing his father's patience by spitting in the air, who could ask a lady with a stroller, another child in tow, the other hand full of luggage trying to climb steps covered slick with frozen ice if she could not hurry up a little? Well Berliners do. And I am caught up in this 'child-unfriendliness' at times.

Childless and not contemplating having children consciously at the time when I wrote this field note, I felt addressed by the strollers, just as I had often been directly addressed by infertility specialists, men and women who I met for research, and my primary interlocutors; they all wanted to know details about my reproductive desires, questions I wasn't prepared to answer. While strollers, as I saw them on a particular day during field work, appeared to ask me questions similar to the ones my interlocutors asked of me, why did strollers arouse so much scorn in some of the Berliners I describe in this chapter? The *Kinderwagen* on Berlin's streets was much more than a carriage transporting babies. Its presence evoked changing spatial practices of inclusion-



exclusion, generational reproductive ideologies and moralities, and a feeling of loss associated with Berlin's atmosphere (*Stimmung*).

## Conclusions

### *The Kinderwagen*

A stroller is designed for a specific purpose. In its conventional and culturally acceptable functionality it transports children from one place to another. An adult pushes the stroller. Most of my interlocutors see the stroller as such. Yet, the stroller is also a sign that in the context of present day reunified Berlin, evokes multiple desires, projections and meanings. If for a parent the stroller is functional because it provides the opportunity for mobility, it is also constraining and socially heavy because it blocks access to certain spaces. For many long term residents of Berlin, the stroller's presence indexes presence of Swabian families and makes palpable the experience of encroachment, exclusion and often displacement. For others, especially childless women residents, strollers speak to not just a spatial, but also a form of reproductive exclusion that makes living with mothers and children unmanageable. And for young men, like the one arrested for arson, strollers signify the ever increasing class divide between families in gentrified neighborhoods. For fathers, the stroller, especially if they push it, signals their participation in child care. And for the ethnographer caught up in the meaning making processes of her interlocutors, the stroller is her interlocutors talking back to her.

I argue that the *Kinderwagen* as a sign indexes not only the immediate presence of children, mothers and/or fathers, but also practices of and transformations in how reproduction in Berlin is experienced today. Thus, what is evoked through this sign is not just an object that mothers and/or fathers use to transport children in, rather the experience of gentrification, the hypervisibility of the concern with reproduction and its

conspicuous practices, the spatial and social exclusion and personal confrontation with reproductive choices. As a sign the stroller stands for something, but importantly *to someone*. Thus, what the stroller means and how it is apprehended is dynamic i.e. the sign and its object are in a dynamic relationship to each other. Moving away from the classic Saussurean view of semiotics that arrives at meaning based on the dyadic relationship between signifier and signified, I draw upon Peirce to interpret what the *Kinderwagen* means at different moments and places and to people in Berlin. Thus meaning comes not from the relationship between signifier and signified rather from the relation between two sets of relations between sign, object and interpretant.

...a sign stands for its object, on the one hand, and its interpretant, on the other, in such a way as to make the interpretant stand in relation to the object corresponding to its own relation to the object. What is at issue in meaningfulness, then, is not one relation between a sign and an object (qua “standing for”) but rather a relation between two such relations (qua “correspondence”).(Kockelman 2007:377)

The *Kinderwagen* as sign has a relationship to its object (a baby carriage), but the meaning of the sign does not (always) emerge from this object it represents, because the sign does not create a corresponding or equivalent interpretant at all times. So while the stroller is an object that transports children, this indexical quality of the sign is not significant when we consider the various meanings the stroller evokes. Sometimes the interpretant symbolizes exclusion, at other times reproductive desires. However, there is also a limit to the range of meanings that this sign evokes; thus the object is always embedded in a geographical and cultural field or a system of signs. Here, I have described this field variously as low fertility Germany, reunified Berlin, gentrified Prenzlauer Berg and generational experiences with reproduction. It is through the embeddedness in this cultural field that the (limited) range of interpretants arise. Thus the

incompatibility between what the sign indexes and what is perceived, provides a deeper insight into the “child-unfriendliness” of Berliners in relation to strollers they encounter.

The sign, or representamen, addresses somebody... we find the sign (or representamen) inviting, as it were, the interpretant to “perceive” or “understand” the object as it (the sign) “perceives” or “understands” the object. Insofar as the interpretant is incapable of “perceiving” the object in a manner identical to that in which the sign “perceives” it, a dialogue is initiated... In any dialogue, if there is total agreement between two interlocutors, further dialogue becomes unnecessary, if not impossible. (Colapietro 1989:21-22)

Following this, I suggest that one way to interpret the burning of strollers is to draw upon Canetti’s (1973) idea of the crowd. When part of a crowd, there is a certain renunciation of the fear of being touched. In a crowd, individuality is replaced by the feeling of being equal, with each and every material body and person also part of the crowd. Social distinctions are for that moment suspended and there is a general feeling of belonging and identification with other members. Just as a crowd comes together in these moments of suspension of difference it can as easily disintegrate. “The most important occurrence within the crowd is the *discharge*. Before this the crowd does not actually exist; it is the discharge which creates it. This is the moment when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal.” (Canetti 1973:17) Destructiveness is another important feature of a crowd. It allows for the bond to persist. To sustain this feeling of belonging that which creates boundaries or highlights difference must be destroyed. Hence often the crowd destroys houses or personal objects. “Of all means of destruction the most impressive is *fire*...It destroys irrevocably; nothing after a fire is as it was before.” (Canetti 1973: 21) In analyzing responses to the *Kinderwagen*, I use the idea of the crowd metaphorically to describe how through narrations of similar experiences of reunification, encroachment, exclusion and reproductive practices, Berliners create a

sense of belonging to a place, memories, and generational unit. What unites them is a) they don't have children and/or b) they moved out of Prenzlauer Berg and/or c) they don't recognize the city and people as their own and/or d) they have children but do not flaunt them like the Swabian families. *What unites them thus is the creation and sustenance of the category Kinderwagenmafia.* Yet the presence of *Kinderwagen* in public places such as subways or trains, streets, in or outside cafes or even parked in apartment complexes, focusses attention on the experience of class, regional and biographical differences, most evident through 'conspicuous' reproductive practices. The emotional responses at the sight of the *Kinderwagen* create an antagonistic and negative discharge that allows commentators to feel a sense of belonging, even as they speak of encroachment and their exclusion from certain city spaces. I argue that the destruction of the *Kinderwagen*—either by responding to it as an object causing irritation or scorn, or by keeping it at bay i.e. not allowing strollers in certain spaces, or by burning it—is an attempt at the destruction of representational images through which differences between “Berliners” and “Swabian” are sustained. The attempts at elimination however, refocus the attention on these social categories in Berlin's changing reproductive landscape.

### ***Kinderwagenmafia or the “Swabian Mother”***

This chapter discusses Berliners' aggression towards a certain kind of mother on the streets in the city, expressed through negative commentary, body language, gestures and attempts at physical and emotional distancing from the stereotype of the “Swabian mother.” As reproduction moves from the ‘private’ and inconspicuous to the visible and ‘public’ sphere, I argue that this stereotype of “the mother from *Swabia* obsessed with her child” signals the disquiet aroused by the entitled display of reproductive labor. What

disturbs then is not necessarily the mothers, but the fact that they are “out of place,” and remind Berliners of changing spatial practices and reproductive ideologies.

Multiple factors contribute to the context of the hypervisible child and mother. I have discussed the paradigm-shift in how political engagement with low fertility in Germany shapes the (moral) discourse on having children. Further, reunification and increased migration of families with children to specific neighborhoods in Berlin, investment in property development in former East Berlin and ensuing gentrification changes the experience of the city for many long term Berliners who speak of a loss of home.

I pointed out that though people from all over Europe reside in gentrified neighborhood like Prenzlauer Berg, Swabians are identified as the group responsible for family gentrification. The Swabian families I interacted with in Berlin have all bought their homes. Most of them received monetary support from their parents. Some had inherited from grandparents. I also spoke to men and women (between ages of 30-55) either in a job, free-lance artists or unemployed about how they had been driven out of central neighborhoods in Berlin like Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg where they had lived for anywhere between 10-30 years of their lives.

The reasons are not merely economic. Of course that’s the first thing that drives you away but now I won’t even stay if someone paid my rent. This is not my home. It is full of children, *Kinderwagen*, children’s toys and mothers who always look ready to fight, their shoulders hunched their elbows out pushing the *Kinderwagen* on streets, in cafes and footpaths,” said Niko a 40-year-old childless friend.

I was often party to the display of these internal class dynamics in private as well as public places. Logically the easy target of these projections was the Swabian families

who along with the Berliners make clear distinctions between themselves and those who belong to Berlin: economically, in life-style, values and morals.

Some of the common statements I heard often during field work were: “if they wanted to have a home and get married and have their children, have peace and quiet after ten at night, have no pubs around their homes, they should have stayed in the villages they come from, why come to a city like Berlin?” (a 45-year-old high school teacher from West Berlin) or “I lived here for 30 years, had to move out 5 years ago. I can’t afford it; neither do I belong here. Everything is chic and clean, where are all those little pubs where we friends would meet, drink beer and hang out and no one told us to keep it down because their kids were sleeping?” (Jürgen, the 50-year-old unemployed East Berliner we met earlier) or “Yes of course their *Kinderwagen* cost 1000 euros. Their parents and grandparents had to wait 40 years before the woman finally had a kid, so now they can finally give her the money for the *Kinderwagen*!” (40-year old childless woman. She is single and lives alone.) Once while I waited in a long line at the grocery store, a construction worker on his lunch break started complaining about having to wait for so long just to buy a sandwich. A fellow shopper asked him to have patience and show some consideration to the cashier “because they also have to work hard.” To this the construction worker replied sarcastically, “Yes, yes and I of course am lazy and unemployed and get regular pocket money from my Swabian mother!” (*Ja, ja und ich bin faul und arbeitslos und kriege Taschengeld von der schwäbischen Mutter!*). This statement clearly expressed scorn at the perceived easier lives of Swabian families who have a secure economic base and live in relative luxury as compared to working class Berliners. Often I heard about extreme, masochistic statements, like the one from a 70-

year-old professor of a friend, “I have to jump over the birth water puddles left behind by the Swabian mothers!” (*ich muss hier immer über die Fruchtwasserpfüten der schwäbischen Mütter steigen*) in reference to the impunity with which people had children and displayed them in public. Interestingly it is not just people who are long term residents of Berlin, those without children, or men who speak about the Swabian mothers in this negative register. We also see how mothers themselves—irrespective of where they come from or how they identify themselves—seek to distance themselves from these stereotypes.

I argue that the stereotype of the “Swabian mother” is a classificatory category in that it places individual mothers arbitrarily in a class or social group, which is deemed distinct (i.e. has certain indicative features) from other social groups in Berlin. So all mothers or women with children pushing *Kinderwagen* have the potential to become a Swabian mother. These categories are concerned with systems of relationship between groups, rather than individual traits or characteristics that would enable descriptive classification. So while from the inside we see divergence in the group of mothers and the way they relate to each other as illustrated in this chapter, the category of “Swabian mothers” unites all mothers in Berlin (observed or imagined) *from the outside*. This means it creates a specific emotional and social relation between “mothers from Swabia” and “others” in Berlin. While this mother stereotype legally, socially and emotionally pushes ‘others’ out of specific spaces in Berlin, stereotypical renderings also create a sense of belonging for those who bemoan the loss of the ‘original’ charm of Berlin. The category of the “Swabian mother” is sustained by the collective effervescence produced in moments of conversation, through life constructions, and in the reality of spatial

inclusion and exclusion from particular city spaces. Thus the category of the Swabian mother signals a moment in time in Berlin and produces a way of emotional and social relating, organized through reproductive choice, labor and performance. While not all *Schwäbische Mutter* are from Swabia or obsessed with their children as characterized by the indicative features of this category, the experience of the performance of motherhood in Berlin is categorized as such. This way of relating between mothers and ‘others is prominently visible as people confront each other on the streets, encroach the other’s space and/or display in an entitled manner what the other doesn’t have: children.

### ***Conspicuous Reproduction***

The *Kinderwagenmafia* conjures up the image of the determined, aggressive Swabian mother pushing her stroller through Berlin’s streets and onto playgrounds and inside cafes. The presence of the *Kinderwagenmafia* in topographical space dramatizes the encounter with mothers, children and reproduction. I use “conspicuous reproduction” to refer to the practice of mothering that is in the public eye, on display, for public contemplation and consumption, and one that *addresses* a public. While neighborhoods like Prenzlauer Berg or particular communal spaces in the city—streets, playgrounds, cafes—act as a stage on which maternal practices are on display, these geographical spaces are not objectively or independently producing hypervisibility, i.e. the real presence of children, mothers or strollers in one’s physical space does not amount to (an experience) of hypervisible reproduction. Alarmist reportage, discourse on low fertility in Germany, and immigration (and now refugee presence), also consumed in the privacy of one’s homes and in personal encounters add weight to this conspicuous display and address a German public. Finally, for the *Wende* generation *Kinderwagenmafia* signify personal and collective losses, exclusions, and evoke reproductive desires and ‘choices.’



Following Iveson (2007), I use the terms private and public to clarify what conspicuous reproduction means. I am neither framing public-private either as exclusive and sharply distinct spheres, nor as always collapsing together. Topographically defined public refers to that which is physically situated in city spaces such as parks, streets, squares, and the context where a/the public can potentially be addressed. This definition does not take into consideration the public that is addressed at home while listening to the radio for instance, nor does it consider a private conversation that can happen in a topographically public space. On the other hand, there are culturally defined norms that signify topographically public and private spaces. This is evident when there is conflict over what may or may not be appropriate practices in public, for instance breastfeeding or masturbating. Thus, I show in this chapter how material city spaces animate public experience, while also emphasizing that this materiality is devoid of meaning for my interlocutors unless they *feel* addressed.

Here I draw on the concept of procedural space (Iveson 2007), that is, the spontaneous space created in the moment of action or speech, which makes reproduction socially prominent, valuable, visible and conspicuous. Thus, procedural space is created in the actual encounter with the *Kinderwagenmafia*, in the context of German demographic anxiety, and the *Wende* generation's reproductive experiences and ideologies. Reproduction is conspicuous because it appears explicitly, it is present, not just materially in the bodies and objects on the streets of Berlin but in political discourse, in family law and in public consciousness.

Hannah Arendt (1958) discusses the Greek conceptualization of the *polis* as a place of freedom, where people appear to each other as equals, where through speech and

persuasion and not violence, political action is possible. This is distinguished from the household sphere where people live together to fulfill needs and *pater familias* exercise violent control to manage coexistence (Arendt 1958).<sup>131</sup> Arendt continues to make a distinction between *polis* and physical spaces in the city.

Thus it is not the physical space rather people organizing that creates public space. ... action and speech create a space between the participants... It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance *explicitly*.” (Arendt 1958: 198-99 italics mine)

This is not the visibility associated with presence in the topographical sense, rather a hypervisibility that comes from social and cultural value and prominence. Thus when I speak of conspicuous reproduction i.e. the hypervisibility of children and/or mothers in specific (material, discursive and social) spaces of Berlin, I refer to precisely these moments of explicit appearance. The *Kinderwagenmafia* appears to be in ‘public’ because of its actual physical and sensuous presence on streets, in playgrounds, in cafes, apartment houses, and experienced through screaming and running children, scattered toys in doorways and mothers pushing strollers. Also, its appearance is social and emotional in that the *Kinderwagenmafia* addresses the *Wende* generation and the German public: reproduction and those who biologically reproduce are of value. The *Kinderwagenmafia* disturbs because it demands attention, it is prominent and egotistic through obsessive parenting, consumption practices, and the blatant display of the desire for children.

I argue that conspicuous reproduction is the experience of a shift in meaningfulness of biological and cultural reproduction as apprehended by men and

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<sup>131</sup> The polis is a medieval concept. In the modern world the social and political realms are not distinct.

women of the *Wende* generation. When speaking of “publicness” then, my interlocutors speak of how having children has attained a specific social and national value in Germany today, such that other concerns—including their own experiences of loss—find little articulation.

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I often sat on benches around children’s playgrounds with a book pretending to read while observing how kids played and interacted with each other, what parents did in the mean time, if grandparents were around.<sup>132</sup> Sometimes I carried a notebook for notes but also to sketch the swings and slides and the tremendous variety in shapes, colors, sizes and purposes of play structures on Berlin playgrounds. It was relatively easier for me to hang out even though I had no stroller or children with me. As a woman, clearly from India, people seemed only curious, but not suspicious of my presence. They were often surprised when I approached them asking them questions about playgrounds in Berlin. In India children’s parks and play spaces look very different: first, they are hardly abundant; there is no space for them amidst traffic, buildings and people. Second they are not so colorful or varied in the kind of play a child can engage in. A typical playground has some swings, slides, perhaps a merry-go-round and sometimes structures on which children can climb.<sup>133</sup>

On one such day, I decided to approach a group of mothers: three of them, all slim, sporty, dressed in jeans and light jackets, helping their children (all aged two and

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<sup>132</sup> Very rarely did I see grandparents accompanying grandchildren to playgrounds. This is primarily because they don’t live in the same city.

<sup>133</sup> Of course now in large metropolitan cities we have theme parks etc. I am talking about regular play grounds.

under) on and off swings and slides, pushing them in wagons, building sand castles, their clothes messy yet chic. As the group tramped out looking for a café to have a hot soup, I walked up and spoke to the blond mother with her two-year-old. She looked irritated, at my presence probably in a hurry to get to dinner. After I introduced myself and asked her if she too remembered playgrounds being as colorful and fun as today, she stared at me blankly, then turned to the two-year-old on her right, bent down and said, “no we did not have such playgrounds. You are a spoiled child aren’t you, oh you spoiled child” (*nein wir hatten solche Spielplätze nicht. Du bist ein verwöhntes Kind, oder? Du verwöhntes Kind!*) Without looking at me, she swung the child up in the air and walked ahead past me still talking to her daughter about how spoiled she was.

Early on in research this encounter confused and embarrassed me. With more time in the field I realized that by asking a ‘simple’ question about difference in childhood experience between generation of parents and children today, I had probably unwittingly added to the surplus of negative commentary on children and mothers in Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. By ignoring me and addressing and conversing with her child, as though I were not present, the mother on the playground was sending a message to me: *you and your opinion don’t matter. All that matters is what my child needs—everything she can get.* Being the center of attention then is not a terrible thing at all. And this she conveyed not only to me but also to her daughter.

Continuing with the theme of hypervisibility of reproduction and confrontation between “Swabian mothers” and “others,” I examine the experience of living without children for West German women of the *Wende* generation and analyze their relation to reproduction, as the material, demographic and social landscape in Berlin is transformed.

Personal and generational history, alarmist media and political discourse around Germany's declining population, and changes in life after the Wall, create an aggressive confrontation (in reality and imagination) between two groups of adults: those with, and those without children.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Generational Memory, Gender and Place in confronting ‘Voluntary’ Childlessness

### *Ich bin das Objekt deiner Forschung*<sup>134</sup>

I first met Sophie in 2010 at the Humboldt University in Berlin. I had gone to see a play, and she was part of the team that directed the play. Later the whole group met over drinks. We didn’t talk much then, but Sophie did make a striking comment upon hearing about my research: “Hmm, childlessness (*Kinderlosigkeit*) and desire for a child (*Kinderwunsch*)—you are certainly exploring a very sensitive topic in Germany today.” After that first meeting, we stayed in touch off and on over email. Then at the start of my yearlong fieldwork in Berlin in 2012, I contacted her on a slow day, to see if she had some time to spare. We met in a bar one evening close to her home in Wedding, a neighborhood in West Berlin. When she walked in, it took me a few seconds to recognize her. Her face looked different from the first time I had seen her. It was harsh with lots of lines around the eyes and mouth. She was skinny, almost as though she had been unwell for quite some time. Yet her demeanor was kind and gentle as before. She asked me if I had settled in and if Berliners were treating me right.

Over the period of that year, Sophie and I met very regularly. She introduced me to her network of friends and set up interviews for my research. I would often tell her about my experiences in Berlin. Not only was she an excellent listener, but also a partner in making sense of my data. Over the course of time her own story unraveled, till one day she announced to me, “*Ich bin das Objekt deiner Forschung.*”

### Introduction

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<sup>134</sup> Translated as: I am the object of your research.

In this chapter, I tell the story of ‘voluntary’ childlessness from the perspective of Sophie, and other West Berliner women of the *Wende* generation, interlocutors who neither chose to have, nor decided against having children. I argue that there is not a steadfast and unswerving relation between the desire for a child and the decision to have or not have one. Rather, contemplation and choice are often fraught with palpable ambivalence, involving both rational processes of reality testing and emotional reactions. Talking about one’s reproductive histories and childlessness today, has more to do with how women in this chapter remember their personal and political pasts; these narrations are not simply a qualification or rationalization of why they chose not to have children. Thus, I argue that childlessness is apprehended through memories of pre and post reunification Berlin and reformulations of gender and inter-generational relations through one’s life. Childlessness, then, is not only the absence of biological offspring. Being childless is without doubt an experience of absence, but one that is refracted through loss and social exclusion in a city exemplifying a particular hypervisibility of reproduction.

In this chapter, I complicate distinctions between voluntary and involuntary childlessness to emphasize that childlessness (*Kinderlosigkeit*) does not necessarily imply a conscious desire (or lack thereof) to have a child (*Kinderwunsch*). The assumption that the desire to have children or be parents and subsequently the inability to do so in one’s lifetime explains the idea of involuntary childlessness, or that the decision to live a child-free life, explains voluntary childlessness may be altogether too simplistic. Rather, this chapter asks how it came to be that some of my interlocutors don’t have children, and when and how does being childless become personally and socially relevant to them. Accordingly, I don’t explain childlessness but instead discuss how the question of desire



for a child is experienced and lived in everyday Berlin by some women of the *Wende* generation in the years after Germany's reunification.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, this alternative conceptualization of childlessness, is not merely about the absence of children. Neither is the absence of a child the primary condition for how childlessness is experienced in the city of Berlin. This experience has more to do with a sense of *exclusion* from social space, a loss of belonging to a city and its people, and consequently changes in one's *Lebensraum* (a space to exist, not merely physical but experiential). Interestingly in the native conceptualization of "child-unfriendly" Berlin, those who have a child or more children supposedly enjoy social space, presence and visibility, but it is not always clear if their experience of having children in this space is always an enjoyable one!<sup>136</sup>

Childlessness in contemporary Berlin is constituted through collective memories of a divided and reunified city, family life, and ideologies and practices of reproduction. These memories are recalled in the contemporary context of Berlin's gentrification, demographic changes, and confrontation with the public display of the 'German family.' *Kinderwunsch* and related decisions are thus embedded onto the landscape of gender, generational relation to reproduction and the sensuous experience of city spaces. I argue that the Berlin Wall ironically provided a safe-space, which sustained the *Wende* generation's ideals of gender relations, their perceptions of time, and structure of life

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<sup>135</sup> Analytical distinctions between voluntary and involuntary are indeed necessary to acknowledge the desire of individuals to attain a specific idea of family life, the tragedy and pain of biological infertility, associated medical and other forms of treatment, and the experience of success and/or continued failure in achieving one's reproductive goals. My aim is not to diminish the reality and tragedy of involuntary childlessness, rather to talk about reproductive choice in a more nuanced manner with specific reference to personal histories and social memory.

<sup>136</sup> See chapter two on mother's experiences of 'child-unfriendly' Berlin.

course. The loss of this environment or *Stimmung*, in the wake of reunification, delegitimizes the life these West German women led through a political and social reemphasis on the ‘German family,’ bringing to bear a confrontation between those with and without children in Berlin. This confrontation is both real as well as imagined. No longer contained or divided by the Wall, the changes in the city draw new boundaries that encroach physically, socially and emotionally upon Sophie’s (and her contemporaries’) ability to “live with her situation” and transform her ‘voluntary’ childlessness into a burden.

Thus what concerns me in this chapter are the “similarities in feelings, behavioral norms, and connectedness” (Borneman 1992:48) that hold a particular generation together. Individuals construct their stories based on what is significant, how they interpret what happened; not all objective facts that belong to a certain time are as significant to all members of a similar age i.e. “a generation is determined not by the shared problems of the time, but by the responses to these shared problems and objective conditions.... Objective processes become part of life constructions only through subjective interpretations.” (Borneman 1992:48) The focus on an exemplary case allows me to inquire deeper into the ambivalence surrounding the question of children. It also enables commentary on the larger social group or generation with which Sophie identifies and to which she imagines herself belonging. Thus, “...the individual life is interesting not because of its statistical typicality, but because of its *prototypicality* for a generation” (Borneman 1992:47).

The stories we hear are decidedly gendered, in that we hear more from and about women on the topic of having or not having children. Germany’s reconfigurations in

gender-relations, oriented to garner women more rights in domestic and/or public realms, have had considerable success when compared with countries such as India. This is especially true in the last four decades following the feminist and anti-authoritarian movements of the late sixties and early seventies in West Germany. Many female interlocutors describe this period as a means to dissociate womanhood from children, kitchen and church (*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*). Yet, as national debates around the demographic crisis begin to gain momentum in contemporary Germany, it is women (especially the fertility of those between 30 to 45 years of age) who become the central focus of these debates, and it is this generation of women that is implicitly marked as producing Germany's disinterest (*Unlust*) in reproduction.<sup>137</sup> Stories of childlessness thus illuminate life experiences at the intersection of generational memory, gender and place at a moment in time in Berlin, Germany.

### **Livelihood Anxieties**

Sophie is 44 years old, single and has never been married. She does not have any children. She comes from Southwest Germany. "Yes, yes I belong to that category of *Schwaben*, the rich West Germans who produce a certain class envy (*Klassenneid*) in Berliners." she said to me, on our first evening together, her mouth twisting in a half-smile and half-grimace when I commented that her German accent was not a Berliner accent. Self-employed, her expertise lies in providing research and logistical support for

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<sup>137</sup>The average age at first pregnancy in Germany is 29-30. Women 39 and younger are statistically counted as potential mothers, as also those between 40 and 45. Yet the latter group, if they do not have children, is often presented in demographic data as having reached their cohort fertility, i.e. in all likelihood they will remain childless for the rest of their lives. Often national level data on fertility/childlessness is calculated on the basis of this older group between. See <http://www.stern.de/panorama/kinderlosigkeit-immer-weniger-frauen-werden-mutter-707541.html> or <https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/GesellschaftStaat/Bevoelkerung/Bevoelkerung.html>

different kinds of educative and artistic performances or exhibitions. The range of projects and population she works with is quite diverse. During the year that I was in Berlin, she had worked on a project with immigrants in Berlin, identifying problems with integration, held theater workshops in different schools throughout Europe, completed some research work for a museum, and helped direct plays. For Sophie the hustle is always on. She is never sure what her next project will be. Although never having to rely on unemployment benefits, Sophie said, “I just about manage to keep afloat financially. Even though I have such a large network and can rely on people to help me out, I haven’t had a lucky break career-wise. But most of my friends in this field, especially if self-employed, work like I do.” Whenever she talks about her work, she seems happy. However, the struggle to get projects is catching up with her. Sophie admitted that increasingly she finds herself doing work that she may not necessarily find creative but earns her a good sum of money in return. She has no alternative source of income and must depend on herself, although “in an emergency, I could ask my mother for money.” She told me that she pays into a special state health insurance plan for the self-employed or artists (*Künstler*). This way she gets a concession and doesn’t have to pay as much as those with a regular income. Last year, she had been working on a film project in Turkey. The employer was German and there was some misunderstanding, which led to an unnecessary financial debt.

I thought my employer was paying the monthly installments for my health insurance, but he was not and the state insurance (*Staatliche Krankenkasse*) has now asked me to pay a lump sum of 1000 Euros to make up for all those months that I did not pay! This is exactly the kind of thing I can’t afford. I consulted with a lawyer, but realize that I will probably not get out of this mess and will have to make the payment.

Making money and continuously looking for new projects is a persistent source of anxiety. Sophie wonders often what she could do to change her state of seemingly permanent suspension to some degree. As the years pass, her sense of optimism about her professional and personal choices has ebbed, she admits. It was during this period of insecurity and anxiety about the future that I met Sophie. She spoke to me about her current situation, sometimes with regret (at not having made the “correct” choices) and sometimes with an excitement about how experiences and ideologies of youth had influenced the trajectory of her life. She recalled how Berlin 20 or more years ago had been the ideal place for her to live out some of her personal and political goals. Today, those goals seem unjustifiable.

### **Moving to Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin**

I was just about three and my twin brothers were five when my parents separated. My father was always away on business. My mother was pregnant with my brothers when her own mother died; just a year after she also lost her father. Since my father was away a lot we rented out a room in our house to earn some extra cash. As is typical when a man younger than my mother moved into that room, she had an affair with him. My father and she divorced on account of that affair and my mother married another younger man. We kids never accepted this new relationship. We gave him a hard time and till the end of that marriage we never established a truce with him. I wasn't even particularly loyal to my father, because he just disappeared from our lives. We even had to move out of that small town in West Germany to avoid “village talk.” I learned later that my father remarried. I then began to see him and his second wife on and off. Then they divorced, and he married again. I guess because of the situation that my mother found herself in, I always felt like I was a disturbance (*Störung*) in her life. I mean I understand that it is not easy to juggle work, three kids, the stigma of an affair and a younger husband. The irony is that eventually I was able to find a way to communicate with my father because he apologized and acknowledged that my childhood was messed up. My mother on the other hand would never hear any of that. She never acknowledges what I felt as a child; she can't accept that it was hard for me, and, yes, I do feel guilty that I can't forgive her. Yet my mother and my brothers are emotionally dependent on me. They say that the one who gets away is the one who parents yearn for more. I never stayed close to home, whereas my brothers have always lived within a 200km radius of both my parents.

Sophie grew up in a little town in the Southwestern State of Baden-Württemberg (West Germany) and was 20 when she moved to divided Berlin. After a particularly uncomfortable time at her mothers' during Christmas in 2012, Sophie spoke at length about her decision to leave home in her teenage years. She had always mentioned to me that as a child she felt that she "got in the way" of her mother's life—single and busy, in and out of relationships after Sophie's parents separated—and that even though she knew she was loved, she felt like she was more an annoying responsibility than a joy for her mother. Admitting that it is only natural to develop such feelings when a single mother who is struggling to keep her head above the water raises you, Sophie said she was resigned to never really being close to her mother. Leaving home and going to Berlin was facilitated not only by the *Wende* but was a way for Sophie to escape the stifling atmosphere in her little hometown and to finally get away from feeling tied down by family obligations.

"It was 1990, a few months after the *Wende*. I moved into a rotted out (*vergammeltes*), definitely-unsafe-for-habitation apartment in Prenzlauer Berg with a few other students from West Germany." A 45-year-old West Berliner and former housemate of Sophie remarked how moving into these abandoned houses was "the thing to do for a lot of us young people. It was illegal, it was cheap, we were not disturbed and we could live the way we wanted." Sophie remembers that all her neighbors were East Berliners. They were curious about the West Germans who squatted in the next-door apartment and would bring them produce and food to eat. Most of these newcomers to Berlin did odd jobs to get by and were often financially supported by their parents. Living in Berlin was extremely cheap and housing was often free for many as Sophie explained further: "Soon

more and more young students, artists, unemployed or those seeking adventure arrived in Berlin. It was the perfect setting. We stayed in these apartments for years without paying rent.” Most of the houses in the former East Berlin neighborhood were dilapidated, suffering years of neglect during the waning years of the socialist era in East Germany. After reunification and during the period of institutional, judicial and infrastructural transition, the East German police were disbanded. Until the fate of these apartments was decided—the time taken varied from a few to ten or more years—a lot of young people occupied these homes without having to pay rent. This does not mean that there was no anti-squatting sentiment or violent intervention from the police. In fact many attempts were made in the earlier years after the *Wende* to evict illegal occupants.<sup>138</sup> “It took a while before systems were in place, before the apartments were sold or bought, repaired or renovated i.e. before anyone could claim ownership. We who stayed for years repaired everything ourselves, even patched up large gaping holes in the floor!” Eventually squatters were evicted or made an offer by the state to buy out the apartments. Some took up the offer, while in other cases, investors from outside Berlin, having had the foresight that eventually real estate prices in Berlin would rise, bought property. Sophie said she and her fellow occupants were prey to a spate of bad luck. They were ready to buy out the apartments they had squatted in for many years, but an external investor made the state a better offer. “Otherwise today I would have had a place of my own in Berlin.”

