

**Transitions from Nazism to Socialism: Grassroots
Responses to Punitive and Rehabilitative Measures in
Brandenburg, 1945-1952**

Doctoral Thesis of

Julie Nicole Deering-Kraft

University College London

PhD in History

Declaration

I, Julie Nicole Deering-Kraft,
confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources,
I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This study examines transitions from Nazism to socialism in Brandenburg between 1945 and 1952. It explores the grassroots responses and their relative implications within the context of both punitive and rehabilitative measures implemented by the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) and the communist Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). The present study is based on archival and oral history sources and addresses two main research questions: First, in what ways did people at the grassroots attempt to challenge the imposition of punitive measures, and did their responses have any effect on the manner in which these policies were implemented at a grassroots level? These punitive measures were designed to remove remnants of Nazism and included punitive Soviet practices, Soviet NKVD camps and denazification and sequestering. Second, to what extent did grassroots Brandenburgers participate in political organisations which were designed to integrate East Germans during the rehabilitative stage and what impact did these responses have on the post-war transition? This study focuses on the National Democratic Party and the Society for German-Soviet Friendship as well as examining wider factors which may have impeded and facilitated the processes of post-war transitions. Two main arguments are proposed. First, the imposition of wide-ranging punitive measures often posed an existential threat at a grassroots level, and therefore at times elicited grassroots actions, albeit severely restricted by practical and political constraints. In turn, these grassroots responses could occasionally have some local impact and somewhat affect the manner in which policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Second, it is argued that the rehabilitative stage, despite some challenges, generally provided a favourable system for grassroots integration in which the needs of the policy makers and a significant proportion of grassroots individuals somewhat converged, eventually contributing to the partial stabilisation of the emerging East German socialist state.

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List of Abbreviations

ABF	Workers and Farmers Faculties in the GDR
Barch	Federal Archives, Berlin
BDM	National Socialist 'League of German Maidens'
BDO	'League of German Officers'
BLHA	Brandenburg State Archive
BRD	Federal Republic of Germany
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
DAF	'German Labour Front'- Trade Union in Third Reich
DAV	'German Anglers Association' in the GDR
DBD	Democratic Farmers' Party in the GDR
DDR	German Democratic Republic
dpd	'German Press Service' in the British Zone
DSF	'Society for German-Soviet Friendship' in the GDR
DVdI	German Administration of the Interior in East Germany
DWK	German Economic Commission in the Soviet zone
FDGB	'Free German Trade Union Federation' in the Soviet zone/GDR
FDJ	'Free German Youth' organisation in the Soviet zone/GDR
GDR	German Democratic Republic
<i>Gestapo</i>	Secret Police in the Third Reich
GPU	Soviet State Secret Police
GST	Pre-military Youth Organisation in the GDR
<i>Jungmädel</i>	National Socialist 'Young Maiden's League'
KdF	National Socialist 'Strength through Joy'

K5	Commissariat no. 5 of the Criminal Police; the predecessor of the <i>Stasi</i> in East Germany
KgU	‘Combat Group against Inhumanity’ in the Western Zone
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
KVP	<i>Kasernierte Volkspolizei</i> – military forerunner of the NVA
<i>Kulturbund</i>	Cultural Association of the GDR
KZ	National Socialist Concentration Camp
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party of Germany
<i>Luftwaffe</i>	German Air Force
MAZ	<i>Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
MfS	Ministry for State Security in the GDR (‘ <i>Stasi</i> ’)
MOZ	<i>Märkische Oderzeitung</i>
MVD	Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs
NDPD	National Democratic Party of Germany
NKFD	‘National Committee for a Free Germany’
NKVD	Soviet ‘People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs’
<i>NS-Studentenbund</i>	National Socialist German Students’ League
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers’ Party
NSKK	National Socialist Motor Corps
NSLB	National Socialist Teachers League
NSV	National Socialist People’s Welfare Organisation
NVA	National People’s Army in the GDR
Pg	<i>Parteigenosse</i> - member of the NSDAP
RDB	‘Reich Federation of German Civil Servants’ in the Third Reich
RIAS	Radio Broadcasting in the American Sector
RLB	National Socialist ‘Reich Air Defence Association’
RM	Reichsmark
SA	National Socialist ‘Stormtroopers’

SAPMO	Foundation Archive of the Parties and Mass-Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archives
SBZ	Soviet Occupation Zone
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany in the Soviet zone/GDR
SED ZK	Central Committee of the SED
SMA	Soviet Military Administration (Regional)
SMAD	Soviet Military Administration of Germany
SPD	Social Democratic Party
SS	<i>Schutzstaffel</i> - National Socialist 'Protection Squadron'
Vdgb	Farmers' mutual aid association in the GDR
VEB	<i>Volkseigener Betrieb</i> – State owned enterprise
VVN	'Society of People Persecuted by the Nazi Regime' in the Soviet zone/ GDR
ZDK	Central German Commission for Sequestering and Confiscation in the Soviet zone

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Following twelve years of Nazi rule, the collapse of the Third Reich on 8 May 1945 brought with it the official end of its associated structures, functionaries and National Socialist ideology. This dramatic collapse of the National Socialist regime was accompanied by serious difficulties in both the economy and society, as Germany was marked by destruction. In the area which was to become the Soviet zone and subsequently German Democratic Republic (GDR), wartime bombing had demolished nearly 65% of housing in urban centres and nearly 40% of the population had lost all of their possessions.¹ Here, the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) was established on 6 June 1945 with the primary goals of supervising the unconditional surrender of Germany, administering the Soviet zone of Germany, and implementing the most important Allied decisions on military, political and economic matters.² This also included the dissolution of the NSDAP and its organs, as well as the removal of National Socialist remnants from political, economic, social and cultural life. The period which followed the collapse of the Third Reich was marked by a steady transformation of the political, economic, social and cultural sphere until, seven years later, in the summer of 1952, the GDR leadership officially announced the establishment of socialism in East Germany. It is this East German transition from Nazism to socialism from 1945 to 1952 which this thesis wishes to examine at a grassroots level in Brandenburg.

Prior to 1945 Brandenburg had been the largest Prussian province. Due to its proximity to the National Socialist centre of power in Berlin, it had established itself as a particularly important region for both the armament industry and military bases throughout the Third Reich, and especially in the final year of the war the province suffered greatly as Allied troops closed in on the capital.³ Following German capitulation, the western part of Brandenburg became a part of the Soviet occupation

¹ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany 1945-1955* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), p. 46.

² Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 21.

³ Ingo Materna and Wolfgang Ribbe, *Geschichte in Daten: Brandenburg* (München: Koehler & Amelang, 1995), pp. 198-199.

zone and was declared a new province on 4 June 1945. The eastern part of Brandenburg was subject to a provisional re-drawing along the Oder-Neisse border decided on by the Allies in the Potsdam Agreement in August, finally being ratified in 1950. As a result of this re-drawing of the border, Brandenburg lost approximately 30% of its surface area.⁴ In 1947, when the state of Prussia was officially dissolved, Brandenburg was renamed a state, with Potsdam as its capital. Despite the reduction in size, Brandenburg continued to be the largest of the five provinces in the Soviet zone, although with only 2.25 million inhabitants it was also one of the most sparsely populated.⁵ After the official announcement of the establishment of socialism in July 1952, when the communist Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) carried out administrative reforms which replaced the federal states with fourteen districts, the state of Brandenburg was dissolved and instead divided into three districts: Cottbus, Frankfurt/Oder and Potsdam.⁶

1.2 Research questions and arguments

The period of transition from Nazism to socialism between 1945 and 1952 in Brandenburg was characterised by a dual combination of punitive and rehabilitative measures which were intended both to remove the immediate legacy of National Socialism and to impose a new political system. These measures were implemented against a backdrop in which the East German population was faced with utter chaos, loss and destruction in the wake of the collapse of the Third Reich. Correspondingly, the present study will explore the following two main research questions.

First, in what ways did people at the grassroots attempt to challenge the imposition of punitive measures, and did their responses have any effect on the manner in which these policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg? Second, to what extent did grassroots Brandenburgers participate in political organisations which were designed to integrate East Germans during the rehabilitative stage and what impact did these responses have on the post-war

⁴ In the eastern part of Brandenburg known as the Neumark, an estimated two-fifths of the population had died by 1945 as a result of military action, flight and expulsion. Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), pp. 79-80.

⁵ Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg 1945-1948* (London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 30.

⁶ Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR 1945-1990* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 5. This was to remain until October 1990 when the state of Brandenburg was once again re-established in its current form.

transition? The present study is based on a micro-historical framework and the term grassroots is adopted to refer to individuals and local communities in Brandenburg.⁷ By focusing on this micro-level, this thesis examines the manner in which central policies were implemented at the periphery or ‘on the ground’ in Brandenburg.⁸ This thesis concentrates on the period from 1945 until 1952 and uses the term post-war transition in a chronological sense.⁹

The first research question will be addressed by examining the following punitive measures which were designed to dismantle the existing Nazi political system: disciplinary measures carried out by the Soviet occupying army, Soviet secret police (NKVD) camps; and denazification and sequestering of the Brandenburg populace. The second research question will be addressed by specifically examining one mass organisation and one political party in the form of, respectively, the National Democratic Party (NDPD) and the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF). Both of these political organisations were part of a wider rehabilitative thrust which attempted to integrate the population into the social, political, economic and cultural structures in order to aid in the reconstruction and consolidation of the new political system. This study will then in turn focus on specific factors which may have both impeded and facilitated the process of post-war transition for selected oral history interviewees and other local Brandenburgers.

Correspondingly, this study proposes two main arguments. First, it is argued that the imposition of these wide-ranging punitive measures to change the political, economic and social system often posed an existential threat at a grassroots level, and therefore at times elicited grassroots actions, albeit severely restricted by practical and political constraints. In turn, these grassroots responses could occasionally have some local impact and somewhat affect the manner in which policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Second, this thesis

⁷ Micro-history was pioneered by Carlo Ginzburg in the late 1970s with the intention of treating people of the past as actors with their own aims and strategies. Carlo Ginzburg, *Der Käse und die Würmer* (Frankfurt/M: 1979), p. 15 quoted in Jürgen Schlumbohm, ‘Mikrogeschichte – Makrogeschichte: Zur Eröffnung einer Debatte’, in *Mikrogeschichte – Makrogeschichte: Komplementär oder Inkommensurabel?* ed. by Jürgen Schlumbohm (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), 7-32 (p. 20). In Germany, micro-history developed under the terms *Alltagsgeschichte* and historical anthropology.

⁸ Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p. 3.

⁹ Conversely, Frank Biess has defined ‘post-war’ not only as a chronological and thematic unit but also as an epistemological tool, see: Frank Biess, ‘Introduction: Histories of the Aftermath’, in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. by Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 1-10 (pp. 2-3).

argues that the rehabilitative stage, despite some challenges, generally provided a favourable system for grassroots integration in which the needs of the policy makers and a significant proportion of grassroots individuals somewhat converged, eventually contributing to the partial stabilisation of the emerging East German socialist state.

