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Aufklären, zersetzen, liquidieren:
Policing Juvenile *Rowdytum* in East Germany, 1956-1968

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The tense and by no means harmonious relation between the SED state and young generations undoubtedly constitutes one of the most exciting subjects of the social and political history of the GDR. After all, the incapability of the GDR to reproduce the generational base of its political body was one of the central features of its collapse. The GDR died literally with the last representatives of its founder generation.

Several important studies have already been written on SED youth politics and the FDJ in general (Mählert/Stephan, Skyba), on the representation of youth as an inner enemy in particular (Wierling) and - most important in recent times - on the impact of Western consumerism and music both on East and West German youth and the political ways to handle it in both of the German states (Poigert). I will focus today on the ways in which the regular police force of the GDR, the *Deutsche Volkspolizei*, reacted to the challenge represented by deviant youth behavior in public. I will show that the ways the criminal investigation departments (CID), the *Kripo* section of the *Volkspolizei*, developed to police juvenile delinquency were from the outset impregnated by a military mode of perception, interpretation and reaction. They eventually were differentiated and rendered more 'scientific' during the sixties integrating first insights of the new socialist criminology. Nevertheless the underlying concept remained the same.

To begin with it has to be underlined, that youth rebellion during the 50ties and 60ties was by no means a purely Western phenomenon in post War Germany. While *Halbstarke* demolished concert halls and confronted the police after movie shows in Hamburg, West Berlin and Munich, their peers in Halle, Leipzig, and East Berlin rather focused on disturbing popular feasts such as Christmas fairs or the annual anniversary celebration of the GDR on the 7th of October. With their Western counterparts, they shared the enthusiasm for popular entertainment embracing each wave of new fashions and music styles as soon as it emerged on the (West) German and US market.

The first identification of these behaviors of mainly male youth gangs as ‘*Rowdys*’ or ‘*Rowdytum*’ dates from 1956. Horst Luther, a young Berlin district attorney writing his Ph. D. thesis on the subject during the late fifties, stated in an article in the end of 1958: ‘In der DDR werden rowdyhafte Handlungen in der Regel von Gruppen junger Menschen begangen’. Following his findings, these young people formed relatively stable, though not necessarily firmly organized ‘Straßencliquen’, initiating ‘rowdyhafte Ausschreitungen, um sich Abwechslung und Erleben in dem eintönigen Tagesablauf zu schaffen.’ Luther was the first GDR legal expert to give a precise definition of ‘*Rowdytum*’, which went as follows:

‘*Rowdytum* liegt bei solchen verbrecherischen Handlungen vor, die der Täter begeht, um zum Ausdruck zu bringen, daß er die Grundsätze der gesellschaftlichen und staatlichen Disziplin bewußt mißachtet, sie nicht anerkennt und dadurch die öffentliche Sicherheit und Ordnung verletzt.’

The core of the definition was ‘expressing the conscious disregard of principles of social and state discipline’. Expressing nonconformist conscience leading to disturbance of public order was only a step away from politically motivated nonconformity. This legal definition owed much to soviet jurisprudence and its definition of hooliganism dating back to the twenties. Ten years later, in 1968, it became officialized by being introduced formally in the new penal code of the GDR.

This *legal* discourse of course had to be adopted also by the CID of the *Volkspolizei* in criminal procedure and in their fight against juvenile delinquency in general. But before I will explore their strategies more in detail, we have to take into account a *security* related discourse underlying them. More in the way of internal communication between security experts of the party and the police, remote from the public of law and youth education experts, a second perspective on *Rowdytum* developed in these years: one of *Rowdytum* as a threat to state security, not just to public order.

To illustrate this, I quote from a daily report of the operative staff of the *Volkspolizei* headquarters on December, 9, 1956:

‘Vorkommnis auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt am Marx-Engels-Platz [in Berlin] am 8. 12. 1956
Am 8.12.1956 gegen 21.00 Uhr haben sich auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt ca. 300 Jugendliche Personen zusammengerottet, lärmten und gröhlten und inszenierten Schlägereien. Diese Gruppen wurden durch den Einsatz eines Zuges VP-Bereitschaft zerstreut und die Ruhe und

Ordnung wiederhergestellt. Nach einiger Zeit wurden durch die Jugendlichen erneut Schlägereien inszeniert, wobei die Zusammenrottungen immer größere und organisiertere Formen annahmen. Dabei war festzustellen, daß ein großer Teil der Jugendlichen sehr stark betrunken war.'

