

“Diesem Film liegen Tatsachen zugrunde ...” The Narrative of Antifascism and Its Appropriation in the East German Espionage Series *Das unsichtbare Visier* (1973-1979)

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Abstract: Since narratives of legitimation have to adapt to shifting discursive environments, they cannot be regarded as static phenomena. To present a sound understanding of their embedment in a specific context, narratives have to be approached from a variety of perspectives – they necessitate, in other words, a “thick description”. This paper addresses the narrative of antifascism as a central element of public discourse throughout the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and contextualizes it specifically in East German television culture. In addition to providing an understanding of antifascism as an ideological signifier exclusively for historical phenomena, such as National Socialism (NS) or Italian fascism, this paper proposes to conceptualize the narrative of antifascism – as it was officially defined in the GDR/SBZ – as a discursive formation that encompasses various political narratives such as militarism and imperialism, as well as past and present political events. Based on this assumption, the highly successful espionage series *Das unsichtbare Visier* (1973-1979), which was produced by the DEFA and broadcasted by the East German state television (DFP/DDR-F), will be discussed in relation to its exploitation of the narrative of antifascism. By approaching these issues, it is the objective of this paper to examine the practices of the appropriation of the narrative of antifascism in an era that was marked by the development of popular (socialist) television culture and, moreover, to contribute to the discussion of the dialectic between stability and flexibility that is inherent to narratives.

Keywords: narratives, television culture, GDR, public discourse

1. Introduction¹

In the course of the past two decades, individual and collective efforts have contributed to a substantial history of television in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Whilst media historical research was for the most part concerned with fostering an image of the supremacy of the SED in media politics,² various projects and publications promoted a differentiated understanding of East German television.³ In that vein, the historiography of the 40-year existence of the *Deutscher Fernsehfunke* (DFF), which was renamed *Fernsehen der DDR* (DDR-F) in 1972, presented considerable gaps, including inattention to such popular programs as the espionage series *Das unsichtbare Visier* [literal translation *The Invisible Visor*]. To that end, this series will be examined as a cultural artifact which oscillates between the narrative of antifascism and the state-led development of an entertainment and popular culture in the 1970s.

After a concise introduction to the concepts of legitimation and narratives, this paper will discuss one of the most immutable narratives of legitimation in socialist regimes, the narrative of antifascism. I will propose an account of this political concept which highlights the potential to promote topical and ideological consistency and coherence between varying political phenomena, such as the remembrance of National Socialism (NS) and the depiction of contemporary West Germany. Roselle et al. (2014) emphasized that the study of narratives must take into account their discursive environment. This means that although narratives might operate as “mobile signifiers” which could be appropriated by different media environments as well as by their actors and discourses, they indeed contain several shared central elements. Hence, the analysis of a narrative which is embedded in the discourses and institutional practices of television necessitates a discussion of the East German mediascape⁴, its competitive relation with the West German television and the concomitant structural and thematic developments in the East German state-television (DFF/DDR-F). In the last section, *Das Unsichtbare Visier* will be analyzed with regards to the institutional prerequisites, its connection with the Ministry for State Security (MfS), and its appropriation of the narrative of antifascism. A concluding statement will help to make evident the dialectic between flexibility and stability with respect to the contextual settings of narratives of legitimation.

¹ I would like to thank Jörg-Uwe Fischer (Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, DRA) and Renate Göthe (Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf) for providing me with valuable archival and press material.

² Cf. the critique of Günter Agde (2003) regarding Holzweißig’s history of East German media, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei. Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR*.

³ For instance, the ambitious project ‘Programmgeschichte des DDR-Fernsehens’ which resulted in variety of publications, including Steinmetz/Viehoff 2008, Dittmar/Vollberg 2007; see also Gumbert 2014, Dittmar 2010, Lee 2003.

⁴ Heiner Stahl introduced Arjun Appadurai’s concept of ‘mediascape’ to the research of media environments in the GDR, cf. Stahl 2010.

2. *Legitimation and Narratives*

Though scholars tend to boil the concept and scope of legitimation down to power relations in a certain period in history to certain groups and individuals, legitimation is a historically recurring aspect of power relations. Every relation between the power holders and their subordinates raises the question of legitimacy; every political system is invariably confronted with its ramifications. It is only a question of *governmentality* (M. Foucault) whether a certain system requires legitimation, since it serves as a central rationale for power holders and for the agents of legitimacy. That is, it gives the power holders the prospect of governing subordinates according to their specific purposes – often purposes which are declared to be in the collective interest. Following David Beetham’s critically acclaimed account of legitimacy⁵, legitimation facilitates the retention of the existing social order, the stability of the power relations and the effectiveness of government, as well as the quality of performance by subordinates. On the other hand, it limits the range of the governmental practices of the power holders. Physical repression, the absence of political participation on the part of subordinates or problematic living conditions will invariably serve to weaken the power of the authority. Hence, legitimacy is a two-fold system that sets certain limits and opportunities at both “ends” of power relations.

As an empiricist who proceeds to analyze legitimation in its socio-historical context, David Beetham focuses on the question of whether or not a power relation is legitimate for the sake of the agents of legitimacy – in other words, do the efforts of the power holders establish legitimacy? This sets certain analytical restrictions which move away from the question of what the narratives and practices of legitimation which are supposed to establish a “belief-in-legitimacy” in favor of the power holders actually constitute, and instead focus on the narratives. That is, the analysis of legitimacy is closely related to its narrations and “narrators”.

Stemming essentially from the context of literary theory, the term “narrative” refers to the telling of a plot or the communication of a chain of fictive or real events. Its use in the context of the humanities – especially in historiography⁶ and social and political sciences – draws attention to the constructivist character of discursive knowledge. The analysis of narratives has proven to be a prolific concept for the purposes of deconstructing the means of discursive power. A variety of studies have shown that an essential feature of narratives is their ability to convey consistency and coherence where the “contingency” of past or present reality does not provide it. In other words, narratives can “connect apparently unconnected phenomena [historical as well as contemporary, S.H.] around some causal

⁵ Beetham 2013.

⁶ White 1980.

transformation...⁷ For example, where a given regime is not able to argue in favor of its current policies, narratives can serve the purpose of masking political or social episodes which, however ultimately, reinforce political legitimation. Hence, there is no doubt that narratives are politically efficient. Furthermore, scholars have pointed to the fact that narratives can influence the “sense making” or mentality (as in the notion of the French *Annales* School) of individuals and collectives⁸ by providing – to borrow a phrase from Foucault – what is to be seen and to be said. Other scholars have turned their attention to the role of narratives in building *collective identities*:

[I]f others are convinced that narrative “fits” ongoing historical developments or understand those developments in terms of that narrative, then their responses become predictable. This cognitive dimension of narratives (understanding of cause/effect and means/ends) can work in parallel with normative dimension. That is, interests and values can be constituted. Narratives can be used strategically to create or cohere identity groups and establish shared normative orientations...⁹

These “identity groups” can distinguish themselves from other groups that would not align with the normative orientations which are provided by the narrative – practices that were commonly referred to as “identity politics”. Furthermore, Roselle suggests that narratives can operate on three levels: International system narratives “...describe how the world is constructed, who the players are and how it works”, such as the narrative of the Cold War. National narratives “(...) set out what the story of the state or nation is, what values and goals it has...” The third level includes issue narratives “that explain why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished.”¹⁰

On the level of analysis, it is important to state that narratives are always embedded in particular discursive environments¹¹, which are themselves the result of certain power relations, e.g. the institutions of mass media, which are only accessible to certain actors and groups. To analyze narratives entails considering their given context and establishing a “thick description”: Who are the actors of a given narrative, what constitutes the communicative setting, who is able to approach and access the arena in which narratives are envisaged, and furthermore, what conflicts are waged through narratives and what resolution does the narrative provide for those conflicts?¹²

⁷ Antoniadis et al. 2014: 4.

⁸ Röling and Maarleveld, cited in Price 2012: 13.

⁹ Antoniadis et al. 2014: 5.

¹⁰ Roselle et al. 2014: 76.

¹¹ Price 2012: 10.

¹² Roselle et al. 2014: 75-76.

3. *Narrative of Antifascism*

According to Beetham's concept of legitimacy and its theory of enforcing political legitimation, socialist regimes have to be regarded as fundamentally different from capitalist societies. Some scholars claimed that the analysis of socialist regimes with regards to their legitimation remains obsolete, because there is no "electoral mode of legitimacy".¹³ Evidently, those objections can be refuted; most certainly, socialist political systems had to maintain their power by reconciling their practices of governmentality with the values of the subordinates to guarantee the effectiveness and operability of government. Against the backdrop of a governmental system which did not provide an "electoral mode of legitimacy", the German Democratic Republic (GDR) constructed and advanced several narratives, such as the ideological aggrandizement of the working class, the eradication of unemployment, and women's equality, among other things, to legitimize the existing power relations. Additionally, one of the most effective discursive devices that was able to garner considerable public consent throughout the history of the GDR, and even after the German reunification, was the narrative of antifascism.

