Local Knowledge of Elites as a Basis for Comparing Political Systems

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Abstract: I organize conversations and press reports about socialist-era officials into four streams of discourse, each stream of discourse representing a particular lesson that I sought to learn in the field. I then examine what each lesson, or strand of discourse, implies about the reputation of East Germany's deposed elite, the inner workings of East Germany, and the moral significance of East Germany. Next, I analyze the identity politics that is woven into local knowledge of East Germany's deposed elite: The discrimination faced by former East German officials, the ambiguous moral position of the anthropologist who is interested in a stigmatized group, and the seemingly elevated moral status of the anthropologists' conversation partners. I then draw on the criteria by which deposed elites are judged to create a framework for comparing regimes. My framework highlights two criteria of judgment: Has the elite violated local or international norms? Is the elite composed of locals or foreigners? These two criteria are a potential source of reputational hazard and delegitimation, and thus can inform analysis of political culture: the myths and rituals that elites draw upon to legitimate their rule.

Keywords: East Germany; Leipzig; elites; politicians; comparative politics; forms of government

The title of this article is also its destination: a framework for comparing elites and political systems. It is a lofty destination that has its beginning in few lessons that I have learned about East Germany's deposed elite. I organize these lessons into four strands of discourse. The first strand consists of a list of terms that describe different categories of East German officials. The second describes my friends and acquaintances' responses to my desire to interview socialist-era politicians. In the third conversational strand, my local contacts speculate about the current circumstances of socialist-era politicians. Lastly, the fourth strand of discourse features exchanges in which my friends and acquaintances have difficulty recalling the names of local East German politicians, and speak instead of socialist-era artists and church officials. These four lessons, or strands of discourse, have a number of subtexts. The subtext closest to the surface is the reputation of the subject matter, East Germany's functionaries and politicians. The other two subtexts--the inner workings and moral significance of East Germany--are less prominent. Together, the four discourses with their subtexts represent local knowledge of East Germany's political elite.

Once I accomplish my first goal of describing this local knowledge, I turn to my second goal, which is analyzing the identity politics that is embedded in this local knowledge. My wish to socialize with this stigmatized group casts me in an ambiguous light. In contrast, my

interlocutors seem to gain the moral upper hand when they present themselves as regime outsiders and criticize East Germany's deposed elite. Most importantly, however, I describe what is at stake for East Germany's deposed elite; they are stigmatized and face discrimination in the labor market. In addition, I argue that the local knowledge that I have assembled here can serve as a backdrop against which to interpret their personal accounts.

While my second goal is inward-looking and focuses on individual politics, my third goal and the destination of this article is expansive and reaches outward. I draw on the local knowledge that I assemble here to create a framework for comparing different types of elites and regimes. The framework that I create differentiates between elites on the basis of whether they are foreign or local, and whether they are perceived to have violated international or local norms. Thematically, my approach shares some resemblance to the work of historians and political scientists who draw on knowledge of political elites to characterize the workings and, more implicitly, the moral significance of political systems. For example, within the context of West Germany, studies of elites, such as the '"Mannheimer Elitestudie"' of 1981, identified the structure of the West German elite as the foundation of the German Federal Republic's democracy (Bürklin 1996: 2). For East Germany, Ludz argued that the rise of the technical intelligentsia in East Germany signaled that East Germany was becoming a less repressive regime (Fulbrook 1992: 40, 104). Countering Ludz, Baylis argued that the technical intelligentsia yielded limited power and consequently were not harbingers of change (40, 98). These arguments enrich our knowledge of West and East German political systems. Less obviously, they communicate particular understandings of the reputation of politicians and the regimes in which they operate. Behind the Mannheimer Elitestudie is respect for democracy and the wish to see West German democracy endure into the future. Ludz's forecast of a softening of political repression in East Germany is likely premised on the assumption that less political repression is a positive development, a premise that elevates the reputation of political actors who are open and tolerant of political differences.

