

generations growing up with no knowledge of (church) religion, with the notable exception of vocal criticism by the anticlerical regime. Thus, even those who opposed the Communist ideology were unable to avoid internalizing anticlerical attitudes while, moreover, being denied the opportunity to learn about churches and religion in any significant detail. Not surprisingly, these cohorts exhibited a substantially lower level of religiosity than did their forebears.⁴⁰

The results of the Communist religious policy remain visible in Czech church organizations up to the present day. The churches were not able to cope fully with their representatives' collaboration with the regime, in some cases even serving the state secret police, and they are today not seen as trustworthy organizations either by the public or indeed many of their members. Popular Roman Catholic conservatism is hampering the much-needed modernization of the church and has resulted in, at best, indifference on the part of the unchurched public, while the 'progressive' Protestant theologies of the past are seen as obsolete by younger pastors and believers.⁴¹ At the same time, no widely accepted substitute has emerged. With notable exceptions, church religion is on the decline in contemporary Czech society and is being gradually replaced not with atheism, but with privatized and de-traditionalized 'spiritual' – esoteric and New-Age – forms, thoughts and activities.⁴² The Czechoslovakian Communist ideologues and policymakers were in fact not particularly successful in terms of spreading atheism. Indeed, ironically, in suppressing churches – not religiosity in general – they prepared the ground for today's spiritual revolution in which "religion is giving way to spirituality"⁴³ in Czech society.

⁴⁰ See Dana Hamplová, "Institucionalizované a neinstitutionalizované náboženství v českém poválečném vývoji," *Soudobé dějiny* 8, no. 2–3 (2001): 294–311; Siniša Zrinščak, "Generations and Atheism. Patterns of Response to Communist Rule among Different Generations and Countries," *Social Compass* 51, no. 2 (2004): 221–34.

⁴¹ E.g. Sváťa Karásek, *Víno Tvé výborné* (Praha: Kalich, 2000): 59–60.

⁴² See Dana Hamplová, "Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiosity," *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 44, no. 4 (2008): 271–94; Roman Vido, David Václavík, and Antonín Paleček, "Czech Republic: The Promised Land for Atheists?" in *Sociology of Atheism*, eds. Roberto Cipriani, and Franco Garelli (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 201–32.

⁴³ See Paul Heelas, Linda Woodhead et al., *The Spiritual Revolution. Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

Johann Ev. Hafner

From indoctrination to testimonials

The book gifts for *Jugendweihe* in the GDR and reunified Germany

Introduction

The following text will explore the surprising persistence of the *Jugendweihe* during and after GDR times. How could this ritual, which was a central instrument for the transmission of scientific atheism, survive the fundamental system change in 1989? The point of reference for this analysis will be the book gifts. These contain not only canonical knowledge for the reader, but also the intention of the organizers. The performative act of gifting a book to the recipient seems to have been the most stable part of the ritual over time. Looking closer, we observe a constant revision of these books. Nearly every year their content is changed, adapted, extended. The stability of the ritual camouflages the fluidity of the content. In order to detect some trajectories, we will describe the changes between the revised and new editions and compare them according to the role of the individual, the social function of the ritual, and the ultimate god-term. 'Jugendweihe'/'Jugendfeier'¹ literally means 'consecration of the youth/feast of the youth.' It takes place at the age of around 14 (Grade 8) and is preceded by preparatory classes which lead up to a public and solemn celebration with family and friends, sometimes with the teachers. If your children attend a public school in the former East Germany today, it is quite possible that professional organizers of *Jugendweihen* join in a parent-teacher conference and start to plan the celebration. In many schools, it belongs to the annual cycle of events. In some cases the entire class signs up. The fact that this ritual did not die out

¹ In the German language, 'Weihe' carries an eminent religious connotation. It is mainly used in Catholic language for the ordination of a clergyman or the blessing of an object that will permanently be used in liturgical contexts (bells, altars, church buildings). After 1989, some organizers changed the term to 'Jugendfeier' ('celebration of the youth') in order to avoid religious semantics and dissociate it from the socialist tradition. For reasons of readability, we use 'Jugendweihe' throughout the text.

after the peaceful revolution² in 1989 draws a lot of attention. Why is this tradition so persistent? Is it something similar now, or completely new? Did elements of the socialist ideology survive?

1 A remnant of GDR times?

In the early 1990s – the years after reunification – the German public debated whether the Jugendweihe should be acknowledged and subsidized as one of many other institutions of formation,³ or whether in fact it represented a continuation of the socialist past. Three different opinions clashed on that issue:

The first group considered the Jugendweihe as a last remnant of atheistic socialism. The tone of texts and speeches often had an anti-capitalistic, even anti-reunification drive.⁴ In fact, it was a great surprise to see that this ritual still found broad reception in East Germany,⁵ notably in the mid-1990s. Especially church groups in the East, who resisted taking part in the Jugendweihe and who had suffered disadvantages such as restricted access to universities, criticized the ‘continuation’ of this tradition. Moreover, the providing organization Jugendweihe Deutschland continued as the direct successor of the former party organization Zentraler Ausschuß für Jugendweihe.⁶ This central committee for Jugendweihen in the GDR – founded in 1954 – had been the official organ of the Communist Party to implement Jugendweihen all over the country.⁷ And,

2 The term ‘Peaceful Revolution’ acknowledges the courageous contribution of the East German people in the late eighties towards the system change, better known as the ‘reunification’ or ‘Wende.’

3 The last government of the GDR under the Lothar de Maizière administration ended state funding of Jugendweihen in April 1990. Joachim Chowanski, and Rolf Dreier, *Die Jugendweihe. Eine Kulturgeschichte seit 1852* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2000), 147.

4 Andreas Fincke, “Anmerkungen zur Jugendweihe aus kirchlicher Sicht,” in *Jugendweihe und Jugendfeier in Deutschland. Geschichte, Bedeutung, Aktualität*, ed. Manfred Isemeyer (Marburg: Tectum, 2014), 114.

5 In 1992 only 800 teenagers participated in Protestant confirmation in East Berlin, but 6,500 in a Jugendweihe. Heiner Barz, “Jugend und Religion in den neuen Bundesländern,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 44, no. 38 (1994): 21–31.

6 Andreas Meier, *Jugendweihe – JugendFEIER. Ein deutsches nostalgisches Fest vor und nach 1990* (München: dtv, 1998), 21–2.

7 The implementation took the East Germans by surprise. In 1952 it was still forbidden as a ‘sectarian’ and bourgeois tradition; in 1953 – after the uprising of June 17th – the SED decided to strengthen the loyalty of the population. It was far more than an invitation to a voluntary commitment. It was a clear expectation of devotion to the socialist cause. In a famous speech in September 1957 in Sonneberg, Walter Ulbricht explicitly called all teenagers to participate. From

many still remembered how the Jugendweihe was introduced as a copy of the Christian confirmation: At the age of 14, in the same month, under a similar name (Weihe). This is why even today children of devout Christian families shun Jugendweihen, and likewise ‘Jugendweihlinge’ rarely participate in confirmation.⁸ Schools that are run by one of the churches naturally offer confirmations and criticize Jugendweihen. The two rituals still exclude each other.

The second group defended the Jugendweihe as a tradition which looked back on a long history even before its ‘abuse’ by the socialist party during the GDR decades. This group intended to revitalize the free-religious, humanistic ritual which was oppressed first under the National Socialists and then hijacked by the Communists. They stressed that a unified Germany – to support freedom of religion – badly needed a ritual for the nonreligious population, breaking the monopoly of the two state-privileged mainline denominations, Catholicism and Protestantism. The main theme was ‘tolerance.’ This kind of Jugendweihe was organized by the Humanistischer Verband Deutschland (HVD) or the Stiftung Geistesfreiheit, with strong headquarters in Berlin and Hamburg. Although the HVD immediately changed the name of their celebration to ‘Jugendfeier’ (ceremony of the youth), most people today still use the previous term ‘Jugendweihe’ and do not notice the difference.