The narrative of antifascism in socialist regimes must be regarded as a complex phenomenon which informed the evaluation and remembrance of historical processes, such as the historiography of National Socialism (NS), as well as contemporary political practices. In the midst of post-war "nation building" (B. Anderson), antifascism played an essential role in the establishment of a specific East German identity.¹⁴ Especially in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) and the GDR, antifascism served the purpose of a "positive" affirmation of the civil catastrophe which the Third Reich had passed on to its successor states.

Informed by the historical determinism of Marxism-Leninism, fascism was said to be closely related to capitalism. Beyond its moral and political implications (an understanding of antifascism that Knütter described as "one-dimensional"¹⁵), fascism is determined by socio-economic factors – that is to say, the asymmetrical distribution of the means of production resulting from private property along with its invariable social struggles. As early as 1935, Georgi Dimitroff provided the succinct and yet canonical definition that fascism was the nexus of an economic and political misconception that resulted in "the open dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialistic circles of the finance capital".¹⁶ Given that this description can be considered as the foundation for various discursive practices of antifascism, it leads to some basic assumptions: (1) Since Marxism-Leninism conveys that fascism

¹³ Beetham 2013: 150-158.

¹⁴ Danyel 1995: 31.

¹⁵ Knütter 1996: 55.

¹⁶ Böhme et al. 1978: 41, translation by S.H.

is not a *sui generis* political system, but, primarily, a socio-economic development based on capitalism¹⁷, antifascism is concerned with heterogeneous phenomena. However, on the other hand, Antonia Grunenberg characterizes the Marxist-Leninist definition of capitalism as “Krypto-Fascism”¹⁸. She restates that the “capital” was elevated to be the focal enemy in the concept of fascism – not primarily the ideology of NS.¹⁹ (2) In line with the extension of the concept of fascism towards capitalism, the definition is particularly flexible in terms of the agents (individuals, collectives or states/nations) it addresses. (3) The definition by Dimitroff is intentionally a-historical. Hence, antifascism is not just directed towards specific historical forms of fascism, but can be projected onto contemporary phenomena.²⁰ This leads to the conclusion that antifascism informed by Marxism-Leninism must be regarded as a diachronic phenomenon. (4) The term antifascism has evolved to overcome an essential terminological problem: it masked the discursive, and yet ideological, congruency of the term “socialism” between its use in Marxism-Leninism and in National Socialism.²¹ Since the communist parties claimed to possess the exclusive ideology on the basis of its scientific validity, it was crucial for the SED to be able to sustain discursive power over central keywords such as “socialism”. (5) The concept of “anti”, as it is inherent to antifascism, is always oriented towards – and at the same time – against something that is externalized in terms of the “Other”. The “Other”, as the targeted object of the “anti”, is at the same time equally needed and rejected. This bipolarity of the narrative of antifascism is likely to develop an irrevocable pattern of “friend-and-foe” which, in turn, strengthens the individual and collective identity through self-assurance.²² Antifascism is, therefore, an essential aspect of (state-led) identity politics.

3.1 Past and Present of the Narrative of Antifascism in the SBZ/GDR

Based on war experiences, it was the aim of the majority of the post-war societies to overcome the immediate past by ascertaining a political and economic alternative to NS that would, above all, restore normalcy. Those basic needs and the shadows of history were superimposed by the division of Germany among the four occupying forces. In the aftermath of the Potsdam Agreement (1945), the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) was set up by a new political order which inserted a distinctive break with the National-Socialist regime and, first and foremost, with its former leaders and its structure. Under

¹⁷ Grunenberg 1997: 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ Faulenbach 1997: 145.

²¹ Münkler 1998: 27.

²² Gries/Satjukow 2004.

the control of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD), the Antifascist-Democratic Order (*antifaschistisch-demokratische Ordnung*), which was, at least in its beginning, supposed to be an integrative political system, was established as a period of transition between capitalism and socialism, as official documents regularly maintained.²³ The SMAD and the German Communist Party (KPD) focused at an early stage on merging the concept of antifascism with communist traditions to accomplish a subtle, and yet strategic, introduction of the Soviet model of socialist government.

Along with the distribution of the narrative of antifascism, the SMAD reinforced the denazification more forcefully than in the occupied zones in West Germany. By 1947, half a million people were removed from their professional and public positions. This was a political strategy that was exploited throughout the history of the GDR to substantiate and affirm the narrative of antifascism as a common political practice in socialist society. Furthermore, in order to guarantee institutional, economic and social stability, the SBZ/GDR relied on the integration of the majority of the members of East German post-war society. This necessity implied that even former members of the NSDAP had to be integrated, both because of their professional expertise in a variety of fields and to ensure a certain social “harmony” in post-war society. Though it contested the very core of communist ideology, antifascism provided an agenda wherein former National Socialists could “absolve” themselves from their collaboration with the NSDAP.²⁴ Whoever actively contributed to the antifascist-democratic order (up to 1949) and the building of socialism (from 1949 onwards), accompanied and supported the “most progressive traditions” of German history. The short phase after the liberation from the National Socialist (NS) regime when the narrative of antifascism provided consent, on the one hand, and at the same time the SMAD supported democratic conditions, on the other, quickly found its abrupt end, however. This was primarily because the Soviet occupation authorities unmasked their aim for political and cultural hegemony in East Germany. After it turned out that the KPD would not be able to sustain and legitimate hegemony over the SBZ in democratic elections – elections in Berlin and West Germany showed quite devastating results²⁵ – the KPD was facing a severe political exigency crisis and had to seek discursive strategies to legitimate a *de facto* one-party government. Upon the merger of the KPD and the SPD under the umbrella of the SED, it was the narrative of antifascism which was supposed to play an elaborate role in the ideological representation of past and present. In the context of the monopoly of the order of (ideological) knowledge conducted by the SED, it is instructive to distinguish between the discursive ramifications of

²³ Wilke 1993: 128.

²⁴ Danyel 1995: 32.

²⁵ Weber 2013: 11.

antifascism with regards to the *past*, its function regarding the East German remembrance culture, and the *present*, i.e. all developments since the introduction of the antifascist-democratic order. This paper proposes to conceptualize the narrative of antifascism as a discursive formation that encompasses various discourses such as militarism and, most importantly, imperialism.

(1) *Antifascism as part of remembrance culture*: The historiography in the GDR was the topic of numerous publications which tried to reconstruct its affiliation with existing power relations. As Martin Sabrow claims, in line with the majority of scholars, the culture of history (*Geschichtskultur*) was exceptionally informed by the ideological and political principles that were provided by Marxism-Leninism in general and the SED and its current guidelines in particular.²⁶ This specific setting laid the foundation for a “discourse of sovereignty” (*Herrschaftsdiskurs*), which perpetuated the supremacy of the SED in historiographical research.²⁷ In line with this assumption, Peter Monteath stressed that “the task of finding a past that could serve the present and the future was strikingly difficult.”²⁸ Following M. Rainer Lepsius, Monteath argues that the remembrance culture in the GDR followed the strategy of universalizing, and yet, making NS abstract through the narrative of fascism. In other words, the ideology of the NS regime was never anything intrinsic or specific to the German nation, but an after-effect of a war-torn capitalist society. Abolishing capitalism was thus considered to be the main “lesson” of the Second World War. This conception of German history, as well as the pressure on the SED to establish a profound legitimation, laid the foundation for a history of NS as the “history of resistance”. As a result, historiography established the rather suspicious phrase of the “winners of history”²⁹ and nurtured a concerted focus on communist individuals and groups as the central agents of resistance against the NS regime.

(2) *Antifascism as part of the evaluation and interpretation of contemporary phenomena*: As mentioned before, it was due to the concept of fascism, which was closely linked to the socio-economic understanding of capitalism, that fascism was not only a label for NS, but also an ideological marker for contemporary phenomena that would pinpoint an archenemy. By constructing an entity outside of its “own” in geographical and, most essentially, in ideological terms, it was possible to strengthen the East German identity against, and therefore, on the basis of the “Other”.³⁰ This practice of promoting and constructing a discrete identity according to the guidelines of antifascism appeared to have a massive influence on the perception and depiction of capitalist societies in official discourse. Consequently, the concept of antifascism laid the

²⁶ Sabrow 1998.

²⁷ Sabrow 2000: 18-21.

²⁸ Monteath 1999: 99.

²⁹ Grunenberg 1993: 120.