This study contributes to the historical scholarship on grassroots East Germany in the post-war period in a number of ways. First, whilst this study does not wish to downplay the repressive dictatorial system imposed on East Germany after the war, it provides a different perspective from previous top-down totalitarian approaches which have tended to neglect the potential influence which developments at a grassroots level could have on the implementation of policies in the post-war period. Second, to date no other study has examined the grassroots responses to *both* the punitive and rehabilitative measures during the post-war transition in Brandenburg. Therefore, this study contributes to the historical scholarship by not just focusing on one single policy but presenting a more comprehensive and multifaceted examination within the same investigation. Third, this thesis contributes to knowledge of the range of grassroots responses to the specific policies, and evaluates the relative implications for the transition from Nazism to socialism in Brandenburg from 1945 to 1952.

1.3 Historiographical contextualisation and theoretical considerations

By adopting a micro-historical framework in order to examine political and social developments at a grassroots level in post-war Brandenburg this approach both reflects, and is a product of, debates and interpretations of East Germany prevalent in both the media and academia, over twenty years after the collapse of the GDR. According to Martin Sabrow the three main strands of interpretation of the GDR which vie for influence in present-day political debates on the GDR are the '*Fortschrittsgedächtnis*', the '*Diktaturgedächtnis*' and the '*Arrangementgedächtnis*'. These exist in a 'tripolar force field' within which the GDR past is constantly being re-negotiated.¹⁰ By exploring the links between the top-down exertion of power and

¹⁰ The '*Diktaturgedächtnis*' highlights the power and repression of the state apparatus, the '*Arrangementgedächtnis*' underscores the links between spheres of power and realms of experiences

the responses at the grassroots, the perspective adopted in this study is consistent with the ‘*Arrangementgedächtnis*’. In doing so it endeavours to move away from conceptualisations of East Germany which enunciate an idealised vision of the GDR, as well as from top-down totalitarian theories which tend to restrict their focus on communist and Soviet attempts to transform East Germany into a Soviet satellite state and to establish SED hegemony.¹¹

This study has been both informed and inspired by a number of recent studies which have also challenged such a top-down methodology and instead attempt to shed light on the grassroots population in the GDR. Mark Allinson has examined ‘the interplay between state and party authorities in Erfurt on the one hand, and the general population on the other’, while Jan Palmowski, in his exploration of the invention of the GDR as a distinctive ‘nation’, has highlighted both how the Party’s actions affected its citizens and how the citizens responded.¹² Similarly, Corey Ross, in his examination of land and industry reforms and the mobilisation of youth in the GDR, has focused on the grassroots reactions to political intervention ‘from above’ and how in turn these policies were subsequently converted at a local level. Using this approach of emphasising the ‘interplay between regime policies and popular responses’, he examines ‘some of the possibilities and consequences as well as the very real limits of human actions’ in the GDR.¹³ In her theoretical work on ‘participatory dictatorship’, Mary Fulbrook sheds further light on the manner in which people living in the GDR actively sought to shape their own lives by learning to ‘play by the emergent rules’ and negotiating benefits for themselves within the existent political constraints.¹⁴ This study intends to build on these approaches by examining grassroots responses in relation to both punitive and non-punitive

in society whilst the ‘*Fortschrittsgedächtnis*’ emphasises the idealistic tenets of the GDR’s founding ideas. Martin Sabrow, ‘Die DDR erinnern’, in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. by Martin Sabrow (Bonn: Lizenzausgabe für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2010), 9-25 (pp. 16-18).

¹¹ See, for instance, Andreas Hilger, Mike Schmeitzner and Ute Schmidt, eds., *Diktaturdurchsetzung: Instrumente und Methoden der kommunistischen Machtsicherung in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1955* (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung e.V., 2001), and Rainer Behring and Mike Schmeitzner, ‘Einleitung’, in *Diktaturdurchsetzung in Sachsen: Studien zur Genese der kommunistischen Herrschaft 1945-1952*, ed. by Rainer Behring and Mike Schmeitzner (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 7-24.

¹² Mark Allinson, *Politics and popular opinion in East Germany, 1945-68* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), p. 6. Similarly, Konrad Jarausch speaks about ‘the interplay of repression and self-assertion in ordinary lives’. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), p. x of preface. Palmowski, *Inventing*.

¹³ Ross, *Socialism*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (London: Yale UP, 2005), pp. 235-249, 292, 295.

measures in Brandenburg and their possible implications for the emerging East German socialist state.

When focusing on the impact of, and responses to, top-down policies at the grassroots level it is important to acknowledge theories which examine the underlying principal ontological questions of the relationship between society and the individual. Within both the social and historical sciences, the development of theories of agency, beginning with Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, have explored the manner in which human actions are both constrained and enabled within social systems. Agency is a social theoretical concept which looks at the interplay between social structures and individuals, and concepts of agency examine how people ‘play a role in the formation of the social realities in which they participate’.¹⁵ The conceptualisation of how individuals function within societies has ranged from viewing individuals as entirely free actors on the one hand, to mere products of the societies in which they live on the other. More recent debates within the social sciences on the dialectic between agency and structure have been dominated by Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘practice theory’ and Anthony Giddens’ ‘theory of structuration’. Bourdieu emphasises the strong influence of external factors on the individual, while in contrast Giddens underscores the ability of human agents to engage creatively with societal structures and to respond to them in diverse ways.¹⁶

In a similar vein, historians have grappled with how individuals act within their social worlds. Based on Alf Lüdtke’s work on *Eigensinn* which he has conceptualised as ‘demarcating a space of one’s own’, various studies have since employed this concept in a number of different ways.¹⁷ It is important to note that the significance attached to agency and the manner in which *Eigensinn* is defined have considerable implications for the way in which the history of the Soviet zone and GDR is conceptualised and analysed. On the one hand there are some historians of post-war East Germany who minimise the potential role which individual agency or

¹⁵ Thomas Barfield, ed., *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), p. 4, referenced in Jennifer Dornan, ‘Agency and Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future Directions’, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 9(4) (2002), 303-329 (p. 304).

¹⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984; repr. 2007). Bourdieu’s agents are more dominated by habitus; see Ritzer and Goodman, *Sociological Theory*, p. 404.

¹⁷ Alf Lüdtke, ‘Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis’, in *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien*, ed. by Alf Lüdtke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 9-63. See also Jan Palmowski, ‘Between Conformity and Eigen-Sinn: New Approaches to GDR History: German Historical Institute London, 11 May 2002’, in *German History* 20 (4) (2002), pp. 494-502.

Eigensinn can play, instead emphasising the structural aspects of state hegemony. For instance, in their research on post-war Saxony, Rainer Behring and Mike Schmeitzner argue that the very limited form of *Eigensinn* which could exist was entirely dependent on the arbitrariness of the ruling powers, who had the ability to close such ‘niches’ at will.¹⁸ In marked contrast to this lies Paul Steege’s recent study of post-war Berlin in which he credits individuals on both sides of the city’s emerging divide with playing ‘vital roles in shaping the Cold War’.¹⁹ Both of these approaches are problematic for different reasons. Studies such as that by Behring and Schmeitzner run the danger of crediting the powers that be with a form of omnipotence and unbridled influence, which ignores not only the very practical challenges of enforcing top-down control, but also neglects any potential influence of grassroots actors. Conversely, Steege’s study, although highly informative, does not successfully problematise the causal link between Berliners’ day-to-day attempts to survive and the outcome of larger Cold War developments, and therefore runs the risk of overstating the impact which individual actors could have on macro-historical events.

In contrast, this thesis challenges assumptions that top-down hegemonic demands were always implemented in the manner in which they were intended, while at the same time it does not wish to claim that bottom-up actions could necessarily have a direct effect on the outcome of post-war politics and the establishment of the GDR. In other words, this study contends that neither the social-deterministic theories, nor postulations of autonomy of individuals outside of social restrictions and influences, can satisfactorily explain the grassroots dynamic in post-war East Germany.²⁰ Therefore, rather than dichotomising human action either as being coerced or being autonomous, it positions *Eigensinn* on a continuum between impotence and influence.²¹

¹⁸ Behring and Schmeitzner, *Einleitung*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Paul Steege, *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-49* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), p. 297.

²⁰ On a further discussion of these issues see: Albert Scherr, ‘Soziale Bedingungen von Agency: Soziologische Eingrenzungen einer sozialtheoretisch nicht auflösbaren Paradoxie’, in *Agency: Qualitative Rekonstruktionen und gesellschaftstheoretische Bezüge von Handlungsmächtigkeit*, ed. by Stephanie Bethmann, Cornelia Helfferich, Heiko Hoffmann and Debora Niermann (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2012), 99-121.

²¹ On the dichotomy between coercion and autonomy see: Cornelia Helfferich, ‘Einleitung: Von roten Heringen, Gräben und Brücken. Versuch einer Kartierung von Agency-Konzepten’, in *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Correspondingly, this study defines *Eigensinn* as ‘purposive human action’, through which grassroots actors attempted to negotiate and shape their own lives in response to different punitive and rehabilitative measures in the post-war period in Brandenburg.²² Whilst the present study positions *Eigensinn* on a continuum between impotence and influence, the main emphasis is on uncovering acts of *Eigensinn* which potentially had an effect, however small, on the manner in which top-down policies were implemented at a grassroots level despite the existent practical and political constraints. It is argued that these acts of *Eigensinn* were mainly motivated by existential threats, including both socio-economic and political concerns, and that these manifested themselves in manifold ways. On the one hand, this included complaints to authorities and acts of petition writing, participation in informal networks of communication, as well as non-participation and public demonstrations of defiance which were discordant with officially prescribed norms.²³ On the other hand, *Eigensinn* could also manifest itself in participation in terms of ‘strategic accommodation’ within the new political parameters in order to negotiate the best possible personal outcome within the structural and political constraints of the post-war period.²⁴ By adopting this approach, this thesis moves away from dichotomous notions of resistance and consent, or compliance and defiance, and

²² This part of the definition is based on the definition of agency by Miles Fairburn, *Social History: Problems, Strategies and Methods* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), pp. 29, 228, 309. Incidentally, it is also similar to that of Thomas Lindenberger, who describes *Eigensinn* as the desire and ability to act purposefully within an authoritarian framework: Thomas Lindenberger, ‘SED-Herrschaft als soziale Praxis, Herrschaft und “Eigen-Sinn”: Problemstellung und Begriffe’ in *Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft. Studien zum Herrschaftsalltag in der DDR*, ed. by Jens Gieseke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 23-47 (p. 32). For a further discussion on the dialectic between ‘Herrschaft’ and ‘Eigensinn’ see also Thomas Lindenberger, ‘Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung’, in *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, ed. by Thomas Lindenberger (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), 13-44 (pp. 21-26). Similarly, Mary Fulbrook has defined ‘agency’ as ‘a capacity to negotiate or to affect the course of one’s own life’. Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), p. 477.

²³ Similarly, Andrew Bergerson, in his study of the Third Reich, has utilised *Eigensinn* to refer to the ‘stubbornly persistent habits of everyday life through which ordinary people expressed themselves publicly in revolt against established authorities’. Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004), p. 264.