A lot of the houses in the city that were originally owned by Jewish families were returned to the next generation. Sophie always had fascinating stories to tell about her

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<sup>138</sup> See for instance Nadine Möller (2011) on squatter movement in Germany.

years of squatting, about the different social groups that squatted in these apartments and the eventual transfer of ownership and her subsequent move out of Prenzlauer Berg:

Well we had a punk, a true (*richtig*) punk apartment complex next to ours – they were always louder, always more colorful and chaotic than we were. They had lots and lots of dogs with strange names. One I will never forget was called *Kotzi* (A diminutive of *Kotze*, meaning vomit). So you can imagine if he got lost and people had to look for him! They had opened a pub in the ground floor of the complex and I have spent many a night there. In the mid-nineties, while the members in my household were contemplating signing a lease with the state, so that eventually we would have to start paying some rent, the punks were completely against any business with the state. There was a film crew that came to our homes during that time. They were making a film about a Jewish man who discovers that one of these squatter houses actually belonged to his grandfather and when he comes to Berlin to claim ownership, he befriends the occupants of the building. Quite a funny story line, so the crew wanted to use our building for shooting some of the scenes. They even paid us 200 *Deutschmark* (DM). They had to block the entrance for some days such that there were only specific times when one could go in and out of the apartment. Now during the filming, a section of the punk apartment, which was right next to ours, happened to fall into the camera frame. So what did these punks do? From the window on top, which was in the frame of the camera they hung a cloth flag on which they had painted a Swastika! The film crew was horrified, negotiations began and the punks got paid 2000DM for taking that flag off! So they actually knew how to work the system better than we did!

The idea of the *Wohngemeinschaft*—joint residence—is certainly not new in Germany. Sophie and her generation were experimenting with living arrangements that opposed traditional family structures. The first wave of alternate living arrangements characterized the student uprisings in the sixties, after which the decades of 1970s and 1980s saw a growing number of single people, friends, acquaintances or even strangers usually similar in age living together and managing an alternate household.

Because it was a real household you know, and we were a different kind of family. This guy Max who moved into the apartment first had already started the repairs on the rooms, the stairwell and the floors. I moved in shortly afterwards and then many others followed. We were the oldest members of the apartment complex (*Haus*) and we were in a relationship, almost like parents. Well we were all these young West Germans, 20 of us staying in a house, with two kitchens and two



bathrooms; no it was not very clean [smile]... There was little privacy and a lot of sharing and exchange of sexual partners. Max and I were really in charge and had to take on a lot of responsibility. There was a huge table in the center of the kitchen where we would assemble to have discussions about occupants' problems with each other, or who was to cook or clean. Also we discussed each other's problems—family, relationships etcetera—it was a very secure environment. I mean I identified with that apartment-community. We would put out sofas outside and have parties every evening. One call for help and 30 people would come out running.

All kinds of different groups of individuals formed these joint households. There were students, punks, communist groups, working class, middle class individuals inspired by the idea that there could be a different way of living that was separated from the structure of the nuclear family; such arrangements were to provide a new way of relating to another and an alternate form of care. Such kind of community living has also been compared to a substitute family of sorts; *Wohngemeinschaften* were often a place where a generation went against its biological parents in the search for other parents (Horx 1984). We see this aspect of a substitute family in Sophie's narrative. In spite of the fact that young squatters were looking for parental substitutes in the *Wohngemeinschaften*—hence the security of a family—these arrangements definitely changed the way in which family or kinship could be imagined.

Through the late 1960s, into the 1970s and early 1980s, West Berlin certainly was at the center of the movement involving a concrete and concerted effort to transform inter-generational relationships, i.e. to demand anti-authoritarianism and informality (Reichardt 2014). The stories of the interlocutors speaking of these social changes provide a perspective on how political ideology intersected with household arrangements, family forms, and choice of clothes, interpersonal networks and contact. Reichardt describes these groups as anti-institutional, anti-state, and democratic; they sustained

their politics and lifestyles through consistent meetings and discussions in local bars and in community houses or joint houses. These alternate routes to earning money, living together, networking, and organizing time had implications for identity, lifestyle, socio-cultural capital and one's daily structure and use of time. Reichardt argues that while the joint living arrangements did not necessarily usher in a revolution, it did change the cultural climate in Berlin; gender roles shifted away from patriarchal ideologies, parental and institutional authority was critiqued and personal and work relations did become less formal. Importantly there was a change in how people related to each other; many interlocutors reported how they strove for more warmth, closeness, tenderness between themselves and others (also see Davis 2008). Berlin (and Frankfurt am Main) were indisputably the center of the anti-authoritarian student movement of the late 60s and have been variously described as "*Bewegungsmetropolen*" or "*Zentren der Revolte*" (Reichardt 2014:27).<sup>139</sup>

Sophie lived in *Wohngemeinschaften* for almost 10 years with different people. "But then after almost a decade of living like that it got too chaotic, too dirty and then I was off, away from Germany, traveling in other parts of the world. And when I came back I moved into my own apartment alone. That was ten years ago I guess." This was a common narrative I heard when speaking to the *Wende* generation, either those who lived in Berlin during the period of the Cold War or those who moved to Berlin when the wall came down. They found solace in a community far away from their immediate family and lived for an extended period of time without a definitive career or life plan in mind, living with friends, doing odd jobs and traveling or studying—practically at no cost, since

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<sup>139</sup> Translated as: Metropolis of social movements and Centers of revolt.

university education was heavily subsidized—for many years. There was a certain mood or atmosphere (*Stimmung*), a sense of slowness to life that did not compel urgent decision-making regarding the future.

### **Men and Children**

So in spite, or maybe because of my family and Berlin experiences, I did not want to have children without a partner. We as children did not allow anyone to take on the role of the father; my mother thus tried to play both roles and she actually took on more of a father's role, stereotypically speaking. This too she did not do well, which was quite painful to watch. I really think a child needs a consistent father and mother figure (*Vater* and *Mutterbild*), irrespective of who plays that role. I don't think that I would want to be a single mother and I am a little critical of women who choose that path; well they can choose what they want, but I can't imagine that for myself.

Sophie spoke about her romantic relations with some disdain, even though she remembers “all the men in my life fondly and except for one of them, I am actually able to maintain my friendship with my ex-boyfriends and in some cases even their current girlfriends and wives.” Sophie often admitted that feminism had influenced her life course tremendously, while also expressing regret at the fact that German feminism muted the voices of men in her generation: “They were neglected, we did a lot of work for women, women's rights, but somehow forgot about the men. Yet men could have fought for their space too.” While reflecting on male marginality in the female quest for more rights at home and in the workplace, she also insisted that men she met seemed poised to exit on the brink of having to take responsibility, or agreeing to be in a monogamous relationship and start a family.

I think maybe it has to do with age. For women it is unfair that by the time they are in their early forties they must absolutely make the decision on children, while men can father even in their sixties! So maybe for us the issue of partners, relationship and children becomes more urgent early on, and men feel like all we want from them is sperm!

One of the primary ways in which Sophie described her socialization into the female role was through the lens of the feminist movement in West Germany. She often told me how she felt that while doing a lot for women's rights, German women had not taken men along. It was easy to ignore them because "we were so focused on making it better for women at work and at home. There was a certain aggression to leaving out the men." And this, according to her has had the consequence that gender relations in her generation are organized with little regard for the 'couple' or the (heterosexual) family. Sophie noted that this was not the experience of people younger than herself. They seem more inclined to settling down into a conventional marital arrangement.

Other Berliners in Sophie's age group had much to say on the topic of gender relations. Vera, a 45-year-old, single, childless entrepreneur believed that Germany's demographic crisis (*Krise*) as she mockingly called it, was an indication of how little sexual desire there is left between the sexes. "Men have become feminized and women are more and more masculine, thanks to our feminists! So no one wants to have sex and that's why there are less and less children!" Katrin, an East German in her mid-thirties who has a Ph.D. and married a Polish man, crinkled her nose and said to me, "I never really dated German men. They are all very enlightened and gender sensitive (*aufgeklärt*) but we lost something in that process too. They are not masculine enough for me. I guess that's why I married a Polish man." Katja who is an artist in her late thirties, single and without children, said,

...well I do think that we are finding it harder to deal with the new masculine in Germany and other parts of the First World too. Yet I do think that, objectively speaking, men, at least in Berlin, will not do or say the romantic thing. They assume we don't want it. There are no real stages of a relationship like in the USA for instance – you sort of announce when you are exclusively dating, you call

each other girlfriend-boyfriend, then at some point there is an engagement, marriage and children.

Berliners often commented on these stereotypical differences between Germany and America and asserted that the *Wende* generation's ideological frameworks, especially those emerging from experimentation with alternate networks of care, defined contemporary romantic, heterosexual relations.

Max, Michael and Niko, East Berliners in their late thirties and early forties had their side of the story to tell. Niko began, "Romantic relationships in Germany are very inhibited or repressed (*Beziehung in Deutschland ist sehr verklemmt*); people are really unable to find a way towards each other". Michael disagreed, saying that in fact now people (especially women) have a better chance at expressing themselves and what they want from a relationship. But in his disagreement Michael reiterated what Max had said earlier about his experience as a man: "As a man I do not find that I have enough space in a relationship to tell my partner what I want; not necessarily sexually, but as an individual who also identifies with his work, friends and hobbies." Echoing Katja in referencing the "American" rules of the game, Max said rather ironically, "well here, there are no rules anymore so we don't know how to proceed in a relationship. No one knows how to play the game; it's down to guesswork."

Sophie's true love was Jan, a man she went to University with and was in a relationship with for a decade before they broke up. "There were many others I had sex with," she told me as we sat one afternoon enjoying the sun along the banks of the river *Spree*. "We never really declared that we were a couple; well we were not exclusive, yet we knew we loved each other." During that period there were moments when she

wondered about children and if a family life were possible, but she never felt that she could trust any man enough to have a child with him:

Around the time I was 39, it was a crisis period for me because Jan and I had several arguments and lot of ambivalence about the issue of children. Somehow we could never make the decision. You know, take the plunge. Besides I always felt that Jan was never 100% there. I guess it was my fault, too. I wanted him, but was also not willing to be with him.

Jan and Sophie are friends and meet on and off. For the 10 years that they were together in an open relationship, they discussed, albeit through disagreement, the future, a family and perhaps living together. Sophie knew Jan could not choose “settling down” at that time, and neither could she. They broke up about five years ago:

Well, broke up actually would mean we were at some point a couple, which we never were, even though we were *together*. I guess what sufficed was that we loved each other. What hurts is that within two years of our break up, Jan got married and has two children. I still love him but I never found a sense of stillness, tranquility or a feeling of being settled (*halt*) with him or any other man.

Over time, Sophie’s narrations revealed to me how she has had to constantly battle with internal contradictions in what she wanted from life. Squatting in a house with strangers who eventually became part of the household family, Sophie and her friends ‘chose’ not to fall into traditional family structures. Yet recalling her own experiences of childhood, Sophie feels that today, if she wanted to have a child, she would prefer a more ‘traditional’ family where a male and a female figure play the role of a father and a mother. Perhaps she came to this realization “too late.” She talked about this often, especially when she mentioned the generation following hers. There was a mixture of

contempt as well as regret in her voice as she contemplated what she had forgone because of how she lived her life until she was 40.

Claudia, the second wife of my father, who also never had children, told me that there is a phase when this feeling of being excluded (*ausgeschlossen*) is very strong but when you are past that age, that life phase you don't bother about it so much. Well, I think it is very difficult in our society because today, especially in Berlin everything has become so focused on becoming parents, being parents, everywhere, every time having children around adults, as if children can't play amongst themselves! And then there is very little scope for you to hang out with these adults if you don't have a child. I know this sounds like an exaggeration, but in the beginning I felt excluded, now I think it borders on discrimination (*am Anfang hatte ich mich ausgeschlossen gefühlt, jetzt denke ich, es ist ein bisschen diskriminierend*).

### **Moving out of Prenzlauer Berg**

“And you know that's why I moved out of Prenzlauer Berg.” That was the first sentence Sophie uttered after I told her about some of my experiences hanging out at playgrounds and talking to parents in the neighborhood. She was still ruminating on an earlier conversation about feeling “discriminated against” as a woman without children. When she first arrived in Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg was the place to be. But over the years:

I have been pushed out of this place that was once home. This is what happens to all who live here but do not have families and over the last 20 years, the face of this place has changed drastically. It is a monoculture (*Monokultur*): no immigrant population, very rich families and mostly married couples with children. They own the apartments and drive people out. It has become very territorial. One time while I was still living in Prenzlauer Berg, I came into the building with my hands full of shopping bags, carrying a lot of heavy things, and I just had to stand there without being able to pass because the whole pathway was full of strollers (*Kinderwagen*). I asked a mother who was there you know, ‘May I pass?’ And she stared at me and gave me a scowl as though I were asking for something unacceptable. These strollers can create fire safety hazards, and once our building manager had to put up a notice requesting the parents to please leave the entrance passage open. It was more a pleading note, almost apologizing

for what he was requesting the parents to do. And I had had it. You are truly a minority here, you feel discriminated against and you move out.

Majority of the population in Prenzlauer Berg is in their reproductive years (25-45 years of age), which has also resulted in a 30% increase in number of births between 2005-2010; the total fertility rate of the neighborhood is still comparable to Berlin's average though. The hypervisibility of reproduction is palpable not only through the material presence of children in the city center but brought to fore through memories of a past *Stimmung* of Berlin that Sophie and others remember, one they describe as drastically different from today. Berlin, according to interlocutors of the *Wende* generation, was a place *not* full of children, as a space *not* serving to constantly remind its inhabitants of a future comprising of a life trajectory that celebrated reproduction and traditional family structures, the way in which the city seems to do today.

Over the four decades that Germany remained divided, West Berliners spent 28 years ensconced in and encircled by a concrete Wall: walled-in (*eingemauert*) in the “free zone,” as West Berliners often described it with ironic smiles and seriousness over the irony. West Berlin was an island in the middle of East Germany and when traveling by land, West Berliners needed transit visas and entry permits to exit East Germany in order to get to any other part of the Federal Republic of Germany or Europe. When the Wall came down, for some West Berliners it was the first time they traveled outside of Berlin, or met people from other parts of West Germany.

During fieldwork, I lived in a former East neighborhood (Friedrichshain) bordering Prenzlauer Berg. These two neighborhoods are situated along the former border between East and West, the Oberbaum bridge over the river Spree dividing



Freidrichshain-Prenzlauer Berg from Kreuzberg in former West Berlin. Before the division of Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg were centrally located but

...during the postwar era, they became literally and figuratively ‘marginal’ districts in their respective parts of the city. In fact, numerous streets in both districts turned into dead ends, leading up to and ending at the Berlin Wall. The unification of East and West Berlin has reconnected the two districts to the historical and commercial centers of Berlin.” (Becker-Cantarino 1996:91)

These shifts in location—from being central to becoming border areas running into dead ends, to regaining geographical centrality—have facilitated post-unification renovation projects, gentrification and changes in the city’s demography, which also reveal specific discourses on reproduction in Berlin.

Other residents of the now-central neighborhoods of Berlin shared Sophie’s sense of loss. Andreas, Peter, Jürgen and Richard who we met in chapter one are unemployed East Berliner men in their 50s. They all rent apartments along the former border dividing the neighborhoods of Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte. They have lived here for the last 30 years or more. I met them a few times during late afternoons as they sat on benches outside the Volkspark am Weinberg park, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes.<sup>140</sup> They often spoke about the German poet Heinrich Heine and how they remembered Prenzlauer Berg before the *Wende*. “Down this corner was the pub where we hung out every evening. Actually there was a pub around every corner. But now everything shuts down at 10pm! So we just hang out here outside the park on benches and drink and smoke.”

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<sup>140</sup> Consumption of beer in public spaces such as parks and public transportation is permitted in Berlin.

I met Burkhard, 45 years of age, through a group of politically active ex-East Berliners I had befriended. He explained to me on a walk through the city why he had had to move to Marzahn, an easternmost neighborhood of Berlin:

I lived here in for 30 years. This was my parent's home. I found a place in Marzahn about 5 years ago. It is not possible for me, with my income, to continue to live in Prenzlauer Berg. Besides this is not my home anymore. I don't recognize any apartments or shops or other pubs I frequented and I certainly don't recognize the people!

Until the fall of the Wall, proletarians, artists, students and the unemployed living in dilapidated houses inhabited Prenzlauer Berg. After 1990, it was one of the first targets of Germany's post-reunification renovation and reconstruction of Berlin. Before and immediately after the reunification, the condition of houses in this formerly peripheral area was so poor that many abandoned buildings fearing their collapse. Those who could not afford to pay rent often occupied these abandoned houses. As we know from Sophie's story, students, unemployed men and women and artists squatting in these dilapidated buildings was a common phenomenon. Today, these central neighborhoods are transformed and inspire debates and protests against gentrification and rising rent prices in the city.

In the 25 years since reunification, the city's now central neighborhoods have evolved into a *Kinderinsel* (children's island), an entertainment park of sorts, with adult schedules and lives and businesses structured around baby food, clothes, strollers, playground, KITAs and children's cafes. Not only have some of the West Germans who first squatted in the run down houses started here families, but increasingly, young, upwardly mobile West Germans with children are moving in. Prenzlauer Berg has been renovated and as locals put it, "the gentrification is complete. You will hardly find any

former East Berliners here anymore.” Between 1995-2000, half of the population in this part of the city had been reshuffled and by 2007 it was about 80%, mostly inhabited by high-income families.<sup>141</sup>

Stefanie is a 33-year-old mother of a toddler. She often told me that she loved living in Prenzlauer Berg where everything she needed for her child—for medical, education or entertainment purposes—was right around the corner. On the other hand, we hear from Johanna, a writer, single, in her mid-forties. She belonged to the first wave of West German youth who moved to Berlin after the *Wende* and watched in alarm the gentrification and demographic changes that came in its wake. “Living here became impossible. The hallways of the apartment and the footpaths were always submerged under baby carriages, children’s bicycles and toys. It was not possible to walk without tripping, or dealing with the aggression of the mothers, so I moved out!”

While gentrification continues in waves throughout the city, nowhere is it as tangible as in Prenzlauer Berg. By the same logic the most visible signs of these transformations are the mothers of Prenzlauer Berg who become objects of special scrutiny and scorn.<sup>142</sup> Armed with bulky, wide, large-wheeled strollers, they have been described as the *Kinderwagenmafia* (stroller mafia) as they clear space, literally, with their children in tow and “emotionally make it extremely difficult for people without children to live here,” Sophie vehemently concluded.

### **Mothers and Others: Past, Present and Future**

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<sup>141</sup> <http://www.zeit.de/2007/46/D18-PrenzlauerBerg-46>

<sup>142</sup> See chapter two.

During fieldwork, I had become so accustomed to the wide-ranging negative commentary on the “Swabian mother” that I had to make extra effort to listen attentively to descriptions of contemporary and past mothering practices. These commentaries shed light on changes in life course, reconfigurations in city spaces, expectations about family life and hopes and dreams for the future, all of which brought to bear a peculiar confrontation between generations, class, and regional groups around the issue of reproduction.

Women were central to the discourse on reproduction in Germany. Most of my interlocutors spoke about women when explaining why Germany faces a demographic crisis. Martin, father of a two-year-old boy, explained:

Wanting children is natural, don’t you think? It is the animal in us. The need to reproduce, to immortalize our genes, I guess. I think people who decide not to have children or have never really felt the need to have a child, perhaps had some bad experience with their own parents, perhaps some trauma they can’t get over.

Uli, 50 years old and childless, often complained to me when I discussed Germany’s family politics with him. “In today’s world everyone wants to only take care of themselves. Women who don’t have children don’t want to give up their freedom. They don’t want the responsibility,” Vera, who we met earlier, turned the standard narrative about selfish childless women on its head:

They tell me I don’t want children because I want to fulfill myself, but it is exactly the opposite, they who have children want to do that and also compensate for something that they missed in their childhood. Are you ever asked when will you get your first car? Then why are you asked when will you have a child?

Susanne and Christine are self employed like Sophie and constantly on the lookout for work to maintain a regular income. The three have known each other for over 15 years now and sometimes work on joint projects together.

Susanne is 45 years old, single and childless. She works as a freelance theater manager. This involves organizing props for shows, doing accounting and conducting theater workshops. She moved to West Berlin in her late teens before reunification and has been living in Prenzlauer Berg for over 25 years. For our first interview, she insisted we meet in the café that does not permit entry of strollers. Identifying as Schwabe herself, she thought that the antagonism against Schwaben is sometimes exaggerated in media, but also acknowledged persisting cultural differences between Swabia and Berlin.

There is a difference between mentality and lifestyle in North and South. I can speak about the Baden-Wuerttemberg stereotypes: hard working, saving money, more traditional gender roles, practical and resourceful. When I first came to Berlin I was shocked at the sloppiness (*Schlamperei*) here. The work culture is really different; Berliners do tend to be lazier. In Berlin for instance if you live in an apartment block, as part of your rent you pay for maintenance and cleaning of the stairwell and the common areas used by all renters. In Schwaben-land, on the other hand, there is the concept of the cleaning week (*Kehrwoche*); all residents in the apartments take turns according to a fixed weekly schedule for cleaning common areas. This is how we save money!

Susanne laughed and continued:

I wanted to get away from exactly these rigid ideas and hence came to Berlin. Up until the 1990s and especially before the *Wende*, Berlin was a place for artists, for people escaping compulsory military service, for young people seeking freedom from conservative ideas, for people interested in culture, for homosexuals to live freely, and of course for people to pursue studies or to live really cheap. In the last ten years or so Berlin has changed so much that all the reasons I came here for are no longer valid; this city is too chic, too expensive, too bourgeois...a lot of artists I knew are no longer in Berlin. I often think of leaving.

Susanne's father was born in 1909 and her mother in 1926. They fled from East to West Germany in the early 1950s with the help of a friend and settled in the southwest. Her father fought in the Second World War. By the time Susanne was born, her mother was 36 and her father 53. In comparison to her friends, she always felt that she was being raised by her grandparents at home and by more open and younger teachers at school. This created a lot of conflict in Susanne, often leading to tension at home. Influenced by the climate of the 70s, she wanted her parents to talk about the war, but there was always a lot of silence surrounding it.

In a way, I was better off than a lot of my contemporaries because I was raised in a very strict household with clear distinctions between children and adults. A lot of my friends had parents who were trying out newer forms of adult-child interactions. I know from many who went to these *Kinderläden* where free education was the motto, that they were always confused about what was expected from them. Without much age and experience these kids were often asked to take decisions that adults should have taken for them! I guess there are advantages and disadvantages to both. I for one have really had to struggle emotionally and psychologically to leave behind some of the burdens of my family, which they accumulated through the trauma of war and the silence surrounding it.

A large part of her inability to be in a relationship and have children has to do with this family history, said Susanne. Her feminism largely concerned with coming to terms with the fate of three generations of women and mothers before her. Her maternal great grandmother raised six children on her own when her husband decided to stop working for no particular reason. Her maternal grandmother became pregnant by a man who did not marry her. Her own mother had to live with a war veteran many years her senior and always give in to his demands. "All these life stories were very interesting, unjust and I spent a lot of years thinking about this 'genealogy of violence,' as I call it." Susanne was in a live-in relationship for almost a decade. For seven out of these ten years

she and her partner discussed having children. “I went through a lot of soul searching. Why did we not feel enough trust in each other to do this? Was it me or the fact that my partner, who was six years younger, never felt ready?”

A year after Susanne broke up with her long term partner, he got married and within two years had two children of his own. Susanne reflected further:

Life in West Berlin especially was slow and relaxed and there were many young people here. We could remain children longer. I had too much to deal with in terms of personal history....so I guess I didn't have time to contemplate children and when I did it was not with the right partner. But honestly I do think I couldn't have been in a position to make any decisions. The lives of these three women in my family—Mienchen, the great grandmother, Lene, the grandmother and Margot, my mother—completely absorbed me and I could not bring myself to have a child.

Christine is a West Berliner, 40-year-old, and childless. She and her boyfriend of eight years do not live together. They prefer to have separate spaces which they direct and use as they want without the interference of the other. Christine said that if they had the money they could potentially live in a large house with two separate sections, so that one has one's private bedroom and workplace. “I can't really imagine living with someone else. I think it also comes from having lived for years in a joint house (*Wohngemeinschaft*) and having shared everything with everyone with no private space at all!” Christine's partner has three children from a previous relationship. She did not really discuss having children of her own with him because she knew he did not want any more. However, getting close to 40, she did make an appointment with a fertility specialist to see if everything was medically ok with her. She never did keep the appointment.

“You know, in my family I was never told that I have to get married and raise a family of my own, but the family that we had together was important. We always had dinner together as a family. So giving each other time was important, which is what I try to do in all my relationships today.” Christine was then deeply disappointed by her father who left her mother for another woman. What infuriated her more was that when her father came back her mother took him in. “Today I can see what motivated my mother. But I was very angry with her for a long time. Eventually I also made peace with my father...but I think these experiences leave an impact on you and the personal for me did become political.” Christine added that her work as an independent artist is uncertain; there is little constancy and such a lifestyle does not seem conducive to having and raising a family.

I often met a lot of women in their early to late forties like Sophie, Susanne and Christine, single or in a relationship, who wanted to tell me a story: “the story about why I did not have children” as they said to me. It was not necessarily why they *chose* not to have children but rather why they ended up not having them. According to Sophie, Susanne and Christine, the current generation of grandparents—the post war generation that came of age in the 50s and 60s and those especially in West Berlin who were involved in the anti-authoritarian student revolts—has played a significant role in shaping the *Wende* generation’s relation to reproduction or *Kinderwunsch*. Often my female interlocutors recalled their experiences of growing up in the early 70s and the influence of their own mothers’ and grandmothers’ relation to feminist ideals.

As these three friends and I sat down for dinner one evening at Sophie’s, Susanne reflected on the influence in her life of her grandmother and mother:



Strong female figures and role models shaped our perceptions of the politics of reproduction; we didn't want to be tied to the home and hearth, but I do think that the younger generation today i.e. those who are now becoming mothers, see this reproductive role itself as political. This is something different from what we visualized as our own future.

Christine nodded, adding that it is not that they as a group had not contemplated becoming mothers at some point in their lives (they still do). Christine reiterated what she had told us about visiting an infertility specialist:

Well it wasn't because we were talking about having children. I mean I didn't even discuss it with my partner. I was doing it for myself, to see if medically everything was ok. But you know then I didn't really broach the topic, because I knew that my partner had had his kids with the ex-wife against his wish.

When Susanne was in a relationship, she spent seven years contemplating her desire to reproduce.

You know it's not so simple. I was confused. I couldn't understand where the hesitation was located; in me, in my partner... But my own work keeps me busy with younger kids and you are like a mother when you are doing a workshop for young people on advertising. Besides, with no child, I don't have to get up at 6am on Sunday and look after the kid, I can have my *Ruhe*, I can make my coffee, read my newspaper and crawl back into bed if I want! Who wants the responsibility of being "perfect" parents?

On perfect parenting, Sophie added:

Parents today, especially mothers, prepare a separate, independent, small ego (*klein Ego*) to send out into the world. They have an idea perhaps that that's what the future looks like: where one has to be egoistic to survive, which is sad. So while they don't want their child to be spoiled, they are rather proud of it, even find it endearing, if the child is impossible. You know I belong to a generation of children from West Germany that was raised by feminists. I am also a daughter of a single mother. Since the 1970s we saw an exponential increase in divorce rates. My mother, while she loved us, gave me the feeling that kids just got in the way of her life. Perhaps that also colors my wish for

a child, but with others it might be that they want to compensate for that lack, and that's when you spoil the child.

Susanne piped in to point out the obsession with and around children, "I saw a mother recently buy an electronic rattle for her child's *Kinderwagen*, so that if the baby cries she switches it on to keep the kid entertained while she can drink her coffee in peace!" We laughed and now it was Christine's turn to chime in:

Well what are you going to do with these West German mothers? The grandparents made so much money during the economic miracle and now that finally their 40-year-old granddaughter has a baby, they can buy the kid a 1000 Euro *Kinderwagen*! I mean there is a picture of my parents with my brother in a rickety carriage with a bottle of *Schnapps* stuck into the side pockets of the carriage. My parents were at the seashore and drank so much that they almost didn't notice the carriage and the baby going underwater! Can you imagine hearing this story today?

I often spoke with the grandmothers (those between 65-75 years of age), the group who Sophie, Christine and Susanne refer to. In West Berlin this group often identified with the generation of 1968, and in the East with socialist ideals of gender equality in productive work. East Berliners often mocked women from the West, recalling how the latter had to defend their desire to work outside the home and were considered to be bad mothers (*Rabenmütter*) for leaving their children in day care. Anna, a 65-year-old former East Berliner and mother of two said:

I think that mothers who only stay at home and focus on their children cause their family more damage. I always worked. My children went to day care, and I was known to pay a lot of attention to my friends too! I mean I didn't feel guilty about it; it wasn't like I was neglecting my child!

Rita, a 70-year-old West Berliner who was active in the anti-authoritarian student revolts in the late 1960s and has a 38-year-old son said:

I was very determined not to be like my mother, I mean, be at home with the children all the time. I think the feminist movement in the West, of which I am proud to have been a part, reversed the meaning of *Rabenmütter* to refer to overprotective or obsessive mothers who focused little on their own self-development. But perhaps we might have gone too far. We raised our children to be “free,” pushing against too much structured disciplining. Our children learnt that, and I think this results in today’s parents being clueless about how to discipline their child!

A shift in what mothering might come to signify today in Berlin is discernible in these narrations of past, present and future ideas around reproduction. For Sophie and her generation, their life trajectories and political orientations—for example taking time to study and travel, pursue a career and be independent, and not necessarily conclude their experimentation with marriage and reproduction—may no longer be the primary or most coveted goal of the “younger generation in Berlin”. This latter group is identified as West German migrants to the city, young, upwardly mobile family gentrifiers, married with steady incomes and those who imagine reproduction as an important life goal to be achieved at a particular time in one’s life. Sophie and her generation’s life constructions provide a window into the particular transformations in regimes of reproduction in post-*Wende* Berlin.

Starting in the 1970s fertility decline in West Germany followed by plummeting post reunification birth rates in East Germany—described variably in media, sociological and demographic accounts as a “culture of childlessness” or disinterest or indifference (*Unlust*) towards having children—have been acknowledged as legitimate political concerns requiring planned intervention. As I have show, this demographic discourse has produced a certain hypervisibility of reproduction, especially palpable in the aftermath of

Berlin's post-reunification socio-spatial reconfigurations.<sup>143</sup> Coupled with a perception of time-acceleration that delegitimizes the life trajectories and experiences of the *Wende* generation, the demographic 'crisis' makes visible a frenzied debate on the future composition of Germany. Further, the confrontation between different social groups (here childless women and mothers) is all the more palpable in a city that provides a heightened sense of intimacy with children. West Berlin, previously cordoned off from the accelerated pace of globalization and gentrification—a city that allowed for life to flow at a slower pace, one that did not attract families with children as it does today, a city identified as anti-establishment and bohemian—exhibits a different atmosphere (*Stimmung*), 25 years after reunification. This particular history adds a curious vigor to the experience of living without children for the *Wende* generation. I argue that the experience of accelerated time post reunification is connected to a feeling of being left behind; it dramatizes the memory of Berlin of another time and is colored by my interlocutors relation to success defined through the life-courses of others who live significantly differently from what Sophie, Susanne or Christine envisioned for themselves.

### **Stretched Time...a Skewed sense of Time**

In 2013, Sophie, Susanne and Christine wanted to meet me on the first of May in Kreuzberg to participate in the festivities of Labor Day in Berlin. We spent a couple of hours walking around the city and enjoying the elusive sun. Finally, around early evening, we sat down to get a cup of coffee at a chic street café along the *Spree* and the

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<sup>143</sup> See chapters one, two and three for the discussion on hypervisibility of children.

conversation turned to time: the time of day, time of the year and the time one imagined one had in life.

Talking to Sophie, Susanne and Christine gave me a sense of security too. I too belonged to this group, at least demographically. In contrast to India, I did not have to explain or defend the fact that I had been married for a decade and had no children. Berliners did inquire about my *Kinderwunsch*, but here, I felt neither a sense of obligation nor a corresponding sense of shame at having “failed” my family. I was infected by their mood, by what they had to say about a time gone by. In a curious sort of way, I too had my experience of the *Wende* in India, albeit not at the rapid pace as it had been in Berlin after 1989. In the early 1990s, the Indian government in response to external debt and foreign exchange crisis, departed from the post-independence planned development model towards liberalization of the economy. I was around 15 years old at that time and witnessed over the next two decades, amongst a myriad of things, a growing sense of anxiety about time. Time seemed to grow more and more elusive, scarce and moving more rapidly than ever before.