The third group kept the tradition which they – following the narratives of their parents – experienced as a pleasant family celebration. For them, the Jugendweihe was and still is a part of the identity of East Germans (the derogatory term is ‘Ost-algie’ – a German play on the words for ‘East’ and ‘nostalgia’). The former organizers reformed the ritual (no more pledges) but kept the main structures, while the staff was reduced to 25 %. Their main theme was ‘life orientation.’ In interviews, some organizers⁹ said that most parents who register their children only have a faint idea of what the ritual is all about. The process of diffusing content already started during the last years of the GDR, when the Jugendweihe had become a more and more state-backed but meaningless ceremony. Since up to 96 % of the age group participated, it was routine, also to avoid dis-

1956–59 the Jugendweihe was state-organized and practiced nationwide, with a skyrocketing participation rate from 12% to 80%, whereas the confirmations dropped from three-quarters to one-third. Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion in der Moderne. Ein internationaler Vergleich* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2015), 277.

8 Albrecht Döhnert, “Jugendweihe nach 1990 oder: Die Wandlungen eines Klassikers,” in *Jugendweihe – ein Ritual im Wandel der politischen Systeme*, ed. Institut für vergleichende Staat-Kirche-Forschung (Berlin: Gesellschaft zur Förderung vergleichender Staat-Kirche-Forschung, 2004), 62.

9 Interview between the author and organizers of the Jugendweihe in Potsdam, May 23 2015.

crimination. Only few interpreted or understood it as a real initiation into the socialist worldview. "I don't think it was possible to touch the hearts or strike a chord with the girls and boys anymore. Overblown demands concerning the youth lessons and the pledge didn't match real life. There were also numerous whitewashing speeches at the ceremonies."¹⁰

Therefore, we currently have to discern between two types of ceremonies or celebrations in East Germany: the Jugendweihe of the Interessenvereinigung Jugendarbeit und Jugendweihe e.V. (since 2001: Jugendweihe Deutschland e.V.)¹¹ in reformed socialist structures amounting to around 90% of celebrations,¹² and the Jugendfeier of the Humanistischer Verband in the free-religious tradition for the remaining 10%. The two organizations are competitors and often accuse the other of implementing a superficial ritual.¹³ However, their rituals do not differ as much as it seems. Both organizations explicitly condemn the repressions under which the Jugendweihe took place in the GDR,¹⁴ both view their ritual as a contribution to an education aimed at developing mature responsibility, and both cater to the public demand for a ritual of adolescence.

¹⁰ Chowanski, Dreier, *Die Jugendweihe*, 138. All the following German quotes translated by Johann Ev. Hafner.

¹¹ The Jugendweihe Deutschland e. V. was founded immediately after the Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe, the official GDR organization, was suspended (June, 9th 1990) and many of its members laid off. The fact that the new association was established only in the states of the former GDR shows that it was more a continuation of GDR traditions than a complete new start. The Jugendweihe Deutschland e.V. still opts for a positive assessment of the Jugendweihen that were performed in the GDR: "But who condemns the Jugendweihe of the GDR sweepingly disregards the honest work of hundreds of thousands of people. Because libertine, atheistic humanists connected in order to continue the tradition of the Jugendweihe as a dignified transition from child to adulthood, the Jugendweihe survives the demise of the GDR." Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt der Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe e.V., "Geschichte der Jugendweihe," last modified August 12, 2015. <http://www.jugendweihe.info/geschichte.3.html>. For the renaming of the GDR committees in 'Interessenvereinigungen' in the reunified Germany, see: Meier, *Jugendweihe*, 23–4, 32–3.

¹² Albrecht Döhnert, *Jugendweihe zwischen Familie, Politik und Religion. Studien zum Fortbestand der Jugendweihe nach 1989 und der Konfirmationspraxis der Kirchen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 168.

¹³ Interview between the author and representatives of Jugendweihe e.V. and Humanistischer Verband.

¹⁴ Werner Hütter, "Fragen zur Jugendweihe," in *Übergangsrituale im Jugendalter. Jugendweihe, Konfirmation, Firmung und Alternativen. Positionen und Perspektiven am 'runden Tisch'*, ed. Hartmut Griese (Münster: LIT, 2000), 123.

2 The continuation of Jugendweihen after 1989

After suppressing free-religious and humanistic Jugendweihen for several years, the SED decided on November 9th, 1954, to found the "Society for the propagation of scientific knowledge" (Gesellschaft zur Verbreitung wissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse¹⁵) and to introduce Jugendweihen in the GDR nationwide. This happened with the clear intention to take control over the youth and reduce the influence of the churches. The SED was convinced that scientific knowledge would dissolve religious attitudes. Thus, the Jugendweihe was meant as an ersatz for the Christian confirmation, and was recognized as such by the people. The Protestant Church tried to defy the provocation and forbade its members to participate, but lost the struggle. The number of confirmees dropped from approx. 75% in 1956 to 30% in 1959, whereas the participation in Jugendweihen skyrocketed from 12% to 80%.¹⁶ The peak of the anti-Christian thrust was before 1961; after that, the fight against the churches was won. The state-organized¹⁷ Jugendweihe started with 52,000 participants in 1955, which increased to 285,000 in 1978. Numbers then fell gradually to 219,000 in 1985. During the last years of the GDR, they dropped to 169,000 in 1989, yet in the five years before reunification, still nine out of ten pupils attended the ritual.¹⁸ After reunification, the Jugendweihe continued on a lower, though stable, level, with between 62,000 (in 1992) and 96,000 (in 2000) participants in East and West Germany. The decrease 2003–2006 is also due to lower birth rates in East Germany after reunification. After 2005, participation slumped to 37,000 (in 2006) and 25,000 (in 2009).¹⁹ In recent years, the Jugendweihe has shared a similar decrease with Catholic and Protestant confirmations. In 2016, the umbrella organization Bundesverband Jugendweihe Deutschland e. V. hosted 37,000 events.

¹⁵ The organisation is better known under its later name 'Urania.'

¹⁶ Detlef Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft. Zum Wandel der gesellschaftlichen Lage der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 384, 415.

¹⁷ By 1989 the organisational infrastructure consisted of 2,500 local committees, who received annually 20 Million Mark from the central bank. Andreas Meier, *Struktur und Geschichte der Jugendweihen/Jugendfeiern* (Arbeitspapier Nr. 8/2001) ed. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (Sankt Augustin, 2001), 34.

¹⁸ Percentage of Jugendweihen in respective the age group: 1955: 18%, 1956: 24%, 1957: 26%, 1958: 44%, 1959: 80%, 1960: 88%, 1965: 89%, 1970: 92%, 1975: 97%, 1980: 98%, 1985: 97%, 1990: 87%. Chowanski, and Dreier, *Die Jugendweihe*, 271–2.

¹⁹ <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/158420/umfrage/teilnehmer-bei-jugendweihen-in-deutschland-seit-1991> (accessed 15/12/2018).

Today around 10 % of the age group receive the Jugendweihe: 7,500 teenagers in Berlin and Brandenburg in 2016, in some places such as Halle/S. in Saxony-Anhalt around 30 %.²⁰

There are some suggestions as to why the Jugendweihe regained popularity after the downturn in 1990 – 1992. One hypothesis holds: There is a basic need for initiation rites in every society. The East Germans – predominantly cut off from the Christian traditions – had replaced the religious confirmation with the Jugendweihe. But, aside from the problematic assumption that there is a universal social demand for initiations, the Jugendweihe is not a rite of passage at all.²¹ At the age of 14 no German child enters a new phase of life nor acquires new opportunities. Graduation or the driver's license come years later. Instead, the Jugendweihe has been a rite closely linked with continuous education in school and state. We have to look for further reasons.