²⁴ Joan Gero, ‘Troubled travels in agency and feminism’, in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. by M. Dobres, and J. Robb, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 34–39, referenced in Jennifer Dornan, *Agency*, p. 319. Similarly, Paul Betts has defined *Eigensinn* as ‘doing things one’s own way’. Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 14 and Corey Ross describes *Eigensinn* as ‘a sense of one’s interests’: Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), p. 50. It must, however, be acknowledged that these thoughts and actions were rooted in a particular place and time. Alon Confino has argued that ‘people have agency while they think and act within determined historical conditions’. Alon Confino, ‘Telling about Germany: Narratives of Memory and Culture’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 76 (2004), 389-416 (p. 410).

instead explores grassroots responses on a spectrum from dissent to assent in relation to the corresponding post-war policies.²⁵

Therefore, to paraphrase Karl Marx, it is argued that post-war Brandenburgers had the restricted potential to make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.²⁶ This study treats this restricted potential and occasional latitude to exert acts of *Eigensinn* as *Handlungsspielraum* or room for manoeuvre within the severely constrained circumstances presented by the post-war transition period. This room for manoeuvre may have been a function in part of the 'limits' of the East German dictatorship which served to dilute and curb SED aspirations for hegemony.²⁷ Given that these other limits to the East German dictatorship existed, the potential effect which grassroots actions had on the implementation of post-war policies can not be overstated and must be considered to be only one among many different factors which could somewhat affect the manner in which top-down rule in post-war Brandenburg was realised.

1.4 Geographic contextualisation

In order to assess grassroots responses in relation to specific post-war punitive and rehabilitative measures in Brandenburg this research adopts both a regional and local focus. A focus on regional and local areas has become increasingly popular in recent decades, particularly in research on the Third Reich, in which historians have

²⁵ On this discussion of opposition and resistance, both organised and disorganised, legal and illegal, in the GDR, see, for instance, Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR: Ein politischer Report* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984). Also: Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, 'Von der Freiheit, Ich zu sagen. Widerständiges Verhalten in der DDR', in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstandes und der Opposition in der DDR*, ed. by Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert und Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995), pp. 85-115 and Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), in particular, pp. 29-33. Furthermore, the East German historian Rainer Eckert, 'Widerstand und Opposition: Umstrittene Begriffe der deutschen Diktaturgeschichte', in *Macht – Ohnmacht – Gegenmacht: Grundfragen zur politischen Gegnerschaft in der DDR*, ed. by Ehrhart Neubert and Bernd Eisenfeld (Bremen: Ed. Temmen, 2001), pp. 27-36 and Bruce, *Resistance*, also provide important insights into challenges to SED hegemony.

²⁶ Similarly, in his study of German political discourse Olick combines insights from the linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin and from Karl Marx, adopting the analytical principle 'that people do things with words, but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. Jeffrey K. Olick *The Politics of Regret: Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 7.

²⁷ Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen highlight almost a dozen factors which limited SED aspirations for hegemony. Richard Bessel, 'Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur', in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 7- 23 (pp. 9-17).

emphasised both the benefits and limitations of regional and local studies. For instance, Ian Kershaw, in his examination of Bavaria during the Third Reich, has cautioned that whilst his findings based on a regional or local case study approach may be limited in their generalizability, macro level studies may conversely generalise with ‘scant regard for regional or local nuances’ and may not necessarily deal with genuinely ‘typical’ trends; in other words, he argues, no region accords wholly with the fictional ‘norm’ of ‘typicality’ imposed abstractly from outside’.²⁸ Similarly, Mark Allinson has investigated how ordinary East Germans experienced political and social upheavals in Thuringia during the Soviet occupation and the GDR, without attempting to make wider generalisations as to Thuringia’s ‘uniqueness or its typicality’.²⁹

With respect to Brandenburg, Arnd Bauerkämper justified his regional focus on Brandenburg’s rural communities during the agricultural reforms by contending that such a micro-historical perspective enables ‘a reconstruction and explanation of perceptions, interpretations and actions in individual communities’.³⁰ Some, such as Timothy Vogt, Torsten Hartisch and Dieter Pohl, have utilised the state of Brandenburg as a framework with which to explore specific post-war developments.³¹ Other researchers in this area have narrowed their focus onto one specific local town, such as Charles B. Lansing in his illuminating study of Brandenburg school teachers.³² Similarly, Matthias Helle has also recently examined the Brandenburg district of Zauch-Belzig, yet he focuses on structural aspects of the transition, without examining grassroots reception.³³ Thus, whilst there have been a considerable number of studies on various aspects of Brandenburg’s history during the Soviet occupation and the GDR, none have thus far examined grassroots reception to punitive Soviet practices and policies, NKVD camps, denazification and forms of political transition and integration. Thereby this thesis contributes to wider

²⁸ Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 10.

²⁹ Allinson, *Politics*, p. 6.

³⁰ Arnd Bauerkämper, *Ländliche Gesellschaft in der kommunistischen Diktatur. Zwangsmodernisierung und Tradition in Brandenburg 1945-63* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), p. 44.

³¹ Vogt, *Denazification*; Torsten Hartisch, *Die Enteignung von ‘Nazi- und Kriegsverbrechern’ im Land Brandenburg. Eine verwaltungsgeschichtliche Studie zu den SMAD-Befehlen Nr. 124 vom 30. Oktober 1945 bzw. Nr. 64 vom 17. April 1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998); Dieter Pohl, *Justiz in Brandenburg 1945-55* (München: Oldenbourg, 2001).

³² Charles B. Lansing, *From Nazism to Communism: German schoolteachers under two dictatorships* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³³ Matthias Helle, *Nachkriegsjahre in der Provinz: Der brandenburgische Landkreis Zauch-Belzig 1945-1952* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2011).

historical scholarship, both on the specific issues under examination, as well as presenting new empirical evidence with respect to Brandenburg.

Whilst this investigation involves focusing on grassroots actions across the Brandenburg province and their potential impact on policy makers at the local and regional level, it also utilises two case study towns, Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, in order to increase the heterogeneity of source material. Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde were selected as local case studies for a number of reasons. Both are mid-sized, industrialised, cathedral towns within a hundred kilometre radius of Berlin, with Brandenburg/Havel in the West and Fürstenwalde in the East.³⁴ Furthermore, the two towns were home to both National Socialist and Soviet organs of terror and imprisonment before and after 1945, making them ideal microcosms with which to examine the post-war transition from Nazism to socialism. Despite these important developments in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, both before and after 1945, their histories in these contexts are both under-researched.³⁵

Brandenburg is a tenth-century cathedral town situated on the banks of the river Havel, seventy kilometres west of Berlin. Its pretty, red-bricked medieval centre boasts an array of historic ecclesiastical buildings, while the town's hinterland is filled with myriad lakes and waterways, making it a popular cultural and tourist destination. The town is the third largest in the state of Brandenburg and has a long tradition of iron and steel works – in the years leading up to the war, Brandenburg/Havel thus developed into an armaments and military hub. The population, excluding military personnel, rose rapidly from 64,196 in 1933 to 83,726 in 1939. Although Brandenburg/Havel had suffered from a high level of unemployment in the early 1930s, by 1935 the demand for skilled labourers had outstripped supply in the town. By spring 1942 industry in Brandenburg/Havel had

³⁴ In total there are three 'märkische Domstädte' in Brandenburg: Brandenburg/Havel, Fürstenwalde and Havelberg in the north-west of the region. See Fig. 1. in the Appendices for an overview map of Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.

³⁵ With the exception of Lansing, *Schoolteachers*, which examines a specific aspect of Brandenburg/Havel's past, and for example, Berlin-Brandenburger Bildungswerk e.V., *Hoffnung inmitten von Ruinen? Schülerinnen und Schüler erkunden den Nachkriegsalltag in Fürstenwalde. Ein Projekt mit dem Katholischen Gymnasium Bernhardinum* (Berlin: dip, 1996), a small scale local oral history and archival project conducted by *Gymnasium* students in Fürstenwalde in 1996.

roughly 5,000 foreign labourers; by late 1944 this had increased to 15,000.³⁶ During the Third Reich, Brandenburg/Havel had also been the site of the first experimental gassing in Germany as a part of the T4 euthanasia programme, as well as being home to Germany's largest and most modern prison, notorious 'Brandenburg-Görden', which housed political prisoners such as Erich Honecker.³⁷ Subsequently, from 1945 to 1947, the Brandenburg prison was used by the Soviet military authorities to intern collaborators and simultaneously by the NKVD as an interrogation prison.³⁸ In addition, the NKVD established their local headquarters and an ancillary operative prison in the centre of the town. Brandenburg/Havel was also exposed to Allied bombing campaigns as well as ground battles at the end of the war, as a result of which approximately 15% of the town had been completely destroyed by May 1945.³⁹ Colonel P.A Wolkow became the Soviet town commander after the collapse of the Third Reich and a new German magistrate was established on 22 May 1945, consisting of a combination of SPD and KPD members. Max Herm, who had represented the KPD in the Reichstag prior to 1933 and was a native of the town, became Lord Mayor in May, after his release from Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He was later replaced by the KPD member Fritz Lange in September 1945, only to become mayor again in the late 1950s.⁴⁰ Lange was to remain as Lord Mayor until early 1949 when he was replaced by SED member Otto Kühne who held the post until 1953.

The second town under examination, Fürstenwalde, is a thirteenth-century cathedral town on the banks of the river Spree, sixty kilometres east of Berlin. Its town centre is also home to a number of historic buildings and museums, while the town is surrounded by a landscape of lush coniferous forests and lakes. It too developed into a local industrial centre in the latter half of the nineteenth century,

³⁶ Klaus Heß, 'Republik und NS-Diktatur', in *Stahl und Brennbabor: Die Stadt Brandenburg im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert* ed. by Gerd Heinrich, et al. (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1998), pp. 59-80, pp. 76, 78.

³⁷ Lansing, *Schoolteachers*, pp. 13, 23.

³⁸ From 1949 the prison was taken over by the East German authorities who imprisoned former Nazis, war criminals, political opponents and members of the failed 17 June 1953 uprising. It later became one of the most feared prisons in the GDR.

³⁹ Frank Brekow, 'Die Havelstadt im Zweiten Weltkrieg – Verschleiß und Zerstörung', in Heinrich, et al., *Stahl*, p. 146.

⁴⁰ Fritz Lange (1898-1981), a Berlin born KPD member since the early 1920s, had been imprisoned a number of times throughout the Third Reich including in Brandenburg-Görden. After his period as Lord Mayor, he subsequently became an SED representative in the *Volkskammer* in 1950, later becoming Minister for Education. Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004), pp. 433-434.

benefitting from its geographical position as a thoroughfare between Berlin and Frankfurt/Oder. Prior to 1945, satellite camps belonging to both Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen concentration camps had been established in the town, with local industry ballooning with the expansion of armaments production and employing a significant number of forced labourers. In Fürstenwalde the population had averaged around 30,000 prior to the end of the war. By July 1945, however, it had dropped to 19,962, increasing slightly by January 1946 to 23,152.⁴¹ Immediately following occupation, the Soviet NKVD set up the notorious *Speziallager* no. 5 ‘Ketschendorf’ on the site of the former Sachsenhausen satellite camp, in which over 10,000 suspected German ‘fascists’ were interned until 1947. Fürstenwalde, even more so than Brandenburg/Havel, had been heavily affected by the the physical destruction entailed by the war, with more than 45% of the town’s buildings being extensively damaged by May 1945.⁴² Colonel S.P. Kitschigen became the Soviet military commander, and on 25 April 1945 he appointed Wilhelm Zernicke, a local former town councillor for the KPD, as mayor.⁴³ In September 1945, Zernicke was replaced as mayor by Berthold Wottke, a KPD member and previous employee in the town’s municipal administration. Wottke was then superseded by SED member Paul Schmidtchen, also a former employee in Fürstenwalde’s municipal administration, in the summer of 1946, only to be followed as mayor by Paul Papke, the former SED district administrator in Lebus, from 1948 to 1951 and Alfred Leonhardt (SED) from 1951 to 1952.⁴⁴ It was these local administrators who would have to attempt to deal with the unprecedented level of chaos which existed in Brandenburg in the aftermath of the Third Reich’s collapse as well as overseeing the post-war transition from Nazism to socialism within their localities.