Dusk fell, the temperatures were cooler and the table on the street at which we sat was cramped with our coffee cups and burning candles. It was an opportune moment to talk about darkness. I had been very perplexed by the lack of lighting in Berlin homes especially in the winter months and at dusk. My evening interviews would increasingly make me nervous because as the day faded, my interlocutors would not turn on the lights for a long time after it was dark in the room. At first I tolerated this and then I started to request that we switch on a bulb. I was confused that Berliners could complain so much about not getting any light in winter and yet sit in the dark at dusk. As a child, I

remember my mother asking us (or doing it herself) to switch on lights as soon as it was evening. Light drives away the troubles that are associated with darkness. I instinctively bow my head in reverence when I switch on a light bulb in the dark. All of this was imparted to us as children not in the form of a narrative but in the form of prayer, one of the lines being “let the light burn and drive away the troubles”. Berliners often brushed aside my query saying they liked to save electricity. I would laugh at that and say, “I could get spanked for not switching off lights when leaving an empty room, so I don’t think that’s the reason for the difference between Germany and India!” Sitting in the dark with Sophie, Susanne and Christine, I learnt that perhaps it had to do with how the passage of time was experienced, stored in memory, and how that affected its perception (*Wahrnehmung*) for these women of the *Wende* generation.

Sophie said:

Well that’s how we experience our seasons. A lot of this has to do with the body’s memory. We know that after the terrible winter will come the beautiful summer and we also have a sense of how long these cycles of winter-grey and summer-sun last. Our bodies know it more than anything else.

Christine added, “and that’s why we can wait longer, we tolerate it better than you. It is inscribed in our embodied memory!” (*Bei uns ist es im Körpergedächtnis eingeschrieben worden*).”

Susanne who had been listening intently spoke:

I love the time of dusk, it’s the blue hour (*blaue Stunde*) between day and night. You belong to a tropical country Meghana. Being near the equator the shift from daylight to nightfall is sudden. For us time at dusk is stretched. It takes a while before it gets really dark and we are used to that and also find this time beautiful and peaceful. Gradually the day comes to an end, and only when it is pitch dark, do we turn on the lights.

Perception of time was central in a lot of my conversations with men and women in their late 30s to late 40s, the group that invariably commented on the reunification as a defining moment in their lives. Often I heard how the younger generation—“you know those in their 20s and early 30s today”—are more conservative than their older siblings. The general opinion was that this younger generation wants to get married and have children. This generation wants to repeat what their grandparents did, according to Vera, Johanna, Jan, Carsten, and many others who often spoke to me about life in East and West Berlin during and after the Cold War. “We could be children longer” (*Wir konnten länger Kinder bleiben*) said Regina, a 43-year-old mother who remembers traveling for a couple of years after university and before starting a regular job. “I thought I still had time” (*ich habe gedacht, ich habe immer noch Zeit*), said Sandra, a 40-year-old who did not think she needed to hurry to get married and have children even into her late 30s, but now perhaps feels a tinge of regret. Dirk, a 45-year old West German recalled:

All I remember of the decade of the 80s is how it was always grey (“*grau, grau, grau*”). Even though rationally I did not think that the East would attack the West, it was the enemy and I felt very aware of its presence in walled-in West Berlin. Yet the Wall provided a sense of security as well as a timeless space, where we could live without being much affected by the external world.

Vera was convinced that Germany did not have to fear its low fertility:

When we were younger, time stretched in front of us. Professionally, I do a lot of media related training for young students and at the age of 25 they are already planning jobs, marriage and children. I don't think Germany needs to fear its demographic decline!

Sophie said that she had an outlook on life that allowed her to take 10 years to study, read philosophy, travel, do something to contribute to society, take time and think. Unlike the younger generation today, she said that she did not feel the urgency to ‘settle down’ in her 20s and 30s.

Most young people I talk to during my work are so conflicted; some look at us with a little envy, that we had this kind of space which they don't have in this fast moving, goal oriented world, while the other half looks at us as losers because we still haven't reached where they think we should be at our age, i.e. have money, a partner and children.

After the 1990s with increased frequency of in and out migration and contact with the outside world, many West Berliners— who, while trapped by the Wall, also found security and *Ruhe* because of it—experienced this accelerated sense of time that Sophie and her friends confront. With material, demographic and cultural changes in Berlin that alter the experience of everyday life and use of space, many *Wende*-generation West Germans face confusion, feel excluded and alienated from a place that was once home. Years gallop ahead of them and time is no longer stretched out.<sup>144</sup>

Tanja Drückers novel *Hausers Zimmer* (Hauser's Room) describes life in West Berlin in the mid to late 1980s through the eyes of a 14-year-old girl, living with her brother and politically left-leaning parents. The girl speaks of a kind of slowness and heaviness experienced in the walled-in city of West Berlin:

This sense of un-changeability or inertia (*Trägheit*) was something very typical to Berlin. While one speaks of a greater intensity and tempo to life in other metropolitan cities like London and New York, everything in Berlin was slow, like being on drugs, but not speed, rather under the influence of marijuana. Perhaps this had to do with the geopolitics of Berlin; in all probabilities the “dead-end” feel to Berlin heightened this sense of un-changeability. (Drückers 2011: 36-37)<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> I am aware that a lot of these renderings were romanticizing on part of the three friends. I have also been told my West Berliners that living inside the Wall, and then getting out for the first time after 1989, they realized how parochial the atmosphere in Berlin had been during the years of their youth in the Cold War period.

<sup>145</sup> *Diese Trägheit war etwas spezifisches Berlinerisches. Während man von anderen Großstädten zu sagen pflegt, dass das Tempo in ihnen höher sei als in anderen Städten des Landes – wie in London oder New York –, war in Berlin alles langsam, wie auf Drogen, aber nicht auf Speed, sondern eher unter Hanfeinfluss. Vielleicht hatte dies auch mit der geopolitischen Lage Berlins zu tun, möglicherweise führte das Sackgassengefühl zu einer besonderen Art von Trägheit.*



In German, *Trägheit* can be translated as feeling carefree or comfortable, and also as unchanging, indifferent (to the outside), passive and untouchable. What this conveys is that within the boundaries of the Berlin Wall it was possible to imagine and live a life without expectation of much change, “a timeless space” (as one of my interlocutors so eloquently described), where days run into one another and time goes on without it seeming like time has passed (*gedehnte Zeitwahrnehmung*).

What is critical is that for Sophie’s generation the perception of time as being stretched out coincided with the ongoing reconfiguration of social and gender ideals in Germany, ideals that have altered significantly since the Second World War. In the East German socialist state women were considered equal participants in the process of nation building. In matters of productive and reproductive labor, they were independent of men; the socialist state supported reproduction, and it was not necessarily confined to legal marital status. In the long term, this moderated the role of men in reproduction (Ostner 2002). In West Germany on the other hand, the woman’s role was largely imagined and practiced in the domestic realm, until the 1968 student and feminist movements began to carve out a new space for women’s rights, especially making a dent in reproductive and labor policies and giving women more independent control over reproduction. Christine for instance said, “Well of course family is the most important thing. However, my mother never told me that getting married and having children should be my priority as a woman.” Many interlocutors who in the 1970s had been a part of the student revolt in Berlin told me how they reclaimed the maligned word *Rabenmutter* and reversed its connotation to mean a mother who obsesses with the household and harms herself by not expanding her horizons beyond children, household and church.

The perception of a slowness of time, or the sense that one had time (to travel, study, meet people and perhaps later have children, if at all), is intimately tied to how Berlin's space was experienced inside and next to the Wall and at the time of the *Wende*. This time-space acceleration intersects with the stories of a generation that witnessed—firsthand and through their parents and other adults—the concrete consequences of feminist ideologies and lifestyles. Berlin's special status during the Cold War cut it off from the rest of Germany. This also made it self-sufficient, capable of sustaining itself from government subsidies, not exposed to rapid globalization and gentrification patterns, or frequent movements in and out of the city. As a self-contained space for most of its post-war history, it is only in the past ten years or so that Berliners say they feel the impact of the *Wende*. Costs of living have drastically increased and people who come to the city are “different,” as many put it. New migrants invest in property and come here to build families, something unusual to pre-*Wende* Berlin. A generation of students, hippies, anti-fascists, and squatters—as Sophie and others self-identified—are perplexed as their city changes, forcing them to confront the ‘choices’ they made or neglected to make, and the devaluation of life-trajectories they had imagined for themselves.

### ***Ich bin das Objekt deiner Forschung***

It was 3:00 pm at *Treptower* Park in May 2013; both of us were on our bicycles, and the first thing we did was seek out a beer garden along the banks of *Spree*. I had asked Sophie while riding along how she was doing, and she shook her head, crinkled her nose, twisted her mouth and said “not really good, will tell you with time at hand” (*erzähle ich dir in aller Ruhe*). We found tables in the sun and she started talking:

You know I might actually be someone you want to interview for your research.<sup>146</sup> I may actually be the object of your study! I have been very preoccupied with the issue of children. You know Benjamin my colleague is separated from his wife but they share the custody of the children. Then there is Stefan the other guy who is helping us with our current project. He is married with children. And these men are constantly talking about their children! And it so strange because I, a 44-year-old childless woman, sit there silent. (*Und es ist alles komisch weil ich als 44 jährige kinderlose Frau sitze und schweige*) So for the project work, we have to follow a tight schedule, dividing the hours in a day between us and assigning specific tasks. We take turns to work. So one whole week Benjamin would work on the project, and then he gets a break for the next week when he is with his children, and either Stefan or I take over. The long and short of it is that ALL planning is done around the children. And I am not at all part of the picture, I have to always adjust and that irritates me and tires me and I can't really contribute anything to that conversation either. (*ich muss immer anpassen, und das nervt mich und das macht mich kaput und sie reden ja ständig über die Kinder, ich kann da keinen Beitrag leisten*)

She continued after a short pause:

I have a friend Anna, she is three years older than I and when she hit 40 she really started thinking about children; you know the usual *Torschlusspanik*.<sup>147</sup> But she didn't have a partner, and she did not want to raise a child alone. And then after a few years the issue was no longer relevant for her. Recently she was in Berlin and I thought, ok at last I will meet someone with whom I don't have to talk about this topic. And we met, she hugged me and then she said – well I don't mean to shock you, but I am pregnant! And she is 46. I mean, I am happy for her and the baby is also doing fine. I didn't even know she had a boyfriend. They met on an Internet

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<sup>146</sup> This is curious, as Sophie had already given me informed consent, but was only now perceiving clearly that her experiences were so directly connected to my research questions.

<sup>147</sup> *Torschlusspanik* (literally “panic that the door will shut”, *Tor* is door, *Schluss* is the noun form of the verb *schließen* which means to shut) specifically refers to panic women feel when they reach a certain age or point in their lives when the biological clock is ticking and the contemplation around reproduction is accelerated. Interestingly there is another very similar sounding word *Torschusspanik* (in reference to the football player's nervousness before shooting a goal, but also metaphorically used for nervousness before doing something of import. Here *Schuss* is the noun of the verb *schießen* which is to shoot). In a way one can play with both these words, because they are relevant for both men and women. One can have *Torschusspanik* (as a man and as a woman i.e. the nervous contemplation of whether or not one should have a child?) and this contemplation is usually associated with the real or imagined biological *Torschlusspanik*. Also *Torschluss* can be literally visualized as the vagina or the tubes closing up or the ovaries no longer producing eggs. *Schliessen* can then be seen as a 'break-down' of the biological machinery internally and a 'closing-up' externally. I have heard the term (*Torschlusspanik*) being used for men too but rarely. Usually it is women who are referred to when using the term - whether by themselves (childless women and/or mothers when talking about their reproductive decisions) or by others (like doctors or other men and women).

dating site. Ok we had a good time when we met but this is not what I wanted to hear and I wasn't really in top shape you know, I had been unwell and it was a beautiful day and I could not wear anything light so even my body was physically tied down and then we walked out of the restaurant and I saw this guy staring really weirdly at me. Later when I was on my bike I remembered! He was a former boyfriend. The only one with whom I had not kept in touch – it had ended that badly. So as you can see some of these memories and issues are resurfacing. I have never seen myself as a woman who absolutely wanted a child, yet also not as one who absolutely did not. One thing I did know because of my own parents' divorce – I did not want to be a single mother.

Sophie's email to me in December 2013 describes her agony well:

The children-insanity (*Kinderwahnsinn*) around me is reaching its zenith. Almost all my girlfriends and close acquaintances are in baby-frenzy or heavily pregnant. Everyone promises during pregnancy to not be this 'über-mother' and what happens? No sooner is the baby born than the madness starts. Photos of the child breast feeding, photos of the child lying on his father's naked belly, photos with inscriptions like "120 grams weight increase in the first week." Who is interested in that? I wonder, people who were always so private, with whom one could never discuss details of their sex life or about their work and income, how can they suddenly become so shameless, circulating intimate photos and talking about private details.<sup>148</sup>

The entitled display of the products of reproductive labor brings to bear the various life experiences and entanglements—personal, partnerships, family, ideas of the future and financial insecurities—that shaped Sophie and many others' relationship to their own reproductive trajectories. The hyper-visibility of children in public spaces, in media, in political consciousness and discourse makes for constant reminders of what those without children missed out or did not opt for. While living without children is also

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<sup>148</sup> "Der Kinderwahnsinn um mich rum spitzt sich gerade zu. Fast alle meinen Freundinnen und näheren Bekannten sind im Baby-Taumel oder sind kurz vor Termin. Alle schwören während der Schwangerschaft keine dieser Übermutter zu werden und was passiert, kaum ist das Kleine auf der Welt..... Es ist zum Haareraufen.... Fotos vom Baby bei Mama an der Brust, Fotos vom Baby beim Papa auf nacktem Bauch, Fotos mit Bildunterschriften wie "in der ersten Woche 120 g zugenommen" -- wen interessiert das? Ich wundere mich sehr, wie Menschen, die immer so privat waren, dass man mit ihnen nie über Details ihres Sexuallebens oder ihres Einkommens reden konnte, wie diese Menschen plötzlich schamlos intime Fotos von sich rumschicken und private Details ausplaudern und teilen...."

often described positively, the display of these reminders is met with aggressive public disaffection with children adding to the commentary on German *Kinderunfreundlichkeit* (child-unfriendliness).

On one of our last walks together before I left Berlin in the fall of 2013, Sophie shared with me her biggest fear:

I am terrified of growing old all alone in Berlin. I shudder at the thought of living alone and taking 30 whole minutes to climb up the four rickety flights of stairs to my apartment. [She shook her head vigorously from side to side, closing her eyes and finishing with] That's why after 20 years in Berlin, having lived an exciting life, house squatting, fighting the fascists after reunification, traveling to former East German states and outside Germany, working independently and never finding *halt* (a sense of stillness, tranquility or feeling settled) with any man, I often contemplate leaving this city, in the perhaps naïve hope that I will feel at home elsewhere.

Sophie and I continue to correspond. She was actively seeking to move out of Berlin and find jobs in other parts of Germany, or outside Germany. When talking about children in her life, she expressed a great sense of relief that she didn't have to shoulder the responsibility of another life, yet very clearly regretted that she will only always be an aunt to someone else's child and being a mother is not her destiny. Her annoyance at the wanton display of children on the streets of Berlin is accompanied by regret on the one hand and anger on the other, at the devaluation of her generation's life course, which no longer seems validated in the changing climate of reunified Berlin.

By early 2015 Sophie found a temporary position in a neighboring European country. She sublet her apartment in Berlin and moved out. During the year that she was away her emails to me grew increasingly positive. There was a short stint again in Berlin which she described as not pleasant at all, "I realize I am through with Berlin. That makes the goodbye less painful, even though I still do have some close friends in the city. But

now I want to get out.” Until 2017 she has employment outside Berlin, after which the hustle will begin again.

## Conclusions

### *A Generation remembers a time gone by: Co-constructing and Experiencing Childlessness*

#### *Childlessness and Memory*

In this chapter, I show how the experience of childlessness is intimately tied to how the past is recalled from the point of view of the present. Individuals identifying as the *Wende* generation remember Germany’s reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall as marking a crisis or turning point in their lives. Many interlocutors who were in their teens at the time of the *Wende* told me how they were not necessarily at the Wall, participating in the energy and euphoria of breaking it down with tools or their bare hands. Yet some of their friends did do that, as did their parents, relatives, or other adults they knew. Without physical participation, nevertheless they had memories. For those who did not actually break down the Wall, the fact of reunification, the experience of shaking hands with people from the other side, the discussions with friends and family, hearing different stories, and seeing photos and documentaries creates a collective memory of the event. This collective experience that Sophie shares with others, frames and reinforces her real and imagined exclusion from city spaces as Berlin changes materially and sociologically. Thus whether or not Sophie *chose* or did not choose to have children is less relevant; her experience of childlessness today is constructed through reflection and recall about life in an earlier era in Berlin, her experience of family, feminism and men, and her participation in reconstructing her own reproductive trajectory, even as she and her contemporaries confront the public display of the new ‘German family’ in the city. *Kinderwunsch* and related decisions are thus embedded onto

the memory landscape of gendered and generational relations, and sensuous experience of city spaces. I argue that the experience of safe space provided by the Wall and divided Berlin sustained the *Wende* generation's gender and reproductive ideals, perceptions of time, and structure of life course. This environment or *Stimmung* is absent in the wake of reunification; Germany's demographic history and Berlin's spatial-social reconfigurations post *Wende* make childlessness personally and socially explicit for my female interlocutors.

Halbwachs (1980[1950]) writes that the individual takes part in two types of memory, one that comes from his personal life, that is, something that she witnessed, something that happened to her, or autobiographical memory. The other memory is historical and evokes the individual's membership in a group. Autobiographical memory is not completely sealed off or independent but relies on reference points in the historical. These take the form of language, text, monuments, artifacts and others' narrations and memories. The individual's narrative about what happened in the past, or oral histories, have as the starting point an individual consciousness, which relies on the collective referents to reinforce, confirm, imagine and remember that which happened: "Collective remembrances may be laid on individual remembrances, providing a handier and surer grip on them." (Halbwachs 1980[1950]:59)

Further, these individual or collective remembrances have a dynamic relation to time. Unlike the written record—history in text form—social recall or social memory is limited to the life span of those composing the group. Thus the reconstruction of the past is always from the point of view of the present, and it "always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995:130). The *Wende*

generation too recalls its past—living away from family and with friends, doing odd jobs in Berlin to sustain oneself, sexual experimentation and influence of feminist gender ideals—not necessarily as part of their personal but rather their collective histories and thus identifies with the loss of the “original charm” of the city of Berlin. Thus “recent history [is] reconstituted by formal study because it already bears the stamp of that history.” (Halbwachs 1980[1950]:57) The formal history provides reference points. These may not necessarily be events that are part of individual memory; that is, the individual did not directly experience them. For instance, Sophie and others recall the influence that feminist ideologies had on their life style choices and gender relations. While taking part in defining and living out “German feminism,” these women did not directly experience West Berlin’s anti-authoritarian movements. Yet my interlocutors construct an intimacy with former generations of women (kin or otherwise) to make sense of their personal experiences and choices. The collective memory of the 1960-1970s feminist movement in Berlin, Germany is the external frame that relocates personal memory.

Referring to Dilthey’s concept of quantitative and qualitative time, Mannheim (1993[1952]) writes that the concept of generation needs to move away from the idea of chronology to one of:

An interior time that cannot be measured but only experienced in purely qualitative terms.... This idea that, from the point of view of the history of ideas, contemporaneity means a state of being subjected to similar influences rather than a mere chronological datum, shifts the discussion from a plane on which it risked degenerating into a kind of arithmetical mysticism to the sphere of interior time which can be grasped by intuitive understanding.... The time-interval separating generations becomes subjectively experienceable time; and contemporaneity becomes a subjective condition of having been submitted to the same determining influences. [Mannheim 1993[1952]:356-357]



Thus generations, if viewed as succession in time, would not allow for the co-existence of different chronological generations and their influence on one another. It is the presence of something beyond them, other than them, that allows for Sophie and others to talk about similarities and differences between generations.

**Co-constructing Reproductive Trajectories**

The oral histories of Sophie and others from her generation or social group about the memory of Berlin as a quieter or slower city, find their starting point in a contemporary moment. The experience of an earlier, slower time in the confined spaces of the city—before, and for a few years after reunification—reference the heightened sense of time-space contraction in Berlin with its relatively young history of gentrification. Narration evokes a dynamic sense of belonging as Sophie and her peers confront the city as it is today: changes in Prenzlauer Berg, demographic transitions, state intervention in family life, public display of children and the new German family, and different lifestyle and reproductive choices of the “younger generation.” As individual narratives find social reference, the personal and collective reconstructions feed into each other and create a sharper division between aggregate groups: childless, and those with children, mothers and childless women or Swabian in Prenzlauer Berg, and ‘Berliners’ living on the outskirts. This structure of memory, reflection and narration allows for the real and the imagined to collapse and create charged discourses around anxious, tyrannical mothers and omnipresent children, who remind the childless that they no longer belong.

Every individual belongs to a social group. These assertions of belonging are dynamic and depend on how the present life phase structures how one remembers. The

belonging to a group is constituted through certain material or objective features. These are abstract categorizations, which often appear in enumeration or statistics such as age, sex, citizenship, marital status and number of children, to name a few. Demographers and national statistics, for instance when speaking about fertility and childlessness in Germany, focus primarily on women who are currently between 40-44 years. Yet subjectively, individuals narrate belonging and create belonging through reference to certain perceived commonalities, i.e. a shared personal or generational history. The collective is constructed through the narration with reference to lived experience in the past and present as well as through use of anecdotes, stories and categories passed on orally or in written text. Thus Sophie's construction of her "choices" and experiences of childlessness also belong to the narrations of a group that is constructed collectively through social signs and frameworks and representational ideas. The individual (Sophie) and her group (who remembers the *Wende* or their childhood in certain specific ways) also remember the past with reference to the present. Thus personal and social memory is dynamic, evolving and located in the present, whereas the historical record or demographic statistics are a form of crystallized representation. The *Wende* generation's memory is embodied in the living social, it is subject to forgetting, lying dormant and then be triggered suddenly by some experience in the present (see Nora 1996[1992]).

Thus, there is thus greater complexity to the story of the self-assured, feminist, career-oriented, selfish woman who 'chooses' not to have children, as many women without children were described in my field site. While generational remembering adds a certain vigor to the experience of living without children, it is fed by the real and material consequences of a new hypervisibility of reproduction in public spaces and in people's

consciousness. The national demographic crisis comes together in an accelerated manner in the local context of Berlin. The political frenzy around reproduction, reunification and subsequent (family) gentrification, and the increased legal and social tolerance of and value accorded to children splinters the holding environment of the *Wende* generation. As they recall their life histories and choices, they are confronted with a changed place that no longer feels like home, a place that devalues their life course, making them confront their reproductive choices.

***Voluntary and Involuntary Childlessness: Amorphous Kinderwunsch***

Given the recent demographic transition in Euro-American contexts, the history of feminist movements, and increased female control over reproductive decision-making, childlessness in Germany can be and is often conceptualized as a lifestyle choice. Often enough, it was also described in my field site as a consequence of heightened level of individualism, egoism or investment in the self (especially on the part of women) and as shirking of responsibility (especially on the part of men). I noted that on the one hand there is considerable silence surrounding reproductive decision-making, considered primarily an intimate affair amongst couples in Berlin. Yet, on the other hand, once the child becomes a reality (pregnancy and/or birth), he or she very much enjoys a public or outside-the-house presence.<sup>149</sup>

Discourse on women in Berlin who chose not to have children was often negative. In India, an infant or toddler will be passed around from adult to adult, almost like a plaything. Almost all adults can also discipline the child. The child's presence in public, while very common and ubiquitous, does not supersede the authority of adults. Also,

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<sup>149</sup> See chapter one.

unlike India, in Germany the chances that a couple will be pressurized either playfully or earnestly by neighbors, friends or kin to have children, is rare. Even if questions about *Kinderwunsch* (desire to have children) are asked of men and women, the chances that they would face stigma in event of inability to or choosing not to reproduce are comparatively reduced. Goffman refers to the stigmatized individual as one who departs negatively from the expected set of norms and is socially labeled as not normal, therefore weak, inferior or dangerous. The process of stigmatization is two-way, i.e. those considered normal, and those departing from the normal share the same beliefs about the stigmatized person's identity (Lemert and Branaman 1997).

Furthermore, certain stigmatizing terms may circulate as part of public discourse that refer to the stigmatized person. For instance, during my work on childlessness in slums in India, childless women were often referred to as *vanzhooti* or *banj* literally meaning sterile in Marathi and Hindi respectively (whether or not they were medically infertile was irrelevant). In Berlin I never heard stigmatizing terms for childless (or medically infertile) women. On the contrary there was a general negative discourse on mothers and idioms indexing the new *Rabenmütter*. Nevertheless, there is a definite evaluative register within which specific categories of women without children are slotted. As Sophie's story has shown, though there is little stigma associated with being childless, there is a sense of exclusion that women like Sophie speak of when confronted with parents and/or children.

During fieldwork I often asked interlocutors why Germany's demographic 'crisis' was so prominent in public debates. My questions were general, but the answers were most often gender specific. On the one hand, 'voluntarily' childless women were

described as egoistic, individualistic, and career-oriented. On the other hand, the locus of blame for the demographic crisis in Germany was a failed family policy—unlike those in France or the Scandinavian countries—that made it structurally and socially challenging to balance work and family life. Interestingly, infertility specialists sometimes described infertility as a social sickness. One of the doctors at an infertility clinic where I collected data said to me in a disgusted tone:

It is not that there is something wrong with them physically. It is this attitude. They wait too long and then the body is no longer fit to have children. First they want to study, party, have a career, also have multiple partners, travel and when they (women) are 40 they look for a man or if they have one, they try to have children.

Such an explicit condemnation of a ‘choice’ revealed on the one hand a professional frustration at having to deal with “hopeless cases” of infertility and on the other hand, assumed a willful, self-centered female subject who had decided to not have children.

The distinction between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ childlessness is complicated and perhaps even artificial.<sup>150</sup> Sophie’s childlessness—irrespective of how and why she does not have children today—is curiously on display. Sophie seeks no diagnosis (of her “social sickness”), yet the reconfigurations in the city and a threatening confrontation with parents and children in public spaces, reminds her of a life without children. Berlin, especially Prenzlauer Berg, is inundated with children and provides little comfort in that it permits more and more space for families. The public display of children and the accompanying media coverage and political discourse on Germany’s

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<sup>150</sup> Campbell (1999) distinguishes between women who always knew they didn’t want children and planned their lives accordingly and women who remain childless as a consequence of lifestyle. Morell (1994) argues that framing childlessness as choice is problematic. Often childlessness is an outcome of

demographic crisis is often alarmist, representing the perspective of “a collective population or the state” (Douglass 2005:5). It also serves as a constant reminder for Sophie that perhaps she does not belong to Berlin anymore. Yet, Sophie’s account illuminates differences between statistical aggregates and lived realities that show the vacillating and amorphous trajectories of *Kinderwunsch*.

If for women like Sophie, Berlin’s spaces push out and exclude, for the protagonists of the next chapter the city proves to be “child-friendly.” Berlin allows for fathers of the *Wende* generation to express a new and empowered form of parenting. In the next chapter I discuss how the *inclusion* of men as fathers into macro discourses on creating desire to reproduce, produces material, legal and social room for the practice of “active fatherhood.”

# CHAPTER FOUR

## ***Aktive Vaterschaft* and the Demographic Crisis: Production and Expression of a new German Masculinity?**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss the emergence of new elements in German masculinity in light of a history of ‘fatherlessness,’ and contemporary social policies aimed at arresting the trend of continual low fertility and a demographic transition characterized as crisis. The articulations of masculinity, of being a man, are not fragmented experiences. They encompass multiple aspects of life such as career, choice of life partners, hobbies, and reproduction. In this chapter, I focus on a particular experience of being men—men as fathers—in Berlin, Germany. Encouraging fathers to directly engage in the care of their children is, I argue, part of the larger goal of creating a ‘child-friendly’ Germany. Policy reforms that give more rights to fathers, infrastructure and material space to organize father-child activities, and a social acceptance of men pushing strollers through Berlin’s streets, play a role in stimulating the desire to reproduce; they also animate men’s subjective ideas about engaged fatherhood. I thus provide ethnographic evidence of a potential shift in orientation in the category of the “German father,” and discuss the multiple conceptualizations of fatherhood involvement (Booth and Crouter 1998, Brandth and Kvande 2016, Doherty, Kouneski, and Erikson 1998, Elliott 2016, Hawkins and Dollahite 1997, Hawkins and Palkovitz 1999, Lamb 1997, Marsiglio et al. 2000) reflecting a general trend in Western Europe that supports gender equality through inclusion of men in direct care of children (Gregory and Milner 2011, Hearn et al. 2002, Hearn and Pringle 2006, Matzner 2004, Roopnarine 2015).

When speaking of fathers, I refer to men from West Berlin and/or West Germany between the ages of 30-50 years. They have one or more children and are either primary



care givers or actively seek more sustained access to their children (especially if divorced or separated). Often these men recollected their relation to their own fathers (or representations of these fathers) and spoke about how they desired to build and sustain a different and closer bond with their children. Determined to care for one's child in a more engaged way, the fathers in this chapter project hope and optimism (in spite of challenges) in light of the changing attitudes towards men as caregivers.<sup>151</sup>

*Versorgung* or care is at the core of active fatherhood (for father's caregiving role see Bergman and Hobson 2002, Knijn and Selten 2002). Everyday practices, local discourse and policy reforms, reflect a shift in emphasis from being weekend fathers (*Wochenendpapas*) to being present everyday. I examine these shifts in multiple arenas— personal, social, legal— to present the different facets of *aktive Vaterschaft*. I describe the range of physical, emotional and rational acts of care that fathers engage (or wish to engage) in. These acts of care are not necessarily distinct from fathers' role as providers, yet they are presented as an alternative to being typecast primarily as the breadwinner. Using the body to carry, hug, clean, play with, and talk to the child is as valuable to the father-child bond as is disciplining through the creation of an emotional attachment that also serves to direct and guide a child's actions. Additionally, the burden or responsibility of rationality is also significant to the physical and emotional connection. Most fathers must make (or want to take part in making) medical,

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<sup>151</sup> The stories of West Germans or West Berliner men of the *Wende* generation have significant overlaps as they remember their own fathers who were socialized into the breadwinner role in West Germany. Here, I refer to the dominant discourse on post war gendered division of roles, and the attenuation of the male figure in the family, following the anti-authoritarian and feminist movements in the late 1960s and 1970s in West Germany. This marginalization of the man, did not necessarily have positive consequences for women who increasingly bore the double burden of responsibility within family and at work. Engaging in productive labor did not parallel the sharing or handing over of child care responsibilities to the male

educational or residential decisions in the child's best interest. Thus, different forms of care are integral to the creation of a new, and positive image of the father that signifies his equal participation in social reproduction.<sup>152</sup>

This idea of care, which goes beyond the role of genitor and provider, is increasingly expressed in policy documents under terms such as “gender sensitive family policies” (Matzner 2004, Maywald 2013:54-55, Hearn et al. 2002) that aim to support more concretely father's rights. The rhetoric urges a re-signification of the concept of father, from one whose role was largely attenuated since the end of the World Wars, through the division of Germany and reunification, to one of a rightful and capable caregiver and participant in the upbringing of his child.<sup>153</sup>

It then is time to reexamine Ostner's (2002) claim that in spite of expansion of fathers' rights in state policies, contemporary fatherhood cannot be put on the political agenda in Germany because of its association with the fascist past. Ostner argues that there has not been a significant movement in the direction of transforming “men into “responsible dads” in both Germanys” (Ostner 2002:150) and this has to do with

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partner or state institutions.

<sup>152</sup> Three words that often appear in government documents, institutional language and narratives of fathers to further emphasize male role in social reproduction are *Fürsorge*, *Betreuung* and *Erziehung*. *Fürsorge* is explained as meeting the physical and emotional needs of the child, *Betreuung* as supervision (watching the child) and *Erziehung* as up bringing, socialization and disciplining.