Was its extinction prevented by the fact that the tradition had already been well established before the formation of the GDR? If tradition were the stabilizing factor, though, then confirmation, which has an even longer history, should have had great success after reunification. The tradition of the Jugendweihe was contaminated in such a way that it could only survive through a total relaunch. By introducing new topics, by renaming the organization, and above all by disassociating it from its former 'abuse' by the National Socialists and Communists as a rite of submission, the Jugendweihe/Jugendfeier gained new legitimacy. In most texts (see below), it is depicted as the ritual of freedom from any state or church paternalism. Thus, it is rather ideological discontinuity than continuity that explains the success of the Jugendweihe/Jugendfeier.

The real continuity lies in the family traditions. The Jugendweihe was an established practice of East German family culture, handed down to today's children.²² It was possible to revitalize it with reference to its anti-institutional his-

²⁰ "Today, around 30 percent of an age group in grade 8 still celebrate the Jugendweihe in Halle. This amounted to 735 adolescents last year. A further 20 percent are spread across confirmation and the Jugendweihe of the Humanists." Sandy Schmied, "Wer feiert heute noch Jugendweihe?" *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, April 10, 2015.

²¹ Christian Schmidt-Wellenburg, "Die Jugendweihe. Bedeutung und Funktion eines biographischen Übergangsrituals," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 14, no. 2 (2014): 362. This study tries to depict the Jugendweihe as an initiation into adulthood, although major 'initiations' like the driver's license, the right to consume alcohol in public or graduation from secondary school come later. The only innovation at the age of 14 is the legal possibility to go out without an adult chaperone until 10 p.m. and – sometimes – to be addressed in the formal 'Sie' instead of 'Du.'

²² This is the thesis of Schmidt-Wellenburg, *Die Jugendweihe*, 363: "Ostdeutsche Identitätskonstruktion" (justification of the parents' participation by making the children take part in a harmless ritual). He rejects a "necessity of a uniform East German remembrance or narrative commu-

lary. Even as early as the 1980s, the official party line for the Jugendweihe as the time when a youth becomes a responsible member of the working class faded. The population increasingly saw it as a family celebration.²³ Although the speakers still employed a socialist rhetoric, this was merely an empty shell. This shell could be filled with new contents. If one were to ask organizers of Jugendweihen, they would unanimously point out that in most cases it is the parents who register their child for the ritual. Obviously, the function of familial initiation into adolescence (in sociological terms: primary social integration) takes precedence over the function of social initiation into responsible citizenship (secondary social integration).

3 The book gifts for Jugendweihen in the GDR

As part of a city-mapping project of the University of Potsdam, we visited several Jugendweihen, focusing on the providing organizations.²⁴ Many scholars²⁵ compare the Jugendweihe to its functional equivalents, the Catholic and Protestant confirmation, by applying the category 'initiation' or 'rite de passage.' The similarities are obvious: a preparatory phase, a performative act, a new phase of life, a high tone during the celebration. The ritual basically consists of seven elements:

1. preparation courses, formerly 'Jugendstunden' (optional),
2. gathering in a public building,
3. music and shows,

nity," but views the Jugendweihe as a space for non-discursive continuation and for dealing with the situation as strangers in one's own country.

²³ Albrecht Döhnert has shown in his study how social motives of group identity (family celebration traditions, peer group dynamics, sibling dynamics, the standards of a post-Christian majority, and an anti-institutional affect, which is projected on the established churches) led to the permanence of Jugendweihen. Cf. Döhnert, *Jugendweihe nach 1990*, 51–65.

²⁴ Johann Hafner, and Johanna Bohnsack-Fach, "Humanistischer Regionalverband Potsdam/Potsdam-Mittelmark," in *Glaube in Potsdam. Bd. I: Religiöse, spirituelle und weltanschauliche Gemeinschaften*, eds. Johann Hafner, Helga Völkening, and Irene Becci (Baden-Baden: Ergon 2018), 645–58.

²⁵ See Wilma Kauke-Keçeci, *Sinnsuche – die semiotische Analyse eines komplexen Ritualtextes am Beispiel der ostdeutschen Jugendweihe nach 1989* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang 2002); Birgit Weyel, "Konfirmation und Jugendweihe. Eine Verhältnisbestimmung aus praktisch-theologischer Sicht," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 102 no. 4 (2005), 488–503, 495. Hartmut G. Griese, ed., *Übergangsrituale im Jugendalter. Jugendweihe, Konfirmation, Firmung und Alternativen – Positionen und Perspektiven am "runden Tisch"* (Münster: LIT, 2000).

4. a speech,
5. an individual stage-call: pledge and congratulation,
6. gifts (certificate,²⁶ flower, book²⁷) and
7. a private celebration afterwards.

In GDR times, the texts were meant to pass on the canonical knowledge of socialism. If we want to find out about the continuation of socialist ideas, it is more promising to look through the long chain of book gifts before and after 1989 than to compare the rituals.²⁸ So, the following text focuses solely on one specific part of the ritual: the books. Books are “not merely an issue of repression, but also of persuasion²⁹”, and the Jugendweihe books specifically tried to include the youth into socialist society by imparting the official worldview through illustrated articles. The question that arises here is whether remnants of this worldview continued after the reunification, or how they were substituted.

Admittedly, the analysis of books alone is fragmentary, and most youths probably did not read these volumes. Moreover, to the conclusions drawn here would ideally be confirmed through empirical research on the recipients' side. However, there are several reasons to focus on the gifted books:

- They were used by the organizers of Jugendweihen as reference points for the program of the preparatory courses, for the content of the speeches and for the design of the celebration.
- It may seem that the pledge would serve as a more stable tertium comparationis. It was changed only twice during the 35 GDR years,³⁰ whereas the gift

²⁶ The certificate was issued by the central committee for Jugendweihen in the GDR (Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der DDR).

²⁷ Book gifts were an element from the very beginning of Jugendweihen in the 19th century. The first proletarian Jugendweihe on April 14th, 1889, in Berlin already contained a pledge, a book and a certificate. Cf. Landesvorstand der Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.V., ed. *Aufbruch ins Morgen* (1991), 22.

²⁸ For early assessments, see Ralf Rytlewski, “Politische Rituale in der Sowjetunion und der DDR,” in *Der unvollkommene Block*, eds. Hannelore Horn, Wladimir Knobelsdorf, and Michal Reiman (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1988), 203–25; Matthias Hartmann, “Ein pervertiertes Ritual lebt weiter. Jugendweihe in Ostberlin” (1992), in *Deutschland-Archiv. Zeitschrift für das vereinigte Deutschland* 25, no. 6 (1992): 563–5.

²⁹ See the introduction of this volume, page 6.

³⁰ In the 1960s, the ceremony had its climax in a solemn pledge. The earliest version from 1955 (1. commitment to a happy life for all working people and to progress in economy, science and arts, 2. to a unified, independent Germany, 3. to defend peace in the spirit of friendship) did not yet include “the great idea of socialism.” The later version which became obligatory from 1968 until 1989 added “true patriots” and “defense against imperialist attacks.” “Gelöbnis zur Jugendweihe 1967,” in *Meine Jugendweihe. Teilnehmerheft 1989/90*, ed. Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugend-

books underwent constant revision (seven completely new editions before 1989; replaced by several, very different books since 1989). However, the pledge was abolished after reunification, and the gift books have survived until today.

The socialist gift books were designed as condensations of canonical knowledge. They contain the essence of socialism. But, instead of teaching boring or abstract party programs, they offer interesting stories about physics, biology and history, in order to demonstrate that the laws of evolution apply to molecules as well as to societies. Similar to the cosmological proof of God, the gift books should prove a scientific³¹ worldview. We will see how this normative approach was changed after the Peaceful Revolution, when compact worldviews were lost.

Speeches and classes rely on personal presence; books can be taken home. In sociological terms, language is fragile interaction, texts are stabilized communication. Books are objects, which can be handed over solemnly. Like in the performative act of swearing on the Bible, the receiver symbolically accepts its content. The gifted books represent the implicit knowledge which is handed down to the next generation.