⁴¹ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/994, ‘Tätigkeitsberichte des Einwohnermeldeamtes 1945-46’, no pag. and BLHA, Rep. 202E/24, ‘Bevölkerungsstatistik der Landkreise der Provinz Mark Brandenburg 1945 (A-L)’, p. 52.

⁴² KALOS F/RdS/258, ‘Erfassung der Kriegsschäden an Wohnhäusern und Industrieanlagen 1946-1950’, no. pag.

⁴³ Klaus Geßner and Wladimir W. Sacharow, *Inventar der Offenen Befehle der Sowjetischen Militäradministration des Landes Brandenburg* (Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 49.

⁴⁴ Paul Papke (1896-1970) was a long-time KPD functionary who had been imprisoned in Sachsenhausen until May 1945. After holding a number of posts as district administrator until becoming mayor of Fürstenwalde in 1948, he was eventually removed from this position during the SED purges of the early 1950s. He subsequently became the director of a district agricultural school in Brandenburg. See, Weber et al, *Kommunisten*.

1.5 Remarks on methodology and sources

In order to examine grassroots responses and their possible implications on the post-war transition, I have examined archival material and conducted twenty semi-structured oral history interviews. The following section will outline the written and oral sources used, discussing advantages and disadvantages associated with both methods and the rationale for combining these approaches.

In order to contextualise regional and local events in Brandenburg at a macro level, a variety of collections in the Berlin Federal Archives (BArch and SAPMO) were examined. The *Ministerium des Innern (DVdI)* files provide an insight into both the centralised administration as well as grassroots field and opinion reports on a wide range of issues such as denazification, sequestering, returning POWs, criminality and judicial proceedings against Nazi criminals. The *Kommission Sequestrierung und Beschlagnahme* collection includes a large number of sequestering lists, statistics and directives as well as grassroots complaints. The *Gesellschaft für Deutsch Sowjetische Freundschaft* files contain information on conferences, membership numbers as well as reports, analysis and statistics on grassroots developments. The *National Komitee Freies Deutschland (NKFD)* and *NDPD 1948-1990* collections, which are to date still under-researched, include minutes of meetings and gatherings, regional and central party congresses, reports on regional and local political activities, and accounts from regional associations of the NDPD Party. Other macro collections utilised include the *SED ZK: Abteilung für Sicherheitsfragen*, the *Ministerium der Justiz*, the *Oberstes Gericht der DDR*, the *Generalstaatsanwaltschaft der DDR* as well as the files in the *Nachlass Wilhelm Pieck*.

At a regional, meso level, collections in the Brandenburg State Archive (BLHA) in Potsdam were examined. Of notable importance was the collection of files from the *Ministerium des Innern* which provided a valuable insight into regional concerns on a wide range of matters such as sequestering, complaints and their responses, the combatting of ‘anti-democratic’ activities, a large number of denazification protocols, as well as expellees and returning POWs. The files of the *Büro des Ministerpräsidenten* provided further insight into expropriations, complaint letters and complaint statistics as well as cabinet decisions. Other relevant collections

utilised included the *Statistisches Landesamt*, the *Oberlandratsamt Eberswalde* and *Oberlandratsamt Lebus-Seelow*.

At a micro level in Brandenburg/Havel, the archival holdings of the 'Stadtarchiv Brandenburg' (SAB) were examined, particularly utilising collections such as the *Rat der Stadt Brandenburg: Bereich Oberbürgermeister* which provided grassroots information on a broad range of issues such as denazification, sequestering, relations with the SMA and salient local problems. The collections of the *Rat der Stadt Brandenburg: Bereich 1. Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters*, the *Rat der Stadt Brandenburg: Bereich Inneres* and the *Rat der Stadt Brandenburg: Bereich Sekretär des Wahlbüros* also provided useful local information on post-war Brandenburg/Havel.

Lastly, the archival holdings for Fürstenwalde, which had been rescued from a coal cellar after 1990 by a committed local archivist and are now held in the 'Kreisarchiv Landkreis Oder-Spree' (KALOS) in Beeskow, proved invaluable. The *Rat der Stadt Fürstenwalde* provided an insight into matters such as denazification, sequestering, local relations with the SMA, and reports on businesses and institutions. The *Stadtverwaltung Fürstenwalde* collection also yielded important information on population statistics, sequestering, schools and hospitals, former local Nazis, public notifications, administration reports and denazification among others. The collections of the *Rat des Kreises Fürstenwalde/Spree*, and the *Stadtverwaltung Fürstenwalde Museum* were also valuable.

Such archival material, just like any historical source, must however be treated cautiously. Administrative and political reports written by functionaries on varying ends of the power spectrum are likely to have been influenced by personal agendas and subjectivities. Particularly more junior officials may have been tempted to embellish their reports in order to impress superiors. Yet arguably, although files produced in later decades of the GDR tended to demonstrate an increasingly uniform style and discourse, the files produced in the Soviet zone and very early GDR years provide a somewhat different perspective. As Jonathan Osmond argues, 'in the early years the reporting language was only marginally affected by party gibberish', and interestingly the incidence of what the SED regarded as 'negative opinion' in these

reports is in fact rather higher than one might expect.⁴⁵ One reason for this may be due to the fact that the creation of the SED in 1946 was followed by a short phase of open articulation of problems which were considered to be negatively affecting the self-portrayal of the Party.⁴⁶ In fact, the reports in these early years tended to paint a picture of post-war chaotic circumstances, during which administrations and administrators often struggled to cope. Moreover, the very practical challenges facing administrations charged with the transition from Nazism to socialism can be seen in the fact that due to a chronic shortage of paper, report writers were often forced to re-use office supplies from the Third Reich, creating the paradoxical situation that the reverse side of early KPD/SED reports are peppered with swastikas and acclamations of Hitler.

It is conceivable that the higher incidence of negative reporting from this time means that successes may have been toned down whilst difficulties may have been overstated in order to receive more support and funding to combat economic, political and social challenges. Yet on the other hand, it is also not surprising that the magnitude of the difficulties presented by the collapse of the Third Reich were reflected in the archival material. Nonetheless, this period of relative openness was short-lived, and between 1948 and 1953 numerous waves of political cleansing were initiated, leading to the beginning of an increased uniformity of party-political doctrine in report and letter writing.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding these factors, this archival material allows a snapshot of the post-war transition period, and particularly the ‘*Eingaben*’ or petitions in these archival collections, penned by disgruntled former Nazis and ordinary citizens alike, provide valuable contemporaneous information on the responses and strategies of grassroots actors. As Paul Betts highlights, citizens’ communications are particularly interesting as they ‘straddled the line between the public and the private’, and thus permit an insight into the impact which post-war

⁴⁵ Jonathan Osmond, ‘From *Junker* estate to co-operative farm: East German agrarian society 1945-61’, in *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-71*, ed. by Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), 130-150 (p. 132). Also, Mark Allinson, ‘Popular Opinion’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁶ Andreas Malycha, ‘Die Illusion der Einheit- Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in den Landesvorständen der SED 1946-1951’, in *Sowjetisierung und Eigenständigkeit in der SBZ/DDR (1945-1953)*, ed. by Michael Lemke (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), p. 102.

⁴⁷ Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von Links. Kommunistische Ideologie, Nationalismus und Anti-Zionismus in der frühen DDR* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), p. 342. See also Alf Lüdtke, and Peter Becker, eds., *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte: Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie, 1997).

measures had within localities.⁴⁸ Similarly, Lex Heerma van Voss maintains that such petitions, which demanded favours or the redressing of injustices, enable present-day historians to hear the voices of those who would otherwise remain silent.⁴⁹ These archival sources, therefore, despite these qualifications, provide a window into the manner in which central policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg as well as some of the grassroots responses and problems encountered.

In addition to archival sources, this thesis is based on twenty oral history interviews which were conducted in the towns of Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde in 2009. The oral history approach was applied in this study in order to explore further subjective experiences, perceptions and memories of the post-war period at a grassroots level. From a methodological standpoint, there are a number of differing approaches within oral history; these have been most usefully categorised by Paul Thompson, who has identified four distinct principal methods.⁵⁰ The methodology and analytic tool utilised in this thesis is based on Thompson's fourth approach known as 'reconstructive cross-analysis' whereby:

The oral evidence is treated as a quarry from which to construct an argument about patterns of behaviour or events in the past [...] wherever the prime aim becomes analysis, the overall shape can no longer be governed by the life-story form of the evidence, but must emerge from the inner logic of the argument. This will normally require much briefer quotations, with evidence from one interview compared with that from another, and combined with evidence from other types of source material.⁵¹

This method has also been termed by Lynn Abrams as an 'evidential approach' which she defines as 'the application of oral history for evidence gathering, the use of oral testimony as data, providing information to support an argument'.⁵²

This approach has, usually implicitly, been recently used by some other historians researching the Soviet zone and GDR, with greater and lesser degrees of success. For instance, Jan Palmowski has complemented his written evidence with 45 semi-structured interviews; however, his study lacks reflection on oral history as

⁴⁸ Betts, *Walls*, p. 173.

⁴⁹ Lex Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction', in *International Review of Social History, Supplement 9, Vol. 46, 'Petitions in Social History'*, ed. by Lex Heerma van Voss (Amsterdam: Cambridge UP, 2001) pp. 1, 10.

⁵⁰ The first three approaches are the 'single life-story narrative', a 'collection of stories' and 'narrative analysis'. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 269-270.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁵² Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 15.

a method and his interviewees often remain formless and out of context, frequently without the inclusion of basic information such as year of birth.⁵³ Similarly, Paul Betts has also conducted 45 interviews and 40 questionnaires in East Berlin for his recent fascinating study on private lives, yet this also occurs without a methodological discussion of his interviews. Moreover, Mark Allinson has used only ‘informal conversations’ with Thuringians to supplement his archival findings whilst Corey Ross conducted no interviews and instead used opinion survey material.⁵⁴ In contrast, and in line with previous research conducted by Dorothee Wierling, this thesis applies the ‘reconstructive cross-analysis’ and ‘evidential approaches’ by combining both archival sources with oral history interviews, thereby permitting a reflective analysis of convergences and divergences of findings across multiple sources.⁵⁵

This utilisation of the oral evidence as a ‘quarry’ in this thesis, rather than adopting a different oral history methodology, has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand the drawback is that, unlike with life-history interviews, given that the focus is thematic rather than biographic, some of the essence of the individual and their life experiences gets pushed into the background.⁵⁶ Moreover, the decision not to undertake a systematic narrative analysis means that the manner in which the individual interviewees may have created and used stories as interpretive devices is not explored in this thesis.⁵⁷ Yet on the other hand, the benefit of the ‘evidential’ or ‘reconstructive cross-analysis’ approach is that personal experiences are directly contrasted with those of contemporaries as well as being placed within a wider historical context. As this thesis weaves material out of both archival and oral history sources, it thereby

⁵³ Palmowski, *Inventing*.