<sup>153</sup> In general in Europe (and the USA), from the 1990s onwards there has been increasing academic interest in the multiple forms of family involvement and engagement practiced by men as fathers. There is a corresponding shift in family policy, and infrastructural and cultural investments in supporting this idea of the “new man,” participating in the direct care and upbringing of his children (see Gregory and Milner 2011). Rapid changes in gender relations, family structure and forms, increase in women's participation in the labor market, at the same time continued gender discrimination in pay, inadequate child care options and demographic transition, all play a role in shaping the extent of actual male involvement and challenges to involvement. The resignification of the father in Germany that I refer to is part of a dual process of change: on the one hand the German context reflects these larger changes in Europe (and now the presence of refugee men from whom ‘European men’ may seek distinction) and on the other hand the country's unique history of post War reconstruction of the family and the feminist and anti-authoritarian movements

Germany's history as well the variable constructions of fathers in the East and West that led to a further weakening of men's role in family and society. Post war discourse on the 'fatherless generation'—fueled further by the anti-authoritarian movements in the 60s and 70s, and post-socialist transitions, symbolically attenuated the role of the (fascist) father and his (oppressive) authority (see Biess 2002, Borneman 2004, Hagemann and Schuler-Springorum 2002, Jerome 2001, Kundrus 2002, Mosse 1985, Mosse 1990, Mosse 1996). Thus the idea of fathers as (positive) role models diminished and has so persisted up until after German reunification. (also see Adorno et al. 1969, Habermas 1969, Mitscherlich 1969 [1963]) After the division of Germany, the East German socialist state was concerned with supporting women in balancing employment and child-care. Public institutions took over child-care responsibilities when women were at work and in the service of raising socialist citizens. Women centered policies made men (married, unmarried and divorced) less relevant to achieving women's goals related to employment and family (see Borneman 1992, Jurczyk and Klinkhardt 2014, Ostner 2002, Pohl 2000, Rosenbaum and Timm 2010). West German family policy was non-interventionist; the state withdrew from the private sphere of reproduction and family, to distance itself both from the national socialist legacy and also East Germany (Ostner 2002:155) Here the male breadwinner model of the family was promoted. Women were primary caregivers as mothers, and men remained distant from the daily care of and contact with their children.

It is important to note that there is a considerable difference between practices of individual families, experiences of fathers who belonged to post-war or the fatherless

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shape the idea of the new "German father."

generation, and the representations of the father. The aim is not to diminish the emotional and loving bonds that exist(ed) between these generations or the positive memories and images of the father that children did have. However the dominant post war discourse around the image of the father, family policies that restricted fathers' involvement in child care, and significant historical events like Germany's division—all of which discredited the role of the family father—cannot be ignored in understanding fatherlessness as a “symbolic configuration” (Ostner 2002:152) in Germany at a particular moment in time. It is *against* and *away from* this representation of the evil, absent or weak father that the *Wende* generation desires to move. So while in the dissertation introduction I contextualize how distance from the post war generation, and family policy changes have created spaces for men to practice ‘active fatherhood,’ this chapter discusses how men practiced being fathers and how these formulations intersect with their own personal, relationship, and family trajectories as well as with hegemonic notions and national representations of the ‘German male.’

My interlocutors described an emotional willingness and possibility to depart from the national past of the father figure in different ways. Common tropes were those of time, memory and generation. As Germany is further removed in time from the Second World War, as the war generation dies out and the national memory stores other historic events, it is possible to move from looking back to looking ahead. Interviews and informal conversations with anyone above 30 years of age revealed that there was no organized school activity they remembered that served as a source of positive identification with the nation. History lessons consisted instead of several visits to former concentration camps. Morning assembly did not involve singing the national anthem as it

did during my school years in India. However, a female high school teacher in her early 40s indicated a greater distance between the generation coming of age *after* reunification, and the memory of the Second World War: “For us this war history was very much part of our legacy of German guilt. But now history lessons must include the history of division and reunification, and that is more a matter of pride than shame for children who learn about freedom from the repressive socialist regime.” Berliners also told me that one manifestation of this new found German image was the open expression of pride when hosting the football World cup in in 2006. “We were able to wave the German flag! The last time I did that was in 1989 after reunification,”<sup>154</sup> a 45-year old West German said.

The other most commonly cited reason for a reduced sense of hesitation or fear to express pride in one’s German identity was the changing global image of Germany in wake of the economic crisis. Speaking from the point of view of the global financial crisis, a 50-year-old businessman explained with pride, “I feel like there is a new image of Germany that one sees today in the world. We have done so well economically. We are reliable, we can be trusted; we can perhaps be leaders without any sinister ideas attached to that word!”<sup>155</sup> At this historical conjuncture, there is greater moral and

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<sup>154</sup> In 2006 Germany not only hosted the football World cup, but also secured 3rd place in the championship. In 2010 when I was in Germany and watched the World cup with fellow Berliners, Germany secured 3rd place again. The football team was highly praised for being a young, dynamic and very hardworking team who had achieved a lot by coming 3rd. In 2014 Germany won the football World cup.

<sup>155</sup> Almost 70 years after the end of the Second World War, the memory of the war while alive, appears irrelevant. In light of violence and death in the Middle East and terrorism all over the globe, Islamic fundamentalist groups are the *active* image of the evil (*Böse*) today, not as much Germany. Quite definitively, global leaders look towards Germany to play its part in securing individual and national freedom. Obama, during his speech at Brandenburg Gate in May 2013, urged Merkel to work with America on matters of equality and freedom especially among vulnerable populations in war torn countries. At a time of global economic recession, Germany’s relative stability rouses a sense of awe, security and refuge for those less fortunate. A growing number of foreigners and refugees seek employment and/or domicile in Germany in spite of restrictive immigration and refugee policies. (On Germany’s global status as a powerful nation, also see *Die Ostdeutschen sind einfach verschwunden*, Interview of John Borneman by

cultural room for men to experience and express their desires to be active fathers; my ethnography shows how they negotiate their own imaginations and ideas about fatherhood in a city that provides legal, material and social possibilities for attaining a new masculine ideal.<sup>156</sup>

Reforms in the rights of unmarried fathers (1998), in parental/paternity leave policy (2007), and in child custody laws (2013) indicate an increasing acknowledgment of father's rights. There is also an assertion of men's ability to provide child-care, an encouragement of men in child-care professions, and monetary and infrastructural investment in institutional support for (potential) fathers through support and advisory groups. German fathers today are regaining and reclaiming the political and social legitimacy to voice their desires and participate as involved reproductive actors. Thus this space of German masculinity as expressed in the form of an active father emerges as a key site for reconstructing a 'child-friendly' Germany. At the confluence of specific transformations in Germany—distance from the post war legacy, the country's image as economically powerful and culturally vibrant, persistent low fertility, and an increased political engagement with encouraging internal reproduction—fertile ground for the creation of "responsible fathers" is in sight.

### **Meeting Fathers: Exploring Spaces of *aktive Vaterschaft***

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Quynh Tran on the 25th anniversary of German reunification, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Nov 9th, 2014, 45, Feuilleton 39.)

<sup>156</sup> And now more recently in the light of the European refugee crisis, Germany's open door policy for a large part of 2015-2016 creates a first impression of openness and acceptance of difference.

I heard stories of fathers on paternity leave, fathers working professionally for fathers' rights, and fathers separated from their children.<sup>157</sup> For all these men, active fatherhood entails first and foremost establishing a physical and sensual connection with their children, as soon as the child is “out of the womb and no longer dependent on the mother's body for daily nourishment and care,” as many often articulated. Thus the substitution of the mother's body with male physical contact and presence is an important element of caregiving. Fathers believe that once this attachment is achieved, it is easier to sustain long-term contact and enduring bonds with one's offspring. Especially for those living apart from their children (children of all divorced and/or separated men I interviewed, were living with their mothers), consistency in seeking regular contact with their children constituted an important aspect of care. Laboring to rebuild contact and a

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<sup>157</sup> I mainly spoke to fathers in the age group of 30 to 50. A large number of them had children 6 years old or younger. Some fathers who I met in a support group often had older kids; these were men who were either separated or divorced (or going through the process) and met regularly with experts to seek legal advice on obtaining joint custody or sustained visitation rights. I met all these fathers through social and professional networks in Berlin; some of these men were friends of interlocutors and others I contacted through different father-centered initiatives that have cropped up in Berlin over the last decade. These initiatives—both state sponsored and community based—have garnered a conspicuous presence in their goal towards working for and with “men in families,” and provide support and advice for instance to expectant and/or current fathers, as well as material space for fathers to meet, socialize or discuss challenges. Other activities that fathers participate in through such initiatives include: courses on preparation for pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, legal counseling, and support with organization of father-child activities. Only a few fathers were older with older children. I suspect this age group of father-child drew my attention because of their visibility in print and visual media and their not large, yet precisely because of that striking prominence on the streets in Berlin. It was not uncommon at all to see men pushing strollers or men accompanying children to playgrounds, feeding them, reading to them or talking to them. They were not just present at home (especially those on paternity leave) but actively engaging with their children publically. The selection of fathers was biased in that I spoke to those who are also the obvious “target group” of state and community led interventions and appear more frequently in print and visual media. As fathers of young children, they automatically become relevant to discussions about parental leave, or problems associated with getting admission in day care centers. As single fathers, some of them are accorded a heroic status; only 5% of single parent households in Germany are composed of father-child, whereas 1 in every 10 homes in Berlin are single parent households (*Nicht von schlechten Vätern*, ZDF Film on single fathers all over Germany. The film presented in ten parts speaks of trials and tribulations of single fathers and how they overcome challenges to establish and maintain an emotional bond with their children).

loving relationship after divorce or separation was for some fathers a “first experience with being fathers.” Separation, then, was a moment of epiphany, where they realized and recognized the desire to be with their children and affect their children’s lives in a significant manner. For men who were in a relationship, parental leave was an effective way of establishing the foundation for close bonds with their children.

***Active Fatherhood in Elternzeit***

Fathers on parental leave said that they had multiple motivations to stay at home. These included personal, economic and partnership arrangements. Fathers who took more than the usual two months of parental leave emphasized the personal and emotional motivations behind this decision. Extended time was an opportunity to be available at every step of the way for their child—in the present and everyday—to establish a lasting bond for the future. One of the fathers who I met regularly during his paternity leave was Sebastian. He provided a window into understanding how paternity leave for him was a crucial element of being an active father: “If you want a direct relationship to the child, not only through the mother, then the job and money lost when on leave become secondary concerns.”

***Being Present now for the Future***

Sebastian loves to walk around Berlin, pushing his nine-month-old son Jonas in the stroller. Sebastian is 36, married and works in an automobile company. He took half a year’s parental leave after his son turned six months old. For the first six months, his wife was at home with the baby. Sebastian is proud to be one of the few fathers who spend extended time with his son. National figures indicate that most men take the two months



that are legally required for the couple to get a total of 14 months of parental leave.<sup>158</sup>

Sebastian says,

I did not want fleeting moments with my son. While men pushing *Kinderwagen* all over Berlin is now passé, it is not enough; importantly I can do what one believed only the mother could do – care for the child. I will be with Jonas till he is one. We are already scouting around for day care centers and hope that we start the process of detachment way before he turns one. That way he will get used to the day care.

Sebastian's primary concern with being an active father is being present in Jonas's life everyday, so that Jonas can see him as someone he can turn to, talk to, relate to.

You know a *Bezugsperson*, that is someone to relate to on an everyday basis, not only when something is 'important' or 'urgent'. I never had that with my father. My parents got divorced and they both moved out of our home when I was 16 and my brother 14! My mother moved to South Germany and my father moved into his new girlfriend's house here in Berlin. So it was my brother and I, teenagers, who were left to take care of the house, cook, clean, learn for school and manage ourselves without the presence of our parents. I would never want that for my son. I want to show him that I am part of his life and he can count on me, without necessarily having to do everything I say!

Sebastian and I took many walks during the months that he was on paternity leave. He was not very expressive about what life was like for him living with his brother in Berlin, but he repeatedly stressed that for him being a father meant being present: in person, listening to his son, being a reliable figure who his son could trust emotionally and with decision making.

After Sebastian dressed Jonas in the morning and gave him something to eat, he would put the child in the stroller and start walking. We would meet at a central place usually around 11 in the morning and take walks that often lasted over an hour.

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<sup>158</sup> Only if the father takes a minimum of two months of leave does the couple as a unit get 14 months of parental leave. While on parental leave 65%-67% of the salary is paid. If the father does not take leave,

Sometimes we would take the subway to get to a park where we could walk. Sebastian planned all routes in order to “avoid dogs and unruly teenagers.” He would stuff the stroller with water, milk, infant food and cookies, fruit, an umbrella, an extra set of warm clothes and diapers. About an hour into the walk, Jonas would stir and depending on his mood would be handed a cookie to munch on or taken out of the stroller and fed some mashed vegetables or fruit. Sebastian would talk to him, hold him on his lap, and would feed him after tying a bib around his neck. Our favorite spot to feed Jonas was in the *Tierpark* (zoo in former East Berlin) where massive pathways lined with trees and benches provided us the scope to sit in silence and for Jonas to hear the sounds of different animals. I would tentatively ask if Sebastian needed any help, say, to hold the food containers or hand over blankets or hold Jonas. Sebastian would smile sardonically and showed surprise that I imagined he needed help; he would say, “no I do this by myself.” Soon, I stopped asking, able to quell my impulse to help with what seemed laborious and tiring.

Indeed, in the six months that I regularly met Sebastian, I did not once hold Jonas. This seems absurd to me, because I cannot imagine being in the presence of a child for an extended period and not touching or holding him. Was it because I never saw Jonas out of his stroller? Or was it because Sebastian was always doing something with him: feeding, changing or talking to him? Or was it simply that as a man, a father on parental leave, he sent a message about his ability to care, by tacitly restricting my contact with his son? As a woman in her reproductive years and especially as someone from India, I was often asked by my interlocutors why I did not have children or when I was planning

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then the paid parental leave time period is 12 months.

to have them. Often I heard surprise or even a bit of frustration, when they asked, “but isn’t it natural that you want one? In India especially people are so child friendly; how can you not want one?” Perhaps Sebastian was confused about my presence; perhaps he thought of *me* as incompetent; whether consciously or not, Sebastian let me know that he was as capable as mothers in general, and perhaps more capable than me, who did not have any experience being a parent.<sup>159</sup>

Sebastian and I spoke about a range of topics: the economic crisis, difficulties in Sebastian’s workplace, immigration issues, German history and reproduction and wanting, having, and disciplining children. Having received intensive history lessons about the German fascist past (as all educated Germans did), Sebastian would sometimes exclaim in an exasperated manner, “I mean the more we focus on this German guilt, the less capable we will be of moving past it. Why do I have to feel guilty for what I didn’t do? Also how many times and how long are we to feel guilty?” In emphasizing this urgency to look ahead now, towards a new Germany, he expressed doubt about whether or not this could be achieved through the conversion of Germany to a country of immigration.

Sebastian was careful in expressing these views and measured his words, but he also stated implicitly the need to encourage Germans to have children. “And fathers have

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<sup>159</sup> In my field site, having experience with children, was understood as a consequence of having one’s own children through whom one built experience. In India though children (especially girls) as young as ten (whether or not involved in care of younger siblings) have some form of contact and experience with children, so that their transition into motherhood is not the very first encounter with the child and its needs. I was often taken aback when Germans who saw me with infants (and later with my own infant) commented on how comfortable I was handling the baby even though I was a first time mother. I wanted to say (and did at times), “but why should that be surprising. I have handled and cared for many infants in the family and in my friend circle!”

a very important role here; to imagine a future relationship with my child, it is important how I relate to my son *today*.”<sup>160</sup>

Before becoming a father, rationality guided his ideas about how he would or would not bring up his child; now he is more flexible, rational yes, but also emotional. “I thought I could always go according to a plan. Structure everything according to what I think is best for him, but it doesn’t work that way.” Sebastian says now he is more open to responding to the needs of Jonas, instead of always planning in advance what he must do, how he must discipline him or respond to him. “You can’t anticipate everything.” Thus, being an active father in the future entails being an active father today, which means being flexible with one’s ideas about what is best for one’s child. To respond emotionally and not rationally has been difficult for Sebastian and he has learnt most of his active parenting through doing. Sebastian explains his struggles in the process of achieving *aktive Vaterschaft*.

I don’t want to only be a father to have fun with (*Spasspapa*). I want to learn about everything related to Jonas’s needs. Establish the connection as soon as the umbilical cord is cut. Of course this is a big challenge. While women want this support they also find it difficult to let go of control. They don’t have a natural ability to look after children, as is popular opinion – mothers too must learn just like us fathers – but we think the woman’s role as mother is natural. And this leads to the problem of our role models (*Vorbilder*) or lack thereof. As men in Germany we have until now hardly had the most positive father figures to learn from. Practically too, one is at a loss because there is so much support and material out there to help women be mothers. For us there are no role models, minimal support and almost no preparatory help.

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<sup>160</sup> It is important to clarify that this was not an evasion or desire to erase historical reality on the part of Sebastian. Many interlocutors sincerely acknowledged their awareness and strongly signaled their condemnation of early twentieth century Germany. The awareness of the holocaust as a central element of German history is pervasive. It is difficult to convey how it weighs down the self awareness and—crucially for this research—the relationship to fatherhood, for many of my German interlocutors.

As Sebastian spoke these words, he tucked his infant son into the carrying cloth in front of him, cradling him, carrying him, in front of his stomach, an *almost* pregnant father. Sebastian works at forming an attachment to his son, which was his wife's prerogative during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, through other forms of care and imaginations of future care. He often said that as Jonas grows older their relationship would change. Right now, his son needs him physically more than anything else, but this also entails forming an emotional bond, which will endure into later years when Jonas turns to Sebastian for advice. Even as he reflected on the lack of role models, he said he was lucky that during paternity leave he found a group of men and fathers he could relate to at the *Papaladen*. The *Papaladen* is a community initiative started in 2007 aimed to support current and expectant fathers in their role as active parents. This is a place that enables men to form a community where it is possible for them to socialize as fathers, seek advice and be with their children. I found the *Papaladen* online and then visited the place. This is where I had first met Sebastian before we began our regular walks through the city over the next few months.

### ***Papaladen: A Father-Child Space***

The room is rectangular, big enough to house four king size beds and has large windows through which light filters in on sunny days. The floor is covered with thick carpets and we leave our shoes outside. On one side of the room is a table where four different kinds of bread and cheese, cut tomatoes and sausages and lettuce are arranged on different plates. A coffee machine brews coffee and invites the visitor to pour some into one of the many mugs on the table. The other side of the room is cluttered; there are racing car tracks on the floor on the side of a small toddler slide. Big and small balls and soft toys lie bunched up in another corner. Rattles, pillows and small cloth books with

pictures for children are strewn on the floor. Children between the ages of six to 18 months crawl, walk, cry, fight and laugh and climb over the carpet, slides and toys. I am the only woman in the room. A group of about eight fathers chat with each other, they help themselves to some breakfast, feed their children and play with them as and when the little ones demand more attention. I am visiting the *Papaladen* in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin.

Richard is one of the founders of the *Papaladen* (translated as father's shop/store). This is a large rented space where fathers and children play together. Behind the main room is a kitchen, a bathroom, and tucked away in the right hand corner an office where Richard furiously types emails and answers calls as he networks with other fathers' groups in Berlin as well as in Switzerland and Austria. The *Papaladen* started in 2007, coincidentally and fortuitously the same year as the then Federal Minister for Family Affairs Ursula von der Leyen introduced reforms in parental leave. This serendipitous simultaneity of state inclination to support families and community based efforts to provide men with a space to be active fathers, has boosted Richard's work of supporting father-child attachment and relationships tremendously.

The *Papaladen* organizes various father-child activities. These involve picnics, outdoor games, reading or painting and a breakfast once a week, where fathers on parental leave come with their children to share their experiences. On one such breakfast morning in the Fall of 2012, I found myself in the *Papaladen*. This is a space for fathers and Richard had warned me that I may not be welcome to join the group every week, but I could establish individual connections with the men if they were willing to talk to me. That's how I had met Sebastian.

This particular breakfast session was awkward; the men looked at me with some suspicion as I mentioned my research and asked them if I could talk to them about their experiences. Some of them had questions about where I came from and were interested in India, but most others stood around, did not say much and clearly looked irritated by my presence. After a couple of email exchanges with some fathers at the *Papaladen*, I was able to get access to a few who wanted to talk to me about fatherhood, especially why they decided to take time off from work even though economically it was not a practical decision. The economic motivation to provide for one's offspring was secondary in their opinion, especially in the early years of the child's life when there was the opportunity for them to create an enduring bond with their offspring.

***Physical Closeness and Active Fatherhood***

While not necessarily welcome in the *Papaladen* itself, I was invited by many fathers to speak with them one on one. Most of them were eager to express their motivations to be engaged and active, which meant to be present in the everyday and engage in mundane activities with their children; to form associations and to be a person the child could relate to through these shared experiences. Many told me that they too had a right to this extended time with their child and want to feel as capable as mothers:

I want to be a part of my child's life in very literal terms—when he says his first words, takes his first step—and take the smallest decisions about what he should wear, if it's cold enough to put on a cap and gloves or what shoes to buy him, not just the big decisions about health and education and insurance! (Bernhard, 45, father of a six-year-old boy and an infant daughter).

Jan a 45-year-old father added to this comment,

I always wanted to establish an immediate connection with my children, quite like what they call true mother's love (*wahre Mutterliebe*), which for women comes

from the physical and biological experience of having had children, having been pregnant. But after the umbilical cord is cut, I could take over.

Jan has two teenage children. For over ten years now he works in a state funded project that brings together different institutions and people who work on fathers' rights or provide support services to existing and expectant fathers.

With continued conversations with the men I met at the *Papaladen*, the group of fathers started expanding on their idea of *aktive Vaterschaft*; this was something that extended to the realm of the sensual, a male experience of physical closeness to the infant, which often mothers easily access through pregnancy and breast feeding. Thus, physical contact with the child was an often-desired element of the father-child relationship of care. "I like to cuddle with my child. To really keep him close to me physically. This sensual closeness to children in Germany is something new, something that we as children did not have from our parents", Pablo, another 40-year-old father at the *Papaladen* told me. Romanus who was listening remarked, "have you seen the Turkish fathers, they are so much more close to their children – physically for sure; they will pick them up, cuddle them, kiss them, pinch them, pull their cheeks. I think a lot of German fathers want this kind of close contact (*enge Beziehung*) too."

I interacted and spent time with parents whose children were anywhere between a few months to eight years. I rarely saw any mother or father tightly hug a child to his/her chest (other than in the carrying cloth) and shower the child with kisses or roughly squeeze the child's cheeks or continue hugging or kissing either an infant or an older child, after protests from the latter. Klaus, 45 years, and a friend, told me after he watched me play with his daughter on several occasions, "you should be a nanny (*Tagesmutter*) Meghana; you are just like the Turkish baby sitter of Rosine. She and her



three children also squeeze Rosine tight and keep showering kisses on her. They hold her a lot, just like you.”

Martin, father of two, born in 1972, explained to me,

And that’s why I am interested in India. I was watching something on TV about oil massages for infants, which is so much a part of the everyday routine. The relationship to the child is more sensual (*sinnlich*). It is thankfully becoming like that now here in Germany too. The child’s routine is not so much driven by the clock as it was, you know wake up at 7, go to bed at 9, eat at fixed times... not like a machine. As a father and a caretaker, I see myself paying closer attention to what the child might want and not just how I structure his/her life.

Of course, there are other kinds of physical closeness, which German parents and their children share. Holding the child, but not squeezing or kissing it too much, stroking the child’s face, cuddling infants and talking to them and kissing children on the mouth, something that I found very strange as an Indian. Kissing on the mouth is a form of intimacy that is expressed between sexual partners. In India, certain type of kissing would also be considered “dirty” even between lovers. So, to see this odd practice of kissing children on the mouth made me uncomfortable. Also, cuddling in India is very different from what I saw in Germany. In India, it would not be uncommon to trouble or irritate a child by showering him/her with kisses, squeezing the child tightly, not letting him/her go when so demanded. There is some degree of humor attached to these moments. Adults can have a laugh while squishing the child to their bodies even as the child complains a little. After they let go of the child, an apology is often offered to placate the child. All of this is done in jest. To an outsider though it might seem like such cuddling is violating the child’s boundaries, in the same manner as a kiss on the lips violated some generational boundaries of intimacy for me. I assume a child in Germany would be considered more sovereign than one in India and an individual whose physical boundaries would thus be respected accordingly. By the same logic, the use of and control over one’s

bodies is an important element of declaring the child sovereign. I observed in Berlin how most often children are left to play and explore the environment on their own. Physical agility and control over one's body at an early age is desired. I often could not help exclaim in surprise when I saw children barely two years of age pushing themselves along on a *Lauftrad*. In playgrounds, they played in the sandpit, climbed over the play structures and explored the rocks, stones and sticks that are often part of natural materials in Berlin's playgrounds.

Significant to care and long term fatherhood involvement then means creating a bond that is similar to an embodied one available to women through pregnancy and childbirth; yet the physical contact with the child that fathers on parental leave seek defines a specific male experience of care that involves carrying, feeding, holding and soothing their child, after the umbilical cord has been cut. While the parental leave policy provides an opportunity for men to do so, they insist that it is their subjective commitment to an extended period of care that makes possible a long-term father-child relationship. All the men I interviewed through the *Papaladen*, had taken a minimum of six months of leave to stay at home. I learnt that for fathers, the earlier this sensual experience of father-child bonding, the deeper and more enduring the connection in the different stages of the child and parents' lives. Yet, while men pushing strollers on the streets in Berlin is an outward manifestation of the changing role of fathers in the lives of their children, there is much to be done at the inter-personal as well as community level, to change attitudes about what fathers can *really* do when practicing 'active fatherhood.'

### **Actively Working for Social Recognition**

In the last decade or so there has been an increased attention to the value of the father as family man and as a contributor to the upbringing of children. Of course there is a discrepancy between personal or social ideologies and the actual practice of active fatherhood. (see Matzner 2004:9, Roopnarine 2015) Like Sebastian said, men pushing strollers in Berlin is hardly a new phenomenon and also not indicative of the quality of engagement between father and child—fathers are called upon to do more and they want to do more. So on the one hand, there was a palpable tenderness amongst my interlocutors (men and women, single, married, parents as well as childless) when speaking of the caring, active father who swaddles his child, feeds her, takes her for walks and plays with her. There is also a certain longing and admiration for a man who takes paternity leave; this is the kind of man women desire, a man ready to fulfill the role of the biological and social father (see Lippe and Fuhrer 2004, Witte and Wagner 1996 on male motivations to reproduce). This is the new man—desired not only by women, but also by the German nation. These men potentially arouse the desire to have a child in women: “no one asks men why they don’t want to reproduce; women are being blamed but men need to be held responsible too,” a friend with two children commented when I asked why she thinks women in Germany did not want children. In numerous such conversations with childless female interlocutors between 30-45 years of age, I heard, “well if the man is willing to take the responsibility too, I would have a child!”.

Not surprising then that this new figure of the active father is endearing and desirable, whereas mothers as obsessive and unsure about the choice of role (mother or career-woman) are avoided, face child-unfriendliness and aggression. On the other hand, as many fathers insisted there are challenges to being an active father. Women continue

to be seen as naturally better at child care and also have a wealth of resources to draw upon in support of this role as mothers. Even in countries that have a history of generous parental leave and commitment in social policy to gender equality, it is women who do most child care work (see Plantin 2015 for discussion on fatherhood involvement and Swedish policies). Partly these are structural issues. Not less significant is the continued acceptance of traditional gender roles between couples, the assumption that women are inherently better at caring for children.

In an interview with Richard, the founder of *Papaladen*, I learnt more about his own personal experiences of being a father and how he has been motivated to fold the father back into the family in a more significant way. Richard, who is 50, speaks of how different it was in 1982 when he was a student and had a son. This experience has shaped his current professional work. He has been a fathers' rights advocate for over 15 years and works towards more social recognition of fathers' desires and rights vis-à-vis their children. Largely discouraged in his attempts to participate in child care, Richard now passionately advocates for parity in the conception of father-mother roles:

I was the only male student in 1982 who had a child. It was very odd for other people. My parents asked me to not get involved, to not have the child, to not interrupt my studies. But I was determined to support my girlfriend. Let me assure you it was no fun, there was no joy in it really, only responsibility, but later came the joy. When I wanted to be in the delivery room at the time of my son's birth, people thought I was crazy, but thankfully our midwife allowed it. Today, 20 years hence I conduct preparatory courses for fathers on childbirth! If today a father doesn't want to be in the delivery room he is mocked – Are you crazy? You softie! (*spinnst du, du Weichei*) In just one generation so much has changed. But we have a long way to go and fight against many negative stereotypes.

While very positive about changes in the image of fathers with respect to their role in childcare, Richard maintains that even today in Europe and globally when one speaks of the family, one speaks of mother and child. With a dismissive gesture of the

hand, as though he were brushing away crumbs from the table-top, Richard moved his fingers from one side to the other, looked at me and said, “and the father...hm?” Implicit in that question was that the father does not have a significant presence in people’s discussions or imaginations about child care.

It has been a long and very slow road to legal recognition of the biological father. Till 1998, legally speaking, the biological father’s role was attenuated, if the couple having the child were not married. It’s only been a few years since the state recognizes the rights of unmarried parents – more importantly the father. In Germany, a father’s legal rights over his child (biological or socially recognized) have remained unshaken in their authority from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until after the Second World War. Over the course of Germany’s division, the contrasting political regimes in the West and East placed different degrees of emphasis on matters of marriage, family and offspring, yet over time were inclined more positively towards strengthening the mother-child connection. Mothers were primary care givers – both in East and West. While the West promoted traditional gender divisions between the male as breadwinner and female as child-rearer, in the East, public childcare institutions and other pro-natalist policies allowed for women to be employed full time (Pohl 2000:259, Rosenbaum and Timm 2010). Yet the primary load of housework and childcare fell into women’s laps in the East too.

Richard continued:

When my son was born, there was a state representative at our family center who served as an *Amtsvormund* i.e. he represented the rights of my child and I as the biological father did not matter because my girlfriend and I were not married! So in legal matters a stranger, a state representative stepped in and took my place. I knew my son and his needs better than any other man but until my girlfriend made an official request, the *Amtsvormund* did not step down. Clearly the law is

to be interpreted as protecting the rights of the mother and child against the bad (*böse*) father.

Children out of wedlock in both Germanys were legally considered to not have a father, and care responsibilities were automatically handed over to mothers. In the case of West Germany, a state appointed representative served as a legal guardian (*Amtsvormund*), which is what Richard refers to when talking about this experience. In the East mothers had the right to make legal decisions with respect to the child. After 1998, children born in and out of wedlock have the same legal status in Germany. This means that both parents (regardless of whether they were married to each other) have rights and responsibilities with respect to the child.

Richard said he is proud to be associated with the work he has done. But he fears that society is not ready for this new role of men yet; according to him mothers keep fathers at bay, especially when they feel insecure, or if the couple is having relationship trouble: “Even after the 1998 reform, mothers still had the upper hand in matters concerning the child.” While the legal status of children born in marriage and out of wedlock was deemed the same after 1998, in cases where there was contestation over who the biological father was, the mother’s consensus was paramount to granting the father access to his child. German law states that the woman who bears the child is the legally recognized mother; there is hence no doubt about her identity. Legally, the man who is married to a woman at the time of the birth of a child, or has acknowledged paternity is the father (whether or not he is the genitor). In cases where the husband is not the biological father, women were given the prerogative of supporting the genitor’s paternity claim (Peschel-Gutzeit 2009, Pohl 2000) In May 2013, a revision in family law,

allows for the man who believes himself to be the genitor to appeal directly in family court for legal recognition of paternity. The mother's agreement is no longer required.

In another interesting turn of events, in 2010 the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, rolled out an initiative—*Men in KITAs*—to increase the proportion of men working in childcare institutions, especially day care centers. This is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), which is responsible for providing monetary and infrastructural support in education and professional training, creating access to employment and especially focusing on disadvantaged groups. Initially conceived as a project that would provide little boys in daycare centers adequate male identification figures (since more than 95% of day care personnel are female), this idea has been expanded in the last five years.<sup>161</sup> The assumption that only men provide boys with appropriate male role models has been critiqued by organizations such as the *Papaladen*. Instead of imagining men as providing the “masculine” role model, the inclusion of men in day care centers is aimed at exposing children to more diverse, multiple and variety of reference persons and thereby enriching the quality of environment in which they first learn to relate to a larger social group. Also, gender equality is a primary driver of this initiative i.e. equal opportunities for men to take on caretaking roles.

Promotional videos encouraging men in daycare centers on the *Men in KITAs* program website in Germany show interesting ways in which young unemployed men, or

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<sup>161</sup> See Holgar Brandes, Markus Andrä, Wenker Rösler and Peter Schneider-Andrich (2013) “*Männer in Day care centers – Was machen sie anders und wie profitieren die Kinder von Ihnen?* Ergebnisse aus der “Tandem-Studie” zu professionellem Erziehungsverhalten von Männern und Frauen”, in *frühe Kindheit, Männer in der Erziehung*, Deutsche Liga für das Kind in Familie und Gesellschaft, Berlin.

those not initially trained for child care can be encouraged to change their professional line of work and do a job that is “more creative, fun, allows one to go outdoors and not be stuck at a desk, is more flexible, yet with a lot of sense of responsibility and achievement.” As the video proceeds, the screen splits into two and shows on the one side an entrepreneur stuck at his desk job, dealing with figures and numbers and meetings, and the other side of the screen shows smiling, laughing men with children in day care centers playing with colors, singing, dancing and going out to the playground. Germany wide, the percentage of men in day care centers was 4.1% in 2013. The statewide variations are quite stark. For instance the percentage of day care centers staff that is male is 10.2 in Hamburg and 8.3 in Berlin, whereas in Bayern and Sachsen-Anhalt the percentage is 2.3.<sup>162</sup> Yet this is a bold step in the direction of building not just family men who care for their offspring at home, but also creating the possibility for all men to tap into their potential to nurture, care for and mold the future generation.<sup>163</sup>

In spite of all these changes in legal requirements and rights, according to Richard the biggest barrier in the social acceptance of men as caregivers is men themselves; men need to start believing they are as good as their female partners at nurturing and caring for their children.

