



Exam 2

Course: **World Society GenEd**

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In 1989, the collapse of the Berlin Wall marked an important moment in Germany history, as the formerly separated East and West Germany would reunify. Prior to reunification, Germany was separated into East and West states, both physically, economically, and socially. The socialist eastern Germany was notably controlling over its inhabitants' lives and resources which left the state struggling to progress culturally and economically. Despite the newfound freedoms, the reunification was challenging for many East Germans since they were far behind their West German counterparts. Many Germans reimagined their lives prior to reunification, seeking to know how beneficial the new era of Germany would really be. Films such as *Goodbye Lenin!* and *Lives of Others* offer insights into Germany's past and the impact of reunification on citizens.

Reunification of Germany brought both positive and negative effects for its citizens. While the main focus of bringing the countries together was for the benefit of its people, the conversion had a significant number of annoyances as well. Two big changes were in social and economic reconstruction. It was clear how much a struggle adopting the new currency was for Western Germans in *Goodbye Lenin!* Upon finding his mother's savings, Alex attempted to trade his Eastern Marks for the Deutsche Marks but was turned away. This was particularly a problem for many because of East Germany's economic position being so poor that Eastern Marks being almost worthless.

The sudden transition from a socialist to capitalist system brought significant social shock for many East Germans. Post-reunification, things like products, brands, and jobs were no longer controlled by the state. The East German region was flooded with new brands and lifestyles which left many unfamiliar and without a sense of identity. The film *Goodbye Lenin!* makes this situation a bit comical in the way Christines, (Alex's mother), character was designed. In the beginning of the story, she has a heart attack and falls into a nine-month long coma. When she awakens, the doctor warns Alex that any stressful situation could induce another life-threatening heart attack. Ironically, Germany reunified during her coma. To protect his mother from this shocking news, Alex creates fake news stories and reuses junk from eastern Germany to save his mother from learning about the shocking news.

While reunification brought the opportunity of better lives for East Germans, many people were left questioning how the change really affected them. The term "ostalgie" is commonly used to define the feeling Eastern Germans had while longing for their lives pre-reunification. This word was derived from the German word "Ost", which translates to "East", and "nostalgia". An important notion brought up by Immanuel Kant is that this concept of nostalgia is merely the desire to remember memories from the past, not to return to the past. The film *Goodbye Lenin!* captures ostalgie in a way that deviates from authenticity. A part of reality which was not as touched on was how eastern Germany was an authoritarian force that constantly suppressed and surveilled its inhabitants. The film *Lives of Others* portrays this other side of East Germany through the lens of Stasi. The protagonist of this story deals with the

complexity of having a high-ranking position in the GDR while seeing firsthand the negatives that his job brings forth.

In conclusion, the reunification of Germany brought much opportunity but was paired with the complexities of adopting new ways of life. Many eastern Germans were left longing for the fulfilling aspects of life prior to reunification and referred to as *ostalgie*. The societal impact this event had on Germany was clear through films such as *Goodbye Lenin!* and *Lives of Others*; however, it's critical to understand how deeply eastern Germany GDR affected the standpoint of its citizens.