⁵⁴ Betts, *Walls*. Allinson, *Politics*, p. 10, Ross, *Socialism*.

⁵⁵ See, in particular, Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR. Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2002).

⁵⁶ In life-history interviews interviewees are encouraged to tell their life-story and associations and connections are subsequently analysed within a biographical whole. In the 1980s Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato and Dorothee Wierling pioneered the use of oral history in Germany as a tool for exploring aspects of private behaviour and memory from both the Third Reich and the GDR. On the post-war memories which emerged from 200 life-history interviews in the Ruhr area in the early 1980s see Lutz Niethammer, ed. “*Hinterher merkt man, dass es richtig war, dass es schiefgegangen ist*”. *Nachkriegserfahrungen im Ruhr-Gebiet. Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960*, Vol. II (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1983).

⁵⁷ This has been adopted for instance, by Andrew Bergerson in his study of Hildesheim during the Third Reich, who used a representative sample of 36 narrative interviews with respondents born between 1900 and 1930. Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans*.

provides an insight into a much wider range of perspectives, experiences and memories than is possible with the other oral history methodologies.

In order to find suitable interviewees, a purposive sampling technique was adopted specifying that all interviewees had to be born before 1933 and were to have lived in Brandenburg/Havel or Fürstenwalde before, during and after the post-war transition period.⁵⁸ This target group was selected in order to understand the post-war transition period from the perspective of long-term residents of these Brandenburg towns at a grassroots level. It was decided to find such interviewees with the help of local newspapers and contact was established with the two local archives who generously facilitated contact to the local media. Subsequently, newspaper articles appeared in the 'Märkische Allgemeine Zeitung' (MAZ) and the 'Märkische Oderzeitung' (MOZ) which highlighted my doctoral research project and invited individuals interested in being interviewed to establish contact. Both articles stated that I was interested in interviewing local residents about their experiences amidst political and personal changes during the transition from National Socialism to the Soviet zone and early GDR.⁵⁹ The respondents were given the option to decide on the location of the interview and were informed that the interview would take approximately two hours. Ten interviewees were selected from each of the two towns. The majority of the interviews took place in their own homes. Seven of the twenty interviewees requested that their interviews be anonymised and were therefore given pseudonyms.⁶⁰

I designed a semi-structured interview schedule, consisting of predominantly qualitative questions with a number of corresponding quantitative questions based on Likert items embedded throughout the interview.⁶¹ The interview addressed the perceived impact of past experiences ranging from childhood to the later GDR years, with a strong emphasis on the post-war period. All items in the interview schedule

⁵⁸ On purposive sampling in relation to oral history see: Jack Dougherty, 'From Anecdote to Analysis: Oral Interviews and New Scholarship in Educational History', *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999), 712-723 (pp. 719-720).

⁵⁹ No references to specific post-war policies or events were made in the newspaper articles.

⁶⁰ The interviewees also signed consent and release forms after the conclusion of the interview. For an overview of the individual interviewees, see Table 1. in the appendices; the pseudonyms in the table are marked with a *.

⁶¹ For a clear and concise social scientific overview of methodological issues and considerations in relation to qualitative semi-structured interviews see Thomas Diefenbach, 'Are case studies more than sophisticated storytelling?: Methodological problems of qualitative empirical research mainly based on semi-structured interviews', *Qual Quant* 43 (2009), pp. 875-894.

were read aloud to the interviewees and great care was taken to avoid leading or biased questions.⁶² The interviews lasted between 1.5 hours and 4 hours.

Whilst all of the interviewees were relatively young during the post-war transition period and lived in the region of Brandenburg, they differed markedly in terms of life experiences and their characteristics varied along a number of important dimensions. Fourteen of the interviewees were male and six were female. The oldest of the interviewees was born in 1921 at the time of Germany's first reparations payment as part of the Versailles Treaty, while the youngest was born in 1933, two days after Hitler was appointed Chancellor. In fact, two interviewees were born during the period of hyperinflation, ten were born between 1924 and 1929 during Weimar's golden age, and eight were born between 1930 and 1933 during the Great Depression. Thus, as Trevor Lummis has argued, 'the date of the private life-cycle events of each cohort will fall into a different period of public historical events', and the group of twenty interviewees born between 1921 and 1933 experienced important personal developments at different points in time.⁶³

Generally speaking, the group of interviewees was geographically stationary throughout their lives, despite the various political ruptures which they experienced; fifteen of them were born in either Brandenburg/Havel or Fürstenwalde, with the remaining moving there as very young children, whilst by 2009 only three had moved away and even these had remained within the locality of Brandenburg. Whilst this is unrepresentative of the population as a whole, given the relatively high proportion of refugees and expellees, it is not unusual for the majority of GDR residents who tended to be far less mobile than their West German counterparts.⁶⁴ The persistence of patterns of local memory was a key focus for my study, which is why I selected interviewees on this basis.

⁶² For further details see the interview schedule in the appendix.

⁶³ Trevor Lummis, 'Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence', in *The Oral History Reader*, by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006; 2nd ed.), p. 257. Dorothee Wierling refers to the age group born in the 1920s as the 'reconstruction generation'. Dorothee Wierling, 'The Hitler Youth Generation in the GDR: Insecurities, Ambitions and Dilemmas', in *Dictatorship*, p. 307. Mary Fulbrook distinguishes between the 'First Hitler Youth generation' which was born during and after the First World War, and the 'Second Hitler Youth generation' the so-called '1929ers' born between 1926 and 1932. Mary Fulbrook, 'Normalisation' in the GDR in Retrospect: East German Perspectives on Their Own Lives', in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?* ed. by Mary Fulbrook (Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), 278-319 (p. 288).

⁶⁴ In December 1945, 406,000 expellees were living in Brandenburg. Materna et al., *Geschichte*, p. 224.

In terms of education, four had the equivalent of A-Levels (*Abitur*), seven had the equivalent of O-Levels and eight had left after primary school. Only one respondent, Fritz Krause, did not complete school due to his internment in an NKVD camp. For those who did complete school, the mean school leaving year was 1944. All twenty respondents then undertook further qualifications and apprenticeships – the mean year for finishing the first qualification or apprenticeship was 1951. Thirteen went on to undertake a second qualification after this, while almost half of these again went on to complete a third qualification. Two of the twenty interviewees held doctoral degrees, further underscoring the fact that this interview cohort cannot be considered to be representative of East German society. The professional trajectories of the interviewees also varied – three had semi-skilled or skilled manual jobs in the GDR, eight had middle level jobs in supervisory or executive roles, while nine later held high professional posts. The earliest year for retirement amongst the interviewees was 1983, whilst the last interviewee retired twenty years later in 2003. The relative heterogeneity of this group of individuals and the diversity of their life experiences were also reflected in the interviews, as the respondents, who were aged between twelve and twenty-four in 1945, also differed considerably in their political views and retrospective accounts of both the Third Reich and the GDR.

Methodologically, the use of oral history has a number of benefits. It provides an opportunity to uncover the grassroots perspectives and memories of individuals who might not otherwise appear in the historical record, while also allowing access to a different mode of information. This is particularly the case in relation to this study, given that those who experienced the transition from Nazism to socialism in East Germany are an increasingly dwindling demographic.⁶⁵ Bearing in mind that ‘oral history is not intrinsically more or less likely to be accurate than a written document’, it is also a valuable source with which to complement archival material.⁶⁶ However, the use of oral history, just like other methodologies, also presents some difficulties. Depending on the sampling technique and size used, the results can rarely claim to be representative of larger groups and instead merely provides a window into some of the personal perceptions and memories which existed at a grassroots level at a certain point in time. Particularly with the use of a

⁶⁵ Sadly, at the time of writing in 2013, five of the interviewees had passed away.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts. The social construction of oral history* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 113.

small cohort as in this thesis, it is impossible to provide an adequate representation of, for example, male and female, rural and urban and generational differences. Moreover, given that the issues addressed in the interviews took place more than fifty years ago it must be acknowledged that the passage of time may have had an influence on the accuracy of their recollections.

Further consideration also needs to be given to the mode of recruitment of this interview cohort and possible associated self-selection biases. For instance, given that the initiative had to come from the interviewees themselves to establish contact in response to the newspaper articles, it may be argued that their level of initiative may not be representative of other individuals of this age cohort in Brandenburg. Furthermore, even though every care was taken not to mention any specific political practices and policies in the newspaper articles and therefore pre-empt some of the possible responses, the decision to participate may nevertheless have been influenced by personal motivations and experiences which may not have been characteristic of the population more generally. Thus, none of the findings based on the present cohort of twenty interviewees can be generalised or considered to be representative of wider East German society.

Moreover, as an oral history interview is a process of reflexive social intercommunication, both interviewer and interviewee invariably affect the interaction, while as Elizabeth Tonkin points out, an additional way in which recall is 'wrong' comes from the 'well-known presentation of self-in-the-best-light'.⁶⁷ Furthermore, unlike archival material, oral history does not provide access to a static historical 'truth', as memory is not a stagnant entity. Clearly archival material and oral history evidence function within two differing chronological paradigms, and therefore require a weaving of threads of layers of memory and time. In other words, the archival material provides a subjective snapshot of how events were represented in the past, whilst oral history evidence provides a subjective snapshot of how the past is remembered in the present. Given that interviewees are social agents who have internalised both their own experiences as well as wider discourses over time, oral history interviews, by their very nature, provide an insight into a combination of

⁶⁷ Tonkin, *Narrating*, p. 115. For an overview discussion on various methodological considerations in oral history, including questions arising from the interview as a joint creation between interviewee and interviewer, see Ronald J. Grele, 'Oral History as Evidence', in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), pp. 43-101.

individual memory as well as public discourses. There are a number of theorists whose conceptualisations of this phenomenon are relevant in relation to assessing the oral history evidence in this thesis.

In relation to individual memory, Aleida Assmann maintains that memory consists of both ‘appresentation and representation’, and is thereby simultaneously ‘mediated and processed’ by the memory agent.⁶⁸ Similarly, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan utilise the terms ‘retroactive interference’ and ‘proactive interference’ in order to describe how memory can work both forwards and backwards, as when ‘newly encoded memory traces reshape, cover, or eclipse older memory traces’, or when older memories remain salient and ‘shape our sense of the context or relative importance of later experiences’.⁶⁹ Wulf Kansteiner focuses more on the emotional component of individual memory and contends that ‘private memories appear to be particularly flexible and able to integrate diverse images and story elements irrespective of their historical accuracy’.⁷⁰ In line with these assessments, recollections based on the oral history interviews in this thesis can therefore not be considered to be ‘objective’ accounts of the past, but rather subjective retrospective perceptions and interpretations which will have been subject to both revision and (re)interpretation. These personal memories also exist within the wider social framework of changing public discourses, both before and after 1989, which will at times correlate with private experiences, whilst in other instances might also stand in stark contrast with personal memories and convictions.

Similar to the dialectic between structures and individuals discussed above, issues surrounding the question of how the memories of oral history interviewees are potentially shaped by public discourses throughout their lifetimes reflect certain wider ontological assumptions amongst different theorists. For instance, Dorothee Wierling has attempted to assess ‘the interplay between personal and official narratives’, by emphasising the ‘instances of mediation between these two spheres’.⁷¹ Lynn Abrams argues that rather than individual memory being entirely

⁶⁸ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), p. 273.