Brawls and riotous gathering still continued for a while, the police reacting with some arrests and clearing the place with tear gas and water cannons, until '*Ruhe und Ordnung*' had been established by midnight. As the last detail it is reported:

'Bei den Vorkommnissen auf dem Marx-Engels-Platz konnte noch festgestellt werden, daß amerikanische PKW über den Marx-Engles-Platz fuhren und vermutlich Aufnahmen gemacht haben.'

A follow-up report on the next day contained some information on the 36 persons arrested: 16 of these were Westberlin residents. One among the 31 arrested to be indicted for riot and breach of public peace was already known to police by his participation in a recent *Oktoberfest* brawl. Three others, it was noted, had taken part in the excesses - 'Ausschreitungen' - committed by Westberlin youth at the Brandenburg Gate on the 5th of November just one month ago.

The coincidence of very heterogeneous 'elements' place this event, this '*Vorkommnis*', neatly between an a-political Saturday night brawl and counterrevolutionary uprising: *Oktoberfest* on the one side, Westberlin youth and demonstrators against the Soviet invasion in Hungary an the Brandenburg gate on the other, not to forget the US-american Military personnel driving by for reconnoitering.

This frame of perception is emblematic for the response of state socialist security experts to public disorder. In order to 'read' them accurately, international politics have to be taken into account. During the last weeks of 1956, the Hungarian and Suez crisis had led to quantum leap in stepping up the SED's leadership security efforts. In December 1956 and in January 1957 the politburo developed new schemes to prevent domestic uprisings in which the regular police was to play an important part. On a meeting of high ranking regional police chiefs, the deputy minister of the interior, Willi Seifert, had to explain the new schemes of operation to apply in case of inner unrest. In order to illustrate how regular police forces should intervene against 'disturbances of public peace and order' through 'ordinary police measures', he re-

minded his colleagues of the very recent, rather improvised tear gas and water cannon attack against the juvenile *Rowdys* at the Berlin Christmas fair.

In times of widespread fear of (or hope for, depending on one's perspective) Hungarian and Polish insurrection infecting also the GDR population, which would eventually ensue in a renewal of the June 53 uprising, youth rebellion represented a unerring omen of imminent political uprising. By the same token, the ability or inability of *Volkspolizei* units to handle such situations in a swift manner served as indicator of their *Einsatzbereitschaft* – their preparedness to act - in general, should a real case of military emergency occur.

We can thus discern a duplicity of discourses interpreting *Rowdytum*: An alarmistic, one, focused on the military aspect of state security, linking the breach of public order to the abhorred dangers of a fascist or capitalist plot for uprising, and a legal and criminological one reflecting the motives of perpetrators and the circumstances of such behavior in order to develop strategies of law enforcement and prevention. Of course these discourses did not exclude each other, but were employed in different contexts: The military one rather in internal security experts' and police communication, serving to dramatize the danger of *Rowdys* to socialism. The criminological discourse was used in particular as a sort of 'interdisciplinary code', which the public prosecutors and the police used jointly in order to mobilize the cooperation and compliance of other institutions and mass organizations for their fight against juvenile delinquency with the perspective to overcome it altogether one day.

This second discourse interpreted *Rowdytum* as being inspired and triggered off by Western so-called *ideological* diversion (whereas the first one would assume direct underground interference on the part of Western espionage agencies). All products of the commercial entertainment industry, in particular pulp fiction, movies, and pop music, were perceived as part of a deliberate strategy to lure East German youths away from socialism. The categories used to characterize and to analyze these artifacts were derived from the long standing German tradition of anti *Schund und Schmutz* campaigns, youth protection – *Jugendschutz* - and anti-modernism discourses. (See Poiger and Rauhut for more details.)

But *Rowdys* were not regarded as mere victims and/or agents of NATO propaganda only. Some responsibility had also to be attributed to circumstances inside the GDR society as well. Deficient education, and following from this, failing educators were discerned as the second source of juvenile delinquency. Here, the generic category of *Widersprüche*, contradictions, popular in Marxist-Leninist ideology anyway, served as analytical tool: In particular the fami-

lies' moral 'syllabus' often seemed to deviate substantially from what was taught officially in schools and in the youth organization. Parents tolerating their kids' consumption of Western radio and TV programs, or neglecting the education of their children, refusing to take care of their leisure time, some of them being so busily involved in *sozialistischer Aufbau* that they just did not have the time to look after them – this was regarded as the main source furthering *Rowdytum* from within the GDR. The situation was aggravated when the local FDJ proved to be unable or disinterested to draw up an interesting youth life for this particular kind of disenfranchised youth, and rather preferred to focus their energies on secluded preaching-the-converted type of activities with their loyal members.