³⁰ Triandafyllidou 1998.

foundation for the oversimplified exploitation of the explicit connection between capitalism (and capitalist societies) and NS. At some point, it was in the SED's own interest not to clearly distinguish between capitalism, NS and imperialism, since it was the "financial monopoly" (*Monokapital*) that was inherent to all of them: "The consensus which held this model together was the twofold antifascist consensus: as an anti-capitalist and anti-Western consensus."³¹

The Marxist-Leninist notion of imperialism goes back to Lenin's *Imperialism as the Highest Stadium of Capitalism* (1916/17): on the basis of capitalism, the means of production are in the hands of a monopoly, the financial sector and the industrial sector are melting in favor of a "finance capital" (*Finanzkapital*), international monopolies are developing and the world is splitting apart into different territories.³² Contrary to the connotation that a present reader would give to the term "imperialism" (most probably the expansion of a certain territory), it is primarily a political phenomenon that develops *inside* a nation or society.³³ The doctrinaire interpretation underscores that it is for the most part a phenomenon of the twentieth century (regardless of its roots in the nineteenth century), since it describes the worldwide, contemporary struggle against socialism/communism. Hence, to an extent more than fascism, imperialism constructs a dichotomy which focuses on contemporary politics. For instance, contemporary societies which adhere to the socio-economic concept of capitalism, such as the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), are almost exclusively characterized as imperialist states. Since imperialism is marked by a flexible and yet ambiguous definition, the term could be applied to any possible nation, with the "added value" that imperialism denotes a certain aggression. The *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* points to the most important international actors of imperialism being West European countries, Japan and the USA. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is furthermore considered to be the central military alliance.

Closely related with imperialism, militarism must be regarded as a basis of contemporary antifascism. That is, as an accompanying factor and an inherent phenomenon of capitalism, it is the military appearance of the financial monopoly (*Monokapital*) which should maintain existing power relations. In conjunction with militarism, the military-industrial complex (*Militärisch-industrieller Komplex*) highlights the involvement between the actors of capitalism (*Monokapitalismus*) and the arms industry. This interpretation is incidentally also common in the political discourses of the West. Another essential factor in the discussion of antifascism in the GDR lies in the so-called "peaceful coexistence" concept, popularized by Khrushchev (*Friedliche Koexistenz*), who dispersed

³¹ "Der Grundkonsens, der dieses Modell zusammenhielt, war eben der anti-faschistische Konsens, verstanden im doppelten Sinne: als antikapitalistischer und als antiwestlicher Konsens." Grunenberg 1993: 134, translation by S.H.

³² Böhme 1978: 363.

³³ Wettig 1996: 289.

this concept throughout the USSR and invariably across all the states under Soviet hegemony. A closer look at Khrushchev’s remarks indicates that he was referring to a pragmatic “harmonization” of the political struggles based on the premise that there had to be political and economic exchanges between, for example, the USA and the USSR – without, at the same time, letting go of the ideological rupture and struggle between the political systems.

The perception of West Germany as having been under the influence of fascism is deeply anchored in the context of the inner-German conflict. Some cornerstones of that conflict include the public disregard of the GDR by the FRG as a sovereign state until the late 1960s, the rapprochement between Brandt and Honecker at the beginning of the 1970s (*Ostverträge* etc.), as well as the establishment of embassy-like institutions (*Ständige Vertretungen*), among other things. Most certainly, the FRG was definitely not as rigorous with regards to denazification as the GDR. Furthermore, most important as fodder for East German propaganda were the individuals who had leading positions in the NS regime and who were able to pursue their political or public career in West Germany soon after the war. Among the most prominent were Theodor Oberländer, Hans Globke and Heinrich Lübke³⁴, with whom the SED was particularly preoccupied. Their public dismemberment was pushed forward in the hopes of reaching specific aims. Firstly, it was to solidify the GDR’s profile on the national and international stage as an anti-fascist state³⁵ and in so doing to establish East Germany’s moral superiority. Secondly, the embodiment of the GDR itself was conveyed to be the “ultimate goal of antifascism”³⁶. Moreover, it was their expressed aim to highlight the affiliation of West Germany with individuals from the NS regime and the continuity between the Third Reich and the FRG. To gain publicity, the Department of Agitation in the Central Committee (*Abteilung für Agitation im ZK der SED*) was meticulously planning to publicize the names of West German politicians who were involved in the NS regime. The objective was nothing less than the complete discrediting of the FRG under what was deemed to be tantamount to an “illegitimate state” (*Unrechtsstaat*).

Apart from individuals who were truly historically controversial, it was the first prime minister of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer, who received special attention from the agitators of the SED for a couple of reasons: (1) Adenauer, who was a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), was known to be a staunch anti-communist and refused any diplomatic relationship with the SED on the basis of a strict dichotomized worldview.³⁷ Adenauer followed the so-called Hallstein doctrine, which determined that any diplomatic contact with third states who had recognized the GDR as a sovereign state would, in

³⁴ Lemke 1995.

³⁵ Wicke 1995: 136.

³⁶ Finker 1999.

³⁷ Kolditz 2000: 67.

turn, be terminated. The latter was an unambiguous expression of Adenauer's claim to have Germany's one and only exclusive mandate based on international laws (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*). A depiction of Adenauer that was commonly used, for example, in political caricatures, was that of the West German "splitter" (*Spalter*), who refused to make way for German re-unification.³⁸ (2) In line with the rejection of the Soviet bloc, Adenauer facilitated the integration of the FRG into the Western community (*Westintegration*), most notably by FRG's joining NATO in 1955. This was, of course, interpreted as a political commitment to the declared enemy in the dichotomy of the Cold War at the epicenter of global imperialism, the USA. (3) In the early 1950s, it was Adenauer who was planning to re-establish a German army – even against resistance inside the CDU – which (not only in the campaigns of the SED) was referred to as "remilitarization". At some point, this development towards the rearmament of West Germany played into the hands of the SED and their propagandistic conception of "militarism".

Contrary to Globke and others, the defamatory campaigns against Adenauer, who was regarded as the "personification" of the FRG and circumscribed by contemporary propagandists as the "Hitler of our days"³⁹, were, however, not successful, because ultimately his affiliation with the Nazi regime could never be found to be plausible, neither in foreign nor in internal political discourse. After Adenauer's death in 1967, West Germany's first prime minister was consigned more or less to oblivion by East German historiography, as suggested by Sebastian Kolditz.⁴⁰ Yet in contrast to Kolditz's prescription, the beginning of a national historiography in the 1970s was marked by the "resurrection" of Adenauer, seen, for example, in the first East German national historiography *DDR - Werden und Wachsen: Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, which was edited by the Academy of Science in 1975.⁴¹ Yet on the whole, the loss of Adenauer as a political actor and, most importantly, as a counterpart to the GDR, served not only as the loss of the quintessential adversary for the whole of West Germany, but also as the end of propaganda against individual figures in West German leadership. Former collaborators of the NSDAP and criminals of war simply became too old. What's more, the political shift of the first government led by Social Democrats under Willy Brandt (1968) brought with it a new foreign policy concerning the East Bloc (so-called *Neue Ostpolitik*), making it hard to perpetuate a derogatory campaign against individuals.⁴² This shift ostensibly marks the beginning of the dilution of the efficacy of the antifascist narrative.

Besides the FRG, the USA was another obvious essential target, since it was believed to be the driving force of imperialism. Etrich defines four central

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁹ Lemke 1995: 64.

⁴⁰ Kolditz 2000: 65.

⁴¹ Akademie der Wissenschaft 1975.

⁴² Böhme 1978: 621-623.

aspects of the propagandistic image of the USA, which are in line with the antifascist narrative as it has been discussed above⁴³: The USA is the major global force of imperialism in the political understanding of the SED. It is the stronghold of the international “finance monopoly” (*Finanzmonopol*) and is thus latently fascist. The USA is governed by the “monopoly of the bourgeoisie” (*Monopolbourgeoisie*) and therefore shaped by class struggles. Finally, it is propped up by cultural and political decay. Constant ammunition for anti-American discourse was derived from American foreign policy, significantly from the intelligence agencies – namely the CIA, which was perceived to be a central weapon of imperialism – its engagement in proxy wars of the Third World⁴⁴, and finally, the role of the USA in the inner-German conflict.

3.2 “Legitimacy-in-Context”: the 1970s in the Wake of New Practices and Discourses of Legitimation

By the early 1970s, the SED experienced a sudden disruption that affected the governmentality of the state and, hence, the strategies of legitimation. In 1971, Walter Ulbricht confirmed his resignation in favor of Erich Honecker, who took over the position of general secretary (*Generalsekretär*) of the SED and later the leadership of the state council (*Staatsrat*). This shift made Honecker the leading representative in a system that was –regardless of the changes in the nomenclature – still supported by the principles of democratic centralism (*Demokratischer Zentralismus*) and the ideological foundations of Marxism-Leninism. Yet the shift meant nothing less than the renunciation of the political and economic practices conducted by Ulbricht, as well as a number of pragmatic shifts in the discursive legitimation and ideological foundation of the GDR. Though Ulbricht’s New Economic System for Planning and Management (NÖSPL) introduced a diversification of the methods of planning in order to rationalize the economy, the sheer disregard for disintegrating infrastructure and consumer goods led to a severe shortage of supplies.⁴⁵ On the side of the integration and legitimation through ideology, the Ulbricht administration was marked by a traditional interpretation of the Marxist-Leninist “utopian” concept of history that projected needs into the future, a communist future, to be sure. The combination of a “will to force citizens into sacrifices”⁴⁶, which was only possible with the respective belief in the legitimacy of the SED, conflicted with the supply shortage and the fact that Ulbricht’s administration left a great many basic demands of the population unfulfilled.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ettrich 2003: 43; cf. also Montag 2003.