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Also see Rohrmann, T (2005), Wofür ein Mann gebraucht wird...in *Textor, M.R. (Hrsg.): Kindergartenpädagogik-Online Handbuch*, [www.kindergartenpaedagogik.de/1352.html](http://www.kindergartenpaedagogik.de/1352.html)

<sup>162</sup> See <http://www.koordination-maennerindaycarecenters.de/index.php?id=609> and <http://www.koordination-maennerindaycarecenters.de/forschung/maenneranteil-bundeslaender/>

<sup>163</sup> Yet there are some other contradictions in law that continue to maintain (after reunification) the West model of family life: man as primary breadwinner and women as primary care givers. The *Ehegattensplitting* (a taxation policy that benefits male breadwinner and female part time employment marriages), inadequate child care institutions and half day schools such that part of child care must happen at home and this invariably is the responsibility of women; high percentage of German women are in part time jobs, especially since women still are paid less than men and this might ultimately influence the choice of who stays at home and looks after the child. Also, there is evidence that even though more fathers have started availing of the paternal leave, they restrict their time in care of their children to two months (Jurczyk



A lot of men are very defensive, they think they must plead and be nice and ask to be equal participants in childcare. In my legal and personal counseling sessions, I try to tell men to think of themselves as equal to the mothers. You are after all the father, you bring up the child too, and you know your child and what it needs. Communicate to the mother that you yourself believe that you are worth this, don't undervalue yourself; a lot of men think the woman is more important, she can do better and more and knows the children more. But this is not the case. Men need to believe this.

Richard is not alone in his efforts to include men as caregivers in the family. In Berlin especially, various networks and initiatives have sprung up to support work with fathers—fathers' groups, father-child activities, legal counsel—all aimed to feed into an image of the father as a valuable resource for the child. The personal desire to be active fathers and social recognition of this role are often in conflict; while the father pushing the stroller is an approved and desired image, there tends to be a social and often legal bias in how fathers are evaluated with respect to their competency in giving care. This is especially relevant for men who are separated or divorced and struggle, sometimes for years, to have access to their children.

### **“We call ourselves Childless”: Separation, Child Custody and Active Fatherhood**

I met with a group of fathers over a period of ten months every two weeks in the state-run Family Center in a neighborhood of Berlin.<sup>164</sup> This father's group (*Väterrunde*) is divorced or separated from their partners and meets to discuss personal and legal matters related to child custody and contact. Other than this support group, these men are regularly provided with counseling and legal support at the Family Center. The *Väterrunde* is one of the many Berlin wide father's group initiatives that contribute to the

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and Klinkhardt 2014). These features of the welfare state and labor market structures are all indicative of the bias towards a traditional model of the family (Rosenbaum and Timm 2010:138-139).

<sup>164</sup> This is a state-run facility in a particular neighborhood in Berlin. It supports families with young children and youth through the organization of various communal activities, child-care services, family life education and counseling and importantly legal help in matters of child custody.

larger goal of creating social and community level networks for fathers who want to participate in *aktive Vaterschaft*, particularly after separation or divorce.

“Separation from the partner is often an opportunity to experience fatherhood” (*Trennung ist auch eine Chance, sich mit dem Thema Vaterschaft zu beschäftigen*), said Jörg, 45-year-old father of a 6-year-old and an active counselor and social worker on fatherhood and child custody. For these fathers then, I learnt how active fatherhood often did not involve direct and everyday contact with their child; however, to be an active father meant to consistently and relentlessly resort to legal recourse in order to have contact in the future. Thus for these men, separation or divorce, provided a tragic but concrete opportunity to show care and love through continued attempts at meeting, being with, and building relationships with their estranged children.

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It is a cozy room, a small group of men between the ages of 35-50 who meet every two weeks at the Family Center strategize and support each other’s efforts at securing access to their children. They call themselves childless (*kinderlos*) in spite of having children. These fathers tell different stories of how and for how long they have been kept apart from their children. What they all share is a sense of utter loss at not being able to father their children every day, play a meaningful role in their children’s lives. In the father’s group, not only did I get to hear their stories of custody battles as a group – some bitter, some exhilarating – but also met with some of these men for individual interviews.

Jörg works in the Family Center and conducts the father’s group meetings. Other than marital counseling, he has over the last couple of years intensified his efforts on

working with fathers, especially those needing legal advice and other forms of support related to child custody or visitation rights with children. He is very passionate about this work,

These are men who have children but have very little contact with them; children are not part of their everyday, these fathers don't wake up with them, take them to school, cook for them, clean and clothe them, read to them or bring them to bed at night. They don't have this pleasure because the child's mother has managed to keep the father away and circumscribed his legal rights.

Personally for Jörg, the fight for and with fathers began after he had his son Oskar. Within three years of his son's birth, the couple separated.

In 2007, close on the heels of the separation, Jörg started working with the concept of *aktive Vaterschaft*, which categorically focuses on building a “relationship of closeness and everydayness, togetherness and presence between fathers and children,” as Jörg described. The involvement of fathers in the upbringing and disciplining of their children is the ultimate aim of the various father-child activities that the Family Center organizes. Additionally, at the Center there is a lot of practical support for expectant fathers—such as classes and courses on pregnancy, child nutrition and health, play, education, information about physical contact with the child such as carrying and feeding the child—, which Jörg finds indispensable to the process of becoming fathers.

It is not that mothers are born with this knowledge either. They learn faster probably because of the various role models they have consciously or subconsciously imbued. Unfortunately, we, especially in Germany, hardly have any positive male or father role models! In the last couple of years fathers have become center stage to family policies. Child care is no longer seen only as a mother's job. See in West Germany especially, this was the case – fathers earned and mothers took care of the children. My own father was a weekend Papa. While this is pretty much a global phenomenon what is interesting about Germany is the consistent lack of a positive father image (*Vaterbild*). And in the East because the state took care of women and children, it often replaced the father's role as provider. The younger generation now – I mean those who are now becoming

fathers – are imagining another possible relation between themselves and their children.

One of the crucial ways in which to reimagine this changed relationship between children and fathers, is through legal efforts of the Family Center and through counselors like Jörg who regularly provide information and support to fathers separated from their children. “Unless fathers share custody and have the possibility of relating to their children as mothers do, how will this new idea take wings,” the group of fathers who I met at the Family Center insisted. These men emphasized that at the time of separation, the distraught man is shocked, angry and possibly grieving over the loss of a partner. Before he knows it, their child is no longer there either. “Unfortunately, there is little time to grieve the absence of a partner; if fathers want to continue to engage actively with their children they need to act fast. We like to remind new members to the group to not lose focus on the father-child relationship,” emphasized Stefan, another regular member to the group. Stefan has teenage sons with whom he regained continuous contact after a long legal battle over five years. The family court finally saw no reason to keep the father and children apart. Unfortunately, for Stefan the children don’t live in Berlin, but he says they are more willing and generally excited about meeting him and staying with him during holidays.

Simon, another regular attendee of the support group is 50 years and has one son who is 13 years old. When he was about three years old, the authorities placed Simon in the care of his paternal grandmother because his parents physically abused him and eventually split. Simon is convinced that his ex-wife tricked him; she planned to get pregnant and then split to get money from him. She has poisoned the son against him and it has been five years since he saw his son alone even though they live in the same city.

Simon explained that in general it is very easy for women to get custody of their children,<sup>165</sup>

Mothers have more rights in this matter. There are hardly any support systems for fathers.... although recently there is a change there. Mothers want to control their children, they want rights in this society and at their work place. But they never want to share any of these rights with fathers. Germany has always had a terrible father-image (*Deutschland hat immer ein schlechtes Männerbild gehabt*) but it wasn't like women did not participate in exploitation. The problem of feminism is that women just wanted to turn the situation around and exploit men; they were not looking for equality (*Gleichberechtigung*). It is more like competition (*Gegnerschaft*).

These fathers continue to struggle to convince legal authorities of their desire to be with their children, the benefits to the child of knowing the father and the right of the father to care for the child. In 2007 reforms in parental leave brought the father's role starkly into focus. Both a political shift in attention, and community based efforts to provide men with a space to be active fathers, has boosted work that supports father-child attachment and relationships through daily contact and interactions. While Simon continues to struggle for visitation rights, he is hopeful that it will become harder for authorities to keep him away from his son: legally, the father is not redundant in the child's life and Simon hopes that his continued efforts to be an active father in seeking contact with his son, will pay off; he is especially encouraged when he meets other fathers in the *Vätterrunde* who have had a positive engagement with the legal system.

### **Recognizing the Active Father: Shifts in Legal and Professional Orientation**

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<sup>165</sup> Simon spoke about his experience of marginalization in various ways and on several occasions in private conversations with me. His parents physically abused him and he has had to live with chronic headaches that he believes are related to the beatings he endured before being removed from his parental home. When speaking of negative father figures, he refers to women who were equally integral to the national socialist ideology. His parents were born and raised during the period of Second World War and exercised authoritarian disciplinary methods that have traumatized Simon for life. His mother was involved in this abuse. His distrust of female figures was reinforced especially during the period of his custody battles. His frustrations about the feminist movement then are not the same as a misogynist statement coming from a person who considers women to be subordinate.

Thomas is 45, lives in Berlin for over 15 years now. He was raised in a Catholic family in Bayern, and lived until his teenage years in Munich, after which he traveled intermittently for a period of ten years in Latin America and Asia. Thomas often asked me about life in India. He had been studying and practicing yoga for many years. Having visited India several years ago he said he had adopted a Buddhist way of life: he meditated, believed in striving towards a middle path (“no extreme emotions and a balanced perspective on life”) and about 20 years ago had given up eating meat altogether.

Over time, he tried his hand at different occupations, enrolling in various training courses—film editing, journalism, cooking, and massage therapy—finishing none of the courses before setting off on his travels. He moved to Berlin a few years after reunification to practice full time Yoga, both to learn advanced methods and eventually to open his own practice. His own practice never materialized and when I met him Thomas, he was on welfare and had started a course on podiatry financed by the job center.

Thomas joined the *Vätterrunde* in October 2012 and I met him regularly for a period of ten months, following closely his confrontations with his wife who wanted a divorce. On his first visit to the *Vätterrunde* he was distraught, having learnt a few weeks ago that his Romanian wife and the mother of his 3-year-old daughter “without seemingly any good reason” wanted to leave him.

She announced that she wanted to leave. We had two appointments at the *Jugendamt* (youth welfare center) and they said that since she wanted to leave she should move out and not disturb the routine environment of our daughter. But she hasn’t done anything for the last four months. I even looked up apartments for her online, close to where we currently live so that Anna our daughter does not have to change the day care. Now behind my back she has found a female lawyer and

is forcing me to move so that she doesn't have to go through any kind of trouble. We have to now appear in family court to settle this matter!

Thomas came to the *Vätterrunde* seeking counseling to minimize losses from the impending separation. He suspected that the pregnancy and separation had been his wife's plan all along. Thomas met his wife Paula at an advanced Yoga course they both were taking in Latin America and within a few months of knowing each other she was pregnant. The child, a girl, then aged three, was born in Romania and after her birth, Paula brought her to Germany to join Thomas.

We have two rooms in the current apartment. When my daughter was an infant one of the rooms became a sort of mother-child room. Instead of her own bed, my daughter slept in the master bedroom with my wife and I slept in the smaller room. We had no communication; the child was always in the same bed. And my wife doesn't seek contact with too many other mothers, so she has become fixated on the child.

The *Vätterrunde* members were more interested in warning Thomas about his precarious relationship with his child; the secondary emphasis was on counseling him through the shock of the unexpected separation. Helmut a father of two spoke vehemently:

We often get obsessed with the couple at these moments and then forget that there is a child in all this too. As fathers, we should dare to imagine how we see our relationship with our child not just two but 15 years from now. Based on that we have to fight to maintain contact right from the time of separation.

Helmut who had a son and a daughter around ten and 12 years of age, choked on his words. He was struggling to communicate regularly with his children, who he had only recently resumed contact with. When he separated from his partner five years ago, she presented proof in court that Helmut was psychologically damaging his children. Through five years of continuous legal efforts and proof of financial and psychological stability, the decision to disallow Helmut to see his children has been revoked.

When asked about his daughter, at first Thomas could not articulate what he wanted in terms of future contact with her. At that moment when we first met, his daughter seemed more like a burden, he was in shock over the events, did not understand his wife's motivations and was focused on getting out of the relationship without much economic damage.

It was not my dream to have a child, I knew it would be too much, a small child needs a lot of attention; it's only now that she plays on her own a little bit. Also I didn't exactly have a perfect father figure (*Vaterbild*). I don't remember my father really doing anything with us, never football or fishing or anything else. If there was something it was plucking berries – they are thorny, have cobwebs and spiders, the weather is humid, you are sweaty and its for a purpose – to make marmalade, no activity just like that, for fun. He never did anything only for us, we were just present next to him.

When Thomas's parents found out about the pregnancy, his parents asked him to send the girl some money and forget about her. This shocked him and he responded by marrying his girlfriend and took on her last name. Thomas explained that his parent's reaction was so negative for him that he understood that he was to receive no support from them. Thomas explained that since the daughter would anyway not carry the family name, it did not really matter what she was called, so in order to have one family name he just changed his last name and took on his girlfriend's last name, "which I think was seen as my weakness, my inability to be a man!" Thomas did his best to support his girlfriend, especially when his parents suggested abortion and separation from the girlfriend. Not very enthusiastic about becoming a father, he felt at a loss, having learnt relatively little from his own father on how to deal with children. His presence in the *Vätterrunde* at times seemed to distract from the agenda. Other men were focused on finding a way to be with their children; Thomas seemed to talk a lot about the cheat that the girlfriend was and how he did not consider himself to be a good enough father. The *Vätterrunde* while at



times impatiently so, kept insisting that he should not forget his child now. It was time to act *now*, to imagine that his relationship to his child in the future was dependent on the efforts he took to be with her now.

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Have you seen hyenas? Well she is a bit like that. And I mean not just sly, even her body, she holds it up in a slightly crooked way, like the uneven back of a hyena. I know it's a mean thing to say, but...

Thomas described his wife to me, after showing me papers that the local *Jugendamt* had sent indicating that his wife had made a formal complaint that Thomas was uninterested in childcare and that he was not a good father. This meant that the *Jugendamt* personnel were obliged to check the home condition and make an assessment on whether or not the daughter was safe in the presence of her father.

While very open about not having wanted children, also not having a very positive role model in his father and his own struggles to relate to his child, Thomas did not abandon his pregnant wife and run away from the responsibility of fathering a child. To be accused of not being good for his own daughter and that the child was not safe around him, was not just untrue but also a last desperate attempt on part of his wife in response to the *Jugendamt's* suspicion of her accusations.

Ok initially I too was not able to connect with my child, but I took care of everything else in the house – cooking, cleaning, and groceries – so that my wife could take care of the child. And since Anna can communicate I am so much better with her. My wife told the caseworker at the *Jugendamt* that I had scared Anna because I shouted and used bad language. I mean I went through different phases – in the beginning one is shocked, then sad, then depressed, then perhaps verbally aggressive because one feels the need to defend oneself. But what she told her lawyer, I find it impudent – that around me my daughter's psychological health is negatively affected! I am not the best father but I am not as bad as she describes! (*Ich bin nicht der Supervater aber ich bin nicht so schlimm wie sie es beschreibt*)

The already experienced group in the *Vätterrunde* assured Thomas that the *Jugendamt* would not automatically assume that he is at fault. Ulrich a regular member said, “things have actually changed over the last few years and the legal rights that fathers are gaining are accompanied by a reorientation of staff to not always think of the mother as always in the right.”

Thomas started reading up on endangerment of child when a complaint from the day care center came in. One of the teachers saw Anna beat up a doll and thought that a caseworker from the *Jugendamt* needed to be sent home to check in on the child’s situation. The day care center was always more sympathetic to Thomas’s wife, and Paula felt confident that with the case worker’s visit she could get Thomas to move out.

As it turned out Thomas did benefit from the recent changes not just in rights of father with respect to their children but also the general attitudes of personnel in the *Jugendamt*. “The caseworker spoke to me and not just to my wife. She also listened to my side of the story. I did not get the feeling that the matter was already decided in the favor of the mother,” Thomas reported later. The caseworker who visited Thomas and Paula observed that the child was happy, talkative, running to both her parents, very comfortable with spending time with Thomas and wrote in her assessment that she saw no reason to keep the father and child apart.

In an interview at the *Jugendamt*, I learnt that a significant change in assessment of well-being of the child when deciding in matters of shared custody (*gemeinsames Sorgerecht*) is as follows: there is a shift from the father having to prove that time spent with one’s children, is indeed beneficial for both father and child. Now the mother must prove that the child’s well-being is *at risk*, if shared custody is not denied. This means

that before 2013, the parent (invariably the father) who made a case for joint custody or regular contact with his child in event of separation, had to prove the positive effects of this on his offspring. Now contact with the father is considered necessary for the well-being of the child. This is a tremendous step in the direction of giving fathers more rights.

Thomas and Paula started living separately by the end of 2013. In the end Thomas did decide to move out for the sake of his daughter. He did not want to remove her from her familiar environment. His new apartment is a half an hour bus ride from where Paula and Anna live. He sees his daughter regularly – two to three days a week – and is negotiating more overnight stays for his daughter at his new home.

### **Conclusion**

Attention to the role of the father in the family, his care giving potential and the beneficial aspects (for fathers, children, as well as mothers), of this shift in fatherhood work from cash to care (see Hobson 2002), parallels a process of disintegration of the traditional nuclear family. Put in other words, with the increasing number of single parent households, divorces and separations, low fertility and ensuing decrease in extended kin-network for child care, and social and legal recognition of alternate family forms, the father's role in the Euro-American context has taken on new dimensions (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erikson 1998, Hearn et al. 2002, Jurczyk and Klinkhardt 2014, Roopnarine 2015). The “new” father then is one who is expected to strive for equitable distribution of child care responsibilities. These cultural ideals and practices vary across geographical regions, national histories, infrastructural and policy arrangements, and generations. In this chapter, my aim has been to highlight how a particular generation of West German fathers, imagine and practice active fatherhood and how they construct their idea of a good father given Germany's attenuated father figure and the

contemporary policy interventions to create a ‘child-friendly’ country. These articulations of fatherhood are also very particular to Berlin, where one finds an ever-increasing array of father-child initiatives and activities that promote men’s involvement in their children’s direct care. While often characterized as ‘child-unfriendly,’ Berlin certainly appears to be father-friendly, allowing men material, legal and social space to express their ideas and practice their versions of *aktive Vaterschaft*.

This chapter then provides ethnographic evidence of a shift in the orientation towards the image of the German man channeled through the construction of an active fatherhood, that entails care giving as the central element of a renewed father-child interaction and long term relationship. I discuss how this resignification of the category “father” is visible through individual and community based changes in fathering practices as well as legal and political discourse on gender equality, abilities, and desires of men to develop a relationship of long-term care through everyday engagement with children.

Changes in the image of German man and/or father through the period after the Second World War till after reunification emphasize the contingency of masculine ideals in the specific case of Germany (see Beasley 2008, Connell 2005, Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, Gutmann 1997 on contingency of masculine ideals). I argue that the rebuilding or production of the positive image of the father as a male role model, signals a restructuring of earlier ideas of fathers in the family and is parallel to the rebuilding of a child-friendly German society. Yet, this reconstruction of the man as father in a new image is not something out of the ordinary, rather a part of a longer process of the production of German masculinity and fatherhood. The image of the father has taken on different discursive and experiential forms since the end of the World Wars, through the

Cold War years of division and now in the two decades post reunification. My ethnography captures one of these contemporary moments of transition; I show how the space of German masculinity uncovers anxieties around personal and national reproduction, family and life style transitions and the content of German society at a time of a politically recognized ‘fertility crisis’ in reunified Berlin. While masculinity has traditionally been associated with the role of the man as producer, this “new man” who engages in direct care of his child, shows a passion for the rights of the father and continues to overcome legal hurdles to have consistent contact with his child, thereby challenging hegemonic and/or dominant models of masculinity. Also, fatherhood (its various conceptualizations and practices) is dynamic and contingent; its different forms are produced in different contexts and at the confluence of various economic, social and cultural factors.

Following the stories and imaginations of *aktive Vaterschaft* in the lives of fathers—those on parental leave, those working for rights of fathers and those in custody battle—and examining legal reforms that aim to establish the father as an equal and worthy participant in child-care, I argue for the production of a particular idea of the German society mirrored in the parallel process of making men into certain kinds of fathers. These processes of construction become more starkly visible in moments of ‘crisis.’ In the case of Berlin, Germany, I illustrate the intersection of reunification and demographic transition, the political concern with the demographic crisis that brings into focus the debate on what constitutes the German nation. This is addressed through policies directed at creating more desire for having children (*Lust auf Kinder/Familie*) or a ‘child-friendly’ Germany. I also speculate that distance in time and memory from the

fascist past, allows for political intervention in matters of family and reproduction; these tend to be perceived locally and globally as a necessity and not problematic. It is within this context that the refashioning or resignification of the man as father—not primarily as genitor and/or provider, rather as *Erzieher*, as someone who shapes, molds and creates a person, a German citizen—becomes urgent.

The next and final chapter continues to explicate the idea of being an active father, through specific practices of engagement and care. Here, I tell the stories of men diagnosed with infertility who seek legitimacy as partners in reproduction. I discuss efforts of medically infertile men to claim intimacy to their desire to be fathers and establish paternity through multiple investments of physical, sexual, emotional and imaginative labor. By expressing desire to be parents, by being involved in infertility treatments, by verbalizing emotional and physical challenges to treatment, and in some cases choosing alternate (not genetically determined) routes to parenting, these men seek to be salient to reproduction.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## **Invisible Sperm, Visible Men: Male Infertility and Achieving Paternity through Couvade**

### **Introduction**

This chapter draws on data from extended interviews, conversations and observations at and outside an infertility clinic in Berlin, Germany. I discuss how the medical diagnosis of male infertility curiously opens a route for men to seek visibility in matters of reproduction and express their wish to become fathers. Being named the *Verursacher* (cause) of infertility is a moment of recognition, of not just the sperm's diminished role in fertilization, but also men's experience of reproductive marginality and their desire to start a family. The diagnosis of male infertility enables the achievement of paternity through alternate forms of relationality.

Highlighting men's voices, I show how men, in an otherwise peripheral position vis-à-vis reproduction, speak about "bearing the burden of diagnosis" as a route to a more intimate and shared experience of childlessness and potential fatherhood. This chapter illustrates how paternity is a social achievement, a process of kinning (Howell 2006) constituted over time, and in multiple forms that do not emphasize genetic relatedness, instead the diverse investments of physical, sexual, emotional and imaginative labor. Such kinning is especially relevant in the lives of men diagnosed with infertility, who—in an Euro-American context of the "minimalism of paternity" (Guyer 2000:83)<sup>166</sup>—seek fatherhood often by making insignificant physiological paternity, even as recent changes in Germany's assisted reproduction laws give children conceived through donor sperm the right to know their biological father at the age of 18. Such legal reforms further

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<sup>166</sup> Paternity is reduced to a genetic relation, hence connotes a minimalism of what it means to be a father.



strengthen the value of genetic paternity. I show how care, and not the primacy of genetics is central to fatherhood for the men in this chapter.

I describe how through the imitation of embodied and discursive elements of the ‘female’ experience of reproduction, my male interlocutors—diagnosed as “hopeless” cases of infertility—sought acknowledgement and recognition of their *Kinderwunsch* (desire to father). These male practices emphasized (potential) fatherhood, irrespective of the provision of genetic substance. I draw on literature on *couvade* from the anthropological record to analyze how men attempt to be partners in reproduction and achieve an alternate conceptualization of fatherhood. Couvade refers to ritual behavior undertaken by the expectant father around the birth of a child, that mimics the mother’s pre and/or post partum behavior, diet and mobility restrictions. I argue that my male interlocutors’ kinning practices are structurally similar to couvade and signal both, male reproductive marginality, and men’s desire to be salient to reproduction through multiple acts of care.

The men we meet in this chapter are all between the ages of 40-45, born and brought up in West Berlin or former West Germany, and had lived for extended periods in Berlin, either before or during my research. Wanting children and unable biologically to conceive, for these interlocutors, active fatherhood starts with multiple caregiving and participatory practices *before* conception or birth. These acts of care require imagining male participation in reproduction at different moments in time. For many men the desire to have a child with their partner or wife is an important element of being fathers. Seeking treatment and taking ownership of the diagnosis of infertility is crucial to becoming significant in medical and other reproductive decision making. Given the

political and social climate in Berlin that promotes men's direct involvement in child care on the one hand, and reproductive laws that undermine male participation on the other, the stories in this chapter highlight men's desire to have children, be part of the reproductive process and achieve paternity first and foremost by expressing the desire to be fathers. This acknowledgement of the diagnosis of medical male infertility, ironically opens multiple routes to asserting the experience of disrupted reproduction and enables participation in longing for, having, and caring for one's child.

While anthropological, demographic, and policy research on reproduction has primarily focused on the experience of women (Dudgeon and Inhorn 2009, 2004), more recent studies on men and reproduction aim to highlight male perspectives on a range of issues such as family planning, reproductive loss, fatherhood, infertility treatment and childlessness. (Bledsoe et al. 2000, Dudgeon and Inhorn 2004, Gutmann 2007, Hobson 2002, Inhorn 2007, Inhorn, et al. 2009, Knecht, et al. 2010, Townsend 2002) With specific reference to reproductive disruptions such as infertility, men continue to occupy marginal positions especially in light of the emergence of reproductive technologies, as the female body becomes the primary site for treatment (Birenbaum-Carmeli 2009, Herrera 2013, Knecht, et al. 2010, Throsby and Gill 2004). This is in spite of the fact that half of infertility instances are a result of a male condition. Especially in matters of medical tourism, egg donation, surrogacy, and kinning, women 'automatically' become the center of research (see Bestard 2009 on women's experiences of kinning and egg donation; see Cussins 1998 on kinship in cases of donor egg IVF procedure, gestational surrogacy and intergenerational donation and/or surrogacy; see Payne 2015 on cross-border egg donation and "biodesirability" between Sweden and Baltic States). While

women often carry the burden of responsibility for infertility socially as well, recent research also shows different ways in which men participate in infertility treatments; either in a supportive role or as partners in the quest for conception (Inhorn 2012, Joshi 2008). A growing commitment to understanding men's experiences of infertility sheds light on the relationship between fertility, virility and masculinity (see for instance Becker 2000, Goldberg 2009, Inhorn 2004, Thompson 2005, Tjornhoj-Thomsen 2009 in Introduction), and the subsequent destabilization as well as reinforcement of hegemonic masculinities (see Moore 2009 on hierarchical representations of sperm; see Schmidt and Moore 1998 on the production of technosperm). This chapter contributes to this growing-literature on reconceiving "the second sex" (Inhorn, et al. 2009:1) and also diverts from previous work by highlighting the relation between diagnosis of male medical infertility and active kinning practices of men. Thus, my aim is move beyond the discussion on women's practices of kinning and the conflation of infertility, virility, and masculinity, to show how paternity is achieved in the absence of biogenetic relatedness for infertile men.

### **Paternity as Social Achievement**

Since Morgan's study of Australian, North American and Hindu Indians in the 19th century, anthropologists have argued for paternity as a "complex 'achievement'" (Guyer 2000:65) According to this evolutionary logic, fatherhood was not a biological or a social reality until higher stages of societal development, appearing at the time when authority, inheritance and personal property became relevant for populations of a "civilized" society (also see Engels 1972) By early 20<sup>th</sup> century this evolutionary logic was discredited, and there was a recognition of the value of the father, his connection with his child and paternity's relation to other social, sexual and economic networks in the communities that anthropologists studied. Evidence also showed an extensive variety

within and amongst groups in how paternity was recognized, when it became relevant, and in what ways. Anthropological literature on kinship analyzed divergent ways in which multiple forms of paternity are recognized in different societies that were previously erroneously characterized as being ignorant of physiological paternity.

In the introduction to *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Radcliffe-Brown (1950) refers to consanguinity or descent not in terms of a physical relationship but of a social relationship between parents and children. In order to explain this difference between genitor (the one who provides the genetic substance or the biological component of paternity) and pater (the one who confers a specific social position that also determines the child's relationship to the wider network of kin by virtue of a socially recognized system of kinship), Radcliff-Brown provides the example of the illegitimate child in modern societies. Such a child has a genitor but no pater i.e. no socially recognized father (Radcliff-Brown and Forde 1950:4) and it is the latter who establishes a child's position status, and obligations within the larger kinship systems. Amongst the Nuer, for instance, children belonged to the lineage of the man (pater) who paid the bride wealth whether or not he was their biological father, i.e. the genitor (see Evans Pritchard 1951). In case of death of the pater, the brother of the dead man could beget his dead brother's wife's children. In this case the brother was the genitor (and also the acting pater) but the dead man was the pater through whom the child secured socio-political and religious networks over his/her life. If the widow did not want to cohabit with the brother of her dead husband and had children from another unrelated surrogate, then the latter was the genitor. In this case, the children born to this woman had three socially recognized fathers: the dead husband of the woman in whose name the bride wealth was paid i.e. the

pater who determined the children's life long social and religious identity, the brother of the dead pater who was the acting pater and would determine the day to day relations of obligations and duties of the children of his dead brother and the unrelated genitor whose recognition determined rules of marriage and procreation. Another common form of marriage noted amongst the Nuer was that between women. A barren woman could marry another woman following the same marriage rituals as a man would. The wife would bear the woman-husband's lineage children. In this case, the barren woman was the social and legal father i.e. the pater, whereas the male kinsman or unrelated male who provided the genetic material for reproduction of the pater's lineage was the genitor. (Evans-Pritchard 1951:108) Writing of the matrilineal Trobrianders' ideas of conception and gestation, Malinowski (1929) concluded that although the Trobrianders had words for different parts of the body and were very familiar with human and animal anatomy, they were ignorant of the facts of physiological paternity.<sup>167</sup> According to native theory, the real cause of birth was spirit activity in that a dead ancestor found his/her ways into the body of a woman from its own clan. The entry point was through the head and then

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<sup>167</sup> Edmund Leach has argued against this assertion (ignorance of physiological paternity), especially popular among the 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionists such as Bachofen (1861), Engels (1972), McLennan (1970) [1986] and Morgan (1871). These anthropologists claimed that the development of the social organization proceeded from a matrilineal society to a patrilineal one and the discovery of the physiological male substance in procreation was of paramount importance in the evolution to this higher stage of social organization. Leach in his 1966 Henry Myers Lecture, draws comparisons between Christian practices and beliefs, and those of societies in which physiological paternity is not recognized in the manner in which it is in modern society. He argues how practices (e.g. wearing of the wedding ring or a wedding ceremony conducted in church) and beliefs about those practices, what they mean or what effect they have on one's life may not always coincide. In the same manner because the "savage" does not automatically refer to the role of the sperm in conception, does not mean he is ignorant of physiological paternity. It means that in certain contexts, the fact of physiological paternity is not relevant and need not be recognized as such. Take for instance, the Christian idea of the myth of virgin birth. It does not automatically imply that Christians are ignorant of physiological paternity; instead the myth reinforces the dogma that the Virgin's child is the son of God. (Leach, 1966) Thus Leach draws our attention away from the debate on whether or not physiological paternity was a known fact to the relation between procreation beliefs and the larger context or cosmology of people we study. Thus as Delaney writes, "Paternity is a concept, the meaning of which is

the spirit descended to the belly and the woman was pregnant. The blood in the body of the pregnant woman nourished the child, just as the breastmilk did once the child is born. Thus, spirits put the child in a clanswoman; the woman's blood made the child, and the seminal fluid played no role in creating the child. So who was the father and what role did he play? The word for father is *tamala* and it means "...the mother's husband, the man whose role and duty it is to take the child in his arms and to help her in nursing and bringing it up." (Malinowski 1929:195) Thus the father was defined socially through marriage. All maternal relatives were of the same body and in that sense the father was always a stranger to the child, yet a child always resembled the father (irrespective of visible resemblance), because it was the father who molded the child with his care, feeding and other acts of love. (also see Malinowski 1969 for a discussion of spiritual kinship between father and child).