The texts themselves shall now be considered below.

weihe in der DDR (Berlin [East]: 1988), 4. Whereas the social function of the socialist Jugendweihen was the membership in the workforce, the individual function was the pledge to actively commit oneself to the cause of socialism. However, the pledge was not meant to be a religious oath, nor a philosophical creed, but a vow to the goals of mankind (“Bekanntnis zu den Zielen, für die die gesamte Menschheit kämpft,” see Chowanski, and Dreier, *Die Jugendweihe*, 114). Yet, the ritual element of a stage-call and the performative speech-act (“Yes, so we pledge!”) became a quasi-religious event.

³¹ The German word ‘*Szientismus*’ denotes the attempt of communist regimes to introduce “dialectical and historical materialism” as the real consciousness. It does not come as a surprise that the term ‘*wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung*’ (scientific worldview) was introduced in 1951, three years before the SED decided to use the Jugendweihe as a major means of indoctrination. Thomas Schmidt-Lux, *Wissenschaft als Religion. Szientismus im ostdeutschen Säkularisierungsprozess* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2008).

3.1 *Weltall Erde Mensch*³² (22 editions, 1954–1972)

Weltall Erde Mensch. Ein Sammelwerk zur Entwicklungsgeschichte von Natur und Gesellschaft (*Space Earth Man. A compilation on the evolution of nature and society* – henceforth *WEM*) was inspired by an exhibition “Die Entwicklung des Weltalls, der Erde und des Menschen” (The Evolution of Space, Earth and Man) in Czechoslovakia, CSSR.³³ It was printed by “Verlag Neues Leben,” a publishing house in East Berlin, which was founded by four prominent communists (among them Erich Honecker) and which concentrated on literature for the youth. Although the book was meant for “*unsere Jungen und Mädchen*”³⁴ (for our boys and girls), its abundantly illustrated descriptions of scientific findings made it popular among adults as well. As handwritten dedications in copies show, it was also given as a present to diligent workers and reliable unionists. The first edition, 1954–1957, was a great success and was printed in large numbers. First intended as an encyclopedia for the communist youth in general,³⁵ it rapidly became a favorite gift for the Jugendweihe.³⁶ The 1958–1960 *WEM* was published in a second, revised version. From then on, it was made the official present for Jugendweihen with the intention of controlling the youth and reducing the influence of the churches.³⁷ Starting with the 10th edition, the *WEM* con-

³² *Weltall Erde Mensch. Ein Sammelwerk zur Entwicklungsgeschichte von Natur und Gesellschaft* (Berlin [East]: Verlag Neues Leben, 1954).

³³ The exhibition became prominent in the GDR, as it was displayed in public libraries. *Neues Deutschland* vom 7.09.1954: 4. Later, the adult education center ‘Urania’ organized similar exhibitions in Berlin and Leipzig. Schmidt-Lux, *Wissenschaft als Religion* (2008), 263–7.

³⁴ Walter Ulbricht, “Vorwort,” in *WEM* (1955), 2. Ulbricht was deeply convinced that knowledge of the natural sciences would inevitably diminish religious worldviews.

³⁵ The book *Gott Mensch Universum* (God Man Universe) (1956) can be viewed as a Christian counterpart to *Welt Erde Mensch*. It was a translation from *Essai sur Dieu, l’homme et l’univers* (1950) and was printed until 1964 in seven editions. Even the structure is similar: It rebukes the antireligious polemics of communist theories, shows the historical contingency of atheism and materialism and suggests the compatibility of evolutionary theory and Christianity. The closing articles deal with the problem of evil/suffering and contrast Christian eschatology against communist utopia. It seems that the genre of encyclopedic volumes had a renaissance during the early Cold War.

³⁶ *WEM* was distributed among 16 % of the East German youth in 1955, 24 % in 1956, 29 % in 1957, 40 % in 1959, 80 % in 1960, 85 % in 1965, 90 % in 1960 and 95 % in 1973. Torsten Morche, *Weltall ohne Gott. Erde ohne Kirche. Mensch ohne Glaube* (Leipzig; Berlin: Kirchhof & Franke 2006), 49, 54–5, 62–3.

³⁷ This intention reflects the decision of the 13th Komsomol (youth organization in the Soviet Union) congress in 1958 to launch an antireligious campaign by introducing ‘red rituals.’ The party acknowledged that religion – especially its recruitment via rituals – had persisted in

tained the dedication “Zur Erinnerung an die Jugendweihe gewidmet vom Zentralen Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” (In remembrance of the Jugendweihe dedicated by the Central Committee for Jugendweihe in the GDR). After an attempt to introduce another book, the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) decided to retain the *WEM*. In total, the *WEM* went through 22 editions in 20 years.³⁸ Allegedly, this book was the most printed publication in East Germany. However, under the same book format and the same title, it was continually revised: With the exception of 1961 (see below), another revised edition was published every year. It was completely rewritten in 1962 (10th edition),³⁹ 1966 (14th edition) and 1972 (20th edition). The ideological claim of the book grew with the number of editions until the early 1960s, as the first sentence in the 14th edition documents: “This book is the book of truth.”⁴⁰

The success of this book was interrupted only twice: In 1957 *Unser Deutschland* (*Our Germany*)⁴¹ tried to temper the aggressive tone of the *WEM* and used a more patriotic perspective, praising the achievements of the GDR. Due to the loss of ambition and the lack of evolutionary materialism, general secretary Walter Ulbricht ordered the edition to be shredded. The editor of *Unser Deutschland*

spite of atheistic propaganda, administrative measures and scientific education. A survey in Leningrad had shown that religious weddings declined from 25 % to 0.24 % as soon as alternative rituals were offered. Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty. A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2018), 179. So, the party decided to initiate a system of secular rituals that would impart the scientific atheistic worldview. Besides the registration of newborns and weddings, a ‘passport ceremony’ (at the age of 16) was developed. This was the blueprint for the Jugendweihe which was propagated in East Germany.

³⁸ For a concise documentation of the changes between the editions, see Morche, *Weltall ohne Gott. Erde ohne Kirche. Mensch ohne Glaube*, 63–160.

³⁹ All editions after 1962 were directed by Alfred Kosing as the main editor. He was associate professor at the Institute for Philosophy in Berlin at that time, later to become one of the leading figures of socialist theory especially in his function as philosopher in the IfG (Institut für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim Zentralkomitee der SED) and as co-author of canonical works: *Kleines Wörterbuch der marxistisch-leninistischen Philosophie* (Berlin [East]: Dietz, 1966–84); *Marxistische Philosophie. Lehrbuch* (Berlin [East]: Dietz, 1967).

⁴⁰ Walter Ulbricht, “Vorwort”, *WEM* (1966), 5. As a member of the free-religious milieu in Leipzig Ulbricht underwent 1907 the free-religious Jugendweihe as a substitute of the Lutheran confirmation. According to his biography he was intrigued by non-elitist, popular books on the evolution of species and societies, that explained the world in a socio-darwinist manner. Igor J. Polianski, “Das Rätsel der DDR und die ‘Welträtsel’. Wissenschaftlich-atheistische Aufklärung als propagandistisches Leitkonzept der SED”, in *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* 36/37 (2006), 15–23, 18.

⁴¹ *Unser Deutschland. Ein Buch für alle, die es lieben* (*Our Germany. A Book for All who Love it*), ed. Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe (Berlin [East]: Verlag Neues Leben 1957).

was dismissed and assigned a diplomatic role in China. In 1961 *Unsere Welt von morgen* (*Our World of Tomorrow*)⁴² came out as a kind of future vision for the coming 25 years of socialism, promising an abundant variety of goods, immediate customer service, cities full of gastronomy, tourism to every country of the world, wealth for everyone, etc. Ironically, it was somehow the description of the situation of West Germany, not East Germany. Whereas *Unser Deutschland* was too irenic and nationalistic, *Unsere Welt von morgen* was refuted as too daring and consumeristic.