⁴⁴ Montag 2003: 80.

⁴⁵ Meuschel 1992: 221.

⁴⁶ Hockerts 1994: 793, translation by S.H.

⁴⁷ Kusch et al. 1991: 14.

Seeing as legitimacy had been gradually eroding since the end of the 1960s, the reaction of Honecker's administration was evident: the establishment of new governmental strategies to re-establish legitimation of power. In the broad field of measurements, I will only mention two aspects: (1) A focal strategy on the level of *realpolitik* was to reinforce the social policies and to improve living standards. An increase in the quality of life was supposed to help, on the one hand, to obfuscate the economic superiority of the FRG and, on the other hand, to overcome and to diminish the collective memory of the hardship of the preceding decades. The narrative of the integration of social and economic policy (*Einheit von Sozial- und Wirtschaftspolitik*) indicates particularly well that these developments were primarily considered to be a "contract" between the power holders and the subordinates: whoever benefitted from the social policy should have contributed to socialist society with a strong work ethic and a profound loyalty to the supremacy of the SED. (2) Since the beginning of the *détente* between the GDR and the FRG in the late 1960s, East Germany had to face one major problem. West Germany had been presented in propaganda as the successor of the Third Reich and, in turn, the GDR was the positive counter-model to the fascist and imperialist West. With the developing process of diplomatic connections, the SED was frightened to lose an enemy that was the *raison d'être* of the antifascist state. Why should there be an antifascist state when there is no fascism and imperialism in the "other" Germany? Michael Lemke draws the conclusion that due to the complex situation in internal and foreign policies in the 1970s, the SED was compelled to use ideological means in the fight against the West.⁴⁸ As a result, this *détente* led to an increase in political propaganda⁴⁹ and the threat of the "softening" of the ideological struggle developed into a central argument, most prominently expressed in the phrase of "ideological diversion" (*ideologische Diversion*). Moreover, the *détente* resulted in another paradox. The GDR started to engage in the process of "nation building" around the narrative of a socialist nation, which, in turn, led to the denial of the notion of a shared German nation.⁵⁰ Around 1970, the theory of the two German states and one (shared) German nation developed towards a theory of two separate nations (*Zwei-Nationen-Theorie*). As of the 1970s, any shared national culture was supposed to be abolished in order to obscure the idea of a forthcoming reunification. (3) Along with the diplomatic exchange with the FRG, the GDR was able to receive international recognition even by Western states. Consequently, Honecker was able to present the GDR as a sovereign international actor beyond the overwhelming influence of the USSR.

⁴⁸ Lemke 1995: 84.

⁴⁹ Schnoor 2001: 775.

⁵⁰ Naumann/Trümpler 1991; Meuschel 1992; Mai 2001; Kunze 2010.

In its internal policy the SED had to strengthen another crucial instrument of power: the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS). Jens Giesecke emphasized that at the turn of the 1970s the number of MfS employees multiplied significantly. Indeed, the highest rate of growth in the history of the GDR was between 1968 and 1982.⁵¹ Hence, a discussion of the governmental strategies in the era of Erich Honecker must take the MfS in consideration in order to understand the price of the SED’s “will for power”.

4. East German Mediascape and the Pressure of Modernization

In diesem Sinne könnte man sagen, daß wir eine pluralistische Gesellschaft sind.⁵²

The East German border regime was confronted with the cultural exchanges that emerged via electronic media in a profound way. In addition to considering the political ramifications of those exchanges, West and East German broadcasters were faced with a climate of constant competition which affected the programming, scheduling and content on both sides of the border.⁵³ It appears to be evident, however, that the GDR was affected more significantly by the situation of an involuntary and instantaneous cultural transfer: (1) The broadcasts of the FRG had a territorial and geographical advantage, since the West German radio and television broadcasts in West Berlin were located in the center of East Germany. The East German stations, in turn, were only able to transmit their programs in the border regions of West Germany, which, moreover, constituted a much larger territory than East Germany, or in the territory of West Berlin. The “contrastive dialogue”⁵⁴ between East and West German electronic media was thus fundamentally asymmetrical. (2) The institutional system of mass media in the GDR was matched only by the political supremacy of the SED (Holzweißig 1996). At an early stage in the history of the GDR, the SED was able to apply its strict hierarchical model of government to the field of mass media, in order to sustain discursive power in public discourse. (3) Although East German media institutions were founded on a solid financial and institutional basis, they were not able to provide the technical and financial capabilities of the West German broadcasts. This predicament was primarily a problem for the cost-intensive medium of television and studio facilities, technologies etc. that were necessary to keep up with the West.⁵⁵ According to Peter Hoff, television and mass communication is an attendant phenomenon of modernization and, therefore, an indicator of

⁵¹ Giesecke 2011: 71-75.

⁵² Erich Honecker, cited in Staadt and Voigt and Wolle 2010: 31.

⁵³ Dittmar 2002: 104-105

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 122-124

the modernity of a state. Deficits in the means of communication, thus, especially in a situation of ideological confrontation and media competition, are perceived as a national weakness.

Only with the advent of television as a means of mass communication in the late 1960s did the East German nomenclature acknowledge its mass potential. Furthermore, television turned out to be what Pierre Bourdieu (1998) described as an instrument for maintaining order both symbolically and ultimately politically. Contemporary East German media theories labeled this strategic interest and utilization of the media as “mass efficacy” (*Massenwirksamkeit*). To satisfy this political urge for a medium that would reach out to the majority of East German citizens, the political establishment and the executives of the state television (*Deutscher Fernsehfunk*, DFF, and as of 1972 *Fernsehen der DDR*, DDR-F) decided they had to make a huge adjustment in their approach. That is, they had to step back from the political and educational programs that had played a central role in the years of consolidation of television and, generate long-overdue programming with new formats and genres.⁵⁶ Because this original understanding of the role of media was based on educational, political and ideological functions, the beginning of the 1970s ushered in the dawn of a new approach:

Die Unterhaltung verwirklicht die ideologischen Leitlinien nicht direkt, sondern vermittelt. Ihre Aufgabe ist es nicht zu argumentieren, sondern ihre Aufgabe ist es, bestimmte Gefühle zu wecken und zu festigen, bestimmte Stimmungen zu schaffen, bestimmte Erkenntnisse über heitere Erlebnisse zu vermitteln.⁵⁷

In line with this conception of the interplay between official ideology and entertainment on the basis of an emotional impact, the general secretary of the SED, Erich Honecker, complained about the “boredom” that national television would cause.⁵⁸ This, in turn, must have compelled the political authorities to support the development of entertainment programs with the pragmatic rationale of promoting the loyalty of national audiences to the broadcasts of East German television.

⁵⁶ Steinmetz and Viehoff 2008: 280-285.

⁵⁷ “Entertainment accomplishes the ideological guidelines not directly, but mediated. Its task is not to argue, but to convey and to consolidate certain feelings, to create certain moods, and to communicate certain insights through cheerful experiences.” Staatliches Komitee für Fernsehen, cited in Steinmetz and Viehoff 2008: 287, translation by S.H.

⁵⁸ Hicethier and Hoff 1998: 384.

The result of these circumstances and political calculations was a television reform that would increase the number of entertainment formats to attract national audiences. Efforts to win West German audiences were abandoned at the end of the 1960s in favor of this inward focused outlook. Since the West German channels were more experienced and adept in entertainment programs, it seems natural that certain television formats in East Germany would also be informed by developments in the West. This situation can be accurately described as a cultural transfer – with a vector showing from West to East. This transfer came about as a result of this paradoxical interplay of political and ideological antagonism. The inner-German mediascape⁵⁹ furthermore served to keep constant pressure on both sides. It should be noted, however, that those transfer processes and the ensuing adoption of certain media formats on the part of the GDR were never publicly expressed by the responsible producers and programmers. At the same time, the 1971 reform was clearly an acknowledgment of, and a reaction to, the needs of the audiences in the context of an ongoing modernization process. Against the backdrop of the growing demarcation towards the FRG, the DDR-F was supposed to produce a program which would ensure that “... fewer citizens should have the desire to satisfy their entertainment and information needs with the help of the television from the West.”⁶⁰ Hence, the cornerstone of the reform in 1971 was to strengthen the entertainment segment. The slow realization of the need for a new understanding of media as a means not only of ideological education and political information, but of “pure” entertainment, eventually led to a completely new program structure and schedule which was precisely aligned with, and simultaneously poised against, the programs in the West. This pragmatic change involved the reduction of the broadcast of the evening news, *Aktuelle Kamera*, from 30 to 20 minutes and the introduction of new television formats like *Zehn vor Acht*. Besides smaller structural modifications, it was the content of non-fictional and fictional programs which changed significantly, as the long-standing chairman of the DDR-F, Heinz Adameck, proclaimed:

Eine größere Vielfalt und bessere Ausgewogenheit der Stoffe und Genres, vor allem die Vergrößerung des Anteils heiterer, abenteuerlicher und spannender Stoffe, ist für unsere Dramaturgen und Autoren eine ganz entscheidende Aufgabe.⁶¹

Regarding non-fictional entertainment, it was TV shows such as the successful *Ein Kessel Buntes* (since 1972) which had to fulfill two aims: on the one

⁵⁹ Hochmuth 2007: 283.