The subtext that animates the social science of elites is no less interesting than the subtext that animates local conversations and news reports about elites. However, as anthropologists we are sometimes satisfied with the surface meanings of social science and probe no further. This is not the case with local knowledge. It is a matter of professional pride to infer the meanings that local understandings imply, and this is indeed where I begin my article. This article is based on conversations with friends and acquaintances and newspaper reports about East Germany's deposed elite that I have documented in the course of doing fieldwork in Leipzig in 1996-1997, when the dramatic events of the fall of 1989 that led to German unification were still fresh on people's mind[i]. I describe the strands of discourse and their subtext, and summarize the results (see Table 1). Next, I proceed to my second goal, which is to highlight the identity politics that is embedded in this local knowledge. I argue that the local knowledge that I have assembled can serve as a backdrop against which to study the personal accounts of East German elites. I then turn to my third goal, which is to show how local knowledge of a deposed elite can be the basis of comparing political systems. I create a framework for comparing elites and regimes on the

basis of two potential sources of reputational hazard: the origins of the ruling class--whether it is local or foreign--and the type of transgression with which it is associated--the violation of local or international norms. This classification scheme is the destination of my journey. It can inform analysis of the myths and rituals that legitimate different elites and regimes.

1. Types of East German Officials

In the course of reading newspapers and secondary sources, talking to friends and acquaintances, and attending public gatherings of various associations, I collected terms that are used to differentiate and define the various kinds of officials that served in the public sphere in East Germany.[ii] Some terms circulated before the Peaceful Revolution of 1989-1990, while other terms emerged during and after the Peaceful Revolution. The former qualify the extent to which regime supporters and notables were loyal to the regime. In contrast, the terms that emerged during and after the revolution are disparaging. They contain the underlying assumption that East Germany was managed and ruled by a privileged and opportunistic elite that would not have supported meaningful political change because it was not in its interest to do so.

Before 1989, the following terms, mostly positive, were used to describe East German officials:

SED-Funktionär(e): Individuals who belonged to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*SED*) and played an official role in the party.

Leipziger erste: The first of Leipzig. Refers to the first secretary of the regional party administration.

SED-Größen: The grand figures of the Socialist Unity Party. This term encompasses politicians in the capital, Berlin, and the first secretaries of the regional party administration.

Betonköpfe: Block heads. This was a derogatory term that was used in West Germany to refer to East German, and more broadly, East Block political figures. The term identifies members of this group as intellectually rigid.

linientreu: loyal to the party line. It is an adjective describing an individual's adherence to the party's doctrine.

überzeugte: The persuaded, or convinced. This term emphasizes the individuals' complete adherence to party doctrine.

100-prozentige: 100%, used as an adjective to denote complete loyalty to the Socialist Unity Party.

rot (also, *dunkel rot* and *mehr als rot*): Red (also, deep red and more than red): Red is the color of communism. Calling someone red conveys that he or she identifies with the regime. Deep red connotes strong identification.

Rotkäppchen: The literal meaning is red cap (as in red riding hood). It is the brand name of East German champagne (still available in stores). It was used to nickname people with political zeal (Baer 1995: 396).

During and after the revolution, new terms came into use, all of which are derogatory. The new labels disparage those who had a public function in East Germany:

Wendehals: Turn throat. Turn throats are individuals who were once committed communists, but since the revolution have adapted the beliefs and lifestyle of true capitalists. The term recalls the ability of some species of birds to turn their neck 180 degrees (Jarausch 1994: 60).

Bonzen: Individuals who have held managerial posts in East Germany. <u>Bonzen</u> were loyal to their position in the system, their career; they were not necessarily motivated by deep ideological convictions.

rote Socken: Red socks. The term encompasses everyone who has supported the communist regime. It was used by the Christian Democrats (<u>CDU</u>) in the early 1990's as a blanket statement describing people who have chosen to lend their support to the Party of Democratic Socialism (<u>PDS</u>). That party's leader, Gregor Gysi, further popularized the term when he proclaimed that red socks keep the feet warm.