The contents of *WEM* are quite disparate: Most of its articles present history and the latest findings in astronomy, biology, anthropology, social history, with few Marxist-Leninist semantics. One can read it as an interesting, sometimes even entertaining encyclopedia, and this is exactly how it was used. Many East Germans still have the *WEM* on the bookshelves of their parents or grandparents. Nearly everyone in East Germany knows this book. Since nearly everyone received it on the occasion of their Jugendweihen, it did not sell in the bookstores, although it was displayed everywhere.

The two prefaces (by Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker), the introduction (by Robert Havemann⁴³) and a chapter on capitalism and communism are the only sections that employ a gross propagandistic tone. These passages repeatedly explain the Marxist cosmology: Everything consists of moving and evolving matter; matter is real and eternal; workers are designing matter for their own good; there is no supernatural cause like gods or spirits; the mind of man itself is a function of matter; 'idealist' worldviews are illusionary; and history consists of a sequence of necessary changes from hunters and gatherers to slaveholder and feudal societies, climaxing in the most subtle, but extreme, oppression in capitalism.

The reader will not find a utopia of a paradisiac world to come. Instead, the text refers to scientific and agricultural achievements, especially of the USSR, although it abstains from promising castles in the air. *WEM* still expresses the pathos of socialist post-Second World War anti-fascism: the condemnation of war and inhumanity as well as the praise of the suffering poor throughout history.

⁴² Karl Böhm, and Rolf Dörge, *Unsere Welt von morgen* (Berlin [East]: Verlag Neues Leben, 1959). The 4th edition (1961) was used as a book-gift for Jugendweihe.

⁴³ The first chapter by Robert Havemann is a brilliant fusion of philosophical ideas and scientific insights. Havemann wrote it in his Stalinist years. He was a prominent member of the German resistance to Nazism, was sentenced to death but received amnesty because of his importance in chemical research. He became the director of an East-German institute and a collaborator of the secret service, before he lost his position in 1964 due to his straight pacifist standpoints.

There is no everyday life yet, everything is exceptional and extreme. The unbroken optimism regarding a new era of peace and justice colludes with the condemnation of the crimes committed by capitalists.

The later edition, called the *Neufassung 1972* (*New Edition 1972*), carries the same title but is a completely new book. According to the decisions of the SED's 6th Party Congress in 1963, it shifted the topic from 'What is the world?' to 'What is history?' The volume grew from 404 to 517 pages, especially because it then contained many more Marxist dogmas. The chapter *Wie sehen wir unsere Welt?* (*How do we see our world?*) reads like a catechism of dialectic materialism, rendering definitions of matter and mind that cannot be questioned because Marx, Engels and Lenin formulated these truths, which reality then proves. The revision added articles about physics, chemistry, technology (especially space travel) and medicine, now with definitive evidence that the West was using science for war, the East for the good of mankind.

The polemics against religious ideas received less attention: The biblical account of creation is equated with fairytales of nomads. There is no mystery in this world; the ability of mankind to explain everything is infinite. By adding lengthy articles on the biography of Marx, Engels, Lenin, the early German communists and the GDR (down to the details of five-year plans and setting the correct price of a product), *WEM* gradually became a history book. It culminates in the vision of communist existence in which the individual is no longer a private but a political being. It presupposes that the strongest longing of humanity is to live life as workers. Work is depicted as the fulfillment of human life.

The self-confidence of the later versions must be viewed in their historical context: After the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, after winning the fight with the churches over the alternative Jugendweihe/confirmation and after the introduction of civic education (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) as a compulsory subject, 95 % of the youth (by the early 1970s) participated in Jugendweihen. It had become a mass ritual, and *WEM* was the expression of this victory.

3.2 *Der Sozialismus – deine Welt*⁴⁴ (1975–1982)

Der Sozialismus – deine Welt (*Socialism – Your World* – henceforth *SDW*) took a different approach. Instead of explaining the world or history, it offered a lot of short biopics and testimonials by 88 authors (*WEM* was written by 12 authors,

⁴⁴ Zentraler Ausschuß für Jugendweihe in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, ed. *Der Sozialismus – deine Welt* (Berlin [East]: Verlag Neues Leben, 1975).

the *WEM* revised edition by 18). In it, the GDR speaks with all its self-confidence.⁴⁵ The language and design is very much youth-oriented. No more lengthy tracts, the sections about science are shorter but much more ideological: Religion and church are described as natural enemies of science (fought against Aristotle, Bacon, Siger, Bruno and Galileo, up until the German monist leader Ernst Haeckel). This version turns the history of science into a history of scientists in their social contexts. There is not one topic from geology to philosophy, biology to art⁴⁶ that is not deeply entrenched with Marxist-Leninist tendencies. Even the chapter on quantum physics is turned into a debate against the idealistic notion that reality may not be objective. The book does not function as an encyclopedia of interesting findings but as an ideological compass. No discipline is innocent.⁴⁷

The antagonism between socialist countries and the imperialist culture is brought to an extreme. *SDW* dedicates 220 pages (the chapter *Unser Jahrhundert – das Jahrhundert des Sozialismus/ Our Century – the Century of Socialism*) to showing the success of socialist economics. The class enemy is employed as a pattern of negative examples.⁴⁸ The last third of the book is dedicated to *Dein Platz im Sozialismus (Your Place in Socialism)*, and tries to address the individual. But, there is no individual. Each person is class-bound. The very last text is a fervent plea to the reader: You are young, you have to make decisions, you need a com-

45 Preface from Erich Honecker: Testimonial about his anti-fascist life, victory of socialism in the world, GDR as a “state of true freedom and democracy, peace and humanity.” *SDW*, 6.

46 Whereas real art allegedly was part of the fight for a better future and the change of social conditions, under imperialism art was abused to make inhumanity seem normal. *SDW*, 126–7.

47 The ‘laws’ of Engels and Lenin affirm the material unity of the world, the infinity of matter and matter as a priori over mathematics. *SDW*, 111–21. Thus, every theory which is only an ideal model of reality has to be rejected. Scientists from the US are shown in one line with the inhuman experiments in National Socialists concentration camps.

48 *SDW*, 328–30, mentions the usual list: chasing after profits, monopolies, pornography, exploitation, imperialistic wars (Guatemala, Lebanon, Cuba, Angola, Congo, Vietnam), etc. – manipulation on all fields of life. Except for one section about a naughty student who gets his ‘correction’ in school, there is no mentioning of shortcomings in socialist society: The environment, economy and civil freedoms are all in the best shape. With regard to the continuously quoted law of dialectics, the only dialectic is the antagonism between the imperialists in other countries and the socialists in the reader’s own country. This is in a way consistent, because according to Marxism-Leninism you cannot compare individuals but only social systems. Even the achievements are not only shown off, but contrasted against the shortcomings of Western systems.

pass! Marxism-Leninism is your compass! Socialism does need you and your commitment!⁴⁹

SDW is the product of party strategists who wanted to raise new socialist personalities. It substitutes the informative aspects and revolutionary utopia found in *WEM* with a staunch ideology. The ideal is no more the committed anti-fascist, but the disciplined party member. The division between Marxist-Leninist articles and scientific articles is blurred, because every section – from world economy to dating⁵⁰ – is formatted according to the same scheme: Matter is eternal, theories are a kind of practice, the true practice is the collective action of the party and any true party must be Marxist-Leninist. The main contrast between the earlier imperialist era and the current communist era is replaced by the contrast between the imperialist countries outside and ‘our’ socialist society.

In general, the utopian goals are reduced sharply. Instead of a grand vision, the *SDW* describes a blast furnace and the plans to improve working conditions. 1975 was the time when the East started to realize that it had lost the economic race. Yet, it was also the time when protest movements in the West against ecological devastation and NATO weapons and the solidarity movements for Nicaragua or the Philippine communist insurgency fanned the hope that the West would give birth to its own opposition.