⁶⁰ “... weniger Bürger den Wunsch verspüren, ihr Informations- und Unterhaltungsbedürfnis mit Hilfe des Westfernsehens zu befriedigen.“ Heinz Adameck, cited in Dittmar 2002: 115, translation by S.H.

⁶¹ “A larger variety and a better balance of stories and genres, especially the increase of humorous, adventurous and exciting themes, is an essential task for our authors.” H. Adameck, cited in Hickethier and Hoff 1998: 385, translation by S.H.

hand, to create a sense of a GDR identity and, on the other hand, to realize Honecker's idea of a cosmopolitan socialist state by inviting guests from the West.⁶² Other shows and magazines accentuated a certain patriotism (*Heimatsbewusstsein*), such as *Außenseiter Spitzenreiter*. As for fictional programs, new dramatic concepts were introduced that were audience-proofed in West German television, such as crime and detective series. In line with the reforms of the dramatic formats, it was the beginning of theoretical considerations and the practical implementation of series, such as the successful *Zur See [At Sea]* (1974-1976).⁶³

In conclusion, on the basis of an inner-German mediascape which emerged soon after the establishment of a properly functioning media infrastructure, it was the pressure on the DFF/DDR-F by the West German broadcasts which forced political authorities to revise and to modify television programs – a profound transformation and modernization process which started in the late 1960s. To be able to attract a wider audience in the GDR and, furthermore, to affirmatively reinforce the distinctiveness of an East German identity, it was necessary to increase the value of locally produced entertainment. In the course of these developments, a considerable cultural transfer took place which led to the paradox of both interrelation and antagonism – the former with regards to style and entertainment value and the latter with regards to content, such as the ideological and political conflict between East and West, which was commonly depicted in crime as well as adventure genres. It is this paradox which characterized significant parts of socialist popular culture. The series *Das unsichtbare Visier* evolves from this very complex situation.

5. *Televising the Narrative of Antifascism in Popular Culture: Das unsichtbare Visier* (1973-1979)

Das unsichtbare Visier was one of the most successful fictional programs of the DDR-F in the 1970s and can be regarded, as discussed above, as emblematic of the efforts to reinforce the entertainment value in national broadcasts. In addition to its embedment in the development of a renewed East German popular culture, *Das unsichtbare Visier* has to be considered as a response to a variety of political discourses in internal and foreign policies that developed around 1970. Given these circumstances, it is quite surprising that media historiography has paid only little attention to a program that is unique in its theme, its circumstances of production, and in its implicit political and historical discourses.⁶⁴ More specifically, *Das unsichtbare Visier* is

⁶² Steinmetz and Viehoff 2008: 293-294.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 331-333.

⁶⁴ Besides some short remarks in various publications, historian Stefan Wogawa dedicated an instructive monograph to the serial, cf. Wogawa 2010.

profoundly influenced by the narrative of antifascism and must be considered as a strategic product of the East German mass media to improve the image of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS).

Das unsichtbare Visier revolves around the adventures of the espionage section, the so-called *Hauptverwaltung A*, of the MfS. In the course of seven seasons, which consist of 16 episodes that were broadcasted between 1973 and 1979⁶⁵, the first nine episodes follow the MfS agent Werner Bredebusch (Armin Müller-Stahl), who adopts the identity of a former German pilot of the *Wehrmacht*, Achim Detjen, and his contact Winnie Winkelmann (Jessy Rameik). After the withdrawal of Müller-Stahl, the narrative concept of concentrating the story on the Bredebusch/Detjen character was abandoned in favor of a collective, which consisted of Martin Tanner (Gunter Schoß), Dr Clemens (Horst Schulze) and Alexander (Jürgen Heinrich).

Das unsichtbare Visier holds a unique position in the production of fictional programs in the DDR-F, since it is one of a rather small number of fictional programs which were located in the West. Three such series were the highly popular *Zur See*, which tells the story of a crew on a cargo ship⁶⁶, the lesser known adventure series *Das Geheimnis der Anden* (1972) [literal translation *The Secret of the Andes*], and the crime series *Gefährliche Fahndung* (1978) [Dangerous Investigation]. In line with the latter two, *Das unsichtbare Visier* played almost exclusively in the so-called non-Socialist states (*Nicht-Sozialistisches Ausland*) including Argentina, Portugal, Greece, Italy, South Africa and, most important, West Germany. Regardless of the fact that most of the filming took place in the GDR and in socialist countries, such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the locations conveyed an exotic feeling and had a “cosmopolitan flair”. Moreover, the compelling, yet affectionate reconstruction of West German visual and consumer culture ranging from meticulously reconstructed advertising boards to cars, such as agent Tanner’s red Porsche, were clearly not just a means for accuracy, but aimed at achieving a visual representation of the desires for a (Western) commodity culture – desires which might have been aroused by the West German television and cinema productions which had become increasingly present in East German cinemas in the 1970s.⁶⁷

Although there is no distinctive tradition of espionage films in the East German history of audio-visual mass media, or, in other words, there have been no serious efforts to write a history of that genre so far. Nevertheless, *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) and the DFF/DDR-F produced some films depicting stories about members of the MfS, both playing inside and outside the GDR. Until the beginning of the production of *Das*

⁶⁵ In the 1980s the miniseries *Feuerdrachen* was aired, which is considered to be a spinoff of *Das unsichtbare Visier*, cf. Wogawa 2010.

⁶⁶ Steinmetz and Viehoff 2008: 331-33.

⁶⁷ Stott 2012.

Unsichtbare Visier an example of such a history included the successful DEFA production *For Eyes Only* (1962/63) by János Veiczi. Lesser-known productions of the DEFA and the DFF/DDR-F are *Der schwarze Samt* [literal translation *The Black Velvet*] (Heinz Thiel, 1964), *Der Mann aus Kanada* [The Man from Canada] (Rudi Kurz, 1967), *Geheimcode B 13* [Secret Code B 13] (Gerhard Respondek, 1967), *Treffpunkt Genf* [Meeting Point Genf] (Rudi Kurz, 1968), *Projekt Aqua* [Project Aqua] (Rudi Kurz, 1969), *Verdacht auf einen Toten* [Suspicion of a Dead] (Rainer Bär, 1969), *Rendezvous mit Unbekannt* [Rendezvous with Unknown] (János Veiczi, 1969) and *Kein Mann für Camp Detrick* [No Man for Camp Detrick] (Ingrid Sander 1970).

There is no doubt that *Das unsichtbare Visier* was a prestige project of the DDR-F. Firstly, it was not produced by East German television, but by the DEFA as a result of a commission from the DDR-F. The DEFA was certainly better-equipped for a television series, which was cost- and resource-intensive due to a variety of different complex sets, special effects, stunts, etc. Secondly, every season premiered around Christmas, which is the most prestigious time of the year for broadcasting. Thirdly, with Armin Müller-Stahl, the production team cast an actor who was already an acclaimed artist even before *Das unsichtbare Visier*.

Since *Das unsichtbare Visier* dealt with the East German secret service, the MfS was actively involved in the production.⁶⁸ Whenever a television or film production dealt with the ministry, close cooperation was a common procedure for the MfS and the responsible Department for Agitation (*Abteilung Agitation des MfS*).⁶⁹ In the case of *Das unsichtbare Visier*, the MfS supplied the DEFA with feedback on the scenario and information according to a variety of details, e.g. correct uniforms, ranks and organization names. In return, the MfS expressed their hope for a positive audience response: “The adventurous story is skillfully arranged and will no doubt receive positive approval from the audiences. ‘Our man’ Detjen will certainly win sympathies.”⁷⁰ It can only be suspected that this public relations strategy was more than coincidentally overlapping with the growing importance of the role of the MfS during the late administration of Ulbricht and, particularly, at the beginning of the era of Erich Honecker. The close relation between the team of *Das unsichtbare Visier* and the MfS is also underlined by the fact that the only episode that did not premiere around Christmas was aired in February in honor of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the MfS. Nevertheless, as the series proceeds, the MfS is never explicitly mentioned. Only the GDR agents remain to be called *Kundschafter* – a euphemistic term that was frequently used in the official discourse to underscore the difference between Western, imperialist spies and

⁶⁸ Wogawa 2010: 18-25.

⁶⁹ Stadt/Voigt/Wolle 2008: 331.