The anthropological record shows not only that paternity is a social achievement, but also how it takes on various forms and can be distributed over multiple male members of the community. The disassociation of the male body from the evidence of conception, pregnancy and childbirth, makes necessary personal and social practices that establish different kinds of paternity. My data shows how a further disassociation from the process of biological reproduction—the diagnosis of male infertility—sets the stage for visibility of male experiences of childlessness and the process of becoming fathers. I argue that my interlocutors strove to achieve a place in the reproductive history of the couple and establish paternity (present and/or future) by variously evaluating the

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derived from its interrelations with other concepts and beliefs; it is not a kind of categorical entity, the presence or absence of which can be established empirically." (Delaney 1986:495)

relevance or irrelevance of biology and genetics. I show how in the Euro-American context, where the knowledge of genetic conception (fertilization of the egg by the sperm) is widely accepted, men medically diagnosed as infertile seek ways of establishing paternity that extends beyond biology. Specifically, they engage in multiple physical, sexual, emotional and imaginative acts of kinning to achieve or demand recognition of paternity. I show how becoming fathers (or imagining oneself as fathers) is perceived as a long-term process of engagement and care, not necessarily achieved through a single act of intercourse that leads to fertilization of the egg by the sperm, either one's own or a donor's (see Beckerman and Valentine 2002 on partible paternity); but rather through practices resembling the logic of *couvade*.<sup>168</sup>

I make my argument through the analysis of stories of three different men (and in two cases we also hear from their wives), who were diagnosed with male sterility of varying degrees of severity. Mark and Axel represent what the doctors often called “hopeless” cases to mean that it would be near impossible for the couple to conceive via regular intercourse because of absence of sperm in the ejaculate. In such cases a very specialized procedure may lead to pregnancy (see below). While Mark has recently become a father through the successful application of reproductive technology, Axel has a 4-year-old daughter conceived using donor sperm. The third story is Helmut's, who is medically a less “difficult” case, because his diagnosis—low quantity and motility of sperm—is not as complicated a problem from the point of view reproductive medicine. Ironically, he remains childless, in spite of several cycles of treatment. I highlight how my male interlocutors engaged in different forms of “imitative” practices to express and

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<sup>168</sup> See Shapiro (2009) on the critique of Beckerman and Valentine's explication of partible paternity.

establish an intimacy to, and legitimacy of their *Kinderwunsch* and the significance of their “substance” in making a baby. These included the embodied experience of infertility treatment, otherwise normatively focused on women, verbalizing emotions, trying alternate therapies and experiencing physical pain “just like their female partners.”

By interpreting the narrations, responses, and consequences of the male diagnosis of infertility through the lens of couvade as a manner of achieving paternity, I do not claim evidence of ritual couvade in the infertility clinic in Berlin. Instead, by drawing parallels between literature on couvade and my ethnographic data, I point to similarities in structure and logic between the two. This in turn assists in making another kind of diagnosis—the marginalization of men in the larger context of reproductive medicine—and illuminates a process of seeking legitimacy for male to father and participate in reproduction.

### **Mark and Stefanie**

#### ***“It Truly is Our Problem!”***

“It was like being hit with a club – the diagnosis – I had no viable sperm. They call it *Azoospermia*. You know I had the usual initial reactions. I lost all meaning in life. But then, I realized, I *share* in this experience truly, because I am the problem, my body is the problem. This way it truly is *our* problem.”

Mark is 43, Stefanie, 40. She is a schoolteacher and he an engineer. Born and brought up in West Berlin, they know each other for 15 years, have been married for six and have been taking infertility treatments for three. Mark received his diagnosis of *Azoospermia* in 2010, three years before I met them. When his urologist told him to spend the money he was going to save by not having children on a world tour, Mark



recalled his sense of shock, despair and sheer loss of hope. “I had all kinds of irrational thoughts at that point. I wanted to leave my job, leave Berlin. I was crushed.” After careful Internet searches, Stefanie learnt about a doctor in Hamburg, the only known expert in Germany, who could assist in cases of *Azoospermia*. Mark continued, “I did not even dream that there could be a possible solution. But then we learnt about this doctor and that he performed the TESE.” TESE refers to testicular sperm extraction and is a procedure conducted under local anesthesia whereby very small amounts of testicular tissue are surgically removed in order to extract viable sperm cells for an IVF i.e. an in-vitro fertilization procedure. The tissue samples are put in an icebox, which the couple then carries back to their infertility specialist. Mark has undergone TESE two times. The first time the surgeon got six samples of testicular tissue, the second time seven. These were frozen and viable sperm were used for IVF five times without success. On the third trial Stefanie was pregnant but miscarried, after which the couple took a break and then completed two more rounds. By the time I knew them well, Mark and Stefanie were on their sixth trial. In early 2014, they were blessed with a baby girl after their seventh trial.

### ***Self Help Group***

I first met Mark and Stefanie at the Self Help Group (SHG) meeting for childless couples initiated by the counselor at the Infertility Clinic (IC) that I visited in Berlin throughout my year in the field. Over time, regular attendees began to lead the SHG meetings and the counselor exited the group. I was welcome to sit in on the meetings, which took place every six weeks. The group usually discussed progress on treatments and listened to each other’s stories of loss, pain, alternate therapies and humorous moments with doctors. If a couple attending the group got pregnant, they stopped coming for the meetings, even though other members asked them not to stop. I found it strange

that the group generally expressed a welcoming attitude towards recently pregnant members of the SHG. I realize that this positive response could have meant politeness or awkwardness about not knowing how to confront a group member's change of status. In the group women always talked about the inexplicable pain they felt when they heard about or saw another woman pregnant and yet they declared in all instances when couples got pregnant that the latter were welcome to continue in the SHG.

Mark and Stefanie were regulars for over a year and almost always led the discussion. During one such meeting, Mark stepped in to comfort Christine (another member) who broke down for the fourth time during her narration of a recent miscarriage. He said that was one of the reasons he likes coming to the SHG, "is because you realize you are not alone. We too had a similar experience when Stefanie miscarried on our third trial." So far he had been speaking steadily in a monotone. I looked at him and he had stopped talking. He sat ramrod straight in his chair. I had a flash of a memory of how it was when I had hugged him once; it was truly like embracing a plank of wood. Mark is thin and straight with several silver rings in his left ear, a stud in his right and a nose ring in his straight downward sloping nose. His jaw protrudes because he is so thin and he appears to be so stiff that he could break instead of bending at any moment. Suddenly he started to shake, almost vibrate, tremors going down his body. He drew his mouth together in a pout to control his tears and kept looking down. I felt like his heart would burst—literally open in front of his shirt and pop out—because of the physical pressure built up inside his body. He contained his tears as Stefanie briefly put her hand over his, gave him tissue paper and said, "Yes as you can see something that happened almost two years ago still haunts us and sometimes it hits him more, sometimes me."

Mark wiped his tears, still looking down and folded the tissue, tucked it into his jeans and put the rest of the unused tissues in his bag.<sup>169</sup>

### *Diagnosis and Treatment*

Reflecting on his diagnosis and treatment, Mark said to me over coffee at his home,

Well the TESE brings me close to what Stefanie might experience on her body, but we don't think of one or the other person as being the guilty party (*schuldig*). We are a team; this is *our* problem; *we* want a baby. Ok the woman's body plays a large role in having the child but it is still a joint effort. I always think of us as a team. And other than one, I have not missed any appointments at the IC. The one I missed was because of the delay on the subway.

Stopping for breath, he looked at Stefanie who sat there silent, not necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with the idea of being a team. When he heard nothing from her, he hesitated and repeated, "At least *I* think of us as a team, I don't know about you;" Stefanie finally nodded.

Mark often spoke about the process of undergoing the TESE. These verbalizations almost always ended in insisting that the two of them were a team. Mark was certainly able to say this and feel it, precisely because his body too was part of the process of treatment.

Well when I first heard about the procedure, I had to steady my nerves. It is not exactly a regular doctor's examination. Unlike women who are more familiar with

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<sup>169</sup> Incidentally, this group did break up by the end of my fieldwork. Trouble was already brewing for some weeks before I left Berlin in 2013, when another couple in their late 50s and also regular members had had a failed attempt at egg donation for the third time. This couple expected their friends in the SHG (including Mark and Stefanie) to be "more supportive" by calling them up and conveying their condolences. Mark and Stefanie on the other hand explained to me that they felt that it was best to not make any calls and respect their friend's privacy. The last straw was when Mark and Stefanie—as regular SHG members, as the most vocal couple, as representative of the long and agonizing journey towards conception—finally did conceive. After they announced their pregnancy within a few months, most of the regular members dropped out. The sense of security that Mark and Stefanie's inability to have a child lent the rest of the group could not be underestimated. Everyone seemed to identify with them and suddenly they too have "betrayed" the group and moved on with their lives.

their gynecologists, men don't really get themselves examined. But of course I had no doubt in my mind about what I had to do. And when I consider how much my wife has to go through, with all the hormonal treatments, even though she is healthy... The day we did the first procedure it was deep winter and the roads were submerged under snow. I drove through the night to get to Hamburg. The traffic was crawling. The procedure doesn't last long. I remember waking up and they wheeled me into a waiting area. Stefanie sat beside me and held my hand.

At this point Stefanie interrupted Mark with an ironic laugh,

Actually Mark and I were not the only ones in the waiting room. I looked around and saw a whole bunch of men, all of them reclined, a bit groggy from the anesthesia and showing signs of bodily discomfort after the TESE and their wives or partners sitting next to them, holding their hands or comforting them.

The reversal of what is a regular experience of infertility treatment for women, became a recurrent narrative in my encounters with medically infertile men. During the course of three years of treatment that involved a total of seven in-vitro fertilization procedures, Mark received a diagnosis that put his body in focus, not just as the 'root' of the problem, but also as an object that could be medically manipulated, just like his wife's body. He underwent an invasive procedure that involved anesthesia, extraction of bodily substance, bodily discomfort and then eventual manipulation of the sperm for fertilization. An embodied experience of his diagnosis allowed Mark room to claim a legitimate relationship to his quest for conception, instead of being overcome by a sense of helpless pain that another interlocutor Helmut always experienced. Yet, Helmut declared his 'insignificant' body (and sperm) significant by verbal and behavioral identification with his wife's pain and imitated her in seeking alternate treatment therapies.

### **Helmut and Anna**

***“Ich bin die Schwachstelle”<sup>170</sup>***

I met Anna in the early months of my fieldwork during a consultation session with one of the infertility specialists at the IC. Anna was 38 years old and worked as a microbiologist in Berlin. She is from Venezuela and had been living in Berlin for almost a decade. Her husband Helmut was 42 years old, originally from Cologne. He was a school teacher and worked in Frankfurt. He had a small apartment in Frankfurt where he lived during the week. Weekends he visited Anna in Berlin. Helmut and Anna were married for five years when I met them and had been undergoing infertility treatments for almost three years. Anna was diagnosed medically fit to have children. Helmut’s sperm tests indicated low sperm count and the doctors had clarified that this was the primary reason for difficulties in conception. Helmut laughed when he mentioned the diagnosis to me, looking away and then straight at me, his face at first nervously displaying mirth, then misery, “I am the *Schwachstelle*” (weak link or ‘problem’).

Helmut is tall, more than six feet, thin, and balding on the top of the head and has trimmed sideburns. He wears round-framed glasses. From the time I met Helmut, I found him odd. He seemed tortured or perhaps depressive. Yet he liked to talk. His mood shifts were reflected within a very small range of voice modulations, almost as though he had a heavy tongue, which made it difficult for him to speak fluidly, raise or lower his tone, or mold emotion into sounds he produced. Every word seemed to fall hard and heavy in his mouth, and I had to take the effort to pick up each one of the words so as to assimilate them. It was very strenuous to listen to him. His eyes betrayed his emotions better than his voice.

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<sup>170</sup> Translated as: I am the weak link OR I am the problem, indicating that he is the one diagnosed infertile.

Over time I became not just used to Helmut's voice modulations, but understood perhaps some part of that heaviness that at first I could not comprehend. His own strained relationship to his parents and his inability thus far to become a parent confused and pained him deeply.

I was born in 1971 and my father in 1941. We come from West Germany. I grew up in a typical family, which is not so typical now because almost 50% of families today are not together; people divorce very easily. We are a total of three brothers. The oldest one is five years older than I, and the youngest two years junior to me. My older brother is an engineer, has a wife who is a nurse and an 8-year-old son. My younger brother was a music teacher and married to a woman who already had two children from a previous relationship.

Helmut spoke without pause and Anna had to interject and remind him that he was using the past tense to talk about his younger brother! There was a few minutes silence in the room as I waited. Suddenly, Helmut laughed and continued, "well my younger brother is still around, but five years ago my older brother died. He had cancer. But we can't forget him. He is still around you know." Then he mumbled something inaudible and Anna interrupted the conversation again, letting out an exasperated sigh,

Well its the parents who cannot forget. Helmut's mother for instance never says Helmut's name when calling out to him. When we are together at their place and let's say she wants Helmut to fetch her something from the other room, she will first take her husband's name, then correct herself, then take the name of the dead son, then the younger son and then finally correct herself again and say – oh Helmut can you get me a glass of water!

Helmut giggled and continued,

Well I was the least loved in the family. I was born with a defect in the kidneys and doctors operated on me at birth. I was separated from my family for the initial months and my mother could never breast-feed me because of this. My older brother was my parent's favorite and now that he is not there, my younger brother has taken his place. For my father achievement, accomplishment is the most important thing and perhaps I being a schoolteacher am not good enough. A couple of years ago, I confronted my parents asking them why they never prioritized me. They laughed it off, refusing to address my pain! Now we visit

them during holidays and because both Anna and I are very attached to our nephew.

***Treatment: Significantly Insignificant Sperm***

I was at Helmut and Anna's for coffee one evening when we started talking about their experiences of treatment at the IC. Previous attempts in Venezuela and at another clinic in Berlin had left them feeling cheated. They felt that these other clinics were only in the business of making money and kept suggesting additional (and unnecessary) genetic testing to the couple. Helmut liked the treatment approach at the current clinic,

It is holistic. They were not just treating the body. The doctor even spoke in Spanish. And there are counseling services offered too. It is a total package, not just the medical aspect of it; it is not just pure, subject related advice. They think about how we might feel. So when I am not here, I know that my wife has people she can speak with.

Anna actually found the atmosphere at the clinic quite sterile, but she knew that the doctors were competent and that's what kept her there. She did not care much for the other services that the clinic offered and preferred to seek out alternative therapies (like acupuncture, meditation, massages) to counter the side effects of treatment. Helmut on the other hand often emphasized this idea of holistic treatment for infertility. While Helmut has been diagnosed with low sperm count and motility, he is painfully aware of the fact that Anna is the one who has to bear the burden of treatment. "It's her body that suffers. I just provide the sperm." Saying that often, Helmut would oscillate between diminishing not just the corporeal role he played in conception, but also its centrality. He sought for other connections that made it possible for him to be an equal partner. To be together with (*zu-sammen mit*) Anna all along this journey to becoming parents.

By 2013, Helmut and Anna had had six trials of IVF without success. Anna recalled the side effects of the hormonal treatment. "My mood swings are terrible."

Helmut did not let her finish, “Yes and I don’t recognize her then. I have to gather all the possible patience and understanding that I have. I feel like I have taken off a burden from her because I am the problem. My body is the problem...” Helmut stopped talking for a bit and then sunk into his chair. Anna brought us some more coffee. Barely audible, Helmut started to speak, “Being together would also help logistically, not just emotionally.” Then he raised his head and looked at me, so I could hear him better, “for instance this nonsense we had to face with our health insurance. I am the cause,” he ended emphatically. Then lifting his hand, he pointed with a finger making stabbing motions in the air down toward his legs, indicating to me that the sperm is not strong enough to fertilize the egg, “they need to travel and penetrate the egg,” he laughed. “Since all medical treatment is on the woman’s body, my health insurance at first refused to pay, but the clinic helped sort it out.”

Anna has state health , while Helmut has private insurance. At first his insurer refused to pay for treatment because even though Helmut declared his medical diagnosis of infertility, the insurance company wanted proof in terms of bills, medications that Helmut was prescribed, or treatments that he might undergo (regular check ups, tests, other procedures) in order to cover the costs. Since all infertility treatment was actually directed at Anna (hormonal injections, extraction of mature egg cells and implantation of embryos as well as anesthesia, blood tests and other invasive procedures), according to his insurance company Helmut was not the patient in spite of his diagnosis. While the state insurance covers 50% of costs for three cycles of treatment, Helmut’s private insurance covered almost 75% costs for more than three cycles and hence the couple wanted to set the record straight about who was medically infertile. “The male cells must



operate within the female body, so (officially) the insurance companies have to choose between treating the cells and treating the site,” one of the IC staff told me. The accounts department negotiated with the insurance company over several months and submitted additional reports explaining the condition and the treatment protocol before the private insurance agreed to cover the costs. Speaking to the accounts office, I learnt that over time this has become routine procedure and if the doctors make a personal call to the private insurance companies, the latter agrees to cover the costs. It is gradually becoming standard knowledge amongst insurance providers that male diagnosis of infertility may not mean frequent or invasive treatment of the male body, but men are the medically defined ‘patients.’

Although the diagnosis and subsequent treatment renders the male substance and participation insignificant, it is precisely male infertility that brings Helmut into an intimate relation to his *Kinderwunsch*.

I have to go into this room to provide my sperm before every procedure. And there are magazines and films with strange, naked women and I am expected to be a machine and masturbate. It’s such a disconnected feeling. I usually imagine what is going to happen with my sperm. I know it will eventually be given to my wife to make *our* child. And that thought makes it easier for me to masturbate.

The feeling of alienation (*Befremdung*) from the physical aspect of treatment and the perceived difference in Anna’s bodily responses to treatment was very painful for Helmut. Yet he always first declared the diagnosis when talking about his *Kinderwunsch* and explained what that meant to him:

Its not that I feel less of a man (*unmännlich*). It would have been worse if the problem had been *tote Hosen da unten* [literal translation: dead pants or nothing happening down there: impotency]. The doctors found a few young sperm, ones that are fast, doctors can select the good sperm (*aber sie haben ein paar Jungs gefunden, die schnell sind, sie können die guten aussuchen.*”). Also another worst-

case scenario would have been if I had not been the cause or infertility. I mean I think that would have just been terrible for Anna. All the treatments and on top of that the guilt of the diagnosis.

Anna scoffed at Helmut at first when she heard this, but Helmut insisted,

I am not walking around without any idea here. I know, I am in touch with your body too, even if I can't feel it. I understand it in other ways, the pain. It reflects in me (*Es spiegelt in mich wider*)... We suffer together. We *are* together. (*Wir leiden zusammen, wir sind **zu**-sammen*)

Helmut's diagnosis is a declaration: the sperm is insignificant to the process of natural conception, yet the medical diagnosis of his infertility was highly significant to Helmut's experience of childlessness, his ability to feel an intimacy with his wife in their quest for conception, such that he took over the burden and guilt of infertility and provided emotional and other forms of pliability when his body refused to cooperate. Financially too, the diminished role of the sperm proved significant in that it provided the possibility of comparatively cheaper and longer-term treatment using Helmut's private medical insurance. What was even more interesting was how Helmut further sidelined his body—even as he insisted on his equal involvement in the couple's *Kinderwunsch*—by participating, along with Anna in alternate diagnosis and therapy that located the cause of infertility *outside* the body and *within* his kin networks.

### ***Familienaufstellung***

The failure of his body and the helplessness and frustration that he could provide nothing more than sperm while his wife faced all kinds of invasive medical interventions, motivated Helmut to look for alternate explanations to the medical diagnosis. Helmut sought for reasons, other than the results of his spermiogram to understand the couple's childlessness. He believed this was a route to doing more, and participating more definitively, than masturbation for provision of sperm sample in the IC. Helmut started

accompanying Anna to different non-biomedical therapy sessions, imitating her behavior, although not always to achieve similar ends. For Anna a lot of these therapies—including massages, yoga, meditation, change in diet—were a process of detoxification (*Entgiftung*), a way in which she could make her body heal after the hormonal treatments in the clinic. For Helmut, participation in alternate therapies was a journey towards uncovering as a couple personal, social and emotional blockages that prevented conception and thereby gaining more control over his role in reproduction. One of these methods that Helmut and Anna most frequently tried was the *Familienaufstellung*.

*Familienaufstellung* is a group exercise facilitated by an expert. Different people in the group represent different members of the family. The attempt is to understand the desires and frustrations within one's family constellation that might be related to one's infertility. During fieldwork the number of non-medical therapies my interlocutors sought, even as they were seeking medical treatment for infertility, struck me. One of the most popular ones was *Familienaufstellung*. Here is how Helmut described his experience,

There is the person(s) concerned—in this case we with our *Kinderwunsch*—and then there are volunteers who represent various family members or institutions or even things in our environment. We are all in one room and there are other people who get to take on our role – i.e. represent Anna and I. So we get to sort of have an out of body experience by observing all these people. The facilitator doesn't tell anyone what roles they have been assigned; only we as observers know. So the representatives are completely naïve about their identities and the relationship dynamics between the family members they represent. What shocked us is how complete strangers started behaving exactly like our family members – took on their traits. So the man, who had the role of my dead brother, kept saying that he did not feel good in the room and wanted to leave! The nephew (son of my older, deceased brother) was automatically drawn to us and he linked hands with us – not us but the two people who represented us as the childless couple. The kid loves us. Our sister-in-law's role became transparent to us through this exercise. She kept pulling our nephew (i.e. her son) away from us. She is the obstacle; she

does not want us to have a child. She has always been jealous because her son (the nephew) is so fond of us.

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I often have day dreams you know. I see my wife Anna in a rocking chair and she is breast-feeding our baby or rocking it to sleep. I see myself talking to my baby. I think it is good that I am the problem; I mean can you imagine what my wife would have to go through emotionally if on top of the horrible side effects of the hormones, she also had to bear the guilt of the diagnosis? This way I can take on the burden of the biological problem.

Helmut reiterated this as the two of us sat in an overcrowded café close to his home. He told me that lately he had been gripped by deep sadness.

The more I get entangled into it, the treatments, the awareness of my diagnosis, the worse it becomes. When friends or relatives have babies, I feel a pain in my chest. When I see a small baby in a stroller, I feel physical pain and sadness. This is especially true at moments when a recent attempt at the clinic has failed yet again.

Nonetheless, Helmut said that this experience of the *Familienaufstellung* was absolutely fascinating for him and that he was actually relieved because it became clear to him what he had always suspected (his sister-in-law's stance towards them) and he felt that because he could clearly see it now, in a sense the problem was out of the way. Now the only thing left to tackle was the biological aspect of infertility. Helmut had confessed to me in another meeting when Anna was not present that he too is now more open to alternate therapies ("though I have my limits of course!") because he wanted to eliminate other factors that might be hindering their ability to conceive. He was acutely aware of the medical analysis that had determined one, direct cause of infertility: the quality of his sperm. It was this diagnosis that brought him in touch with so many other aspects of his life that were invisible to him. The sperm became redundant in that it was perhaps not the most significant for becoming a father. His participation in conception was possible also

because of what he *felt* and *did*; just like Anna he felt the pain and jealousy when others had children and the need to seek alternate therapies to remedy a biological condition.

In August 2013 when I left Berlin, Anna and Helmut had decided to take a break from the medical treatment. Anna spoke about excruciating pains and health problems that she experienced during her last IVF cycles. She took almost four months to recover from the shock to her mind and body. She seemed very relaxed about her decision to stop for now; Helmut was relaxed but more in a helpless sort of way:

Well what can I really say, I don't have a say here in terms of medical treatment because she is the one who is going through all this. My role is really insignificant, she has to bear with the physical consequences and the emotional aspects that come with the invasive treatment.

#### **Axel**

##### ***Diagnosis and Treatment: Es ist einfach ein Körper!*<sup>171</sup>**

Axel was born in 1969 in West Germany. He is a professional musician and theater artist and currently lives with his wife and four-year-old daughter Ella in Cologne, West Germany. I met him through an infertility counselor in Frankfurt in 2010. The family was acquainted with the counselor during the period when they were attempting to explain to Ella how she was conceived. The counselor in question has written several children's books with appropriate illustrations that help parents who have children in non-normative family structures (homosexual unions as just one example) or using non-normative means (be it egg or sperm donation or adoption or surrogacy) explain forms of reproduction and family constitution to their children.

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<sup>171</sup> Translated as: It is only a body!

For the longest time Axel believed that people who have children have them because they have nothing more meaningful to do with their lives.

As I turned 40, I suddenly panicked. I started thinking about the fact that I might regret not becoming a father, even though I was terrified of the thought of becoming one. I think the whole thing was resolved when I also met my current wife and she made it very clear to me that she wanted a child, in fact more than one. Things moved fast then, since we were not too young any more, we did not waste time in trying the conventional way first and waiting to see what happens, instead went straight to the doctor to get tested. My wife was perfectly capable of having biological children. What I wasn't prepared to hear was that I wasn't. I was given the diagnosis of *Azoospermia*. It was extremely difficult at first. Women are more connected to their bodies you know. They can feel internally the workings of their body – pains, bloating, menstruation, hormonal treatment, injections, mood swings... Men stand by and watch, helplessly. But, suddenly my body was in focus. In the consultation room I was now part of the treatment plan!

The pair acted fast. At first Axel tried a course of Zinc tablets, which are sometimes known to increase the quality of the sperm, but pretty soon it was clear this was not the way to go.

We then proceeded to do the TESE and used the extracted sperm for an IVF procedure. This we did two times without success. I have to say if the first shock was the diagnosis, the second difficult moment was the TESE. Not because it's a complicated procedure but the thought of having a doctor remove testicular tissue to look for possible sperm cell...well it felt like an invasion of my privacy and to have the doctor examine your reproductive organs. Well men are not used to that. It took me an effort to go ahead with it, but I did, I wanted to; it was the part I was to play.

After one IVF procedure following the TESE, Axel and his wife took a break for a few months and then tried a second time. All treatment was done in Prague, because of the more relaxed regulations surrounding pre-implantation diagnosis. This meant that in Prague they could increase chances of pregnancy by testing embryos for quality before implantation in the uterus. For the second procedure, the couple asked the clinic to use donor sperm in addition to Axel's.

I got a call from the doctor. I had come back to Germany from Prague. He told me that the embryos fertilized by the donor sperm had developed perfectly and those using my sperm had not. I heard the news and called my wife. She asked me what we should do. I knew what she wanted (to go ahead with the procedure). I must have paused on the phone for exactly thirty seconds and then I said, lets use the donor embryos.

At the time of my research Axel's daughter Ella was four. Her *Kindergarten* teachers and the parents of her friends know about the infertility treatment, just as Ella does. She once suggested to Axel that instead of getting married she could live with her best friend Helene all her life and use a donor to have a child! Axel firmly believes that he must talk openly about sperm donation with family and friends in order to not make the whole thing seem so extraordinary, "it (sperm/egg donation) must come out of this taboo zone." For Axel the genetic material plays a small part in his experience of being a father,

You know the body, the flesh and blood that is just one part of it after all. I don't think that my daughter would be any better or worse if she had my genetic material. She is who she is. The body is just that – only a body (*es ist einfach ein Körper*). Besides, I look at it this way, my wife and I live together, we love each other and sleep with each other. So biologically we already started the process of conception, so what does it matter where the sperm comes from? My wife carried and delivered the child and I am the person my daughter knows as her father.

### ***Being a Father (like a Mother)***

As a father I did everything that the mother would do...I mean to really *be* the father. I discover my father in myself when I am dealing with Ella. I know what she likes, what she doesn't, I encourage activities that she enjoys and is good at. I give up things for her. It's part of being a father. If physically the treatment was focused on my wife including of course the burden of pregnancy and delivery, then nurturing Ella has become a physical experience for me too, not just in terms of lack of sleep, or the sheer exhaustion, but its funny how I had physical pain (with no real physiological cause) in my chest when Ella was an infant. I used to take care of her, spend so much time with her, that often I neglected my music practice. Not playing the cello, instead caring for my baby girl was giving me chest pains!

Axel spoke less about the TESE and more about playing the role of the father. That is what he was closer to for the last four years of his daughter's life. Substituting the treatment and labor process that his wife went through with the labor of love that he characterized as physically painful, Axel established and legitimized his connection with his daughter. In the absence of a genetic relationship, the father-child bond found a material manifestation in Axel's chest pains, imitating the physical pain his wife went through during the treatment process and at the time of delivery.

Also for Axel, the sperm *is* redundant, not just medically, but also in its meaning for his ability to be a father. As a unit, Axel and his wife thought about, imagined and desired this family. The wish breathes life into the idea of the child, conception then being only one part of a larger process that shapes and defines the father-child relationship. Axel clearly did not imagine that the parent-child relationship is determined at the point of conception; for him in any case becoming a father was a process that because of the medical treatment was broken down into various parts. Thus becoming parents happened in stages, over time, through different forms of assistance and with the help of different parties who shared in the making of babies. Finally, the end product, a living infant outside the womb, is legally the child of the individual or couple who sought and paid for treatment, not just with money but also with their time, emotional energy and physical investments. The labor started with the desire for the child, moving into the treatment process, continued into conception and delivery and through the process of living as a father.

## **Conclusions**



***Couvade: Declaring and Seeking Intimacy to Kinderwunsch and Achieving Paternity*<sup>172</sup>**

Derived from the French word *couver* meaning ‘to hatch’ or “to sit, i.e. on eggs” (Reik 1931[1919]:27), couvade refers to ritual behavior usually undertaken by the expectant father around the birth of a child. The *Dictionary of Anthropology* defines it as, “The imitation by the father of many of the concomitants of childbirth, around the time of his wife’s parturition; it is also called men’s childbed. The father may retire to bed, go into seclusion, and observe some taboos and restrictions in order to help the child.” (Munroe, et al. 1973:30) In Europe it is traced back to the Basque region (along the border between Spain and France) where the husband of the woman takes to bed (as though he had delivered the child) and is attended by the women in the household (Kimmel and Aronson 2004). In South America, South-East Asia, Melanesia and Africa these ritual practices include taboos related to regular male activities such as hunting, using the axe or any heavy tool, travel and socializing with other men and/or diet restrictions.

In anthropology the term was first used by E.B. Tylor (1878) who observed how across a variety of societies in South East Asia, Europe and South America, men deviated from their normal activities, before, at the time of, or after the birth of their child. Drawing on Bachofen’s (1861) thesis, Tylor concluded that the couvade represented a transition from matrilineal to patrilineal society. Thus the ritual was a manner of confirming and establishing paternal authority and cemented the social relation between father and child. “In other words, it is a piece of symbolism whereby the father asserts his paternity, and accordingly his rights as a father, as against the maternal system of descent

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<sup>172</sup> For a detailed discussion on various anthropological interpretations of the couvade, see appendix 1.

and inheritance.” (Crawley 1902:420) Magico-religious interpretations of couvade (Crawley 1902, Karsten 1931, Roth 1893), argue for a material connection between father and child; this means that the two bodies and spirits are affected by each other sympathetically. Hence what the father does, eats, refrains from eating or doing affects the child positively or negatively. Psychoanalytic explanations interpret couvade practices as an expression of womb envy that is, male envy of female reproductive capacity and explain ritual couvade as a process of resolving ambivalence in becoming an adult male. Thus maternal couvade—one of the practices being imitating labor pains of female partner—can be seen as the projection of male desire to reproduce (Bettelheim 1962, Dundes 1987, Reik 1931[1919], Roheim 1955). Finally, couvade has been analyzed not as an isolated practice of achieving paternity or expressing only the father child relationship, but as a practice that is part of a larger whole of meaning system. Thus it is not just the father, but also other kin members who may be involved in certain ritual restrictions or practices that ensure the social reproduction of a spiritual being. Such practices are then linked to a larger system of ideas about social continuity and sharing of substance, not restricted to the nuclear family (Broude 1988, Menget 1982, Rival 1998, Riviere 1974).

Drawing on these interpretations of the couvade, I argue that for my male interlocutors the diagnosis of infertility, facilitated the process of seeking intimacy to their reproductive desires and roles, through material and emotional investments that imitated their female partner’s *Kinderwunsch* and treatment seeking practices. In the context of a “minimalism of paternity” and male marginality in reproductive medicine and infertility treatment, I interpret these imitative practices of reversals, duplications and

identifications as men's attempts to be salient to reproduction and achieve paternity through investments beyond the provision of biological substance.

What surprised me during fieldwork was how unprepared I had been to encounter that which I had already accounted for theoretically: men's wish to have children and their pain of being childless. The verbalization of Helmut's desire for instance, his narrations about treatment and his responses to the presence of other children, were more in tune with what I often categorized as my female interlocutors' words and experience. It was almost like he was a female interlocutor, in the manner in which he spoke about his body and living without children. I certainly argue against a *distinct* or *exclusive* male and/or female experience of infertility. Indeed, men and women share certain common experiences while seeking medical or alternate treatments for infertility or adopting children or living without any; yet this "quest for conception" is gendered (see Tjornhoj-Thomsen 2009). How and why it is gendered, in what particular ways, and when specifically, is it elaborated as such, i.e. under what circumstances do gendered experiences become relevant, becomes crucial to investigate.