Staatnah: The literal meaning is close to the state. It is used to designate individuals who have either worked for or displayed unusual loyalty to the state and thus cannot be entrusted with a position of authority in the new democratic order. These individuals are assumed to have enjoyed some fringe benefits in return for their loyalty. The implied exchange of loyalty for benefits further compromises their integrity.

The terms that emerged during and after the Peaceful Revolution imply that East German officials had little or no incentive to reform the regime. The subtext of labels such as <u>*Bonzen*</u> and <u>*Staatnah*</u> is that regime supporters benefited from their positions and thus did not have any incentive to reform or change the system. This view morally condemns regime

supporters, and elevates the moral standings of regime outsiders, implying that they hold the key to moral and political renewal.

2. Responses to My Desire to Interview Socialist-Era Politicians

The second stream of discourse is found in my acquaintances' responses to my plan to interview Leipzig residents who held political office during the socialist era. Invariably, whenever I shared my project, my interlocutors shifted the topic of conversation to the Stasi. At the time I was very disappointed with this reaction. For example, Rene[iii], my neighbor, a young social worker who has traveled in the Middle East and was active in Amnesty International, said that he could help me find socialist-era politicians. He promised to ask his father-in-law for contacts. I checked back with him a week later, leaving a note in his mailbox. He responded by putting in my mailbox two notebook-size publications. The small one was titled, "Laws concerning the files of the Stasi," and the large one, "Second report on the activities of the federal body overseeing the Stasi files." Attached was a brief message: "Dear Amitai. I have received your note. Good luck with your research. The materials--report on the Stasi's activities. Have fun 'reading,' Rene." Unable to help me with contacts, he apparently thought that the next best thing was to inform me about the moral significance of the individuals that I have sought to interview. It is as if the Stasi was the best approximation of the city's communist-era politicians. I suddenly recalled him saying, "Did you know that the opening of the wall is said to have been a Stasi plot?"

Another telling incident occurred over the breakfast table at the home of a lecturer who worked at the pedagogical faculty. She and her family were enthusiastic about my project. She cried out, "Madness, absolute madness!" She pictured herself interviewing former politicians. She would exchange a few sentences and then break down and scream at them. She obviously abhorred them. I asked her whether she recalled any of their names. Except for Dr. Ebert, the last First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party for the region of Leipzig, she did not recall any. Before 1989, she was not in the habit of reading the papers. She used to flip straight to the entertainment section to find out what was playing in the local theaters. I wanted to focus for a moment on Dr. Ebert and brought him up again. She immediately ran to the other room and produced a copy of a document that describes the latter's collegial relationship with the Stasi. I saw this document elsewhere, as it is something of a touchstone for anyone who is trying to understand the last days of the GDR. In it Dr. Ebert advises the Stasi about how best to quash the nascent opposition.

One subtext of this stream of discourse is that socialist-era politicians and functionaries should be subject to the same legal measures as the Stasi. Another subtext is that the real center of power in East Germany was the Stasi. East Germany was a highly repressive authoritarian state, and the challenge of purging society of its crimes is on-going.

3. Learning About the Circumstances of Socialist-Era Functionaries and Politicians

The third stream of discourse consists of speculations about ex-functionaries' and politicians' economic situation a half a dozen years after the Peaceful Revolution. The Leipzigers that I have spoken to believe that the city's ex-officials have carved out for themselves successful careers in the private sector. Their alleged success suggests that one of authoritarianism's legacies is the persistence of regime supporters in positions of privilege, albeit in business rather than the public sphere.

My first exposure to this point of view was in early November 1996, when I joined in a guided walk commemorating the dramatic events of the fall of 1989. We paused in Augustus Square, formerly known as Karl-Marx Square, when passers-by stopped by our group to share fearful memories. One woman recalled leaving her two children behind at home to join the vulnerable crowd. Her husband wanted to join as well, but she knew that gun toting police were awaiting her in downtown. She told him to stay home with the children, so that if something were to happen to her, the children would have him for support. When she ended her powerful testimony, the group recalled the appeal for non-violence by the Leipzig Six. I strained my ears, but there was no mention of the three local politicians who were among the six who signed the appeal.