⁷⁰ “Die abenteuerliche Handlung ist gekonnt gestaltet und wird zweifellos Anklang haben. Dabei wird unser Mann, Detjen, sicher viele Sympathien finden” *Ibid.*, translation by S.H.

the East German agents, whose objective was to protect the peace. In fact, the term *Kundschafter* itself implies a more passive approach to espionage. This strategy is explicitly supported by several comments in the internal communication of the East German television on James Bond. A paper, for example, which sums up the outcomes of an audience survey, notes that a single spectator considered Detjen to be a “real socialist James Bond”. The response to this interpretation comes as no surprise: “Contradiction: James fuels wars, Detjen is preventing them.”⁷¹

Das unsichtbare Visier covers a time span from 1949 (the year of the foundation of the GDR and the FRG⁷²), through the early 1960s (the erecting of the Berlin Wall in 1961), up to the middle of the 1960s. Quite unusual for the espionage genre, *Das unsichtbare Visier* presents a strictly chronological narration. Hence, the series is supported by an unambiguous strategy of re-telling the history of the GDR, which remembers exclusively the conflict between socialism, on the one side, and imperialism, fascism, neo-fascism and militarism on the other side. Furthermore, albeit the fact that *Das unsichtbare Visier* is clearly an attempt to establish popular culture, the series must be regarded in terms of the discourse of sovereignty (*Herrschaftsdiskurs*) which spawned the undertakings of historiography in the GDR.⁷³ In line with that assumption, archival accounts of the DDR-F highlight the aim of the series to deliver a certain perspective on the history of the GDR – first and foremost by depicting the enemies of socialism and/as the enemies of world peace:

[*Das unsichtbare Visier*] ... schildert den schweren, gefährvollen Kampf mutiger Männer um die Erhaltung des Friedens und den Aufstieg alter und neuer Faschisten, er vermittelt in spannender Spielhandlung ein Stück Zeitgeschichte der 50er Jahre.⁷⁴

5.1 The Narrative of Antifascism in *Das unsichtbare Visier*

Although *Das unsichtbare Visier* premiered two years after the discussed reform of state television, the concept was established well before 1971. Archival materials of the German National Broadcasting Archives (DRA) reveal that the first written concepts were developed in 1970 under the working title *Spur der Wölfe* [Trace of the Wolves]. The German term “Wölfe” referred to

⁷¹ “Widerspruch: James schürt Kriege, Detjen verhindert sie.” N.N., 14.2.75, A 081-05-02/0001, translation by S.H.

⁷² Even though this date is not mentioned in the plot, Peter Hagen mentions it in an interview as the beginning of the series, cf. Lang, 23.11.76, A 081-05-02/0001.

⁷³ Sabrow 2000.

⁷⁴ “... tells about the tough and dangerous battles of courageous men to maintain peace, the rise of old and new fascists, it conveys by the means of a thrilling story a piece of history of the 1950s.” Lang, Ottomar, 19.10.1973, A 081-05-02/0001, emphasis and translation by S.H.

former National Socialists who were not convicted after the defeat of the Third Reich. Consequently, the title of the draft set the tone for a series that must be regarded as antifascist in terms of content, since it wanted to reveal the fictional biographies of former members of the NSDAP in South America and their influence on the FRG. The only difference with the above mentioned campaigns against individuals, such as Globke etc., was, most unmistakably, the fictional source of the characters: "... the depicted facts are true. The heroes are fictitious".⁷⁵ Though the first draft – which had already been developed by the latter writing team of Otto Bonhoff and Michael Schauer in cooperation with Oberst Gunter Halle from the press office of the MfS and Ottomar Lang, screenwriter at the DDR-F – differs from the first three seasons, it nevertheless set a general framework for the political incentive of the production. In the conception of the first season, the working title was *Vergissmeinnicht*. The authors were quoting a speech by Walter Ulbricht, which states that the establishment of a sovereign FRG in 1955 put an end to the efforts of a German reunification. The authors give an introduction to the storyline of former National Socialists, who escaped to Argentina through the so-called "rat line" and their re-arming activities:

Die Sicherheitsorgane verfolgen mit Besorgnis die Zunehmende [sic] militärpolitische Aktivität des Bonner Imperialismus. Noch wirken die vor dem Gericht der Völker vor allem nach Argentinien geflüchteten Nazigenerale im Verborgenen, aber es zeichnet sich ab, daß sie bereits mit der Planung einer künftigen westdeutschen Angriffsarmee befaßt sind. Eine der Maßnahmen der Sicherheitsorgane muss es sein, die im Auftrag des "Amtes Blank" erarbeiteten Pläne schon im Entstehen kennen zu lernen, um wirksame Gegenmaßnahmen zum Schutz der sozialistischen Errungenschaften ergreifen zu können.⁷⁶

Short sketches of the contemplated, but not yet realized, second and third seasons suggested Western espionage activities against the Warsaw pact in the Baltic Sea (*Operation Tentakel*) and a concerted preventive strike against the development of an airplane that was supposed to be the most outstanding in the air force of the FRG and NATO (*Ikarus*). Although those episodes never came to fruition, the construction of enemies and their rationales are instructive for the understanding of the whole series. *Operation Tentakel*, for example, was supposed to illustrate that the FRG in the 1950s was in the phase of preparing for a war in the course of remilitarization and *Ikarus* emphasized the military-industrial complex and, quite unexpectedly, explicitly attacks the foreign policy of the SPD and the "New Eastern Policy" (*Neue Ostpolitik*):

⁷⁵ "...die dargestellten Fakten sind wahr. Die Helden sind frei gestaltet." N.N., 1970, A 081-05-02/0001.

⁷⁶ Schauer and Bonhoff, 24.7.1970, A 081-05-02/0001.

Dieses Flugzeug, dessen historisches Vorbild sich als reiner Atomwaffenträger entpuppte, entlarvt schlagend das Geschwätz von “neuer Ostpolitik” und läßt die unveränderte Aggressivität des Bonner Systems eindeutig erkennen.⁷⁷

With regards to its strategies of remembrance⁷⁸, *Das unsichtbare Visier* consists of two distinct segments that coincide with the appearance of Armin Müller-Stahl.⁷⁹ Both of these segments address antifascism quite differently, since they were situated in a different historical setting. Episodes one to nine provide a specific year and a political context – the information is usually given in the opening by a narrator – whereas the subsequent episodes are located in a somewhat vague contemporary time.

The first nine episodes of *Das unsichtbare Visier* follow Werner Bredebusch, alias Achim Detjen, from the post-war period up to the year 1961. After being incarcerated in a war prison in the USSR – this is only indicated in the story, but not presented in the actual plot – the series commences with Bredebusch’s arrival at a detention camp in West Germany. On a train to the FRG, Bredebusch becomes acquainted with an officer of the SS, Born (Wolfgang Greese), who provides him with personal contacts. Thus, Bredebusch has the opportunity to hide from the occupying powers and the military police. Soon afterwards, he is captured by a secret organization, which gathers members of the SS and staunch National Socialists. This organization secretly transfers him to Argentina, where he becomes affiliated with an assembly of former members of the air forces of the Wehrmacht. Together with his former military superior Oberst Krösing (Wilfried Ortman), Bredebusch makes his way back to the FRG in the 1950s to the predecessor of the German secret service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*), the *Amt Blank*. A statement in a rerun of *Das unsichtbare Visier* in 1989 stresses that the first two episodes, *Der römische Weg* and *Das Nest im Urwald*, concentrate on neo-fascism and the continuities of former members of the NSDAP in the administration of Konrad Adenauer:

Das unsichtbare Visier zeigt, auf welche Weise die alten Nazis und Militärs unmittelbar nach 1945 zum Teil in Westdeutschland, zum Teil im Ausland ihr Afuerstehen [!] vorbereiteten, wie sie anfangs vielfältig getarnt, später offen in alte Machtpositionen rückten als unentbehrliche “Fachleute des Krieges”. Die

⁷⁷ “This aircraft, whose historical prototype was used solely as a carrier for nuclear weapons, unveils the idle talk of the ‘New Eastern Policy’ and shows the unchanged aggression of the ‘system of Bonn.’” Schauer and Bonhoff, 24.7.1970, A 081-05-02/0001, translation by S.H.

⁷⁸ In archival documents this strategy is referred to as the “historisch-politische Konzeption”, cf. Renner, 5.9.1976, DRA Schriftgutbestand Fernsehen: *Das Unsichtbare Visier*, A 081-05-02/0001.

⁷⁹ Even though the precise circumstances of Armin Müller-Stahl’s withdrawal are not transcribed, the actor was a prominent protestor against the expatriation of Wolf Biermann. This support made him *persona non grata* in the GDR and led to his leaving East Germany, cf. Wogawa 2008:48-54.