In the strategies of the *Volkspolizei's* CID to counter *Rowdytum*, both dimensions of interpreting *Rowdytum*, the military and the criminological one, combined to a specific set of measures to be undertaken on the ground in order to put an end to it in the long run. They were described for the first time in an internal instruction by the *Volkspolizei's* main administration in December 1957. Since their principles remained intact throughout the sixties and beyond, they merit closer inspection.

Since collective action by youth groups, gangs or '*Cliquen*' were considered as the prevailing form of '*Rowdytum*', they became the prime target of criminal investigation. This entailed the registration of all cliques and of their members by the local CID in special files, including information about bosses and their deputies, so-called body guards (*Leibgardisten*) and the nick names of group members. To collect this information, the CID not only had to cooperate with other police branches, local administration, the party and mass organization, but in particular and in a more intense way with the correspondent units of the secret police, the *Stasi*. Besides these measures, both superiors and party organizations in the *Volkspolizei* had to work on all policemen's minds to create what the instruction called 'eine Atmosphäre der Unduldsamkeit gegenüber jedem Einzelfall von *Rowdytum*'. This aimed at the widespread proclivity among *Volkspolizisten* on the ground, to belittle *Rowdytum* events as minor, age related offenses lacking any political significance. Before moving to more severe measures in a particular case, the support of the local press, of the National Front, the school and other institutions had to be engaged, in order to evaluate the *Rowdytum* event in public. Parents of *Rowdys* were to be summoned to the police department and to public meetings to be confronted with their responsibility.

More often than not enthusiasm on the part of these civil partners of cooperation did not materialize. In most cases, the *Volkspolizei* had to fight youth criminality on their own. Given a

sufficient overview over the existing ‘cliques’, more effective measures in the form of raids and personal scrutiny had to be taken in order to secure the following effects:

- ‘1. Beunruhigung der jugendlichen Banden und Cliques durch schlagartige Maßnahmen der VP
2. Aufdeckung bisher unbekannter Verbindungen der Cliques zueinander und Verbindungen von Cliques zu solchen Gruppen Jugendlicher, die bisher noch nicht erfaßt wurden.
3. Schaffung von neuen Kontaktpersonen.
4. Fahndungsmäßige Überprüfung
5. Aufdeckung evtl. bestehender Verbindungen nach Westberlin und Westdeutschland’.

(Hauptabteilung Kriminalpolizei, 31.12.57, o. T., BArchB, DO-1, 11-710, Bl. 71-74.)

The author of this instruction explicitly highlighted the importance of creating insecurity amongst the youth gangs, and the importance of recruiting secret informants - *Kontaktpersonen* – among the youth for further investigations.

Two distinct features stand out regarding this approach: First, this list of measures to be taken described youth groups as a kind of military units with superiors, deputies, body guards and subordinates, and as an enemy which after a first warning had to be overthrown by a sudden attack. Second, to do this, the whole set of instruments typical for the *Stasi*’s work had to be applied. *Rowdy* groups had to be treated more or less the same way as political underground groups: they were considered as enemy units which had to be ‘aufgeklärt’, here: meaning not ‘enlightened’, but ‘reconnoitered’ in the first place, followed by their ‘Zersetzung’ – undermining – through selective repression, and finally ‘liquidiert’ – liquidated in the sense of being disbanded.