My ethnographic data points to some general differences between male and female experiences of seeking infertility treatment at the IC where I did fieldwork for a year: 1) Men in general did not verbalize or speak about how they felt, instead about what they *did* to achieve their reproductive goal; they pointed out that talking about infertility was futile because that would force them to think about being childless 2) Not verbalizing also meant a general tendency to not share in a group. Most of the infertility self help group members were female (the groups I attended and others I inquired about) 3) Women were the drivers, the researchers, the instigators of all forms of treatment; men

generally followed and tried to be supportive of the course of treatment that their partners chose 4) Alongside infertility treatments, women invariably sought alternative therapies (acupuncture, massages, diet, *Familienaufstellung* being the most common ones), and 5) Women visited the clinic more often than men. This came to be primarily because as initiators women took it upon themselves to do all the groundwork before involving their partners. Also most medical treatment is female centered and required more time of the woman.

Interestingly, I observed that some of the men I spoke with (as Mark, Helmut and Axel's stories show) displayed a lot of these 'feminine' practices: they spoke about their body, expressed their opinions about treatment, took active part in group meetings or spoke at length about their situation, and were also open to alternate forms of treatment. While Mark treated his body—and ultimately his sperm—to become a father, Axel substituted the role of his sperm and his wife's reproductive labor through his own emotional and physical labor of fatherhood. Helmut on the other hand provided his reproductive substance in the form of owning the diagnosis, carrying the associated guilt and feeling and speaking *like his wife* about wanting children and the pain of childlessness.

Following this, I want to suggest that the diagnosis of male infertility has a relation to these imitative practices that men engaged in either actively or unconsciously. The diagnosis names something about, and in the man, which in a manner shifts his status from "marginal to treatment" to "central to the problem." Whether themselves involved in invasive procedures or not, male interlocutors diagnosed with infertility sought ways and means to own their desire for parenthood, quest for conception, and experience of

fatherhood by performing a typically “feminine” experience of medical infertility and childlessness. I am not suggesting that these imitative practices were all inclusive of what men in the clinic in Berlin expressed or spoke about. Nor am I suggesting that those men I met who were not diagnosed as infertile had no experiences similar to the three stories I present here. And finally, I absolutely do not argue that men felt the same as women. What I do want to emphasize is that the diagnosis itself is powerful in illuminating male marginality in a reproductive clinic, and I interpret the imitative performance of men as a projection of the desire to be salient to reproduction and to ultimately achieving paternity.<sup>173</sup> Hence the diagnosis is not prior to nor the cause of these imitative behaviors; rather, its declaration interacts with other elements in the biographical and institutional context to produce effects that speak to men’s marginality and serve as a means to legitimizing their role in reproduction. Some of these contextual factors include 1) availability of specific treatment procedures (for instance Mark and Axel’s experience with TESE produced different embodied experience of male reproductive participation), 2) willingness to continue medical treatment, seek alternate therapies, or imagine non-normative fatherhood (for instance Axel’s willingness to use donor sperm and his relationship of care with his daughter), and 3) economic, physical and psychological resources at ones disposal (for instance, Helmut’s relationship with his parents and extended kin played a role in the significance of *Familienaufstellung* for understanding his experience of childlessness).

In my field site, male diagnosis of infertility presented a route to expressing and establishing male desire to be fathers and men’s intimacy to childlessness, and described

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<sup>173</sup> On male reproductive marginality, see Birenbaum-Carmeli 2009, Inhorn, et al. 2009.

processes of achieving paternity before, during, and after conception and/or birth. My data thus illustrates a kinning that men practice in the context of infertility diagnosis and technological interventions in reproduction. This chapter highlights the shifting landscape of how kinship is imagined in an Euro-American context in the age of biotechnology. Specifically, it focuses on men's attempt at being salient to reproduction through identification with, and mirroring of "feminine" physical and emotional experiences of infertility.

### ***Visibility***

By invoking couvade to interpret the experiences of male diagnosis of infertility, I examine how certain aspects of ritual couvade reflect in the embodied and narrative experiences of men diagnosed with infertility. There is a comparable conceptual pattern, illustrated in the literature on couvade and my ethnographic data, which points to a projection of the desire among men to be salient to reproduction. Such an analytical framing allows for the explication of gendered relations to reproduction that depart from the established relation between infertility and masculinity. Finally, when juxtaposed with the shifting image of the father in Germany,<sup>174</sup> I argue how the peripheral male presence in the clinic becomes increasingly central through the diagnosis of male infertility. As my data shows, the practices following diagnosis create a space for a subsequent processes of imitation, identification and intimacy to an experience of reproduction that allows for my interlocutors to make their quest for fatherhood *visible*. This embodied experience—which in turn is verbalized when men have their reproductive organs examined, undergo invasive procedures, feel physical discomfort and

become patients *central* to treatment protocol—is indeed not a normative male experience.

Commenting on the feminist critiques of the ultrasound and the manner in which English kinship went through a process of making itself explicit (visible and real), Strathern elucidates what form the relationships between parent and children take on in an era of reproductive technologies (1992:49-53). The ultrasound today is a necessary and ubiquitous part of regular check ups during pregnancy. It makes it possible to “see” the child, as a body, as an individual: the idea of the new living being became visible in the ultrasound image of the fetus. Reproductive technologies have not only been critiqued by feminist scholars to comment on how they objectify the female body, but how, in making the baby visible, they make the mother invisible or an appendage to the fetus.<sup>175</sup> The next question is, where is the father in all this? Strathern writes that it is a fact of English kinship that you don’t “see” paternity as you can maternity (also see Lewis 1986, Lewis and O’Brien 1987, Rowland 1987):

It is not just that the role that the father plays in conception and childbirth is thought to put men at a remove from paternal feelings, but it is held, the father’s genetic tie must be a matter of inference. The father is naturally invisible. Paternity thus has to be symbolically or socially constructed (a picture made of it) in the way, it is held, that maternity is not. The necessity is supposed to be a primeval source of men’s alleged greater interest in social life. Whole theories of social evolution were once built on the supposition that in primitive society, so-called, children would not know who their fathers were, and that civilization has been a long process of making paternity explicit. (Strathern 1992:51-52)

For my male interlocutors the question of their visibility was critical to their experience of childlessness, their relation with the medical world and their interactions

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<sup>174</sup> See chapter four.

<sup>175</sup> This is clearly a pro-life strategy to prevent abortion by forcing the mother to ‘see’ the child before its

within a partnership. Thus, participation in treatment was more a need to be part of the process of conception, i.e. to be the legitimate father (whether or not that meant being the biological father). Ironically, the absence of maternity (inability to see their wives pregnant) made the paternity (or lack thereof) for my male interlocutors visible. Mark and Axel both participated in medical procedures that brought their body into focus. Helmut focused on immaterial elements in his family life that served as impediments to conception. The processual nature of conception, involving various bodily and non-material substances, is highlighted in becoming fathers. In all stories the substance of paternity was not the sperm but the embodied, discursive and emotional *Zusammensein* (togetherness) that made babies over a long period of time.

### ***Kinning Practices***

In the Euro-American context, kinship has been reduced to a biological connection; the biological basis for maternity and paternity have been proven, established and generally accepted without resistance. Guyer (2000:83) refers to this form of recognition of father-child relationship as the minimalism of paternity through the discovery of genetics. For my male interlocutors, medically diagnosed as infertile, in the event of “failure” of their biological substance, it became all the more necessary to make biology secondary to their ability to father. Desire to have children, sexual intercourse with a partner who they loved or were married to, and with whom they as a couple felt the desire to become parents, are as significant in making the baby as the sperm and egg.

Thus in case of the infertile men who find themselves in a medical space with a diagnosis that says biology has failed them, the extension of one’s bodies and emotions in

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birth and arouse some emotions vis-à-vis the fetus.



ways that don't prioritize the provision of organic substance become central to establishing fatherhood. This involves a range of medical interventions which men are a part of, verbalizations of the process of becoming father that extend on either side of procreation: i.e. before the actual reproductive intervention (when the couple desires and wants to have a child together) as well as through it (being through treatment together, contributing male resources to supporting common goals) and beyond (providing care after the child is there or in case of continued childlessness).

To be a father means to extend beyond biology, to disregard the role of the sperm and cultivate the personal and social relationship between self and child through practices of engagement and care. Paternity is thus partible (see Beckerman and Valentine 2002, Shapiro 2009), in that multiple acts (of sexual and other forms of intercourse) are essential to make a baby and establish kinship. Conception is not a single act of fertilization of an egg by a single sperm and fatherhood is not achieved through a single act of intercourse but through multiple acts of care.<sup>176</sup>

Usually infertility treatment itself separates men from this idea of partnership or togetherness, since treatment is primarily focused on the female body. Often I heard doctors tell me how women have “more” of a *Kinderwunsch*. With their diagnosis, men experience what in majority of cases is a woman's “prerogative.” By feeling it on *his* body, or by articulating it as *his* problem (I am the *Verursacher*) and owning the diagnosis, the man in this case is able to carry a part of responsibility that would otherwise not fall on him. This opens up the possibility for being unusually intimate to an

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<sup>176</sup> Also see ‘active fatherhood’ in chapter four.

experience of conception, treatment, having a baby, and feeling the bond of partnership. Achievement of paternity relied on creative formulations of father-child bond and relationship, and not necessarily on “repairing” the medical condition of male infertility to attain genetic kinship. This work on male infertility then departs from previous studies that have focused on male shame and stigma and their relation to male infertility, i.e. studies that show the often undifferentiated connection between (dominant forms of) masculinity, biological sex and reproduction.<sup>177</sup> Instead, I discuss how for some German men diagnosed as medically infertile, masculinity is a secondary concern; I do not claim that biological reproduction is distinct from these men’s ideas about personal and/or socially hegemonic masculinity. However, in the infertility clinic, paradoxically, this connection is suspended in favor of another one: male medical infertility provides possibilities to achieving a form of engaged and involved fatherhood not dependent on genetic or blood relations.

Finally, I argue that in the infertility clinic where men have marginal visibility, the diagnosis of male infertility and the treatment ritual become a way in which men bargain for their position as partners, as potential fathers, as participants in the process of creating life. The imitative practices index the desire to be salient to reproduction, and commitment to partnership and paternity (regardless of genetic relation), confirm and establish male *Kinderwunsch*, and serve as a route to sharing in the burden of childlessness—more importantly—the possible power of creation. These male interlocutors in a particular Berlin infertility clinic announced “publicly” through couvade-like practices, the identity of the (potential) father. The interpretation of my data

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<sup>177</sup> On conflation of male infertility and impotency see Inhorn et al. 2009.

through the lens of ritual couvade thus provide us a unique insight into analyzing male marginality and exclusions within the larger context of demographic 'crisis,' shifts in conceptualizations of German masculinities, and gendered experiences of infertility diagnosis and treatments.

## APPENDIX 1

### Couvade

Derived from the French word *couver* meaning ‘to hatch’ or “to sit, i.e. on eggs” (Reik 1931[1919]:27), couvade refers to ritual behavior usually undertaken by the expectant father around the birth of a child. The *Dictionary of Anthropology* defines it as, “The imitation by the father of many of the concomitants of childbirth, around the time of his wife’s parturition; it is also called men’s childbed. The father may retire to bed, go into seclusion, and observe some taboos and restrictions in order to help the child.” (Munroe, et al. 1973:30) In Europe it is traced back to the Basque region (along the border between Spain and France) where the husband of the woman takes to bed (as though he had delivered the child) and is attended by the women in the household. (Kimmel and Aronson 2004) Spread over South America, South-East Asia, Melanesia and Africa these ritual practices in their more common form include taboos related to regular male activities such as hunting, using the axe or any heavy tool, travel and socializing with other men and/or diet restrictions.

In anthropology the term was first used by E.B. Tylor (1978) who observed how across a variety of societies in South East Asia, Europe and South America, men deviated from their normal activities, before, at the time of or after the birth of their child. Drawing on Bachofen’s (1861) thesis, Tylor concluded that the couvade represented a transition from matrilineal to patrilineal society. Thus the ritual was a manner of confirming and establishing paternal authority and cemented the social relation between father and child. “In other words, it is a piece of symbolism whereby the father asserts his paternity, and accordingly his rights as a father, as against the maternal system of descent and inheritance.” (Crawley 1902:420) Tylor also interpreted the couvade as a form of

magico-religious practice, such that the behavior of the father positively and/or negatively affects the well being of the child sympathetically and must hence be restricted during the most vulnerable time before, during and shortly after birth. While Tylor himself abandoned the latter theory in favor of the former, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Crawley (1902), Frazer (1980[1890]), Karsten (1931) and Roth (1893) have further advanced this Tylorian interpretation.

### **Anthropology and Interpretations of Couvade**

#### ***Magico-Religious Theory***

Extracting from secondary data out of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia on the custom of couvade, Henry Ling Roth (1893) summarizes the different meanings of the custom in the various societies across the globe. The author writes that couvade refers to the several customs, prescriptions, taboos, restrictions and guidelines on how to behave, what to do, what to eat and what to avoid (for a man) whose wife is pregnant or has given birth. Roth argues that these practices are not just a matter of practicality that serve certain functions (as Malinowski suggests of Melanesia), rather have a meaning and signify the deep connection between father and child. This connection implies that what the father does or does not do around the child and his/her birth determines the future prospects of the child – its health, its physical attributes, its personality. The father is responsible for fending off the bad spirits that would otherwise attack the child or make the child vulnerable to attack. Finally, Roth circles back to E.B. Tylor's (1878) support of Bachofen's (1861) treatise that explains couvade as referencing "the turning-point of society when the tie of parentage, till then recognized in maternity, was extended to take in paternity; this being done by the fiction of representing the father as the second mother." (Roth 1893:226) Yet, he does not support this explanation of Tylor, writing that

in many matrilineal tribes such as the *Arawaks* in British Guiana who show no signs of transitioning to patrilineage couvade practice is common. On the other hand, among many tribes in Australia who are in the process of transitioning from matrilineal to patrilineal societies one does not find evidence of the couvade. Thus Roth reiterates the second theory proposed by Tylor that the father is connected to the child not only through social parentage, kinship, customs, affection and duty but materially. Father-child bodies are sympathetically affected by each other i.e. there is a physical bond hence what the father eats and does can directly affect the well being of his child.

The magico-religious interpretations of the couvade have received much attention and credibility. Crawley (1902) writes that couvade is a form of sympathetic magic that involves substitution and exchange of identity. “Things and persons that have been or are in contact of any sort, or between whom there is any tie of contact or connection, retain the connection in a material form, and either party can thereby sympathetically influence the other.” (Crawley 1902:422) The classic couvade where the man takes to bed and pretends to be the mother is a way of warding off the evil spirits, confusing them into thinking that the father is the mother. The father performs his duty and fends off danger directed at mother and child – at birth – a time when they are most vulnerable. Crawley emphasizes that couvade is more than a ritual that helps prepare a man to transition into fatherhood as Malinowski proposed in his functionalist reading of the practice in Melanesia.

R. Karsten who did extensive work among tribes in South America and wrote about the custom of couvade too disagrees with what Bachofen and Tylor propose – that this custom denotes a “... ‘turning-point’ in the history of society when early mother-

right, was changed into father-right, or regarding it only as an “arbitrary” invention of the women etc.” (Karsten 1931:193) Further, Karsten defines this mysterious custom to be based on the belief that everything that happens to the father also happens to the infant, i.e. their bodies and spirits are one, thus emphasizing the importance of examining beliefs around conception to understand *couvade*. For instance, the *Bakairi* in central Brazil and the *Acawoio Indians* in Guiana speak of the sympathetic relation between father and child; they are considered to be of one body and soul. The *Bakairi* for instance consider the newborn child (irrespective of its sex) to be the little father. Being of the same body, there are instances when the father is known to have taken medicine that was meant for his child, believing that by ingesting it, it would cure his child.

### ***Psychoanalytic Interpretations***

Psychoanalytic theories by Bettelheim (1962), Reik (1931[1919]) and Roheim (1955) explain these ritual practices in various ways – as a reversal of Freud’s Oedipus complex, as womb envy or “...a magic ritual directed against one’s own aggressions.” (Roheim 1955:61) These can also be interpreted in terms of ambivalence of gender relations, cross-gender identification or “fear of retaliation” (Reik 1931[1919]:27) In a manner there is a denial of fatherhood, because for one it is dangerous to be a father and the father can be dangerous. Here the ambivalence of hatred, envy and guilt and love toward the mother and the child is transformed into rituals, which are like an undoing or denial of these feelings towards the offspring (also see Munroe, et al. 1973).<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> The authors hypothesize that *couvade* (as a form of projection of the desire to be salient and to participate) will be more frequent and present in a more intense form in societies where infants and mothers sleep together (same bed or same room) and fathers sleep separately and in matrilocal societies (with the infant-mother sleeping practices). A sample of 70 such societies was drawn from George Murdock’s Ethnographic Atlas (1962-1966) making sure that no two societies spoke languages that belonged to the

David Schneider (1955) reviews Bruno Bettelheim's book and explains his central thesis. Based on extensive data on initiation and circumcision rites in primitive societies, Bettelheim reverses Freud's idea of the penis envy and interprets *couvade* as a form of male envy of female reproductive capacity and function. Contrary to the psychoanalytic theory of the primal horde, where the older and stronger male controls the younger ones by blocking access to females in the group thereby also preventing mother-son incest, Bettelheim writes that these rites are in fact a way to resolve some of the ambivalences of becoming adult, becoming male and to transition into the adult role of his sex as determined by the social group. Thus, according to Bettelheim circumcision is not symbolic of male castration and he refuses to accept that at any point in its occurrence could the *couvade* be understood as symbolic castration. This is where Schneider while commending Bettelheim's thesis, also departs from him, disagreeing with the universal interpretation of the *couvade* that Bettelheim proposes.

Reik (1931[1919]) combines Frazer's idea of imitative and sympathetic magic to describe 'maternal' and 'dietary' forms of *couvade*, applying Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus complex (Freud 1938[1955]) to explain the range of physically painful practices, often severely restrictive taboos on food and other activities among men and fathers in primitive societies across south India, Caribbean, south America and Europe. The practice of maternal *couvade* (these divisions were proposed by Frazer but are not to be seen as exclusive categories) where the husband takes to bed and/or dresses like the

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same subfamily. Results showed a highly significant association (70%) between infant-mother sleeping patterns in matrilocal societies and frequency and intensity of *couvade*. The authors conclude that the *couvade* helps to express cross-sex identity in societies where there is low male salience (i.e. the sex roles were not so clear cut and well defined). So the authors agree to some extent with the interpretation put forth by Bettelheim even as they disagree with it being a universal principle explaining the *couvade* as



woman imitating her labor pains, follows the logic of imitative magic, that allows for the action/practice to produce the effect of that very practice.<sup>179</sup> Performing labor pains would in effect produce the feeling of physical pain for men and in turn facilitate identification with the wife in labor. Amongst the *Erukala-Vandhu* of Southern India for instance, as soon as the woman feels the birth pangs, she informs her husband, who then dresses in her clothes, puts a *bindi* (vermilion dot) on his forehead and takes to bed in a dark room.<sup>180</sup> At times these rituals also involve painful treatments of the man's body. For instance, amongst the Carib in South America, Reik mentions the hacking of the new father's back with a *agouti* tooth and later the washing of the wounds with pepper water. During this ritual, the man's ability to bear the pain without complaint is directly related to his son's (new born child's) potential courage.

Reik makes a commentary on the nature of ambivalence in any given emotionally intimate relationship such as husband and wife, and following Freud proposes that the husband undergoes dietary restrictions and physical pain to overcompensate for the hostility and resentment he feels towards his wife. Also by pretending to be the wife, or woman in childbirth, he wards off malevolent spirits, which would otherwise harm the wife and child. By confusing such evil spirits and turning their ill effects on to himself, the husband/father protects his wife and child. Reik interprets this as a projection of the

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Bettelheim states.

<sup>179</sup> See Frazer, James 1980 [1890] *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Volume 3. London, New York: Macmillan. Also see Freud, Sigmund 1938 [1995] *Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought*. In *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. D.A.A. Brill, ed. Pp. 833-851. New York: The Modern Library.

<sup>180</sup> See Crawley, 1902, *The Mystic Rose: A Study of Primitive Marriage*. London, New York: Macmillan and CO.

man's hostility towards his nuclear family, on to the harmful spirits. Then by directing that hostility towards himself, he assuages his guilt.

The explanation of the dietary *couvade* (where severe prohibitions prevent the father from eating certain foods) is directly linked to Freud's development of the Oedipus complex in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1938[1955]). The moment that a man becomes a father, the fear of retaliation grips him. This fear is that the son born to him, who could potentially be the reincarnation of the subject's own father would seek revenge for the hostile feelings that the new father had towards his own father. The child born is thus the new father's own father, and his birth brings back the memory of the primal sacrifice (return of the repressed).

In a similar vein, Alan Dundes (1987) uses the story of Genesis in the Bible to argue that *couvade* rituals as well as the *couvade* syndrome (in psychosomatic explanations) can be interpreted as the projection of envy that men feel towards women's creative powers.<sup>181</sup> "Clearly, *couvade* is, at least in part, an attempt to rival or replace the

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<sup>181</sup> According to Genesis, God rested for a day after the first round of creation and then created the woman from the man's rib. The male God creates the female from the man's body. God cursed the woman (to bear children) at the moment that Adam and Eve left paradise. The man's ability to create life was thus short lived. His envy is repressed not made visible except through projections when man tries to prove and treat women in an inferior manner. Thus Dundes tries to explain male-female relationship in terms of male pregnancy envy. In a general interpretation of the *couvade* Dundes refers to the persistent concern or doubts around paternity, which Freud explicates (that men are always in doubt about who the father is, since one cannot see paternity like you can see maternity). Dundes quotes a tale about the Berat in Albania (see Hasluck 1939:20): The women prayed to their mountain god because they found it unfair that they had to bear the pains of childbirth and the responsibility of child-rearing. So they got together and asked their nameless mountain God to divide up this burden. God agreed and when the time came the neighbor had labor pangs. This boon proved to be a greater risk than relief and the women prayed to the God again to reverse the boon, which he did. Hence today women bear both the pain of delivery and often the primary child rearing responsibilities. Levi-Strauss (1962) writes that in practicing *couvade* it is not the mothers role that the father takes upon himself rather regresses to the role of the child because he feels completely cut off from the process of parturition. Levi-Strauss writes that the Penan of Borneo identify with the child and not the mother as they participate in *couvade* rituals in order to protect themselves (by protecting the child through certain prohibitions on their diet and behavior. "The *couvade* can be explained in the same way for it would be a mistake to suppose that a man is taking the place of the woman in labour. The husband and

female role in parturition (and this is true regardless of whether primitive matriarchy preceded primitive paternity!) We might expect to see *couvade* in societies where male creation myths are found.” (Dundes 1987:158) These myths then are projections of the desire to create/reproduce like the females; in fact, this reversal in the Genesis story is striking because it is from the man’s rib that the woman is created.

### ***Couvade as Part of a Whole***

Riviere (1974), Broude (1988), Menget (1982) and Rival (1998) make a distinction between ritual and psychosomatic *couvade* and argue that these customs should not be seen as isolated having only to do with behavior of fathers, rather we must interpret them within the general pattern of magical customs or as a general set of practices related to life cycle transitions.

Riviere (1974) writes that while *couvade* has expressive (legitimacy of father-child relationship, transition from matrilineal to patrilineal societies, womb-envy) and instrumental aspects (functionalist, rite of passage, fortifying the child’s body and soul) this distinction between ritual *couvade* and *couvade* as a psychosomatic complaint (even though the two might be related and occur concomitantly) needs to be maintained conceptually. Additionally, explaining *couvade* as a universal phenomenon with

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wife sometimes have to take the same precautions because they are identified with the child who is subject to great dangers during the first weeks or months of its life. Sometimes, frequently for instance in South America, the husband has to take even greater precautions than his wife because, according to native theories of conception and gestation it is particularly his person, which is identified with that of the child. In neither event does the father play the part of the mother. He plays the part of the child.” (Levi-Strauss 1962:195) Also compare this to how fathers in Gawa (Munn as cited in Strathern 1992a:56-57) paint and decorate their canoes (which all at once represent the mother’s body, the many mothers and many children and the simultaneously) and in doing so establish paternity not only through the mere activity of painting but also externalizing an image of the unborn child and giving it its distinct features which in all cases must resemble the father. So while in Gawa the father’s role in biological conception is non-existent—Gawans believe the mothers blood coagulates inside her body and becomes the child—the physical characteristics of the child are almost always likened to the father’s physical appearance i.e. Gawans believe children look like their fathers. Thus Munn points to the “close connection Gawans make between these canoe-decorating

universal meanings in all primitive societies is one of the main problems of definition as also categorizing it as a rite of passage (which it is not always). The author then proceeds to give us some general features of the couvade. “In the first place it is clear that the couvade, however we chose to define it or look at it, is associated with birth, with the creation of a new member of society. Now the most obvious aspect of birth is the physical relationship between mother and child...However, regardless of how a society represents the parent-child relationship, the important thing is that the new born child is not just a physical object, it is also an animate being. For most societies the individual is composed of body and soul...For birth to be successful, so to speak, there must be a spiritual as well as a physical creation.” (Riviere 1974:430-431) The author interprets the father’s behavior in the couvade not as a way to create the child’s physical being but rather its spiritual being. The most important point that Riviere makes is to understand couvade not “... as something in its own right, but rather as an aspect of something else.” (Riviere 1974:434). He looks at it as man’s way of integrating the dualism of the body and the spirit in that the couvade is a way in which the spiritual (and not the physical) being is created before, at and after birth (for specific periods of time).

Writing about her fieldwork among the *Huaorani* Indians of Amazonian Ecuador and practices of couvade Laura Rival (1998) points to certain gaps in previous interpretations of the practice. She writes that the couvade practices among the *Huaorani* “highlight two important characteristics of Amazonian birth practices. The first one is that childbirth does not constitute a radical break – it is not an event – but, rather, the process by which a new human life is gradually incorporated within the longhouse. The

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activities and the father’s actions in forming a foetus.” (as cited in Strathern 1992a:57)

second characteristic is that childbirth is at once child-centered and parent-focused.

Perinatal restrictions protect the child and create new relationships between, on the one hand, the child, his father and his mother, and, on the other hand, the parents and the housegroup.” (Rival 1998:630-631) Members in the household or housegroup are known to fast for the health of other people in the household. So there is a larger network of kin into which the child is incorporated. The relations between members of the extended family is reflected in the practices of the *couvade*, which itself is the process of making the child a member of the family.<sup>182</sup>

In a similar vein, between 1967-1977 Menget (1982) studied the *Txikao Indians* of the Xingu National Park (Mato Grosso, Brazil) a small group of shifting cultivators speaking the *Carib* language.<sup>183</sup> He too locates the custom of *couvade* within a larger

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<sup>182</sup> Also see Taylor (1950). He observes how among the Island Carib it is believed that at critical turning points during one's life, such as puberty, marriage, birth of a child, war, death, bodies and spirits are vulnerable to external, malevolent forces which affect human bodies through certain mediums. Food or activities of a certain kind may cause an excess of humor, an excess of body heat and thus cause illness or weakness or vulnerability. Thus at such moments members of the family and/or clan communally follow certain diet and other restrictions on daily routine in order to protect each other. So ill effects of these negative forces can be warded off by the participation of group members who affect each other sympathetically. It is within this larger logic that Taylor interprets ritual *couvade*. He writes, "...the 'mystical participation' of the father in the life of his new-born child..." and "...the form, duration, and sanctions for the restrictions tended to be the same when these were undergone for one's own sake alone as when they were imposed, primarily, for that of another. As we have seen, not only the new-born child, but also its father, the sick and the wounded, and in fact all those turning one of life's critical corners, are or were thought to be endangered by a sort of physical exuberance emanating from heated, overfed, sexually or otherwise excited, pregnant, or menstruating bodies, be it their own or those of others associating with them." Taylor (1950:347)

<sup>183</sup> The taboos are generally associated with heavy workload, violent or harmful activities like warfare or hunting and dietary restrictions. Amongst the *Txikao* bathing in the river (which is usually done a couple of times a day) is forbidden for the parents and the associated genitors for up to several months after the birth of the child. It is believed that the child will develop convulsions if this restriction is violated and is harmful for the parent as well (Menget 1982:200). Sexual continence too involves not just mother and father but the other male genitors. The belief is that if the men empty themselves of the semen, which is analogous to mother's milk which nourishes the child, the child will not grow, he/she will not be able to walk. Ingestion of rich food is to be avoided to prevent the baby from falling sick – but this whole logic applies to others too. Adolescents who have sexual relations before full growth has been achieved will waste away and die or a man who comes back from war and eats hot manioc soup will become fat. The principle is to avoid excess of strong substances that can be unassimilable and/or loss of valuable substance (semen) that protects one and preserves energy for growth. "The social circle affected by the *couvade* is

social structure that allows for social and kin networks to propagate and be reinforced rather than looking at *couvade* as belonging to a nuclear unit that determines relations between father-mother-child. The *Txikao Indians* are a matrilineal society and believe that the creative force lies in the semen. Also it is necessary to copulate multiple times not necessarily with the husband, rather have illegitimate relations during pregnancy in order to create the new being. Thus there is always a small group of genitors (the husband being almost always a member of the group) amongst the *Txikao* and thus often it is not just the parents but also other consanguines who might observe *couvade* restrictions and taboos. Father's legitimacy amongst the group comes more from marriage and not so much from paternity. Diet restrictions (during pregnancy and after childbirth) are part of a larger logic or system of beliefs that impose restrictions not just on fathers or mothers, but also for example adolescents (who should eat, what and when because what you eat affects your abilities and your temperament) or other members of the kin group at different periods in the life cycle. Depending on who is sick, different members of the family have to maintain diet restrictions for the sick person's recovery. It is through such practices that the kin relation is expressed and reproduced socially. Thus, Menget concludes that *couvade* is part of a larger system of ideas of social continuity, sharing of substance, not a vertical gradation from parents to children (not restricted to the nuclear family). "The *couvade* no more "marks" the legitimacy than it punishes the illegitimacy of births; it is a way of publically confirming, denying, or creating classificatory relationships, or rearranging the cognatic universe in the idiom of substances." (Menget 1982:205)

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thus distinct from and wider than the nuclear family." (Menget 1982:205)

Broude (1988) draws attention to how the couvade customs are always embedded in a larger context of belief and ritual by drawing on an interesting thesis proposed by Paige and Paige (1973), who analyzed birth related practices of both men and women (to be parents) from a sample of 114 societies (drawn from Murdock and White's Standard Cross Cultural Sample). Their main argument is as follows, "We suggest that the restriction of women during childbirth and the husband's ritual involvement in birth are both strategies for asserting or defending paternity rights. When paternity rights are established by agreements based on property transfers and enforced by organized kin groups, women will be restricted to insure that nothing upsets the agreements. When such agreements cannot be made and enforced, paternity claims will be asserted by the husband's ritual involvement in the birth... We suggest that birth practices represent a special case of bargaining mechanisms in societies without centralized authority." (Paige and Paige 1973:663)

# CONCLUSION



## **AMBIVALENCE, KINSHIP, AND BELONGING**

“Why don’t they like children?”

The lady with the stroller boarded the subway and edged her way into a corner near the door. The subway wasn’t particularly crowded. Fellow passengers observed the mother with the stroller; some continued to read, others looked away, and two grandmothers—one a Berliner, and the other from India—scowled. My mother, who visited me in the summer of 2013 close to the end of my fieldwork, expressed her discomfort, grimaced, and asked in Marathi, my mother tongue, “why don’t they like children?” I challenged her observation, asking her to explain what she saw. She said she couldn’t really give me any concrete examples, perhaps a few, but she sensed a tensing of bodies the minute the lady with the stroller boarded. My mother continued, “and I am not only talking about this. I have been here for a few weeks to confirm this feeling. There is a hesitation, a lot of distance between adults and children. Yes, I know its all relative, but it strikes me.” During her month long stay in Berlin, my mother, who is a child psychologist and runs a successful private practice in India, oscillated between her personal, visceral reactions to this ‘German child-unfriendliness,’ and her professional assessment of cultural differences, asking me and attempting to understand what I, as the ethnographer made of these differences she sensed so definitively.

### **‘Crisis,’ Memory and Reproducing Ambivalence**

Almost at the end of the process of writing this dissertation, I remembered that my mother’s observations were also mirrored in my early field notes. A general acceptance towards expressing aggression towards mothers, or children, or strollers, and an absence of excessive (negative) commentary on fathers, which I have now discussed

and analyzed in my chapters, seems almost ‘natural’ in the context of fieldwork in Berlin and definitely very understandable to me, but it took a while getting used to.