Whereas in the 1970s the Jugendweihe was exploited to educate the youth from the worldview of the working-class, the Jugendweihe in the 1980s attempted to integrate private needs and stabilize personal biographies. The party edited a magazine including ecological projects (planting trees) and supplied the public with a lot of literature to prepare for the Jugendweihe courses – and ceremonies.⁵¹

49 The imperatives are backed by best-practice examples e.g. about committed volunteers of the party youth organization, FDJ. These texts are obviously streamlined in a politically correct, bureaucratic style.

50 Friendship and sexuality are addressed as unavoidable human behaviors. *SDW*, 454–61. Only in a collective with others do people have the instruments to develop their capacities in every sense. Personal freedom is possible only in a community, and only in socialism is marriage free, i.e. not dependent on social status and money.

51 Zentraler Ausschuss für Jugendweihe in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, ed. *Handbuch zur Jugendweihe* (Dresden: Verlag Volk und Wissen, 1974), 11, 19, 21, 37. This is the function of the pledge ‘*Gelöbnis*,’ which motivates the whole book. It defines how the leaders of the preparatory courses (*Jugendstunden*), the teachers in school, the FDJ representatives and the professionals of the committees (allegedly 100,000 participants!) have to cooperate. It is interesting that the *Handbuch* does not mention the gift book at all. Obviously, the specific celebrations start to diverge from the official line in the book gifts. See also Fred Helbig, *Jugendweihe feiern in Familie und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Zentralhauspublikation, 1987). This guidebook starts with an

3.3 Vom Sinn unseres Lebens⁵² (1983–1989)

The third and final Jugendweihe gift in GDR times was *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (*Of the Meaning of Our Life* – henceforth *SUL*). It was distributed between 1983 and 1989. With its annual edition of 200,000 copies it was the most frequently printed book during these years. The book was especially designed for Jugendweihen⁵³ and starts out with a greeting by Erich Honecker. It is structured from the universal to the individual. The questions in the ideological introduction serve as a first rough table of contents: the evolution of the cosmos – the evolution of mankind – Marxism and its enemies – the meaning of life – the duties of the individual. The book aims at teaching a young person to face reality as it is and to make correct judgements in the interest of socialism. You need not become a socialist, you only have to understand what the world is made of and how its parts interact. It seems as though the party assumes a kind of anonymous Marxism in every human being, a slight shift towards a hidden inclusivism.

Of course, *SUL* repeats the same Marxist-Leninist tractates as its predecessors,⁵⁴ but it spends a great deal of effort to explain what it means to be a responsible and happy personality (not: ‘person’).⁵⁵ Happiness entails ‘successful activity’ in the party, in the factory, in the military defending peace against colonial powers, in summer camps (instead of meaningless vacations) and good entertainment through TV and sports. Especially art will help one to bear ‘unbearable pain,’ which will be present even in communist classless society: tragedy and comedy. These are the only ten lines in which the book deals with depression, but it avoids mentioning death. Although art is presented as a clear functional substitute for religion, the book never displays artwork showing a suffering person (instead, heroic workers and farmers).

SUL is a doctrinal text, illustrated by some short biographies and artworks. It contains no grand utopia, stays very sober and concentrates on everyday life in

orthodox introduction about the difference between the proletarian Jugendweihe and the bourgeois Jugendweihe of the free-thinkers. But, the rest of the booklet unfolds a quite bourgeois handbook for planning the party at home. What to read, say, cook, bake, etc. This documents that the Jugendweihe had become a family ceremony.

52 Zentraler Ausschuß für Jugendweihe in der DDR, ed. *Vom Sinn unseres Leben* (Berlin [East]: Verlag Neues Leben, 1987).

53 The book seems to be the result of a thoroughly planned writing process. The collective of authors gives credit to the Department of Marxism-Leninism and the Academy for Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the SED.

54 Cf. the chapter *Wer treibt die Geschichte voran?* (*Who promotes history?*). *SUL*, 77–140.

55 Cf. the chapter *Du und der Sozialismus* (*You and Socialism*). *SUL*, 209–61.

the GDR. The main message is: Communism may be far away, but we keep on going. This book reflects – contrary to its own intentions – a step towards individualization. It tries to focus on the reality of the youth, but it is written in a redundant, boring, administrative party language. It seems that the rise of individual needs and expectations have forced the party to deal with this topic. That is why the life of young people receives much attention, yet from a negative perspective: Private life is seen critically as a road to intimacy and to in-groups instead of taking part in collective life. Ideals can never consist of idealistic dreams, because the latter are not rooted in social reality. Since the best society that humanity has ever reached is Soviet and East German socialism (freedom, education, welfare and peace), all ideals must be an extension of this society. Everything beyond or below this role model is criticized as a fantasy or a lie.

Since the mid-80s, the SED’s Central Committee planned a new edition,⁵⁶ but the 1989/90 the Peaceful Revolution overrode this process.

4 Book gifts after the 1990 Peaceful Revolution

Of course, no organizer of Jugendweihe after the Peaceful Revolution dared to use the GDR books. Yet, the ritual continued and it required a book gift. So, in the first phase, the organizers chose generally interesting books that were not directly related to the ritual, mostly travel guides to Germany, Europe and the rest of the world. They can be characterized by an obvious abstinence from any ideological position. They all focus on descriptive geographical information with the intention of broadening the minds of the German youth and making them aware of the plurality of lifestyles in other countries, thus fostering tolerance. The driving motives are neither ethical nor metaphysical questions, but rather curiosity about foreign cultures. Since most East Germans could only travel freely to socialist countries, these books seemed to meet suppressed needs. The books served as souvenirs, not as programmatic texts. Among many others,⁵⁷ the earliest shall be presented first.

56 Chowanski, and Dreier, *Die Jugendweihe*, 111–2.

57 See *Deutschland – so schön ist unser Land* [*Germany – Our Beautiful Country*] (Berlin: Reise- und Verkehrsverlag, 1993) – a mixture of tour guide and travel recommendations; Konrad Reich, ed., *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Ein Porträt für die Jugend* [*Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. A Portrait for Adolescents*] (Rostock: Reich, 1995) – a touristic and historical portrait of the federal state of Mecklenburg; Interessensvereinigung Jugendweihe e.V., ed., *Europa. Ein Kontinent und seine Staaten* [*Europe. A Continent and its Countries*] (Berlin: Bertelsmann, 1995) – an overview of European cultures; Werner Riedel, ed., *Die Welt, in der wir leben. Völker – Staaten – Lebensräume*

4.1 *Aufbruch ins Morgen*⁵⁸ (1991)

The book *Aufbruch ins Morgen* (*Departure into Tomorrow* – henceforth *AIM*) contains a history of the Jugendweihe since 1846 (in free-religious circles in Hamburg), excerpts from earlier speeches, portraits of famous Mecklenburger countrymates, and a list of proverbs from great thinkers (Gorki, Goethe, Fontane, Zetkin, Tolstoi, Mühsam, etc.), proverbs in the local dialect (Plattdeutsch), and a pathetic sermon against consumerism and reckless competition.⁵⁹ *AIM* is a typical ‘Wende-product’. The organizers in the association Interessenvereinigung Jugendarbeit und Jugendweihe e.V. still included some of the old cadres of the communist party, but their gift book took up a completely new tradition: The free-religious⁶⁰ ritual of liberals in Hamburg and Berlin in the 19th century, and later in West German cities. The main message now was: no dogma, no paternalism by religions or state, strive for happiness, work together, don’t waste resources!

4.2 *Zwischen nicht mehr und noch nicht*⁶¹ (1994 – 2008)

Zwischen nicht mehr und noch nicht (*Between no-more and not-yet* – henceforth *ZMN*) was first produced in 1994 as a Jugendweihe gift and was printed in ten editions until 2008. Even today it is used for Jugendweihen organized by the Humanistischer Verband. This book is the first to take up the free-thinkers’ tradition. Unlike its socialist predecessors, it comes in a fancy outfit: a red envelope

[*The World in Which We Live. Peoples-Countries-Habitats*] (Stuttgart: Falken, 1998) – an introduction to cultures of various countries.