Verflechtung der Adenauer-Regierung mit dem internationalen Monokapital wird sichtbar.⁸⁰

Remilitarization also plays an essential role in the third episode of the first season (*Das Wasserschloß*). It includes an assembly of former National Socialists, now the most influential actors in the Ministry of Defense, and their discussion of a memorandum (*Denkschrift*) sums up the issues that were connected with the West German remilitarization, and furthermore, a strategy for the defeat of the East Bloc in the case of a military conflict, the inclusion of NATO in the new conception of the *Bundeswehr* and, lastly, an explicit reference to Adenauer's call for nuclear weapons:

[General Kammgruber, S.H.] Und daran kann und soll kein Zweifel bleiben, die Erarbeitung einer strategischen Konzeption für die NATO kann und wird nur dann sinnreich und vertretbar sein, wenn diese strategische Konzeption gewährleistet, dass ein zukünftiger Krieg sofort offensiv in östlicher Richtung auf das Territorium des potentiellen Gegners getragen und als Bewegungskrieg geführt wird.

[Someone transcribing the discussion is quoting, S.H.] General Brandenburg, Doppelpunkt, das würde natürlich am zweckmäßigsten unter dem sofortigen Einsatz von Kernwaffen geschehen. Absatz. Zwischenruf General Mehlmann. Doppelpunkt. Sehr richtig. General Kammgruber. Doppelpunkt. Wie ich Dank einer Konsultation mit Herrn Speidel weiß, bewegen ich uns damit vollkommen auf der Linie auch des Herrn Adenauer. Im Übrigen denke ich, [shift back to General Kammgruber, S.H.] was wir heute hier verabschiedet haben, meine Herren, wird Geschichte in Europa machen.⁸¹

[01:05:50-01:06:10]

The subsequent seasons in the first segment provide a slight shift towards an extension of the antifascist narrative. Along with the depiction of former National Socialists, the (sub-) narrative of imperialism comes more into play. Season two, for example, which includes the episodes *Ein merkwürdiger Anschlag* and *Das Geheimnis der Masken*, concentrates on the interplay between the FRG (especially its intelligence agencies BND and MAD), the CIA and the international military-industrial complex, taking place vaguely in the backdrop of the political developments in Portugal. Stefan Wogawa points to

⁸⁰ “*Das unsichtbare Visier* illustrates how old Nazis and the military prepared for their “resurrection” right after 1945, partly in West-Germany and partly in foreign countries, and how those individuals were reinstated in positions of power as ‘experts of war’. The interdependence of the Adenauer government with the international financial monopoly becomes apparent.” N.N., 3.8.1989, A 081-05-02/0001, translation by S.H.

⁸¹ The generals declare that the NATO should establish a strategy in which any military confrontation must lead to a war (including nuclear weapons) in the Eastern territories. Furthermore, it is emphasised that this concept is in accordance with Konrad Adenauer.

the fact that the second episode picks up the (real) establishment of a NATO air base in Beja⁸². Besides this attempt at (a biased) historical authenticity – an approach that was common in adventure and criminal fiction whenever they entered political terrain – the exotic setting primarily serves to demonstrate the conflicting and interest-led relationship between the CIA/USA, the weapons’ industry and the FRG. In the course of a further introduction to US agent Wilson – he already made a short appearance in the second episode – *Das unsichtbare Visier* establishes the CIA in the network of neo-fascism and militarism. Unlike the depiction of the US intelligence service in *For Eyes Only* (1963) as primarily coldblooded⁸³, Wilson is more of a utilitarian and, yet hedonistic, individual, who seeks to secure and expand his political influence in the name of the USA. In the course of the series, it becomes more and more evident that Wilson has to be regarded as *pars pro toto* for American foreign policies. On the one hand, the concept of imperialism, as discussed above, draws extensively on the USA and agent Wilson is the only representative of the USA in *Das unsichtbare Visier*. On the other hand, Wilson shows the influence of the United States by virtue of his presence in almost all episodes and their varying locations, including Norway, South Africa, Italy and, of course, the FRG. The interplay of the FRG and the USA and their work against peace in Europe in the second season is expressed in a contemporary East German newspaper review:

Schritt für Schritt enthüllt sich ihm [Detjen, S.H.] dabei ein großangelegtes Komplott gegen Frieden und Entspannung in Europa, das dem wiedererstarteten Militarismus in der BRD mit Unterstützung des USA-Imperialismus eine politische Führungsrolle in Westeuropa sichern soll.⁸⁴

The eighth and ninth episode conclude the first segment by following the most duplicitous use of the narrative of antifascism, namely the erecting of the Berlin Wall (the so-called *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall*).⁸⁵ Those two episodes, *Mörder machen keine Pause* and *Sieben Augen hat der Pfau*, deal with the *Bundeswehr* and the explicit planning of an invasion against East Germany under the false pretense that the border troops of the GDR are causing a conflict with West Germany. The story revolves around the frequently exploited trope of *Tag X*, which was a common propagandistic expression that conveyed a concerted “rollback” of the GDR by NATO troops. Moreover, the fascist threat of *Tag X* was used to legitimize the erecting of the Wall, because it was

⁸² Wogawa 2010: 67-68.

⁸³ Weiß 2006: 162-164.

⁸⁴ “Step-by-step a large-scale conspiracy against peace and detente in Europe unveils, which ensures the FRG and its emerging militarism – with the support of the US-imperialism – a leading role in Western Europe.” Berger 1975, translation by S.H.

⁸⁵ Meuschel 1992: 143.

supposed to prevent the GDR from being invaded by imperialist and fascist troops. The first segment and its historical conception, which tries to interweave real events into the diegetic world, is summarized by the dramatic advisor, Wenzel Renner, as follows:

In 9 Filmteilen werden anhand der dramatischen Geschichte des Einsatzes eines DDR-Aufklärers wichtige Erkenntnisse und Zusammenhänge über die Entwicklung der Bundesrepublik bis hin zu jenem Zeitpunkt dargestellt, wo die Bundeswehrmacht sich darauf vorbereitet, mit "klingendem Spiel" durch das Brandenburger Tor zu marschieren und wo die DDR im Einvernehmen mit den Verbündeten des Warschauer Vertrages durch die Maßnahmen des 13. August entscheidend dazu beitrug, „revanchistische Kriegsabenteurer zu zügeln, antikommunistische Hitzköpfe abzukühlen und manchen Politikern des Westens zu einer realeren Einschätzung der Lage in Europa zu bewegen“. (Konrad Naumann, 14. August 1976)⁸⁶

After the withdrawal of the Bredebusch/Detjen character, a collective of the MfS succeeds in the story. The subsequent episodes are no longer framed by a clear-cut historical determination. Instead, they are situated in an undefined, yet contemporary time. Episodes 10 and 11, both of which are called *Der Afrikaanse Broederbond*, follow a scientist in South Africa, who gets lethally infected with a toxic substance in the course of the development of chemical weapons. Moreover, this season tries to construct a connection between the FRG and South Africa on the basis of a shared program to develop nuclear arms. In the background is a secret neo-fascist union which delegates to the South African government and which strengthens the policies of apartheid. In addition to the imperialist USA and FRG, images of South Africa are used to portray a contemporary fascist government:

Dafür bot sich in dieser Spielhandlung ein tiefer Einblick in den innersten Machtmechanismus eines modernen faschistischen Staates. In beklemmenden Szenen wurde man der mittelalterlich-grausamen Riten der Geheimorganisation "Der afrikanische Bruderbund" ansichtig, sah und vernahm mit Erschrecken, daß diese inquisitorischen Geheimbündler, in deren Reihen 1945 führende Naziverbrecher aus Deutschland Unterschlupf fanden, heute die Spitzenpositionen in Staat, Wirtschaft und Armee einnehmen.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The summary indicates that *Das unsichtbare Visier* reveals insights into West Germany's intention to invade the GDR. In reaction to these developments, the allies of the Warsaw Pact had to carry out the "measurements of the 13th of August", i.e. the erecting of the Berlin Wall, Renner, 5.9.1976, A 081-05-02/0001.

⁸⁷ The summary concludes that these episodes offer insights into the mechanisms of power of a modern fascist state, the medieval practices of rites of a secret organisation and its connection with the state, economy and military, Martin 1977.