The walk continued. The marchers had walked the same wide avenues that encircle the historic downtown, though in 1996 the city was in the midst of a construction boom. We were passing under huge cranes, in sight of new hotels and marble-tiled office buildings that were slowly rising along the avenues that ring the inner city. Our destination was the former headquarters of the secret police. On the way I asked the guide about the circumstances of the deputy-mayors and other party officials, and whether the last socialist-era mayor was still a public figure. The guide could not speak about individual cases. But he was certain that they were doing well for themselves, working as consultants for insurance firms, or as realtors and lawyers. He pointed across the avenue to a renovated building with a big sign of an insurance firm as an example of where former officials have presumably found work.

The prosperity of yesterday's party bosses is especially painful to those who were marginalized before 1989, and have not managed to shake off the leaden mantel of marginality. A ranking member of the Citizens Movement, an offshoot of the protest movement that had brought down the regime, was talking to me about her grown children. She recalled that during the 1980's her children were denied admittance to the college-preparatory high school. Yet in unified capitalist Germany, it is important to have a university degree. Consequently, her children are disadvantaged, while the sons and daughters of former politicians had the advantage of a university diploma and were doing well for themselves.

My friend Kurt, a law student, expressed similar sentiments. The *Bonzen* enjoy a sense of wellbeing that they do not deserve. Before the revolution these people had access to vacation spots in Poland through the trade unions (FDGB). Ordinary people could not easily find accommodations in Poland. Since the Peaceful Revolution, the *Bonzen* continue to enjoy a

privileged position. They did not help bring about change, yet they enjoy the fruits of the capitalist system. In contrast, the people who have risked their lives by demonstrating on the streets are holding onto an insecure existence, or are unemployed. I pressed Kurt for specific examples and he shared with me several stories of individuals whom he knew from his neighborhood. A neighbor of his had an important army post. Before 1989, this neighbor used to wait outside each morning for a chauffeured car (a Lada) to pick him up. Since 1989 he has shed his army uniform and instead wears a fancy black coat. He leaves for work with a briefcase in hand. He must be a manager somewhere. For Kurt, these and other incidents prove that there was no real renewal. Regime supporters, including high-ranking party members, retained their privileged position in society.

4. Seeking to Learn More about High-Ranking Individuals

If in the previous section I feature local knowledge of socialist-era politicians' continued prosperity, in this section I document conversations and newspaper reports that omit East German officials, and sometimes shift the focus to East German artists and church officials in their stead. One telling incident took place at a Mövenpick restaurant. I was meeting with some students from the United States and their language instructor, who two summers ago was my teacher as well. I shared my project on socialist-era politicians and received a very muted reaction from her. A student seated next to her joined our conversation. I repeated my research objectives, adding, "I'm trying to reach the former mayor, Dr. Bernd Seidel." I looked at the language instructor and she immediately responded, "No, I'm not familiar with his name." Five minutes later, another student joined the conversation, and I was again called to give an account of my project. I tried to spare my former German teacher the annoyance of hearing about my research for the third time in a row and spoke very briefly. But she was irritated. "In the U.S. people are interested in this topic," she exclaimed. "But no one here in Leipzig is interested."

In instances in which I have persevered through my acquaintances' enthusiasm for talking about the Stasi and reasserted my interest in ex-politicians, my acquaintances turned to discuss the fear that gripped people during the mass demonstration on October 9, 1989, up until the sounding of the appeal for calm. When I asked for the names of the signatories of the appeal for calm, my acquaintances had a hard time remembering the names of two of the three politicians who were among the signatories. Standing outside the five-story apartment row house in which we lived, my neighbor Rene gestured at the lit-up balconies that protruded above us and said, "Everyone here knows that Dr. Ebert had prevented bloodshed. He was one of the signatories." He then tried to recall the other five signatories. Some names were an easy draw: Kurt Masur, the famous conductor, and Bernd-Lutz Lange, the cabaret actor. Both were still important public figures. Masur assumed an important role as a conductor in New York City, and Lange, the cabaret actor, published books, moderated public forums and performed on stage. Then came the theologian's turn. But what was his name? Dr. Peter Zimmermann! But he had ceased to be a public persona following allegations that he had contact with the secret police.