⁶⁹ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, ‘Setting the Framework’, in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6-39 (p. 12).

⁷⁰ Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), p. 321.

⁷¹ Dorothee Wierling, ‘Generations as Narrative Communities: Some Private Sources of Public Memory in Postwar Germany’, in *Aftermath*, p. 102.

constrained by dominant societal influences, ‘most respondents are capable of agency’, or what S.B. Ortner calls a ‘critical subjectivity’, which ‘involves a subject internalising, reflecting upon and then reacting against a set of circumstances or a widely accepted version of the past’.⁷² Similarly, this study is based on the assumption that individual memories and public discourses exist in a state of interplay with one another. On the one hand individual memories can influence public discourses, although this was less likely in an authoritarian system such as the GDR where discourse was usually dictated from above. On the other hand, public discourses from the Third Reich and the GDR may have consciously or unconsciously coloured the memory of individual actors. Furthermore, this applies not just to pre-1989 political narratives, but also to those in the current cultural and political sphere. The contemporary discourses which exist about both the Third Reich and the GDR in German society today, are constantly being influenced by politicians, journalists, historians, as well as through films and television in a continually changing ‘kaleidoscope’.⁷³ Therefore, the oral history interviews need to be interpreted with great caution as it is likely that some of the perceptions and memories of the interviewees had also been shaped by some of these more recent representations of the past.

Particularly during the period under investigation in this thesis, this dynamic between individual memory and official discourse was greatly influenced by the asymmetric power struggle by Soviet occupiers and the SED to dominate official discourse, thereby attempting to stifle grassroots experiences and memories which may not have been in accord with the new political rhetoric after 1945. As a consequence of this, this battle to subjugate possible antithetic grassroots experiences and memories could lead to the emergence of what Michel Foucault has

⁷² S.B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject* (London: 2006) pp. 252-3, quoted in Abrams, *Oral History*, pp. 48, 70.

⁷³ Martin Sabrow, *DDR*, p. 12. On the roles of politicians, contemporary eyewitnesses and historians in the memory politics which influence public commemoration of post-1989 East Germany, see Carola S. Rudnick, *Die andere Hälfte der Erinnerung. Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichtspolitik nach 1989* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011). Rainer Wirtz explores the popularisation of historical themes in German television which took place from the 1980s onward, calling it a ‘historical industry within the television industry’. Rainer Wirtz, ‘Alles authentisch: So war’s! Geschichte im Fernsehen’, in *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn: Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen*, ed. by Belinda Davis, Thomas Lindenberger and Michael Wildt (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2008), 311-324 (p. 318). See also: Judith Keilbach, *Geschichtsbilder und Zeitzeugen. Zur Darstellung des Nationalsozialismus im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2008). See also Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce, *The GDR Remembered. Representations of the East German State since 1989* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011).

termed ‘counter-memory’ at a grassroots level.⁷⁴ More recently, Jan and Aleida Assmann have expanded on this concept by exploring attempts by ruling elites to establish ‘legitimising and de-legitimising memory’ in order to legitimise themselves both retrospectively and prospectively. Following from this work, this thesis examines the grassroots responses to attempts to alter such discourses on the recent Nazi past through political strategy, new laws, (re)educational programs and the erecting of memorials.⁷⁵ Thus, in its treatment of the ‘bottom-up’ memories of the oral history interviewees, as well as in its archival examination of the ‘top-down’ attempts to redefine the official discourse of the immediate past in the Soviet zone and early GDR, this thesis follows Wierling by using the term ‘memory’ in reference ‘to both public representations of the past and the individual act of visualising one’s personal experiences’.⁷⁶ Similarly, Jeffrey Olick maintains that ‘‘memory’ occurs in public and in private, at the tops of societies and at the bottoms, as reminiscence and as commemoration, as personal testimonial and as national narrative’.⁷⁷

Furthermore, recent studies on the private lives of individuals living under socialism in the twentieth century provide important insights for this thesis into the boundaries, or lack thereof, between the public and private sphere. For instance, in the context of the Soviet Union, Lewis Siegelbaum considers private spheres to be composed of the ‘overlapping realms of intimacy, familial relations, and friendships’. In turn, this private sphere is in a ‘dynamic, interactive tension’ with the public sphere, which is also ‘understood as a complex multi-layered category’.⁷⁸ In contrast to historians such as Ehrhart Neubert, who treat the private sphere simply as a form of resistance in the GDR, Paul Betts has concluded that the private sphere was a ‘semi-permeable haven from public life’ in which politics was privatised and the private was politicised.⁷⁹ Similarly, Josie McLellan has argued that private and

⁷⁴ ‘For Michel Foucault counter-memory designated the residual or resistant strains that withstand official versions of historical continuity’. Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, ‘Introduction in Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory’, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 1-6 (p. 2).

⁷⁵ Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, ‘Das Gestern im Heute. Medien und soziales Gedächtnis’, in *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien. Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft*, ed. by K. Merten, S.J. Schmidt, and S. Weischenberg (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), p. 125.

⁷⁶ Wierling, *Narrative Communities*, in p. 103.

⁷⁷ Olick, *Collective Memory*, p. 346.

⁷⁸ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ‘Introduction: Mapping Private Spheres in the Soviet Context’, in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. by Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-21 (pp. 3, 12).

⁷⁹ Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte. Betts, Walls*, pp. 238, 191. Betts also provides a good history of various conceptualisations of the ‘private’ ranging from ancient Greece to Gaus’ ‘niche society’, pp. 5-12.

public worlds of politics, economics and social policy were not discrete. She maintains that one should not assume that regime and popular agendas were always mutually exclusive: ‘At times they diverged radically, but the most popular and enduring changes were based on the overlap between state and individual interests’.⁸⁰ Likewise, this study recognises that when examining oral and written sources, there is always an overlap between the public and private spheres and a bilateral (but not equal) influence of one realm on the other. Thus, by exploring some of the overlaps as well as the incongruities between the memories of the oral history interviewees and the evidence in the archival source material, this thesis illustrates some of aspects in which individual needs and policy measures appear to have both diverged and converged at a grassroots level during the post-war transition period from Nazism to socialism in Brandenburg.

1.6 Scope of study and overview of thesis

This study adopts what Miles Fairburn defines as a ‘problem-led’ approach to social inquiry.⁸¹ In order to explore the reactions and *Eigensinn* of the local population, this exposition examines the responses to a greater range of post-war transition policies than some previous studies; but it does not in any way aspire to present an exhaustive chronicle of all of the post-war policies implemented in Brandenburg in order to facilitate the transition from Nazism to socialism. Nor does it attempt to develop a comprehensive and explicitly differentiated account of post-war East German society, differentiated along the lines of gender, class, generation, or other relevant criteria. Moreover, to examine German post-war experiences and suffering does not in any way detract from the horrific crimes committed by Germans throughout the Third Reich and this thesis, to borrow from Norman Naimark, is not meant as a contribution to ‘the pseudoscience of comparative victimology’.⁸²

Whilst this study explores the experiences of grassroots Brandenburgers in the post-war period, it does not examine the fate of Jewish Brandenburgers and the

⁸⁰ Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 14.

⁸¹ Fairburn, *Social*, p. 29.

⁸² Naimark, *Russians*, p. 7. See also Randall Hansen’s recent reflections on how to narrate German suffering as a result of the Second World War and attempts to by-pass dichotomies of ‘intellectual dead ends of either self-pity or collective guilt’. Randall Hansen, ‘War, Suffering and Modern German History’, *German History*, 29 (2011), 365-379 (pp. 374-379).

dark legacy of anti-Semitism in East Germany. Instead, there have been a number of excellent studies which have explored the treatment of the Jewish community as well as the legacy of the Holocaust in both the Soviet zone and the later GDR.⁸³ Similarly, given that the focus is on those ordinary local Brandenburgers who lived in, returned to or remained in the area during and after the Third Reich, the experiences of German expellees are therefore only briefly addressed and form the subject of other studies.⁸⁴ Furthermore, given that this thesis explores the post-war period from the perspective of predominantly stationary Brandenburgers, this study does also not examine the fate of those East Germans who fled to the Western zones during the post-war period. Whilst this study recognises that between 1945 and 1949, roughly 876,200 inhabitants left the Soviet zone for a variety of reasons, it instead has chosen to focus its attention on the large majority who decided to remain in the Eastern sector.⁸⁵ This decision was taken not only for reasons of feasibility, but also because, as Henrik Bispinck and Damian van Melis have demonstrated, the flight of East Germans to the West was not central to SED policy in the immediate post-war years as the authorities only began to take this issue seriously from the early 1950s onwards.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the potential to abscond to the West no doubt

⁸³ For a retracing of the ideological and rhetorical links between Marxism-Leninism, anti-cosmopolitanism, imperialism and anti-Zionism in the Soviet zone and GDR see Haury, *Antisemitismus*, pp. 293-465. For an excellent study of the parallel treatment of the Jewish question in the post-war period see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi-Past in the two Germanys* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997). Jutta Illichmann, *Die DDR und die Juden: Die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997) examines the type of role that political questions in relation to Germans and Jews, as well as Jews, Jewish communities and organizations, played in the politics of the GDR. On issues of foreign policy see Stefan Meining, *Kommunistische Judenpolitik: die DDR, die Juden und Israel* (Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 2002). In terms of Brandenburg, in comparison to Berlin, the Jewish population in the province had always been relatively small. In June 1933 there were 7,616 people of Jewish faith living in the Brandenburg province, out of a total population of 2,725,697 – less than 0.3%. Laurenz Demps, ‘Die Provinz Brandenburg in der NS-Zeit (1933 bis 1945)’, in *Brandenburgische Geschichte* ed. by Ingo Materna and Wolfgang Ribbe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 619-676, (pp. 624-5).

⁸⁴ See, for instance, Alexander von Plato and Wolfgang Meinicke, *Alte Heimat – neue Zeit: Flüchtlinge, Umgesiedelte, Vertriebene in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR* (Berlin: Verlags-Anstalt Union, 1991). For a more recent study of expellees in the post-war period see also Michael Schwartz, *Vertriebene und “Umsiedlerpolitik”. Integrationskonflikte in den deutschen Nachkriegs-Gesellschaften und die Assimilationsstrategien in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1961* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2004) and Bessel, *Germany*, in particular, pp. 67-92.

⁸⁵ This figure does not include the 1.5 million expellees who passed through from the former eastern territories. Patrick Major, ‘Going west: the open border and the problem of *Republikflucht*’, in *Workers’ and Peasants’ State*, p. 191.