In my research on the *Volkspolizei* history, I browsed through several years’ reports of the Potsdam district CID in order find out how these rules where put into action. In particular, differentiating between the groups turned out to be of central importance: Not all of them were to be treated as a *Bande* – gang – in the legal sense of the word, meaning a group being formed with the intention to commit crimes. The transition from the non-criminal group or

clique to the criminal gang was fluid. Consider the following examples reported in fall 1961. There is the story of the ‘ungeküßten Boys’ in the county of Königs Wusterhausen:

‘Ihre Quartiere hatte sich diese Bande in ungenutzten Westgrundstücken eingerichtet, wo man zum Teil aus Diebesgut sich sogenannte ‚Villen‘ schaffte. Von diesem Ort bzw. auch vom Jugendheim in Zeuthen wurden die strafbaren Handlungen dann unternommen’, such as burglaries, violation of passport regulations, damage to property, illegal possession of weapons, but also ‘staatsgefährdende Hetze und Propaganda’. (Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam, K, 18.8.60, Einschätzung Jugendkriminalität [...] 1. Halbjahr 1960, BLHA, Rep. 404/15-75, Bl. 496-496f.) For the CID, this was a clear case in the sense of *Bande*. A group of four in Velten/Kr. Oranienburg, it was reported, had stolen ‘Buntmetall’ on several occasions. ‘Dabei wurde festgestellt, daß sich diese Jugendlichen ständig in Westberlin aufhielten und dort dem Rock’n Roll nachgingen.’ Forming a larger group with some other ten to twelve youths it was characteristic for them, ‘daß sie mit Mädels in den Wohnungen sogenannte ‚Partys‘ feierten, wobei es zu sittlichen Ausschweifungen kam.’ In this case, a lack of political and moral correctness – Rock n Roll and illicit Sex– stood side by side with minor petty crime offenses (ibid.). And as long as the border to Westberlin was open, there was still another type of group who acted only in Westberlin visiting movie theatres or *Waldbühne* concerts and were very difficult to apprehend as a group in the GDR itself.

The aftermath of the construction of the Berlin wall saw a severe crackdown on all kinds of deviant people in the GDR, but in particular on those young people who had regularly visited Westberlin. As a specific ingredient of this campaign the FDJ took actively part in it by terrorizing youth and adults alike who would not comply with the campaign against watching Western TV programs. Later on, in 1963, this harsh course gave way to a more ‘liberal’ approach in youth politics when even beat music was tolerated and the young generation was courted as the ‘*Herren von Morgen*’, the masters of tomorrow, in official speeches and communiqués. This zigzag course in youth policy was typical for the SED’s approach already since at least 1956, when more a more open minded climate of public debate during the very ‘tame’ and short de-stalinization period in the GDR made possible widely appraised movies such as ‘Berlin Ecke Schönhauser...’ (See also Poiger).

Therefore, the last issue I would like to address, is the question: To what an extent did the continuous change of harsh and liberal approaches to youth politics affect the police’ treatment of juvenile delinquency and of *Rowdytum* in particular? Were these different treatments of youth related issues interconnected at all and in which ways?

One can conceive of this relationship applying a musical metaphor: The underlying theme and its harmonic structure remained identical, but at different times different variations and modes were applied to perform it. As in a theme and variation piece of music, major and minor, different times and tempos follow each other, but you would always identify the underlying structure of the theme. In our case, constructing youth and their behavior, cultures and needs as a potential risk to state security, as it was enacted and conceptualized by police practice, remained the ground theme.

This becomes evident if you look closely at the police' anti-*Rowdytum* measures during the 'liberal' period of the youth communiqué between 1963 and the in-famous *Kahlschlagplenum* in December 1965. Whereas the FDJ and the education system were now licensed to be more lenient towards Beat fans, even furthering contests of amateur guitar bands, the CID interpreted the communiqué as an order to intensify and differentiate their efforts in youth surveillance. Police reports show that they registered *more* youth groups, that they increased their capability to tell them apart as to their cultural and class backgrounds and to assess their criminal potential. This in turn helped the public prosecutors to calibrate their law enforcement policy in more precise ways. Simultaneously the collected information about a growing number of autonomous youth groups whose activities of course had been furthered and to some extent even triggered off by the SED youth communiqué, delivered the very evidence which the hard-liners in the politburo needed in order put an end to the soft course on youth culture in the fall and winter of 1965. So is no wonder that the central CID reported, that in 1965 1988 groups had been involved in formal preliminary proceedings with more than 6000 individuals brought to trial for criminal behavior. In May 1966, when this report was made, there were always 680 groups under surveillance and on the brink of being disbanded through criminal procedure or other 'educational' measures. (HA K, 15.5.66, Bericht über das Auftreten von kriminellen und gefährdeten Gruppierungen Jugendlicher in der DDR im Jahre 1965, BArchB, DO-1, 5.0-38844) This *circulus vitiosus* of continuous formation, registration and surveillance, liquidation and individual criminal persecution would remain unchanged for the rest of the GDR's existence. From 1968 onwards, after *Rowdytum* had been defined as a crime in the formal sense in the new penal code, we can apprehend the quantitative dimension of this practice even more properly, and we will find that the number of about 4000 to 6000 defendants per year will remain more or less a constant number during the years to follow (s. series of reports for the secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Information des Generalstaatsanwalts über die Entwicklung der Kriminalität im Jahre 1968ff., in SAPMO, Dy 30, J IV 2/3J).