The narrative of militarism in the context of the history of the FRG peaks with the trope of *Tag X*; this sub-narrative of antifascism is slowly replaced by the depiction of the military-industrial complex as well as imperialism. As the above discussion of imperialism implied, it is an elastic concept that is used to characterize contemporary phenomena, with the USA being explicitly assigned to imperialism. Whereas the FRG is depicted as being under the spell of former National Socialists, it is the USA which has the geopolitical power to conveniently support fascist movements all over Europe. CIA agent Wilson clarifies what imperialism is thought to be from an inner-German perspective:

Ich arbeite für die Regierung der Vereinigten Staaten und befaße mich mit Problemen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Wir schätzen die Bundesrepublik als unseren wichtigsten Bündnispartner. Nun übersehen wir aber nicht, dass es da maßgebliche Kräfte gibt, die mit wie auch immer gearteten Bestrebungen eine Hegemonie Deutschlands über Europa anstreben. ... nichts einzuwenden habe, solange sie nicht die Disposition der USA stören. Wir wollen eine starke Bundesrepublik, aber es gibt da eine Reihenfolge.⁸⁸

The second-to-the-last season, *King-Kong-Grippe*, deals with a series of biochemical weapons tests conducted by the CIA. The victims are West German military troops and a small-town politician who is explicitly characterized as a member of the CDU and a corrupt individual. To affirm the authenticity of the episode, several East German newspapers presented (next to the review of the episode) a compilation of documents, mostly from West German and American newspapers. The last season, *Insel des Todes*, features a secret organization trying to develop a global neo-fascist union against the backdrop of right-winged terroristic attacks in Italy. In a contemporary review, the organization is described as influencing NATO and counteracting left-winged movements in Western Europe:

In trauter Gemeinschaft mit alten und neuen Nazis und italienischen Neofaschisten versuchen sie, die politische Entwicklung an der sogenannten weichen Südflanke der NATO zu kontrollieren und langfristig zu beeinflussen, Linksentwicklungen zu blockieren. ... Sehr anschaulich zeigt der Film die neofaschistisch-geheimdienstliche Infiltration linksextremistischer Gruppen und deren makabre Rolle im Spiel der Diskreditierung vor allem der Marxisten.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The CIA-agent expresses the concept that the USA considers the FRG as a partner, who is supposed to be a strong political actor in Europe. Nevertheless, Wilson stresses that the international hegemony of the USA is not at issue.

⁸⁹ The reviewer concludes that these episodes illustrate the activities of Italian neo-fascists, who are trying to control the southern territories of the NATO and, furthermore, who obstruct the activities of left movements. Additionally, the episodes unveil the strategies of discrediting Marxists, Herwig 1979.

5.2 Contextualizing the Narrative of Antifascism

In accordance with the aforementioned campaigns against specific individuals, the only actual politician who is personally addressed is the first prime minister of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer. Although he is explicitly mentioned only twice, it indicates his position in the depiction of East Germany's significant "Other", the FRG. Furthermore, the reference to Adenauer seems to be quite remarkable, since he had been more or less abandoned from the East German public discourse. On the other hand, Adenauer made a significant comeback in the efforts to establish a national history since the beginning of the 1970s. *Das unsichtbare Visier* seems to follow these historiographical changes closely. In the episodes that are situated in an approximately contemporary time setting, only a fictitious CDU member – a small-town conservative mayor, who is infected with a drug by the CIA – makes an appearance; other direct political references are omitted. In an internal note from 1974 which sums up a discussion with the press office at the MfS, it is said that the SPD should also be targeted through the strategic narrative of *Sozialdemokratismus* (a term that experienced a boom in the 1970s as a pejorative description of the West German Social Democrats). The idea of attacking the SPD was not realized, which indicates that the team of *Das unsichtbare Visier* was quite cautious regarding their political and ideological accusations in the direction of the FRG. Most probably, this cautiousness was due to the foreign policies of the 1970s and the related détente between East and West Germany. Hence, the political environment of the time would not allow for any targeted accusations as was common in the 1950 and 1960s.⁹⁰ At some point, *Das unsichtbare Visier* can be regarded as a *renaissance* of the campaigning against specific institutions and individuals – for instance the *Amt Blank*, the *Bundeswehr* and, most prominently, Konrad Adenauer. Yet, on the other hand it was the product of a very contemporary conception of the political and ideological struggle, as was discussed with regards to the exploitation of the narrative of imperialism and militarism.

As Matthias Steinle sums up for the documentary film in the GDR, the social outcomes of capitalism in the West were depicted as socio-economic decay, such as unemployment and social impoverishment, and cultural decay, especially regarding American popular culture.⁹¹ One would assume that a series that is located almost exclusively in the West would sustain this perspective. Quite on the contrary, however, *Das unsichtbare Visier* does not operate under such an approach. Instead of depicting, for instance, unemployment and social decay, the series promoted some sort of fascination with the visual appearance of the Western consumer culture. This paper suggests two rationales: (1) At least as of the late 1960s the genre of espionage film was profoundly influenced by the internationally successful James Bond films, which

⁹⁰ Gibas 2004.

⁹¹ Steinle 2003: 448-450.

promoted a contemporary consumerist culture and hedonistic lifestyle.⁹² Moreover, the Bond films transformed the espionage genre fundamentally in that they made way for the accentuation of a “cinema of attraction” for the genre. Though the Bond films were not screened in East German cinemas or aired in the DDR-F, for obvious political reasons, the films somehow made their way to the GDR, e.g. through West German television⁹³ or through verbal propaganda. Despite the fact that Detjen/Bredebusch is clearly conceptualized as a “socialist personality” (*Sozialistische Persönlichkeit*), *Das unsichtbare Visier* follows some of the developments in the West and breaks with the generic affiliation with espionage movies which, for instance, had a *film noir* approach. (2) In the wake of a “socialism of consumerism”⁹⁴ (*Konsumsozialismus*), the yearning for a modern consumer culture was in line with an interest in the visual representation of contemporary Western lifestyle. *Das unsichtbare Visier* can be regarded as a targeted satisfaction of the urge for “visual pleasure”, e.g. modern apartments, Tanner’s sports car, Alexander’s hip photo studio etc. Yet a derogative depiction of the West, along with the depiction of the socio-economic decay, were deemed inappropriate for the entertainment value of *Das unsichtbare Visier*.

6. Conclusion

In the beginning of the 1970s, the SED was facing a considerable loss of legitimacy due to social problems such as low living standards, a barely developed consumer culture and the withdrawal of the somewhat cathartic narrative of the “communist utopia”⁹⁵, which was ultimately replaced with the pragmatic phrase of “real socialism” (*real-existierender Sozialismus*). Due to the political détente between East and West Germany, the stereotypical image of the Western enemy (*Feindbild*) which was supposed to reinforce an East German identity was at stake. Alongside a wide range of governmental measures, some focal narratives emerged that were aimed at restoring and consolidating a “belief-in-legitimacy” (D. Beetham) in the existing power relations. Among those, the narrative of antifascism was one of the most efficacious and sustained discursive devices.

In the second section, I referred to Roselle et al. (2014) and their suggestion of distinguishing between national, international and issue narratives. The narrative of antifascism showed that this separation only works as an abstract typology – narratives are always complex with regards to their appropriation in different media and contexts, and they are most certainly a means

⁹² Bennett/Woolacott 1987.

⁹³ Stott 2012: 66.

⁹⁴ Staritz 1985.

⁹⁵ Meuschel 1992: 236.

of addressing both national and international issues as well as current political issues. Narratives are always embedded in a complex environment. In line with that assumption, the narrative of antifascism – understood as a discursive formation that encompasses a variety of narratives like imperialism and militarism – in *Das unsichtbare Visier* proved to be a “mobile signifier” that was able to be attached to past phenomena, such as the post-war years in Germany, as well as to contemporary political and cultural phenomena, such as the depiction of the FRG as a neo-fascist and imperialist state. *Das unsichtbare Visier* proved that antifascism can be considered to be a fundamentally diachronic concept.

As for the contextualization of the narrative of antifascism, *Das unsichtbare Visier* provides two findings: (1) The series indicates how the narrative of antifascism was appropriated in the 1970s. The first segment revealed a renaissance of the propaganda strategies from the 1950s, such as the reading of the FRG as the single successor of the Third Reich. Those narrative strategies were entirely in line with simultaneous endeavors aiming to establish a national historiography. Additionally, *Das unsichtbare Visier* corresponded with the contemporary range of antifascism from neo-fascism, imperialism to militarism. With regards to the conception of the enemy (*Feindbild*), *Das unsichtbare Visier* targeted primarily the FRG, characterized as a state that was on the one hand under the spell of former members of the NSDAP, and on the other hand dependent on the USA and NATO, with the USA as the central agent of international imperialism, most prominently depicted by the intrigues of the CIA. Furthermore, *Das unsichtbare Visier* utilized imagery from state such as South Africa to illustrate contemporary forms of neo-fascism. Contrary to the depiction of the FRG in terms of an “ABC”-coverage⁹⁶ in documentary films and in television news⁹⁷, *Das unsichtbare Visier* did not rely on the depiction of socio-economic problems. On the contrary, scenes in the FRG were depicted in great detail and, hence, promoted some sort of “visual attraction”. (2) *Das unsichtbare Visier* shows that the narrative of antifascism and, furthermore, any narrative of legitimation can occur in a variety of contexts. This paper provided evidence of the appropriation of a political narrative in popular culture. Hence, narratives of legitimation can provide topical consistency, yet at the same time they have to adapt to the prerequisites of the institutional and discursive environment in which they are embedded.

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⁹⁶ The acronym ABC stands for unemployment (*Arbeitslosigkeit*), employment ban (*Berufsverbot*) and crisis.

⁹⁷ Steinle 2003, Schütte 1997.

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