⁸⁶ Henrik Bispinck and Damian van Melis, eds., *Republikflucht: Flucht und Abwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961* (München: Oldenbourg, 2006). See also Ross, *Socialism*, p. 84. This assessment is also supported by the local archival material in Brandenburg – see, for instance,

played an important role in both stabilising and destabilising the post-war transition in Brandenburg, and this study must be implicitly situated within this wider context.⁸⁷

Moreover, although this study highlights the grassroots responses to post-war policies in East Germany, it does not explore external foreign policy factors such as the Cold War on the development of the Eastern zone in the early years.⁸⁸ Similarly, the western sector of Berlin, and later the West German state naturally played a considerable role as both an influence and a counter-point to developments in Brandenburg, yet the interactions and impact of this dynamic, although they are implicitly mentioned, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Part one of this study focuses on the grassroots responses to punitive measures by examining disciplinary measures carried out by the Soviet occupying army, Soviet secret police (NKVD) camps, as well as denazification and sequestering of the Brandenburg populace. The second part of the thesis explores grassroots responses to the National Democratic Party (NDPD) and the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF) and examines both impeding and facilitating factors to the post-war political transition at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Whilst these two political organisations were part of the wider network of five political bloc parties (KPD/SED, CDU, LDPD and DBD) and the multitude of mass organisations in East Germany, they were arguably those which were most expressly established in order to re-write the official political discourse in relation to tenets of National Socialism as well as altering the parameters of those who now could be (and should be) politically rehabilitated and (re)integrated within the new socialist state.

KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung (file numbers 1007-2009) in which *Republikflucht* from Fürstenwalde only began to be officially recorded from 1954 onwards.

⁸⁷ Richard Bessel, *Grenzen der Diktatur*, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁸ On the influence of exogenous rather than endogenous factors on the early GDR, see Michael Lemke, 'Foreign Influences on the Dictatorial Development of the GDR, 1949-1955', in *Dictatorship*, pp. 91-107.

Part 1: Grassroots responses within the context of punitive measures in Brandenburg

Part one of this study addresses the question in what ways people at the grassroots attempted to challenge the imposition of punitive measures, and whether their responses had any effect on the manner in which these policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Chapter two will explore grassroots responses to the disciplinary measures carried out by the Soviet occupying army and assess the extent to which local Brandenburgers may or may not have had latitude to react to these incursions. Chapter three will then focus on the manner in which grassroots Brandenburgers responded to the Soviet secret police (NKVD) camps and chapter four will examine grassroots reactions to attempts to denazify and sequester property in Brandenburg and the manner in which the implementation of these measures were realised on the ground. It is argued that the imposition of these wide-ranging punitive policies to change the political, economic and social system often posed an existential threat at a grassroots level, and therefore at times elicited grassroots actions albeit severely restricted by practical and political constraints. In turn, these grassroots responses could occasionally have some local impact and somewhat affect the manner in which some of these policies were implemented at a grassroots level in Brandenburg.

Chapter II: Grassroots responses to punitive Soviet measures in the immediate post-war period

2.1 Introduction

The first Soviet soldiers arrived in Fürstenwalde and Brandenburg/Havel in late April 1945. Whilst a small proportion of the Brandenburg population welcomed their arrival as liberation from Nazism, the large majority had experienced the build-up of the Soviet arrival with fearful apprehension. Wolfram Wette highlights that especially after the defeat in Stalingrad, German propaganda had increasingly attempted to portray the Soviet enemy as ‘murdering monsters’.¹ Norman Naimark maintains that ‘there can be little question that by the end of the war most Germans – with the rare exception of those on the Left – had an uncommon fear and hatred of the Soviets’.² A general sense of foreboding at the Red Army’s arrival was also heightened by a fear of retribution for the policies which had been carried out by the Germans on the Eastern front, while National Socialist propaganda accounts of barbaric acts committed against the German population living in the East in the final months of the war, ‘framed expectations everywhere of what would happen if and when the Russians arrived’.³

The present thesis argues that the aftermath of the war and the initial months which followed Soviet occupation had important implications for subsequent post-war transitions from Nazism to socialism at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Therefore, this chapter aims to specifically examine the grassroots responses to the Soviet occupation in the immediate post-war period and assess whether there was any room for manoeuvre for local Brandenburgers to moderate the impact of these punitive measures. This examination of the grassroots dynamic between East Germans and the Soviet occupying army has been both informed and inspired by a number of recent studies which have addressed different aspects of the early post-

¹ Wolfram Wette, ‘Das Russlandbild in der NS-Propaganda. Ein Problemaufriss’, in Volkmann, *Russlandbild*, p. 70.

² Naimark, *Russians*, p. 110.

³ See, in particular, the case of the East Prussian village of Nemmersdorf in October 1944. Bessel, *Germany*, p. 71. See also the accounts of some of the desperate acts of filicide and suicide which were carried out in Fürstenwalde amongst all age groups in anticipation of the arrival of the Soviet army in April 1945: KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2060 ‘Volksgerichtshof 23.5.-6.8.1945’, no pag.

war dynamic between Soviets and East Germans, such as those by Richard Bessel, Monica Black, Norman Naimark and Silke Satjukow.

In order to explore the impact of, and responses to, post-war punitive measures by the Soviet army on local Brandenburgers, this chapter uses both archival material and oral history evidence. The local archival material provided the opportunity to obtain valuable information on contemporaneous grassroots attitudes and responses in post-war Brandenburg, whilst the oral history evidence permitted a more in-depth insight into some of the experiences and memories of this age cohort who were aged between twelve and twenty-four in 1945. However, given that the oral history interviewees are social agents who have internalised their own experiences as well as wider public discourses, the recollections of their general attitudes towards the Soviets after the collapse of the Third Reich are likely to be products of a mingling of both personal memory and official discourses. Considering the high levels of anti-Soviet propaganda which this interview cohort was exposed to prior to 1945, it seems conceivable that this may have somewhat coloured the manner in which the interviewees perceived the occupying army. To borrow from Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, it may be argued that memories of personal attitudes towards the Soviet army in 1945 were formed in relation both to ‘personal experience’ and ‘pre-existing cultural templates’.⁴ Furthermore, it should be noted that the recollections may not just be shaped by these ‘pre-existing cultural templates’ from the Third Reich, but also by subsequent experiences and discourses from the GDR and Germany after 1989.

This chapter will briefly describe the grassroots experiences of post-war chaos before moving on to explore the impact of post-war violence in the form of rapes, looting and lawlessness. Whilst this retaliatory violence was not an officially sanctioned Soviet policy it nonetheless formed the grassroots reality for many in the aftermath of the collapse of Nazism. Subsequently the grassroots impact of the more official punitive strategies of dismantlement and displacement will be explored. The final part of this chapter then focuses on the post-war memorialisation of war dead in order to investigate local responses to revisionist attempts by the Soviets to create a

⁴ T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, ‘The politics of war memory and commemoration: contexts, structures and dynamics’, in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, ed. by T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (London: Routledge, 2000), 3-85 (p. 34).

new ‘legitimate memory’ and a revised political discourse in the aftermath of the collapse of the Third Reich.⁵

2.2 The initial post-war chaos at a grassroots level

The collapse of the Third Reich and the scars of the extreme violence of the war had a dramatic and immediate impact on the lives of ordinary Brandenburgers as the political rupture in 1945 was marked by widespread homelessness, hunger, disease and death; the losses associated with the war were therefore ‘not only military, material, and political but psychological, emotional, and existential’.⁶ In addition to the millions of expellees who had lost their homes and most of their belongings, many of those living west of the Oder-Neisse border also experienced dislocation within their localities. In Brandenburg/Havel, 10,500 of the 23,817 existing apartments had been damaged and 17,000 people had lost their homes, whilst in Fürstenwalde 4,200 apartments and 121 houses had been either badly damaged or destroyed in the town by May 1945.⁷ This is also reflected amongst the oral history cohort where six of those interviewed lost their homes as a result of war damage, being reduced to temporarily living in barns and huts in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.

Indeed, the most immediate concern at the grassroots level in May 1945 was not political but existential, and once the bombing and fighting had ceased, Brandenburgers’ paramount occupation turned to food. The contrast between the pre- and post-war availability of foodstuffs was stark. For instance, in May 1945 in Brandenburg/Havel the main abattoir had dropped to a mere 3% of the output which it had had in February 1945.⁸ In order to prevent the starvation of the population, soup kitchens were set up in Brandenburg/Havel on 6 May and on 19 May the first food ration cards were distributed.

The situation was similar in Fürstenwalde where in May 1945 the entire population of the town was provided with 250g of bread on a daily basis, with an extra ration of 1,400g per week for a working adult, while soup kitchens were also

⁵ On ‘legitimising memories’ see: Aleida and Jan Assmann, *Das Gestern im Heute*, p. 125.

⁶ Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: from Weimar to Divided Germany* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 145.

⁷ KALOS F/RdS/258, no pag. See also Brekow, *Havelstadt*, p. 146.

⁸ SAB RdS/OB. 2.0.2.41/41 ‘Schriftverkehr mit dem Schlachthof und der Sozialversicherungskasse 1945-54’, p. 5.

set up in order to attempt to provide the local population with one warm meal per day.⁹ These rations were linked to the establishment of compulsory work details in both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, which were intended both to feed the local population and begin the removal of the extensive physical destruction which the war had left behind. However, given the widespread dire shortages, even as a member of a work detail, food rations were not sufficient and local Brandenburgers, just like in other regions of post-war Germany, responded by desperately foraging for food and bartering on the black market at exorbitant prices.¹⁰ These difficulties were further compounded by the bad harvest in the autumn of 1945, a consequence of war damage such as loss of machinery and animals as well as landmines, resulting in an extremely critical shortage of food supplies in the winter of 1945.¹¹

In Fürstenwalde the local administration was so concerned about the shortage of food that they feared that if milk and food rations did not increase, ‘all the town’s toddlers’ would be dead in three months’ time.¹² In the summer of 1945 the average death rate in Fürstenwalde from epidemics such as dysentery and colitis stood at one per cent, with babies under six months accounting for almost 20 per cent of deaths. These difficulties were further compounded by a massive typhoid epidemic which hit Fürstenwalde at the end of August 1945.¹³ Brandenburg/Havel experienced a similar typhoid epidemic, and by October 1945 up to thirty new cases were being diagnosed in the town on a daily basis. Furthermore, the outbreak of typhoid was compounded with other epidemics and public health risks such as scarlet fever and venereal diseases.¹⁴

This prolongation of civilian fatalities beyond the war’s end meant that the grassroots landscape in Brandenburg continued to be scarred by the ubiquity of death and local administrators struggled to cope as individual funeral ceremonies were replaced by mass burials. Throughout the summer of 1945, members of Fürstenwalde’s population sent repeated complaints to the town council objecting that the dead were merely being wrapped in sacks or blankets and were then lowered into the ground unceremoniously, forcing local KPD Mayor Zernicke to concede that

⁹ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2071 ‘Befehle und Verfügungen 1945 -50’, no pag.

¹⁰ This desperate foraging for food was a salient memory for the interviewees in both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. See also Steege, *Black Market*.

¹¹ See, in particular, Bessel, *Germany*.

¹² KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/ 994, no pag.

¹³ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2097 ‘Städtisches Gesundheitswesen 1945-46’, no pag.