Two signatories were going to be left out. I volunteered their names, and he quickly joined me. They were Dr. Kurt Meyer, the party secretary for culture, and Jochen Pommert, another party secretary.

Admittedly, the difficulty people have in recalling socialist-era politicians and functionaries is due in part to limited media coverage. Before 1989 only politburo members, particularly Erich Honecker, were privileged to have their faces disseminated by the media. The mayor and other local politicians were only mentioned by name. During the Peaceful Revolution, newspapers dropped the obligatory long-winded salutes to the leadership in Berlin. The author Erich Loest, who was in exile in West Germany, figured prominently (ST February 8, 1990: 6) as were the painters Mattheuer, Ebersbach and Rinkk (ST July 2, 1990: 5). The church superintendent, Magirius, and the priests, Richter and Führer, were featured as touchstones of respectability and civic spirit. Tina Turner's upcoming concert (ST July 5, 1990) as well concerts by other popular singers from the U.S. and Britain were in the headlines. I did not find coverage of socialist-era politicians, and it took a while for the new democratically elected mayor to become a regular feature in the local paper.

In 1996-1997, I was disappointed that I did not find any references to Leipzig's socialist-era politicians in the press. Perhaps mentioning this group would have diminished the reputation of the newspaper and alienated readers. One day, however, I spotted an article that featured a half-dozen smiling Leipzigers who were asked who, among the city's notables, impressed them the most. The column of text to the side had a promising title, "Leipzig's notables from before were not forgotten" (WK April 16, 1997: 10), with "from before" referring to the time period before 1989, when East Germany was in existence. Artists' names came up: Kurt Masur, Uwe Scholz, of the opera ballet, and Jürgen Hart, a cabaret actor. To my disappointment, no former politician was mentioned. No one confessed this anxiety to me, but remembering the names of former politicians might make oneself appear like a regime supporter.

Local Knowledge of a Deposed Elite

I seek the implied meanings, or subtext, of the four discourses that I present above to create a more complete representation of locals' understandings of a deposed elite. I define the four discourses and their subtext as local knowledge. My discovery of local knowledge is grounded in my fieldwork, and I emphasize this point of origins in Table 1. In the first two columns of Table 1, I align the lessons that I have sought in the field with the lessons that I have learned from acquaintances and news reports (titled "Streams of Discourse"). In the three remaining columns of the table, I describe the three subtexts that I infer from each stream of discourse: The reputation of East Germany's deposed elite, the inner workings of East Germany, and the moral significance of the East German regime.

Lessons Sought about East Germany's Deposed Elite	Streams of Discourse	Subtext 1: The Reputation of East Germany's Deposed Elite	Subtext 2: The Inner Workings of the East German Regime	Subtext 3: The Moral Significance of East Germany's Regime
Types of East German officials	Labels that differentiate socialist-era functionaries and politicians	Prior to 1989, labels that describe East Germany's elite and regime supporters highlight loyalty; labels that came into circulation in 1989 and later highlight self-interest and opposition to reform	The prospects of reform in East Germany were low	The regime had a corrupting influence; regime insiders were bad, while the good people were on the margins
Responses to my desire to interview socialist-era politicians	East Germany's deposed elite are like the Stasi	Former functionaries and politicians should be treated like members of the Stasi	East Germany was a police state	East Germany was a sinister authoritarian regime, and the challenge of purging society of its crimes is on-going
Learning about the circumstances of socialist-era functionaries and politicians	Members of East Germany's deposed elite are prospering in the new economy	Socialist-era functionaries' current prosperity is an outrage; one should not feel any empathy for them	Regime supporters were privileged before 1989 and continue to be privileged more than half a decade after unification	The regime put in motion an unfair distribution of rewards that persist after German unification

