

ENGLISH: *STASILAND*

Explain what Funder thinks is right and wrong, good and bad about: East Germany's new society since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the old GDR society with the Berlin Wall and her own Australian society. Do you share her assumptions? Are there other ways of considering some of these assumptions?

"Stasiland" by Anna Funder explores societal values and ideologies through a journey in East Germany. The use of imagery, colour connotations and the slight bias in Funder's writing depict her values and assumptions, thus revealing her disapproval towards the communist regime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), feelings of disgust towards the new East German society which have buried their past, and support for capitalism in East Germany and Australia today.

Funder's attitude towards the East German society after the fall of the Berlin Wall contains both positive and negative elements. She shows disapproval towards the culture's way of dealing with their past whilst supporting the system of capitalism. Upon arrival in Leipzig, the use of colour connotations suggests feelings of revulsion towards the city and the way the East Germans have buried the GDR's history. *"I sit on a green bench. I look at green tiles, breathe green air."* Pg 1. The 'green' objects at Alexanderplatz station symbolise sickness, unease and the lingering presence of the GDR being hidden underground at the station. Furthermore, the strong disinfectant smell that overpowers the author's senses represents the failed attempt of East Germany to hide their shameful 'green' past. The author's assumptions can also be drawn through comparison of the portrayal of the old and new East German society. Feelings of disgust and fear are shown towards the GDR and a sense of relief for the current capitalist society. When Funder was put in the van that transported prisoners in Hohenschönhausen, she described it as *"pitch black and horrible"* pg 225, showing distress and thus negatively portraying the old East German society as citizens were treated poorly and with very limited freedom. Consequently, gratitude is shown towards the current society as one is entitled to an increase of rights and freedom under capitalism. This is displayed through the ability for Funder to travel freely, being able to interview the Stasi men, and not living in fear of being watched and investigated.

To a large extent, the old East German society and communism is portrayed negatively by Funder as she often questions and shows distaste towards those in favour of the GDR whilst demonstrating sympathy with those who have rebelled against it. Descriptions of the interviewed Stasi men, such as Herr Bock often evoke feelings of uneasiness in the reader. His linoleum covered living room is largely emphasised by Funder with the purpose of symbolising the dark nature of the old East German society under the control of the Stasi. *"No matter how much is taken out, this linoleum palace continues to contain all the necessities for life, at the same time as it refuses to admit a single thing...I think, it is much like East Germany itself."* Pg51. This suggests the GDR, which was under communism, was a dull and unpleasant society deprived of quality life, luxuries and freedom, and the only support it gave for the citizens was providing a passable environment for life. The dull material linoleum appears in the text whenever Funder feels uneasy about a situation. It is believed that she aims to make the reader associate the material with her negative feelings towards the GDR. Her sympathy towards the protagonists in the novel: Miriam, Julia, Klaus and Frau Paul, further support the assumption that Funder thinks undesirably of the old GDR society. Through highlighting the disallowance of human rights through their stories, it shows that she believes it was wrong of the Stasi for using torture techniques on their citizens, controlling one's employment, telling someone they 'don't exist' and forbidding a desperate mother from visiting their sick child. An exception to this is shown through Julia's feelings after the fall of the wall. The way in which Funder is captivated by her story grants it with a great sense of credibility and the reader is then made to more openly consider Julia's beliefs than the stories told by the Stasi men. Positive aspects of the GDR and communism stated by Julia include the principle of equality where there are no rich, no poor, no homeless, and the sense of security as everyone knew they were being watched by the Stasi. Julia feels that if the Stasi were still operating, she may not have been raped as it was a taboo in the GDR and the rapist would fear being found out and punished by the Stasi. Whereas in

the new society after the fall of the wall, interrogators were dismissed of their jobs and the Stasi were unable to exercise power.

Funder's Australian society offers a basis of comparison for the exploration of old and new East Germany. Through her attitudes towards these societies, values and assumptions about her own can also be drawn. It is presumed she supports the capitalist system in Australia as she also supports this system of governance in East Germany today and disapproves of communism in the GDR. *"I don't doubt this genuine nostalgia, but I think it has coloured a cheap and nasty world golden; a world where there was nothing to buy, nowhere to go and anyone who wanted to do anything with their lives other than serve the party risked persecution, or worse."* 251. It is clear through Funder's hostility to those who supported communism, that she completely disagrees with them and rather, she believes it was a horrible place to live in where citizens were deprived of freedom and rights. Capitalism is then seen as the 'right' system of governance as it allows one to exercise liberty in regards to the right to travel, own businesses, protest and have access to luxuries. Although Funder does not directly address her views on Australian society, it is assumed she supports the system as Australia is living under capitalism.

I completely agree and support Funder's assumptions and views as find 'Stasiland' credible and my own knowledge and values used to decipher what I feel is right, wrong, good and bad in each of these societies also match the author's. Another other way of considering some of these assumptions, particularly in the theme of 'which dictatorship is right or just' is socialism. Socialism is presented through Heinz and Hagen Koch as an alternative to capitalism and communism. It is seen as dictatorship that combines the two, as well as focusing on production and distribution of goods being owned by the community as a whole. *"Even in this land of rubble and dust there was room for hope."* pg 162. Funder feels that there was 'hope' in Heinz Koch's values and therefore supported socialism as an alternative to communism or capitalism. The debate about whether the old GDR society is better than the new capitalist society also gives rise to a variety of opinions such as entirely supporting the system, entirely loathing it, or feeling that both are inadequate systems of governance. Evidently in the text, Miriam is one who completely loathed the GDR, Von Schnitzler is one who completely supports it, whilst Julia believes that both systems have their flaws.

The old and new East German society, and Australian society are compared and contrasted in 'Stasiland' to reveal the right, wrong, good and bad aspects of each of these systems. Through the writing style, imagery and colour connotations, Funder shows bias and thus portrays United Germany negatively through the way they have covered up their past, however positively through their current capitalist society. It also depicts the protagonists in the novel as victims of the GDR, showing the wrongs in communism whilst presenting a sense of gratitude towards capitalism in her own Australian society.