To make strange again that which once was strange but now familiar, i.e. ‘German child unfriendliness,’ is no easy task. My mother’s presence in the city, was a moment when this became possible. I recalled how I had felt both shock and a perverse delight in the way in which my interlocutors, whether the *Wende* generation or those born after the war, spoke about intergenerational relations. There was a certain intellectual enterprise to examining one’s relationship to one’s parents and an emotional working through of the positive and negative transferences, memories, and insights. Precisely this, was a striking cultural oddity: The taboo surrounding the critique of the family in India stands in contrast to the absolute insistence amongst my interlocutors in Berlin to scrutinize all intimate relationships, especially those centered around the biological family.<sup>184</sup> This desire to question and critique one’s parents is part of the German post war legacy of coming to terms with Germany’s national socialist past. Not only is this historically particular to Germany—not just internally, but even internationally, the Nazi state was the face of evil—but also significant to histories of smaller collectives and individuals who challenged institutional power structures, demanded for anti-authoritarian pedagogy, or those who delved into the lives of their parents or

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<sup>184</sup> “The persistence of taboo teaches, however, one thing, namely, that the original pleasure to do the forbidden still continues among taboo races. They therefore assume an *ambivalent attitude* toward their taboo prohibitions; in their unconscious, they would like nothing better than to transgress them but they are also afraid to do it; they are afraid just because they would like to transgress, and the fear is stronger than the pleasure. But for every individual of the race the desire for it is unconscious, just as in the neurotic.” (Freud 1938[1995]:799)

grandparents by reading archival material or talking to peers about the previous generation's role in Hitler's regime or the Stasi.<sup>185</sup>

India has no comparative memory culture; the violent partition of India after Independence has been recorded in academic literature (see Bhutalia 1998, Das 2007) or a few films and documentaries (Pinjar 2003, *The Day India Burned: Partition*, 2007 amongst others) but has not filtered into public consciousness through the various ways in which the fascist or Cold war past was worked through (and continues to be worked through) in Germany, for e.g. memorialization, school curricula, museums or sites for public consumption, popular media, and written record. The most recent anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat is violently denied as being a pogrom, especially by the educated Hindu middle-class; Narendra Modi was exonerated of all charges in the matter of his active role in the Gujarat pogrom as the then Chief Minister. Modi is today the democratically elected Indian Prime Minister.

What then is particular to Germany, is the public discourse, openness, weakening of taboo, and a socialization of generations into critiquing and coming to terms with a dark chapter of the German history. In India, the negativity and tensions surrounding intimate relations are shrouded in silence by and large. Publically critiquing one's parents or admitting to their flaws and mistakes is not very common; as mentioned such critique

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<sup>185</sup> Stasi short for *Staatssicherheitsdienst* refers to the Ministry for State Security or the secret police agency in East Germany. It has been described as one of the most repressive and effective intelligence and state police agencies, whose main task was to spy on the population with the help of citizens turned informants. After reunification, many Stasi officials were prosecuted for their crimes. The Stasi files were protected from destruction by citizens who took over the Stasi building in Erfurt when officials tried to destroy them after the Berlin Wall fell. Access to ones personal Stasi files have been available to citizens after 1992; East Germans can get information on who spied on them and what was recorded about them as part of state intelligence. Now these files are also open to the general public online. I visited the Stasi museum in Lichtenberg, a neighborhood in former East Berlin with my father a retired officer of the Indian military to

is not only not a part of our history, but is culturally tabooed because of the continued value placed on intergenerational dependency, obligation, reciprocity, and duty. I cannot overemphasize what such a difference in the two contexts—one that is home, and the other that I made into a home of sorts—means for the acceptance of a public and private discourse around family, intimacy, emotions, and transfer of memory traces between generations. The relationship between the parent, self, and the future generation is reflected in this ambivalence toward the figure of the child at a time of transformations in regimes of reproduction; a child evokes and stirs both recognition and indeterminacy in positive and negative ways. This is what my interlocutors refer to when they say that children reflect something from the past, but also give you the possibility of making a break from that past.

The “distance between adults and children” that my mother experienced is indeed a particular German *intimacy* to kin, an intimacy that is possible through intellectual engagement with intergenerational relations, as well as in an emotional working through of the conscious and unconscious transferences between parents and children. Not only is the child in this dissertation a *public symbol* of loss, delegitimization, transformations, and hope for the future of Germany, but she also serves as a *psychic substitute* for experiences, memories and imaginations of family, mothers/fathers, gender ideologies, friendships, kinship and belonging. The ambivalence towards the figure of the child reflects Berliners’ emotional and rational struggles—at a moment of personal, social, and demographic crisis—to make whole, i.e. integrate contradictory and shifting meanings of the objects of reproduction.

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take a look at the equipment used for spying during the period of the Cold War.

As my chapters clarify, objects of reproduction refer to the various people and material objects or places that serve as substitutes, or stand in for, or are saturated with my interlocutors past and contemporary personal and collective desires, memories, and real and imagined experiences concerning belonging to, and exclusion from a family, generation, or place. In moments of ‘crisis,’—here the *Wende* generation’s experiences of conspicuous reproduction in contemporary Berlin—my interlocutors make sense of the emergent meanings of reproduction through an emotional confrontation with multiple memories, and a reassessment of contemporary losses and gains. Ambivalence then is internal to the process of reality testing.

Melanie Klein (1987[1940]) writes about how a baby develops normally through the process of formation of internal objects (i.e. through the internalization of real experiences with the external world as well as using fantasy to work up those experiences); based on the external inputs people in the real world (i.e. external objects) provide the baby, she develops an internal image of the world out there. It is through a balance of the good and bad internal and external objects that the child learns to relate socially and make adjustments, compromises, and also deal with frustrations without necessarily losing a positivity or sense of security. This process of development of internal and external objects starts with the relationship to the mother and her breast as the first ever good (when hunger is gratified) and bad (when gratification is denied) object. The child develops destructive impulses towards the love object (which can be taken away at any time) and in its fantasy, destroys it, feels guilt, and then is involved in a process of reparation to reconstruct the destroyed object. Through this back and forth between feeling love, hatred, guilt and then engaging in reparation, the child eventually

develops a separation from the external world, can see and accept others as having both good and bad elements, and grows in confidence that physical absence (of objects of gratification) does not amount to emotional absence. This normal development of a social being corresponds to the child's experiences of gratification and denial; the likelihood being that adjustment and socialization would be successful when the child has received optimal, or good enough care through its infancy and growing years. Thus, depending on life experiences, care and love received or denied, the child is able to form whole objects that encompass and integrate both good and bad elements. As the child matures he/she develops the ability to hold both aspects of these contradictory emotions towards the love object and relate 'normally' to it. Ambivalence or the "...holding of contradictory feeling states in the relationship towards one object" (Hinshelwood 1989:216) is a key element of developing intimate connections or kinship with others through a continuous assessment of good and bad experiences and the balancing of these experiences in the process of reality testing. "...the young child...builds up his relations to external objects, for he gains trust not only from pleasant experiences, but also from the ways in which he overcomes frustrations and unpleasant experiences, nevertheless retaining his good objects (externally and internally)." (Klein 1987[1940]:360-361)

At a time of 'crisis,' my interlocutors, experiencing a palpable shift in regimes of reproduction in the short period between end of Cold War and 25 years hence, confront in the figure of the hypervisible child their intimate relationship memories, emotional attachments, and reproductive ideologies, moralities and 'choices.' These are dramatized and made conspicuous in the changing demographic, political, and cultural environment of a 'child-friendly' Berlin. I argue that ambivalence towards the figure of the child—in

personal and generational narratives—reflects an emotional and rational working through and (re)construction of the multiple and contradictory representations and meanings of biological and cultural reproduction.<sup>186</sup>

### **Theorizing Ambivalence in Kinship: Reproduction as a Form of Inclusion-Exclusion**

“...symbols and idioms of kinship and gender are invariably “about” differentiation and exclusion, as well as commonality and inclusion, and are, more broadly, key components of systems of morality and virtue that encode hierarchically phrased and heavily value-laden difference.” (Peletz 2001:432)

Michael Peletz (2001) traces the historical record in anthropology on kinship and ambivalence since the 1940s. He argues that older work on kinship (including the scholarship of Radcliff Brown, E.E. Evans Pritchard, Meyer Fortes) under theorized ambivalence, even though these scholars recognized and described contradictory set of emotions their interlocutors expressed when speaking about kinfolk. Rivalries, envy, and burden of responsibility are as much a part of being kin as are the rights and privileges that come from holding specific kin positions. Peletz argues that “...in dealing with kinship, early anthropologists’ concerns with structure, function, and homeostatic systems left little room for analytic discussions on *ambivalence as such*.” (Peletz

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<sup>186</sup> Note that Huberman (2012) in *Ambivalent Encounters* makes a similar argument about ambivalence towards children. The author writes about how North American and European tourists to the holy city of Banaras in India, express intense (both negative and positive) emotions toward the children on the river banks who make money by selling wares, souvenirs, little postcards etc. Described variously by these tourists as pests and flies that one can wave away, beggars and brats, cheats, little entrepreneurs, innocent and responsible, unfortunate and poor, and miniature adults or children who have lost their carefree childhood, these children, arouse intense and contradictory emotional responses. Huberman argues how tourists’ conceptions of childhood “...are influenced by a complex conjuncture of social forces and relations,” (Huberman 2012:68) as well as internal, psychological motivations and desires. Tourists created children as a certain kind of subject: someone they expected to be innocent and interested in a friendship with the tourist, not merely in an economically motivated interaction. When these personal desires for recognition are not met, tourists often experienced disappointment, anger and negativity towards the children who do not adhere to the former’s idealized representations of, as well as real experiences with children in India. Huberman writes that tourists often desire and expect a certain naivety in children in Banaras and hope that the latter would be different from ‘European children.’ The author concludes that for her tourist interlocutors, children became “...public symbols of a rapidly changing and uncertain world,

2001:414) He writes that the theoretical explication of ambivalence in intimate relations has deepened in the last three to four decades as feminist scholarship made visible the intersections between anthropology of gender, reproduction and kinship.<sup>187</sup>

Following Peletz (2001), I argue that recognizing ambivalence in emotions with respect to reproduction of our most intimate relations alerts us to forms of both inclusion and exclusion, the moral marking of ‘normal’ (see Dykstra and Hagestad 2007) or rational subjects versus those whose reproductive trajectories are deemed ‘irrational,’ (see Krause 2001), ways in which kinship is created and sustained, and how newer forms

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and what their narratives most forcefully communicated were anxieties regarding social roles, reproduction, and change.” (Huberman 2012:115)

<sup>187</sup> Gender and kinship—meanings, ideologies, practices—are mutually constructed. The fundamental units of gender—male and female—, and that of kinship—the nuclear family, formed via sexual reproduction—were assumed to be natural and universal facts that explained differences between men and women, and kin and non-kin. Until the 1980s, anthropological studies on social organization focused on the explication of kinship as determined through descent or alliance. The former suggested studying lineage by analyzing the mother-child dyad and the authority of the male figure in determining relationships to larger organizational structures (for instance the work of A.R. Radcliff Brown). The latter suggested the exchange of women in marriage between groups as a central principle of alliance and kin building (Levi-Strauss). David Schneider’s (1984) work is considered to be the fault line between ‘old’ and ‘new’ kinship studies. In his *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, Schneider demonstrated that anthropologists though claiming to study kinship as a social phenomenon, had based their understanding of family and organization of rights and obligations in non-Western societies on relations deriving from procreation. Following Schneider, the new kinship studies provide evidence for strategic ways in which family members and institutions use biological as well as cultural tropes to do kinship. Thus the process of naturalizing or becoming kin is not necessarily predicated upon birth into a family. The critique of the biological basis of kinship was already in place after the 1970s as feminist anthropological approaches interrogated biological determinism in explaining reproduction. This scholarship punctured the hegemonic conceptualization of the biological and hence ‘natural’ idea of reproduction; anthropological studies described instead divergent practices, norms, constraints and resources that made up the context of reproductive experiences. The role of multiple actors—local, national and global—discourses and practices, in shaping ideas around gender, parenthood, children, personhood and kinship has drawn attention to the fluid object of reproduction (see Abu-Lughod 1990, Bamberger 1974, Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1982 [1981], Hodgson 1999, Ortner 2006 [1974], Sudarkasa 1987, Yanagisako 1979). While intercourse, pregnancy and parturition are part of human reproduction, people participate in “...a wide range of activities... that contribute to the birth of viable babies and to their development into adults (Yanagisako and Collier 1987:31). Thus, it is crucial to consider the various meanings of genes, blood, intercourse, love, mothering, fathering, and how these relate to each other, rather than assume a universal relation between biological reproduction, kinship, and gender hierarchies. In a similar vein, this research has analyzed how regimes—systems, ideologies, practices—of reproduction relate to demographic discourses, family policies, migration and spatial reorganization, and collective identifications to produce and reproduce categories (“child,” “mother,” “father” and “childless”) and relations between them.



of belonging may emerge through alternate framings. This insight is one of the most significant contributions of scholarship on gender and ‘new kinship studies’ that examine coexistence of inclusions and exclusions in kinning practices. For instance, we see how intimacy and subordination, violence and care, (see Das 2007) state power and citizen agency (see Ginsburg and Rapp 1991, 1995 on politics of reproduction, Browner and Sargent 2011, Kahn 2000, Kanaaneh 2002, Kligman 1995 on state controlled reproduction and citizen strategies) work simultaneously in reproducing and creating new gender ideologies, hierarchies and kin. Further, research on families of choice (see Weston 1991), scholarship on personhood, the role of multiple substances, people and processes in reproduction (see for instance Carsten 1995, Howell 2006), and proliferation of ‘non-natural’ means of procreation (reproductive technologies, adoption), have established relatedness as processual, achieved over time, through emotional and other forms of culturally meaningful labor.<sup>188</sup> My work contributes to this scholarship on the tenuous relation between sex, procreation, gender, and kinning.

### ***Gendered Inclusions-Exclusions***

“You go to any public place anywhere in Europe and the children who run around the fastest and scream the loudest are German!” (65-year-old childless female interlocutor)

“Through children, we can break the pattern of the past. Not repeat what our parents did. Create something new.” (40-year-old first time father)

“Something is changing, there is some kind of protection mothers get from being mothers today ... Suddenly it is important again to have children!” (40-year-old childless businesswoman)

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<sup>188</sup> See discussion on reproductive technologies and kinning in the introduction chapter.

“In Germany childlessness is a social disease; women wait too long before they decide to have children and *then* it becomes a medical issue.” (50-year-old male infertility specialist)

“Men withdraw and give the reins to the mother. They need to believe that they are as capable of taking care of their children.” (50-year-old father)

The ‘German child’ grows in her value as she continues to arouse ambivalent feelings when she appears: on the one hand, high value, positivity, vitality, limitless possibility, and on the other hand, fear of the unknown, encroachment, loss (material space, social position), moralizing discourses, delegitimization (of reproductive trajectories), and memories (family, other intimate relationships, sociality, and personal ideologies). In the context of the German demographic transition and a growing concern with low fertility, the child is hypervisible. Her presence and/or absence evokes the *Wende* generation’s experiences and (shifting) meanings of gendered reproduction and childlessness at a particular moment in Berlin’s history.

In this dissertation, I have described various practices of biological, social, and cultural reproduction and how these are apprehended in national and local narratives. I have argued that the policy level a paradigm shift reflects a changing relation of the post-reunification German state to the ‘domestic’ affairs of its citizens. At the macro level, narratives of demographic transition, aging and labor shortage, ambivalence towards the inclusion of immigrants are part and parcel of policy reforms to build a child friendly Germany, specifically to make it practical and also desirable for men and women to have both children and careers. In spite of the growing rise and acknowledgement of the multiple family forms in Berlin, family policies reinforce normative heterosexual units. On the face of it, these reforms promise greater gender equity in matters of production and reproduction, but do not live up to this expectation yet: women are often not in

leadership positions, get paid less than men, take longer parental leave after the birth of a child, and do more part time work. Ten years after the introduction of *Elternzeit*—parental leave that encourages fathers to stay home after the birth of their child— anecdotal and media reports indicate that while more fathers do take leave, they do so for only the required two months.

Women who do not have children often confront questions related to their career-centeredness, their relationships, and life course choices. On the the other hand, women who do have children confront stereotypes that describe them variously and often negatively as the *Kinderwagenmafia*, women with *Kinderwagenblick*, *Rabenmutter* or *Kampfmutter*. Women are marked as the primary drivers of reproductive decisions; alarmist fears about the demographic ‘crisis’ simultaneously infuse energy into making Germany child-friendly through the resignification of the man as father: as someone who shapes, molds and creates a person, ergo a German citizen. For children, or fathers actively involved in child care, and some mothers who live in neighborhoods particularly suited for easy care of children, Berlin’s spaces accommodate and encourage the conspicuous performance of emotional and affectionate, as well as entitled parental labor. Conspicuous reproduction appears explicitly in public through the presence of children who while “...*relatively worthless economically to their parents*,” are “...*priceless in terms of their psychological worth*” (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998:12), often represented as miniature adults with commensurate rights and responsibilities.

Particular to the city of Berlin, the *Wende* generation confronts the explicit appearance of the child in the reorganization of city spaces through gentrification. I argue that gentrification aggressively selects a particular life style and is in this way also an

exclusionary fact. For a group of Berliners who lived in alternate household arrangements, experimented with multiple relationships of care, had flexible or low paying jobs, did not have children, specific neighborhoods in Berlin remain socially inhospitable. This demographic—whether childless women, unemployed East Berliner men, or infertile men— have constraints, lifestyles and desires incompatible with a child-friendly Germany. Ironically then spatial organization following reunification and gentrification is becoming (has become) constitutionally exclusionary through child-friendliness, for both men and women; however, it is primarily women, whose reproductive ideologies, ‘choices,’ and labor, are conflated with reproduction. Mothers as well as childless women are marked as (re)producing an ‘obsessive’ or hindering an ‘appropriate’ reproductive *Lust* (desire).

### **Shifting Regimes of Reproduction: Demographic ‘Crisis’ and ‘Outsiders’**

This work elucidates the local-national arrangements within which reproductive relations and moralities, expectations and desires are embedded. Reproductive regime(s) refers to how reproduction is socially organized around specific values, norms, practices and relations. These structure for instance, legal definitions of mother and father (e.g. gestational and social motherhood is fused), determine ‘rational’ reproductive subjects (those of a particular age, marital status and/or sexual orientation), produce moralizing discourses (childlessness as ‘social disease,’ or ‘culture of childlessness,’ ‘appropriate’ number of children), gender norms (reflected in family policies or public child care arrangements) and also signify shifting conceptualizations (e.g. male role in reproduction).

Reproduction then is not a single object. It is not merely a biological process of the birth of a child following sexual intercourse, conception, and parturition. Indeed it is animated through national discourse and ideologies of demography and belonging, structural arrangements of reproductive and productive labor, policy and law, multiple local reproductive narratives, as well as personal biographies of kinning in a city undergoing rapid economic, social and cultural transformations.<sup>189</sup>

Since my exit from the field, reproductive regimes in Berlin, Germany, will be reconfigured further as German society changes in the face of the European refugee crisis. Encouragement of internal reproduction goes hand in hand with the conflicting and polarized views on inclusion and integration of immigrants in the process of sustaining Germany. While there is an urgency to maintain the sanctity of cultural reproduction in the face of a demographic ‘crisis,’ there is also an accompanying shift in the relation to the ‘outsider,’ this becoming exceptionally crucial in the presence of refugees.

In the introduction to this dissertation I outlined the various phases of European demographic transition, specifically the periods in history that record perceptible fall in fertility rates and elaborated on the pre- and post reunification fertility transition in Germany. As seen, former West Germany since the 1970s followed a general pattern of demographic transition visible in “modern” states in Europe i.e. fertility rates started falling simultaneous to the expansion of women’s reproductive rights, demand for

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<sup>189</sup> Reproduction then refers to multiple processes that involve parturition and is not limited to conception and childbirth: in the Marxist conceptualization of the term it means sustenance and constitution of labor, it refers to the (re)production of structures, systems, hierarchies and subjectivities (see Burchell 1996, Foucault 1994[1978], Lemke 2001); it is at once cultural repetition as well as change (see Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1979, Ortner 1989, Rapp and Ginsburg 1991, Sahlins 1981). Biological reproduction is intimately connected to the production of social persons (Conklin and Morgan 1996, Kaufmann 2005, Turner 1967, van Gennep 1960), and is achieved through socialization, feeding, care and other kinning practices (Bestard

women's participation in employment and the influence of the feminist movement. Also the unavailability of adequate child-care options in West Germany have kept women out of the labor force, or imposed part-time work on them, and delayed or permanently deferred bearing children. Former East Germany's demographic transition is mapped along post-socialist fertility narratives, which record drastic fall in fertility starting the time of German reunification.

The heightened preoccupation with the demographic transition feeds into alarmist discourse regarding Germany's impending end as has been so dramatically described in Thilo Sarrazin's book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Sarrazin 2010).<sup>190</sup> The book expresses anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments; it provides quantitative data on the fall in 'native' fertility rates, compares relatively higher fertility amongst immigrant populations and discusses how the current demographic crisis is becoming a threat to Germany's national and cultural identity. According to Sarrazin the presence of migrant population does not add to, rather takes away from the 'essence' of the nation, here specifically referring to a mono-lingual and mono-cultural Germany (also see Castaneda 2008, Vanderlinden 2009 for a critique of similar views). Thus, immigrants are overwhelmingly represented as outsiders (also see Mandel 1994).<sup>191</sup>

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2009, Carsten 2000, Howell 2006).

<sup>190</sup> The title can be loosely translated as: "Germany is doing away with itself" or "Germany is abolishing itself." According to this book—which became a best seller in Germany, polarized the public, and resulted in Sarrazin a party member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the then Board member of the Bundesbank to step down—migrants are not capable of fitting into Germany; Sarrazin declared integration unimaginable and advocated for a highly restrictive immigration policy. His views expressed anti-Muslim sentiments; in an interview with the *Lettre Internationale* he indicated that Arabs and Turks were not as well integrated as Vietnamese, did nothing much for Germany, other than sell fresh produce on the roadside, reproduced too much and "too many girls wearing headscarves" (*ständig neue Kopftuchmädchen produziert*). See: <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2009-10/sarrazin-aeusserung-integration/komplettansicht>

<sup>191</sup> See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/working-papers/142014.pdf>

While the decades of 1950s, 60s and early 70s encouraged immigrant movement into Germany, there was no expectation that these *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) would stay and build a life in Germany. The focus in foreign policy under Helmut Kohl during the 1990s was the integration of already existing non-Germans, the encouragement of the return of foreigners to their respective countries and the restriction of entry of new immigrants. In the late 1990s and early 2000's, owing to continued labor shortage in the IT industry, Germany's political parties were polarized over the passing of a bill that would provide highly qualified foreigners permits to live and work in Germany. The category of foreign labor sought was computer experts (from India). The Christian Democratic Union, specifically one of its leaders, Jürgen Rüttgers, the then Governor of North-Rhein Westfalen, the most populous of German states, vociferously advocated for having more children, specifically those born to German citizens instead of *Inder* that is Indian immigrants (employed in the IT industry). "*Kinder statt Inder*" (children instead of Indian immigrants) became a slogan popularized by this conservative political party. In 2012 EU sanctioned the *Blaue Karte* (blue card) or a work permit which allows qualified non-EU citizens to work in Europe in the IT, medical and engineering sectors, a necessity to tackle the immediate problem of labor shortage, while looking at long-term solutions of population growth.

There has been a recent show of political commitment to making Germany a land of immigration. The 2008 German Advisory Council on Integration and Migration attempts to change the climate in Germany and welcome highly qualified labor into its

fold while integrating older residents through language classes and other interventions.<sup>192</sup> Clearly there is greater incentive and desire for ‘productive’ migrants or highly educated and qualified world citizens who can come into Germany and contribute to its growth and prosperity. On the other hand, policies regarding granting asylum to refugees continue to be restrictive. Local sentiments echo state concerns with respect to obstacles in absorbing and making foreign populations internal: “will they be able to speak German?” or “will they (Muslims) live by the rules of the German constitution?” In some extreme cases an outright rejection of the possibility for integration brings to bear the demographic and cultural crisis Germany faces as feared by some. Mark a 50-year-old interlocutor declared,

See a *Volk* refers to solidarity that comes from being the same, speaking the same language and thinking the same thoughts. I have already said, this whole drama about Germany not reproducing is a smokescreen to legitimize entry of people from outside and to turn them into Germans. But that’s impossible; we can’t make them like us! Today one wants to achieve some sort of a multicultural world. Such a world is grey to me, of one color, because it turns different people into similar people.

On the horns of this dilemma—should Germany consist of *Ausländer* (outsiders/foreigners) or children born to ethnic Germans—the nation struggles to build a

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<sup>192</sup> In an interview with an official from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, working on integration policy in Germany, I asked what the German government means by integration. This is what I learnt - “Integration means that you are able to live within our society, to work here. We do not mean assimilation, but on the other hand we do not want a disintegrated society...we want a German society with a big diversity; it is important for the Federal government that we have differences and common values. Most important is that we are able to communicate, hence the language courses. And what are common values? Those in the German constitution...we have language and orientation courses, that means information about our law system, about our constitution and of course about Germany, about our history, our culture, we want that the immigrants coming to Germany understand our society. The courses are a beginning – naturally they need to find work and contacts, also to other Germans....” In a sudden change of the pronoun, the gentleman looked at me and said his final sentence, addressing me directly – “*Wir möchten dass Sie offen sind*” (We want *you* to be open). The definition of integration that the official provided demands a process of mutual understanding – of each other’s cultural norms that allows for a diverse society, that is united in that people live by the law of the land i.e. the German constitution. While Germany wants to be open and



new image of itself. A country that portrays itself as tolerant, child friendly, and welcoming of heterogeneity debates its demographic composition. The fear that immigration dilutes German ethnicity is expressed in informal conversations and also implicitly in policy documents.

Germany is situated in historically particular ways so that it is acutely aware of its image in the world regarding the treatment of vulnerable populations. However, the generalized sense for ethics, morality, and indebtedness in German politics coexists with a popular desire for cultural homogeneity, expressed through consistent rhetoric on integration and declining support of the multiculturalist paradigm, and the persistent lack of equal social and political rights for non-Germans.” (Castaneda 2008:355)

How will some of these co-dependencies and contradictions in conceptualizing demographic transition, presence of ‘outsiders,’ and cultural reproduction play out in contemporary Germany? If reproductive regimes—as systems and processes that regulate reproductive bodies, morality, law, social norms, and cultural practices—legitimize and/or deny kinship and belonging, how might social intercourse with refugees and migrants reproduce older and create newer forms of inclusions and exclusions? These are questions that will eventually become part of my next project in Germany.

***Reproduction, Fatherhood, Children in a ‘new’ Germany?***

German society has witnessed the unprecedented influx of over a million refugees from war torn Syria and other parts of North Africa, Middle East and the Balkans, in the wake of Angela Merkel’s open door policy announced in August 2015 through the highly controversial words, *Wir schaffen das* (We can do it). In 2015, Merkel’s asylum policy, brought more than a million refugees into Germany. Rising uncertainty about cultural integration, terrorist attacks in major European cities, right wing fundamentalist

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welcoming towards immigrants, she also expects immigrants to be open and flexible in adjusting to

organization across Europe, closing of the Balkan route in March 2016, along with Germany's deal with Turkey to stall the unchecked flow of people into Germany, the 2016 New Years Eve group sexual assaults (by men identified as Arab or North African) on women in different German cities, and the Berlin Christmas market tragedy in December 2016 have fueled fear, rising insecurity and polarized German society regarding the presence of refugees.

Integration is indeed challenging, learning the language and getting job might indeed be the smaller problems, given the last two years of the European refugee crisis. Most Berliners I spoke with after I left the field emphasize the need to meet on some basic common grounds: gender equality, respect for women, and acceptance of democratic principles. My interlocutors often expressed concerns that the cultural divide between the largely Muslim refugee population and Germans would be hard to bridge. On the other hand, several friends in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany have welcomed refugee families into their homes, providing them direct access to language acquisition and integration, as well as see this form of social intercourse as a means to understanding a foreign way of life.

Benni, a 35-year-old interlocutor and friend, recently spoke with me over the phone. Praising Merkel for her morally and humanely admirable decision to open doors for all refugees, he also explained why this politically extremely brave move on Merkel's part is potentially the end of her career and has polarized German society while also providing impetus to right wing fundamentalism in Germany.

I have a Syrian friend, a young man, relatively well educated, speaks English, so in that sense he is privileged and stands a better chance of being integrated into Germany. I have been helping him at every step of the process of seeking asylum in Germany. I have to say, this is extremely difficult, badly organized and time consuming. There are just not enough people to do the job. We are overwhelmed and I must say it is really badly managed in Berlin. Some people in Germany feel threatened in the presence of this mass of refugees, especially Muslim men, others don't. And mind you, Berlin doesn't have those many refugees, about 60-70,000 approximately and now they are mostly in camps on the edges of the city. Who lives in these parts of Berlin? *Not* the middle class who any way had secure jobs and income and finds it easier and morally correct to welcome refugees. People who have low income jobs and are already economically insecure live on the edges of the city, where the refugees have been housed; they feel like the refugees are a threat and protest against the camps in their neighborhood. I mean its understandable why the middle class could have a more open attitude, even though not all of them do! Look, we don't have enough young people to work, to take care of the older folks; so some see immigrants as fulfilling that role. However, managing all this, especially the huge divide in experience and opinion in Germany is all very difficult. And the longer you have refugees doing nothing, i.e. no employment, nothing to occupy them, the greater the chances are that there will be trouble. And lets be clear, its politically incorrect to say anything against refugees, but not all of them are angels! So the more time passes without proper ways to integrate them, the more chaos, and greater the likelihood that refugees will be labeled as violent, asocial elements.

Benni's words highlight the intense contradictory positions and the split in German society over the presence, role and future of non-European, Muslim outsiders to Germany. Refugees are potential labor and will benefit the economy in the long run; they can indeed be seen as a solution to the German demographic 'crisis,' even though this involves imagining a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic German nation. For many though, refugee presence disturbs and diminishes the German value system, and is seen as weakening 'Germanness.'<sup>193</sup> Especially the adult male Muslim refugee is conspicuously

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<sup>193</sup> Pegida (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes or Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) originated in Dresden (East Germany) in 2014 and has gained momentum especially since the acceptance of over a million refugees into Germany in 2015. The involvement of over 1000 men of Arab extraction in the 2016 New Year sexual assaults in Cologne and the December 2016 Berlin Christmas market tragedy that killed 12 people have further spurred Pegida's anti Muslim rhetoric and demonstrations.

marked as the ‘Other,’ as the potential threat to democratic values, to safety and security and as exploitative towards women.

I had left the field before the flow of refugees—unprecedented since the end of the Second World War—so rapidly and unexpectedly changed (and continues to affect in unpredictable ways) the discourse around reproduction, belonging, and ‘Germanness.’ The debate and controversies on the number of refugees allowed into Germany in 2015, then the subsequent reduction of these numbers through mass measures such as tighter evaluations of asylum applications, closing of the Balkan route, and the Turkey deal amongst others reflect the dilemmas of reproducing German society and its future citizens.

The questions that remain are how might the European refugee crisis affect possibilities for kinship and belonging to Germany, especially if the figure of the refugee man is saturated with negativity, if the presence of refugee families pose such extreme practical and psychological challenges for integration. While I have argued that active fatherhood as a process of resignification of the German male is closely related to the demographic crisis and the anxiety over low fertility in Germany, the conspicuous (real and imagined) presence of refugees in Berlin will potentially have implications for German masculinity and fatherhood. How for instance will the ‘German man’ define himself (as distinct from say the Arab or the Syrian)? How might fatherhood practices of ‘outsiders,’ affect the ideology and practices of ‘active fathers’ who strive to participate in reproductive and productive labor? How might the presence of refugee children influence how the German child is conceptualized?

It is certainly too early to see these social changes, but a new generation will be affected by these mutual exchanges. I don't claim that fathering styles across Germany are the same (in fact what I describe is very particular to Berlin); yet I speculate that the conspicuous presence of men (from countries such as Syria, Middle East or North Africa) who are often characterized as patriarchal, gender insensitive and conservative by German standards would facilitate drawing of newer boundaries. On the other hand, social intercourse between Germans and these newer migrants, may affect micro engagements of care between the German father and his child, similar to the acts of physical closeness (hugging, kissing, carrying) that my interlocutors describe as being typical of Turkish fathers. It remains to be seen how conceptualizations of insiders/outside, and moral discourses around their reproductive practices could potentially affect reimagining 'Germanness,' kinship and belonging today and in the future.

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