⁵⁸ Landesvorstand der Interessenvereinigung, *Aufbruch ins Morgen*.

⁵⁹ Note: The book takes up topics of the early ecological discourse in West Germany at this time: population growth, the greenhouse effect and AIDS. The problems of the ‘imperialist’ West are now the problems of everyone.

⁶⁰ *Freireligiöse Gemeinden* were founded in revolutionary times around 1850 in order to form Christian congregations without denominational borders. Freedom of religion only later became freedom from religion when the non-denominational Jugendweihen fused with proletarian ceremonies of school graduation/entering the workforce in 1990s. The Jugendweihen in West Germany under the Libertine (*Freidenker*) organizations had an explicitly atheistic touch. For the history, especially the origins, see Meier, *Jugendweihe*, 96–159.

⁶¹ Patricia Block, ed., *Zwischen nicht mehr und noch nicht* (Berlin: Humanistischer Verband Deutschland, 1994,²1995,³1996,⁴1997,⁵1999,⁶2000,⁷2004). Here, I refer to the latest edition.

with stickers.⁶² It contains short texts predominantly by German poets (Hesse, Kästner, Kahlaue, Kunze), some cartoons, some lyrics and comments from students in the humanistic classes of *Lebenskunde* (‘life skills’) in Berlin.⁶³ The selection is brilliant, focusing on problems of adolescence: falling in love with the teacher, dating a boy, spending a year abroad, chatting and teasing on the internet, living without a father, etc.⁶⁴ Only at the end does it render a very short history of the Jugendweihe as a story of victimization and a short outline of humanistic thought: Humanism is depicted as the world of individual free choice. Since man is prone to deception, one should doubt rather than just believe. Fairytales, occultism, religions and myths are expressions of human dreams of a better world. But, they result from the inability to accept that humanity does not know the answers to the ultimate questions of matter, time and the universe. Humanists are presented as less impatient and more humble than the religious.⁶⁵

ZMN refuses to be a programmatic book. It offers everyday situations such as that of a father entering his daughter’s messy room. The parents’ perspective is complemented by the youngster’s perspective, for example being forced to spend her vacation with her parents. The contributions in this book are helpful material for further discussions about responsibility, fidelity, happiness, etc. They are written with great honesty and a deep sympathy for the ambiguities of growing up, as indicated by the title *Between no-more and not-yet*. The overall message – don’t follow an authority or your own feelings blindly – differs quite significantly from books used in religious education, where the basic tone is trust and fidelity. *ZMN* emphasizes doubt and rationality.

The Jugendfeier explicitly takes up anti-authoritarian thought: Traditional institutions like school and family are necessary but tend to be deceptive, selective and sometimes oppressive. This is a U-turn compared to the socialist Jugendweihe, where the individual was a dangerous entity which had to be integrated. All of the examples are taken from the context of individual morals (school,

⁶² At first glance they look like collector pins from contemporary youth culture: reggae colors, a peace dove, a teddy bear, etc. They make reference to specific stories in the book.

⁶³ The preface by the main editor describes the intention of the book: The adolescent reader should understand that she/he is not alone at this difficult age. *ZMN*, 11.

⁶⁴ Most of the stories feature existential crises and dilemmas: A girl is dating the most attractive boy in school but does not want the love or the stress (*ZMN*, 24–7). A 15-year-old girl has cancer and has two different lives, before and after the illness (*ZMN*, 110–4). A boy makes his first steps to find a gay partner, goes dating in clubs, makes contacts in parks (*ZMN*, 124–7). A boy’s mother erases every trace of his father and depicts latter as a liar to her son. During a Jugendweihe, the boy wonders about the advice of the speaker, opting not to place too much trust in hearsay (*ZMN*, 143–5).

⁶⁵ *ZMN*, 150–3.

peers and family); the wider range of social ethics (the state, humanity, the planet) is omitted.

4.3 *Lebenswege, Geraden, Kreuzungen, Umwege*⁶⁶ (2012 – 2017)

The latest gift book *Lebenswege (Ways of Life)* – the product of a workshop process initiated by the HVD⁶⁷ – features some adults who ‘made it.’ They are interviewed by teenagers who are just beginning of their life journeys. The book wants to help the reader “to develop your own criteria.”⁶⁸ Nine dialogues are transcribed: between a girl from an orphanage and a retired worker, between a daughter living without her father and a mother living without her husband, between a young immigrant from Azerbaijan and a diplomat from Africa.

There is no more programmatic or historical text at all, but only the more or less fragmented biographies of ordinary people. Compared to other gift books, AIM, ZMN and Ways of Life shift towards shorter texts by multiple authors. The architecture becomes less systematic, the overarching worldview is lost. Instead of transporting knowledge, the texts orbit around the question of how to live in a complex world.

4.4 *Weltanschauung*⁶⁹ (2009 – 2017)

Weltanschauung (worldview) serves as the official book gift today for Jugendweihen that are organized by Jugendweihe Deutschland e.V. Immediately after the Peaceful Revolution, the authors created a book gift that can be viewed as a pre-

⁶⁶ Patricia Block, ed., *Lebenswege. Geraden, Kreuzungen, Umwege* (Berlin: Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands, 2012).

⁶⁷ Again, it is Patricia Block who designed and published this collection of dialogues between an adult and a teenager. Patricia Block also authored *Einmal im Leben. Ein Elternratgeber zur Jugendfeier/Jugendweihe* (Berlin: Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands, 2001) and *Humanismus ist die Zukunft. Festschrift Hundert Jahre Humanistischer Verband Berlin* (Berlin: Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands, 2006). She seems to be the main author in the area of humanistic education.

⁶⁸ Block, *Lebenswege*, 9.

⁶⁹ Jugendweihe Deutschland e. V., ed., *Weltanschauung. Jugend verändert die Welt – Das Buch zur humanistischen Jugendweihe* (Berlin: Duden Paetec, 2009,²2010,³2012).

cursor.⁷⁰ *Weltanschauung* features certain parallels with *Weltall Erde Mensch* in format and content. The texts are written in a scientific style comparable to the genre of German youth encyclopedia (*Jugendlexika*), complemented by testimonials and personal opinions of teens. Like a school textbook,⁷¹ *Weltanschauung* inserts questions for further discussion, tests and crossword puzzles, and illustrates its articles with tables and pictures.

The introductory chapter dates its own Jugendweihe tradition back to German free-thinker and free-religious movements in the second half of the 19th century, the proletarian Jugendweihen in the 1920s and the socialist Jugendweihen in the GDR. Although an aside mentions overambitious party members who used the ritual to ban dissident pupils from higher education, the text downplays the highly politicized function.⁷²

The first section describes the history of adolescence and its social status in modern society between volunteer work and commerce, before it answers typical questions about sexuality, drugs, mobbing and employability. The second section explains the basics of democracy and European integration. The third section features scientific knowledge about the big bang, genetics and biological evolution, including its critics from Intelligent Design arguments. The fourth section deals with problems of the global population and climate change, computer science and information technology. Section Five deals with religion and takes a strong standpoint: Religions are made by men, gods are wishful thinking.⁷³ The major religions are featured in general terms: Whereas Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism are described by their teachings, Christianity is depicted along with its history – especially the violent phases (persecution in the Roman Empire, forced conversions/missionaries, crusades). The message is clear: religions may be helpful to foster humanitarian ethics (one example is

⁷⁰ Konny G. Neumann, Kurt Neumann, and Jens Wohlert, *Was ist der Mensch, was soll der Mensch? 105 Jahre Jugendweihe – 50 Jahre Jugendweihe in Hamburg nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg – 5 Jahre Zusammenarbeit der Jugendweihe Hamburg mit der Partnerstadt Dresden. Ein historischer Überblick inklusive Anhang. Als Gedenkbuch allen Kursus-TeilnehmerInnen der Jugendweihe Hamburg überreicht* (Hamburg: Heinevetter²1995). The book is a result of the cooperation of the West German foundation Geistesfreiheit in Hamburg and the East German association Interessenvereinigung Jugendweihe in Sachsen.