From hindsight a conspiratorial interpretation suggests itself: With 1963 youth communiqué, the youth had been officially ‘incited’ to articulate their needs and views in self-organized ways - only to render them more perceptible for state surveillance what than would ensue in more differentiated ways to put them under control. (And there are some utterances attributed to Ulbricht which seem to confirm this assumption, indicating that he knew very well what he was doing when he pressed on the FDJ to focus on politically indifferent youth already in 1961; s. Ph. D. project on GDR youth by Mark Fenemore/University College of London.)

One can follow this logic throughout the rest of the GDR’s history with several ‘highlights’ of repression standing out. In August 1968 f. i., the repression against supporters of the Prague spring was to a large portion a crackdown on youth groups, mainly from high schools and universities. The scene of GDR rock music which flourished during the seventies always had to struggle with severe censorship and a to-and-fro of their fans getting into trouble with the police. From the early eighties onwards punk music and its subculture were considered particularly inimical to socialist discipline by the police, and so on.

Nevertheless one important, paradigmatic change in handling juvenile delinquency taking place during the sixties has to be accounted for. When scheme makers, be they prosecutors or police officers, set out to define ‘*Rowdytum*’ and to target juvenile misbehavior as a specific object of law enforcement in the early sixties, this was all part of the utopian assumption, that socialist society and its progress would let criminality perish all together within a short period of time, that is within a couple of years. But although criminality of adults diminished, youth criminality did not, at least not to the same degree. The portion youth criminality in all criminality remained on high level between appr. 30 up to 50 % and more, depending on the age groups included in the statistic procedure. Addressing this persistent youth criminality with more differentiated approaches also implied taking it into account on a long term perspective: One age group after the other went through the critical period in which they formed *Rowdy* groups to be put under surveillance, disbanded and their most stubborn members be sentenced to prison or labor camps (*Haftarbeitslager*, until 1976). In the end, pragmatic routine gave way to utopianism. The emerging management of youth deviance on practical terms represented the transition to the paradigm of resigned, disillusioned ‘real existing socialism’ which would later become the trademark of the Honecker period.

On the other hand, this actual disenchantment with ‘their’ youth stood in direct contrast to the self-image of the SED as a movement which wanted to incarnate the future and therefore needed the youth as the imagined beneficiaries of their social policies. In order to uphold this

image at least at certain moments of public feasts and ceremonies, both secret and public police developed a particular preparation procedure anteceding every major event of the kind, be it the GDR's anniversary on the 7th of October, Lenin's 100th anniversary, and in particular the 1973 World Youth Festival in Berlin. Drawing from their detailed and rich files, every potential disturber of such events was summoned to local police stations and had to comply to certain restrictions, such as not visiting the capital during the festivities, and abstaining from bad conducts in the month to come. More stubborn cases were brought to trial for offenses such as asocial behavior, 'Asozialität', so that they had to serve their prison sentence during the festivities.

To sum up: The state socialist police were never able to bring to an end the continuous emergence of independent youth cultures in GDR society and their unruly, disorderly behavior in the GDR public. These would remain an integral part of social life of the younger generation being to a large degree inspired by Western popular culture, in particular the subsequent waves of Rock music. Of course, the SED had to find pragmatic ways of handling them, to the extent that she would try to control these activities within in their own cultural politics. Nevertheless, fighting the import of variants of Western pop culture considered as particularly 'degenerate' and 'decadent' would remain on the agenda of hard-liners fighting youth sub-cultures. *Rowdytum* and its persecution therefore remained a permanent obsession of the SED leadership. This becomes evident in an almost emblematic way at those occasions, when the SED - and the police at its command - joined all their efforts to keep *Rowdys*, asocial individuals and other outsiders off the scenery and the public spaces of the republic, in order to convince herself and the world public of the harmonious unity between the party and 'ihren Menschen' - their human beings.

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Where no other references are mentioned, the paper is based on

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