Lessons Sought about East Germany's Deposed Elite	Streams of Discourse	Subtext 1: The Reputation of East Germany's Deposed Elite	Subtext 2: The Inner Workings of the East German Regime	Subtext 3: The Moral Significance of East Germany's Regime
Seeking to learn more about high-ranking individuals	It's hard to remember Leipzig's socialist-era politicians; East German artists and church officials are easily remembered	Leipzig's deposed elite has no legacy worth remembering; individually they are an embarrassment and remembering them, a potential liability	The relative autonomy enjoyed by the arts and the church symbolizes a limit of the regime's span of control	Mostly, the regime did not corrupt East Germany's artists and church officials

Table 1: Local Knowledge: Aligning Streams of Discourse with their Subtexts

I present in the third column of Table 1 the subtext which is closest to the surface, the reputation of East Germany's elite. It suggests that East German officials are maligned and stigmatized. Unflattering labels are attached to their person, and their years of public service is conflated with collaboration with the secret police. Their alleged prosperity after the Peaceful Revolution is a sign of injustice. They are best forgotten.

The fourth column of Table 1 features another subtext that I infer from the four streams of discourse: the inner workings of East Germany. This subtext implies that the East German regime relied on a class of self-interested individuals, and that there were no prospects for reform from inside the system. East Germany was a repressive police state. The allegation that former regime supporters are thriving suggests that the current social structure is partly a legacy of the authoritarian past. Yet there was an important limit to the power of the East German state: Although East Germany is alleged to be a repressive police state, artists and church officials enjoyed some degree of autonomy.

The third and last subtext that I explore is summarized in the fifth column of Table 1. It addresses the moral significance of East Germany. The regime had a corrupting influence on society. Regime insiders were morally tainted; if there were any people with strong ethical values, they were on the margins. Stasi-related crimes still pose a moral hazard to society, and the work of exposing collaboration with the Stasi remains a challenge. Half a dozen years after the Peaceful Revolution, the corrupting influence of East Germany is also felt in the labor

market. Nevertheless, the regime's corrupting influence has its limits; many East German artists and church officials were untainted and remain a source of pride.

Fieldworker, Interlocutors, and a Deposed Elite

Now that I have characterized local knowledge of East Germany's deposed elite as streams of discourse and their subtext, I would like to turn to my second goal: Describing the identity politics that is embedded in this local knowledge, and in which everyone who has been mentioned in this article is entangled. Let me start with socialist-era politicians and functionaries. Local knowledge casts them as symbols of the least palatable aspects of the now-defunct regime; they are condensed metaphors of a condemned moral order. These perceptions support the discrimination that socialist-era politicians and functionaries face in the public sphere after German unification. The East German institutions which employed and reinforced their status were dismantled, and their legacy of public service was systematically questioned (Jarausch et al. 1997; for a description of how this applies to officers of the East German army, see Bickford 2011). There are policies in place which discriminate against them in the labor market (Ardagh 1995: 474; Bundesverfassungsgericht 1997: 1-2), and in some cases individuals face legal action (Maier 1997: 303-329; Borneman 1997).

Interestingly, the local knowledge that I have summarized in Table 1 can be employed to *anticipate* East Germany's deposed elite's personal accounts of their tenure in office and present circumstances. Seeking to repair their reputation and contradict local understandings of the workings and moral significance of East Germany, they would claim the following: 1. We were motivated by the wish to help; we did not receive special privileges 2. Neither we and nor East Germany should be conflated with the Stasi 3. Our modest circumstances are a sign that we are no different from anyone else. The few who prospered after 1989 might say: Our success is due to individual efforts after we left office in 1989. 4. (In a few instances) We admire and remain connected to East German artists and church officials.

Having interviewed Leipzig's socialist-era politicians, I can confirm that the local knowledge that undermines their reputation serves as an important backdrop against which to interpret their personal accounts (Touval 2000). I can also confirm that while the above points feature in their accounts, there are important variations, distinctions, and exceptions that are grounded in their individual biographies and interest in current events, including the policies of Leipzig's current elite. For example, socialist-era politicians' accounts of their housing circumstances are partly grounded in their critique of the policies of the city's current administration (Touval 2011).

