

From the original film's press kit, courtesy of bauderfilm.

How did you come up with the idea for this film?

Marc Bauder: Originally we wanted to make a film about what was referred to as "buying East Germans free." It is a German-German topic about which most people know hardly anything today. Over decades, the GDR government sold political prisoners to the West German government and earned approximately 3.4 billion West German marks. Over 33,000 people left the GDR for West Germany in this way. Many saw it as a kind of exile, because they left behind their past lives as well as prison. We were very interested in the personal dimension. With Anne, Utz, Matthias and Tina we found protagonists who could help us portray this sudden rupture for a wider audience.

Why do families of the former detainees play such an important role in the film?

Dörte Franke: We wanted to find out how Anne, Utz, Matthias and Tina had managed to build new lives for themselves and what role their past had played in this. During our discussions, they often referred to one specific issue that still affected them today: namely, the consequences that had been born by their families, which were torn apart at that time. This made it clear to us that, in addition to the 33,000 who were bought free, there is an unknown number of family members who were left behind, or who moved to West Germany through the so-called "family reunion" program. This critical time in all their lives, thus, did not end once the political prisoner had been "bought free." The more that these consequences became clear to us, the more we wanted to make a film about how these families are dealing with their past.

The film touches only briefly on the backstory of political persecution in the GDR.

Marc Bauder: During this project we made a conscious decision not to go into the details of the political persecution of our four protagonists in East Germany. There are other films that document this historical background, and our film debut, *No Lost Time*, also deals with the mechanisms of this oppression. Although there are still gaps in the historical reconstruction of the past, this time we wanted to focus on the important repercussions of the issue in the present. This film deals with what has been left behind, in these families, in the present.

You yourself have a similar personal background to the families portrayed in the film. Why do you think it is such a difficult issue to address today?

Dörte Franke: I was 5 years old when my parents were arrested for similar reasons as our protagonists. I lived with my grandparents for two years, until the West German government bought my parents free and I then moved to West Germany through the so-called "family reunion" program. I cannot remember anything about this period and only began to really develop an interest in the subject in my early twenties. So I can definitely relate to the children's position in the film. It still is difficult to ask certain questions, probably because the subject is always present subliminally, which obviously affects children. On the other hand, I can also relate to the parents in the film, who deal with their extreme experiences in their own ways. Like the protagonists, I also took a detour and first wrote a book on the subject. As a result of all this, it was especially important for me in this film to confront the fears about this topic, which today exist on all sides.

What is the essence of this film? Is there a lesson to be drawn?

Marc Bauder: Utz says in the film that his life in prison was something exclusive—that is, something that could never be fully comprehended by other people. At the same time, his daughter wishes nothing more than to overcome this separation and have a closer relationship with her father. For me, this is the core of the film. Even when the needs of different individuals collide, each has its own justification. You see, just like for his daughter, to me—and probably to most other people—this past seems like something quite intangible, almost absurd. But for 250,000 East German political prisoners this was a real experience, which they still have to deal with today. And one must presume that each of these prisoners has a family, which also must have been affected.

I believe there is still a deficit in our country when it comes to dealing with the past. In public discourse there are a few stories about the fates of individuals, but there is hardly a widespread awareness about the aftereffects left by the East German dictatorship in our society. This film allows us a very intimate look at three families, which are not isolated cases but instead stand for thousands. The film shows different models of dealing with the past, but refrains from making judgments regarding a "right way" to do so. Rather than advocating a particular model, the film appeals to people to take a step forward towards closer examination and discussion of this topic in public.