⁷¹ Consequently, *Weltanschauung* is published by the distinguished publishing house Duden Schulbuchverlag. The main author is Konny Neumann, headmaster of a high school and vice-president of Jugendweihe Deutschland e.V.

⁷² It is true that the local celebrations were largely de-ideologized (cf. *Weltanschauung*, 17), but this refers only to the later decades of the GDR.

⁷³ Cf. *Weltanschauung*, 134–5, 151, 158.

the project "World Ethos" by Hans Küng), but ultimately they consist of human self-sedation.

This standpoint is backed by the following Section Six on "philosophy and questions of meaning": Religions are attempts to fill the gap of the inexplicable. The meaning of life "is three-fold from today's vantage point"⁷⁴: the preservation of the human species, the tradition of cultural achievements and human progress in science and ethics. Ethical progress should lead to responsibility for the common good, although mankind is mainly determined by self-preservation and egoism. Section Seven discusses the importance of values, among which the universal ones (like human rights) should be preferred. The humanist tradition (medieval humanism – French Revolution – Enlightenment – New Humanism in the 20th century) is credited with defending these values against fascists and religious fundamentalists. The last section unfolds contemporary challenges such as migration, hunger, global injustice and military conflicts.

Unlike the other 'post-Wende books', which focus on topics of individual life-orientation, *Weltanschauung* consists mainly of scientific and political topics. It tries to be a compendium of what one should know or think about, thus taking up the tradition of the early book gifts. Of course, it does not convey socialist ideology, but it does take on a certain doctrinal style.

5 Conclusion

a) Rituals can change their content. The high stability of the Jugendweihe is due to the perseverance of interactions (rituals) over communication (content). The layer of meaning and distinctions may vary, while the layer of doing and exchanging (celebrating, giving presents, gathering) remains the same. A clear sign for the endurance of the ritual is the fact that the liturgical pledge was changed only twice, whereas the book gifts were subject to constant alteration. Yet, unlike the pledge, the book gifts survived past 1989.

b) From the collective to the individual. During its 60-year history, the Jugendweihe made a U-turn from a ceremony preventing individualism to a celebration of the individual. One can easily observe party language vs. private testimonials, a programmatic vs. narrative format, collective vs. individual culture. This took place during communism in the 1970s, as documented by the book gifts and by the increasing attention to the family celebration (overshadowing the school event). "The Jugendweihe became increasingly biographized during

the GDR, moving from an instrument of education for the state towards a celebration of the socialist personalities."⁷⁵ After a phase of great visions, the party wanted to mold the individual into the socialist project, stressing not so much the goals themselves but the individual responsibility to reach the common goals. So, individualization started not after but before 1990. The phase of the travel guides was a brief intermission, during which new formats were sought.

c) From initiation to self-affirmation. The more the Jugendweihe had become a mass ritual, the more it lost its integrative function: You don't need to make a decision for a cause anymore, it is done for you. People opted out and transformed the Jugendweihe into family festivities. In the late GDR, the primary integration (into family and adulthood) had outpaced the secondary integration (into party and state). The process of individualization expanded after the German reunification, when the Jugendweihe first became a transition into the world to explore (travel guides), and then became a ritual of self-determination. Dissenting from the original Libertine tradition, which was a quasi-religious movement for brotherhood and equality, with the exception of *Weltanschauung* the latest books of Jugendweihe abstain from any universal ideal or ideals of solidarity. Your own biography is an ego-project. The Jugendweihe became a ritual of attention to Me.

d) From matter to biography. What are the god-terms of the different versions of Jugendweihe? In socialist books, the origin of everything – nature, history and consciousness – is matter. For epistemic reasons, it cannot be described accurately because consciousness is both a complex form of matter and its 'reflection' at the same time. In order to conceptualize matter, thought is trapped in an epistemic cage. Matter thus is the horizon of transcendence; it is everywhere but escapes objectivization. Matter is the unsurpassable, endless pool of possibilities.

This will be substituted by the 'post-Wende god-term' 'biography.' The future is no longer a necessary evolution but an unpredictable, dangerous meandering of events. Nobody can guarantee consistency; growing up is an fluid develop-

⁷⁵ Wilma Kauke-Keçeci, *Sinnsuche – die semiotische Analyse eines komplexen Ritualtextes am Beispiel der ostdeutschen Jugendweihe nach 1989* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 276. This individualization was highly disputed in the Soviet Union as well. Party cadres complained that the post-war generation had grown up in wealth, but had only a superficial atheistic consciousness: The young were nonreligious such that they are indifferent to any worldview. Instead, they are left "with the mistaken view that the most important goal in a person's life is professional advancement and nothing else," cited in Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, 208.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Weltanschauung*, 153.

ment, consisting of setbacks and frustrations.⁷⁶ Each person has to cope with these interruptions in his/her private and professional life. The task is to create one's own identity by linking the changes into a consistent biography. This is why the 'post-Wende books' render narratives, not programs. The freedom to give meaning to one's own life (within the intimate context of family and peers) transcends positive and negative experiences.

⁷⁶ Crisis, diseases and death find their place in Jugendweihe books only after the German reunification, where fragility is seen as an individual destiny which has to be integrated and accepted. Most challenges arise from diverse family constellations (no father, no mother, no husband, no kids), which are not shown as broken relationships but as reality. Whereas the 'pre-Wende books' emphasize diligently contemplating whether one wants to marry this or that boy or girl, the 'post-Wende books' suggest a relatively detached acceptance of every way of life.

Jenny Vorpahl

“Proletarian culture does not fall from heaven”

Patterns of legitimation in the reception of ritual traditions in the GDR

Introduction

Since 1876, the civil marriage is the only legally valid marriage in Germany.¹ Therefore, in Germany every bridal couple has to pass through the registrar's office. They can also opt for a religious ceremony, which was common practice until the end of the 1950s for the majority of the German population. Grand efforts were made during the political, social and cultural reorganization of post-war East Germany to install alternative concepts for ritual customs concerning lifecycle changes. According to a survey conducted by GDR researchers, the percentage of weddings taking place in church had fallen to 4.8 % by 1984.²

The examination of legitimization processes in this article is meant to be a contribution to explaining the rapid and enduring establishment of civil marriage as the only type of wedding ceremony in a socialist society. The design

¹ See § 1 and 41 of the Gesetz über die Beurkundung des Personenstandes und die Eheschließung. Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt 1875, 23. For the GDR, see § 24 of the Civil Status Act [Personenstandsgesetz, short PStG] of 1957 and § 12 PStG of 1981. The introduction of registrar offices and the obligatory civil marriage was one of the measures introduced in opposition to the church within the context of the Kulturkampf and a result of the separation of church and state. See Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918. Machtstaat vor der Demokratie*, (München: C.H. Beck, 1995), 367–8, 375.

² Cf. Federal Archive Berlin [BArch] SAPMO – Olof Klohr et al., *Kirchen und Religionsgemeinschaften in den drei Nordbezirken der DDR. Kirchenstudie 1986* (Rostock-Warnemünde, 1986), 374–5. Christopher Binns also notes a drastic decline in church weddings down to 0.5 % in 1971 in the Soviet Union, but concedes that it is unclear how many secular weddings are performed in a ceremonial way or just as simple registration. Cf. Christopher Binns, “Sowjetische Feste und Rituale (II),” in *Osteuropa* 2 (1979): 118. Concrete numbers are only available for the most ‘successful’ areas like the Baltic republics and the Ukraine, which acquired a forerunner role in establishing alternatives to religious rites since the late 1950s. For the Ukraine the secular celebration of weddings rose to 82.9 percent in 1982. Cf. John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46–7, 120.