Shifting to my friends and acquaintances and the authors of the news reports that I mention in this article, the key points from Table 1 can be thought of as rhetorical means, or tropes, of creating social distance and asserting an identity that is morally superior to that of East German officials. To follow Table 1, my interlocutors are regime outsiders who were destined to suffer indefinitely as victims of an authoritarian police state. They remain relatively

disadvantaged compared to regime insiders; within the confines of the discourses that I feature in this article, their only attachment to the East German State is through the church and the arts.

But it is important to note that when East Germany's deposed elite is not the topic of discussion, my friends and acquaintances appropriate many of the symbols of East Germany. The polarized premise is gone and instead nostalgia emerges (Berdahl 1999), as well as memories of compromising one's values (Ten Dyke 2000: 156). If in conversations about East Germany's deposed elite my interlocutors identify themselves as regime outsiders, in interactions that elicit expressions of nostalgia they present themselves as marginalized insiders.

Ostalgie, or nostalgia for the East (*Ost* in German) is sometimes identified by western Germans as proof that eastern Germans are not successfully mastering their history nor their individual complicity with the regime that has oppressed them (Tsai 2010: 294). This perspective has an interesting effect on my interviewees. From my experience, marginalized insiders transform into insiders when the conversation topic shifts to western German judgments of East Germany. Similarly, in Daphne Berdahl's fieldwork at the Leipzig Forum of Contemporary History (ZGF), former citizens of East Germany characterize the western German perspective on East German history as false and misleading, a product of western German power, and reclaim their East German experiences with pride, assuming, in effect, the identity of complete insiders. Berdahl labels conversations in which such opinions are voiced as "eastern German discourses of oppositional solidarity against western hegemony" (Berdahl 2005: 161). Suddenly, outsiders, turned marginalized insiders, become proud insiders.

The identity politics that is embedded in local knowledge also affects the anthropologist. My wish to meet Leipzig's deposed elite suggests that I was not accepting the polarized worldview of my friends and acquaintances. Some of the moral pollution that is associated with East German officials rubbed on my person, making me seem naive if not morally insensitive. In some instances--not reported in this article--I was asked to abandon my study of socialist-era politicians and focus instead on the victims of the regime. It was often easier and more socially rewarding to speak about other topics. Yet as this article demonstrates, there are also benefits to challenging local mores. Nevertheless, since the West has won the Cold War, this article may well be tainted by "victor's justice" (Berdahl 2005: 161). When I and other scholars and commentators call a regime authoritarian, we imply that the regime is flawed, and that it needs to be reformed or overthrown so that a democracy will flourish in its place. Thus, while my acquaintances and friends in Leipzig might criticize me for seeking to interview East German officials, I am also vulnerable to the charge that I share some of the flawed assumptions that guide western scholars' thinking about authoritarianism.

The Contribution of Local Knowledge of an Elite to Comparative Politics

Knowledge of elites can also be employed to compare political systems. John Higley and Jan Kapulski offer a good example of a comparative framework that associates particular configurations of national elites with different types of regimes. In their comparative

framework, Higley and Kapulski create a table that considers the extent to which there are differences within a ruling elite--elites are either widely or narrowly differentiated--and the extent to which an elite is united. They populate the four cells of their matrix with different political systems (Higley and Pakulski 2000: 111).

In this article, I propose a framework that draws on the reputation of elites to categorize political systems. Examining Table, 1, one can combine together different cells to generate many different comparisons. While some combinations would have little merit, other combinations yield interesting insights. But to follow Arend Lijphart,

> Comparative analysis must avoid the danger of being overwhelmed by large numbers of variables and, as a result, losing the possibility of discovering controlled relationships, and it must therefore judiciously restrict itself to the really key variables, omitting those of only marginal importance. The nature of the comparative method and its special limitations constitute a strong argument against what Lasswell and Braibanti call "configurative" or "contextual" analysis...[iv]

Recommending parsimony over "self-defeating perfectionism," Lijphart advises against pulling numerous factors that seem to have some causal significance to generate a large number of comparisons (1971: 590).

Following this advice, I start with one of the most important findings in Table 1, the association of East German officials with the Stasi, and consider on the general case for which this is a specific example. The association with the Stasi implies that socialist-era officials violated international human rights norms. Reflecting on regime change around the world, including further back in time (Iran and Weimar Germany), one can imagine political circumstances in which elites are accused of violating local norms. Thus, the first axis that I create differentiates between elites which are presumed to have violated local norms and elites which are presumed to have violated international norms. Then, seeking the further relevance of the distinction between local and international, I assign the second axis the task of defining the question of origins. Is the elite presumed to be local or foreign? While in eastern Germany, socialist-era politicians and functionaries are presumed to be fellow nationals, there are regimes in which members of the ruling elite are alleged to be foreign nationals or belonging to another ethnic group. I present the resulting comparative framework in Table 2, Comparing Political Systems on the Basis of Elites' Origins and Type of Transgression. Members of East Germany's deposed elite belong in the upper right quadrant: They are presumed to be fellow compatriots who have violated international norms (Touval 2012).

	The Elite Is Presumed to Have Violated Local Norms	The Elite Is Presumed to Have Violated International Norms
The Ruling Class Is Perceived to be of Local Origins		East Germany's socialist-era politicians and functionaries
The Ruling Class Is Perceived to be of Foreign Origins		

Table 2: Comparing Political Systems on the Basis of Elites' Origins and Type of Transgression

My comparative framework draws on perceptions from a very particular source: a set of informants and media reports that I encountered while doing fieldwork in Leipzig in 1996-1997. Local knowledge is specific to a particular time and place. When populating Table 2, it is important to note whose perceptions are being featured. The reputation of elites varies across social groups, and some judgments may well clash with scholarly understandings of the social origins of a particular elite and its compliance with local and international norms.

The potential disjuncture between local and scholarly knowledge may well discourage some scholars. However, classifying elites by their reputation might be instructive for political anthropologists and others who are interested in elites' struggles for legitimacy. After all, the presumed social origins of elites and the type of norms which they are alleged to violate are two potential sources of reputational hazard. The classification of elites and regimes that the table can yield could be employed as a backdrop against which to analyze the myths and rituals that political actors draw upon to legitimate and display their power (more about political rituals in Kertzer 1988, Lindholm 1988). In other words, the framework can help capture the links between specific constellations of political risk and the metaphors and metonyms that political actors embellish through rituals and myths.

My first goal in this article is to draw on lessons that I learned during my fieldwork in Leipzig to characterize local knowledge of a deposed elite. I summarize this local knowledge in Table 1 and then turn to my second goal, which is to examine the identity politics which is embedded in this local knowledge. I argue that my key findings are an important backdrop against which to interpret the personal accounts of members of a deposed elite. Turning to my third goal, I create a framework for comparing elites and regimes based on their reputation (Table 2). Emphasizing the perceptions and judgments that undermine the legitimacy of elites and regimes, the resulting classification scheme could serve as a backdrop against which to examine the efforts of elites to gain and sustain their legitimacy. This last goal is also the destination of my journey. I hope that it will be further developed in the future and become the starting point of a new journey.

[ii] In retrospect, I wish I had asked my informants to describe the context in which these terms were used and whether they were used in a similar fashion by all groups in society. I should have also inquired about the origins of the terms, including whether some of the derogatory labels that are found in the latter part of the list originate from West Germany. For an important contribution to the study of rhetoric and the Peaceful Revolution see Kerry Kathleen Riley's book, Everyday Subversion: From Joking to Revolution in the German Democratic Republic (2008).

[ii] All names are pseudonyms, except for the name of Leipzig's last socialist mayor and five of the six signatories on the appeal for calm (Dr. Ebert's name is a pseudonym).

[ii] Lijphart 1971: 690.

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