¹⁴ SAB RdS/OB. 2.0.2.13/13 ‘Bildung des Stadtbeirates und Namenslisten der Mitglieder’, p. 33.

it would perhaps be necessary to find a private company ‘who would perform the funerals more piously’.¹⁵ Indeed, Monica Black’s analysis of death in Berlin has revealed that throughout the Third Reich the Nazi leadership had established a clear differentiation of burial policy which ‘enacted distinctions that were simultaneously moral, cultural, and racial’, maintaining that Berliners felt that ‘ignominy was associated with a mass grave, that it was a patently unacceptable breach of custom, and that it was therefore only used for racial subordinates and outsiders’. According to Black, coffins gained a ‘profound symbolic currency’, as they were ‘more than wooden boxes’ in Berlin in 1945, instead epitomising ‘the very order of society, its foundations, and its self-conception’. A lack of a coffin to bury the dead therefore symbolised ‘the collapse of that society and a way of life’.¹⁶ In this manner the high civilian death rate and ensuing mass burials experienced in Brandenburg in the wake of the collapse of the Third Reich painfully epitomised the utter physical and societal breakdown with which the grassroots population was faced in 1945. Moreover, as Richard Bessel has argued, the ‘the sudden transition from power to impotence’ was devastating, and the ‘chaos, desperation, fear and violence of early 1945 reduced people’s horizons and concerns to their own small worlds’.¹⁷ It was therefore against this backdrop of widespread homelessness, hunger, disease and death during the aftermath of the Third Reich that the Brandenburg population would be forced to deal with the post-war occupation of the Soviet Army.

2.3 ‘Watches, women, looting and lawlessness’: first encounters with the Red Army

The first Soviet soldiers arrived in Fürstenwalde on 22 April 1945 and in Brandenburg/Havel on 30 April 1945, the day Hitler committed suicide. The events which ensued in East Germany in effect mirrored aspects of the extreme violence which had previously been perpetrated by the *Wehrmacht* in Eastern occupied

¹⁵ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2093 ‘Friedhofsverwaltung 1945-46’, no pag.

¹⁶ Black, *Death*, pp. 122,130,132,155,208. See also Richard Bessel, ‘The Shadow of Death in Germany at the End of the Second World War’, in *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Alon Confino, Paul Betts and Dirk Schumann, (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 51-68 (p. 61) who examines the impact on Germans of the public exposure to, and encounter with, the corpses of both Germans and concentration camp prisoners in 1945.

¹⁷ Bessel, *Germany*, pp. 5-6, 66, 338.

territories. This ‘boomerang violence’ which occurred immediately after occupation can be described as primarily opportunistic in contrast with the previous more centrally coordinated military efforts during the war.¹⁸ It also took the form of interpersonal and individual violence, albeit that it was happening on a large collective scale.

Of the twenty oral history interviewees, nineteen claimed to have had a negative attitude towards the Russians during the Third Reich and recalled that they experienced the build-up of the arrival of the Soviet army with great apprehension.¹⁹ For most of the interviewees the very first contact with the Red Army took place when Soviet soldiers entered the air-raid shelters where the civilians were hiding. The majority described a similar discourse where the first front soldiers arrived exhausted looking for German soldiers, while the second wave, who had not fought at the front, came looking for booty in the form of ‘watches and women’. These recollections highlighted the suddenly inverted power dynamic between both nationalities and the forced acquiescence of the German population in this context. Former Hitler Youth member Reinhold Rösner, whose sixteenth birthday fell on the arrival of the Soviets in Fürstenwalde, recalled his first experience of retaliatory violence when a *Waffen SS* soldier, who had been hiding next to him in a bunker, was shot at point blank range by Soviet soldiers.²⁰ Wolfgang Fried, a former Hitler Youth member who was eighteen in 1945, recalled the arrival of the Red Army in the cellar in Brandenburg/Havel: ‘three Russians came into the cellar [...] and shouted “German soldier, German soldier!”, and then the next ones came and shouted “Uhri, Uhri!”’.²¹ In fact, these imitations of the stereotypes of the Russian inability to pronounce the German word for watches were a common theme throughout the interviews, in part reflecting perhaps a certain conscious or

¹⁸ Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 242.

¹⁹ The exception amongst them was the youngest interviewee, Wolfgang Heinrich, who later became an active SED supporter. Interview with Wolfgang Heinrich on 1 September 2009. Although this dread of the Soviets existed across all age-groups, it was particularly the younger generation which had been most systematically inculcated with National Socialist propaganda, both through youth groups and school books. Benjamin Ortmeier, *Indoktrination. Rassismus und Antisemitismus in der Nazi-Schülerzeitschrift "Hilf mit!" (1933-1944) - Analyse und Dokumente* (Weinheim: Juventa Verlag, 2013). Also Julie Nicole Deering, *The Influence of National Socialism on Children's School Textbooks during the Third Reich 1933-1942* (Dublin: Trinity College; Unpublished Dissertation, 2005).

²⁰ Interview with Reinhold Rösner on 10 September 2009.

²¹ Interview with Wolfgang Fried on 25 June 2009.

unconscious reproduction of elements of the Nazi stereotypes of ‘primitive’ Russians amongst some of the interviewees.

This exposure of the East German population to overt physical violence was often also twinned together with psychological violence and rape and in those first initial points of contact between Soviets and Germans, several interviewees recounted that some women in the air-raid shelters were sexually assaulted.²² For instance in Fürstenwalde, former *Jungmädels* Ulla Beck, fourteen at the time, was forced to watch how her aunt was taken out of the air-raid shelter by Russian soldiers.²³ The problems became so acute that on 11 July 1945, the week before the Potsdam Conference was to commence, Wilhelm Pieck, who had returned from exile in Moscow ten days previously along with the *Gruppe Ulbricht*, went as far as to complain to the Soviet military governor Georgy Zhukov about rapes and plundering.²⁴ Nonetheless, as Naimark has highlighted, it was difficult if not impossible for a German woman to bring a Soviet soldier to justice, while, he argues, the ‘lack of open recognition by Soviet authorities of the problem of rape unquestionably contributed to its persistence’.²⁵

Given this lack of official channels to deal with the issue, the responses to the rapes at a grassroots level varied, as individuals were forced to find their own strategies to cope with these Soviet incursions. In the oral history interviews the memories ranged from feeling utterly powerless on the one end, to recollections of actively devising strategies to avoid sexual assault on the other end of the spectrum. Interestingly, it appears as if the male interviewees in this cohort experienced the most extreme feelings of complete powerlessness at these developments. For instance, Dr Siegfried Reinke, a former Hitler Youth member who was fifteen when the Third Reich collapsed, recalled the forced passivity of the population when the Soviets arrived in Brandenburg/Havel:

The Russians, they were brutal in my parent’s house [...] twelve families lived there and out of these four women were raped, viciously raped, the Russians, always when they were drunk and they were often drunk, they were

²² None of the interviewees reported to have personally experienced sexual assault, although I deliberately did not confront the respondents with this question in the interview. Without being prompted, however, the interviewees did speak about the sexual assault of family members and neighbours by Soviet soldiers.

²³ Interview with Ulla Beck on 27 August 2009.

²⁴ Jan Foitzik, *Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (SMAD) 1945-1949: Struktur und Funktion* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), p. 68.

²⁵ Naimark, *Russians*, pp. 92,101-2.

extremely dangerous [...] it was well-known that after the capturing of a town lawlessness was allowed to rule for three days, women were allowed to be raped.²⁶

Similarly, Hans Gericke, a twenty-one year old in 1945 who had been a member of the Hitler Youth and the *NS Studentenbund*, claimed to have reacted with resigned passivity: 'It was a spectre [...] but we couldn't start a new war, we had to put up with it'.²⁷ Wilhelm Fiedler, twenty-four at the end of the war, whose fiancé was sexually assaulted by Russian soldiers in Brandenburg/Havel recalled that: 'I was so angry at that moment, if I would have had the opportunity [...] to take revenge, which isn't Christian [...] the human side of me would have probably done it'.²⁸ Rape has been described as a 'bio-political strategy' and can be viewed not only as an act of violence against the female body, but also against their male 'owners' and supposed protectors.²⁹ Likewise, these memories reflect the fact that these particular interviewees, who were teenagers or young men in 1945, felt powerless to intervene against the sexual assault of partners, sisters, mothers, aunts and neighbours after the collapse of the Third Reich. This pervasive sense of male impotence and helpless rage at the situation may have been further heightened by the asymmetric gender balance which resulted from the many men who were missing, captive or dead, with the consequence that there were a disproportionate number of females who would have needed to be 'protected' in the aftermath of the war. In fact, out of a total population of just over 2.3 million in the Brandenburg province in December 1945, 60% were female and 40% were male, while in particular age cohorts the gender imbalance was even more pronounced. For instance, in December 1945, 78% of eighteen to thirty year olds in Brandenburg were female.³⁰

In contrast to this stand the memories of some of the female interviewees, whose retrospective accounts suggest the presence of a strong grassroots community in which Brandenburgers rallied together in order to protect particularly the teenage

²⁶ Interview with Dr Siegfried Reinke on 23 June 2009.

²⁷ Interview with Hans Gericke on 9 June 2009.

²⁸ Interview with Wilhelm Fiedler on 25 June 2009.

²⁹ Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, 'Becoming Abject: Rape as a Weapon of War', in *Body and Society*, 11 (2005), pp. 111-128.

³⁰ This corresponded directly to the overall percentage of women in the Soviet zone who also made up 60% of the total population of 16,194,626 in December 1945. BLHA, Rep. 202E/22, 'Bevölkerungsstatistik des Landes Brandenburg 1945-48', p. 7. This trend was to continue for some time. For instance, in June 1949 the population of Fürstenwalde was 24,195 - of these 10,184 were males whilst 14,011 were female. KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/165 'Einwohnermeldeamt 1947-50', no pag.

girls from assault. Dr Edith Dorn, a former *Jungmädels* who was fifteen in 1945 and living in Brandenburg/Havel, was hidden in various attics, while Ulla Beck and Carmen Jung, a seventeen year old former *Jungmädels* from Fürstenwalde, both recalled being locked into small rooms with other girls with wardrobes being hauled in front of the door.³¹ Similarly, former BDM member Erika Schulz, seventeen when the war ended, stated that she was hidden in a grocery shop in Fürstenwalde along with other local girls, with vegetables stacked up in front of the door as camouflage.³² Indeed, the manner in which the interviewees describe how a collective community spirit served to protect some of the female population in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde is also reflected in some of the secondary literature. Naimark has found that in a situation of ‘societal breakdown and the fragmentation of the German sense of community and even of family, the threat of rape paradoxically provided an important impetus to rebuild village and town organisation and to maintain community unity’.³³ Similarly, Atina Grossmann maintains that in the ‘dark times’ of rape, women ‘also presented themselves as resourceful agents’.³⁴ Consistent with this argument, seventeen year old former BDM member Gertrud Hirsch proudly recalled:

I wasn’t afraid because I could run fast [...] I ran up to the attic so quickly that the Russians didn’t even have a chance to spot me. And then they said to my mother ‘where is daughter?’ and she began to cry and said ‘I don’t know’. And because she was crying I came back down and cheekily said ‘here I am!’, but nothing happened. They also tried to look for us at night but never found us.³⁵

Arguably this account is a good example of an interviewee attempting to retroactively portray herself in a positive light as a resourceful agent who appeared to outsmart the primitive Soviet soldiers who could not speak proper German (‘where is daughter’) and seem to have been easily outwitted. On the other hand, Gertrud Hirsch’s amused laughter while telling this story also suggests that she was indeed in the fortunate position to have avoided sexual assault, either as a result of her own actions, or due to other exogenous factors.

³¹ Interview with Dr Edith Dorn on 24 June 2009. Beck, 27.08.09. Interview with Carmen Jung on 9 September 2009.

³² Interview with Erika Schulz on 28 August 2009.

³³ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 117.

³⁴ Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Oxford: Princeton UP, 2007), p. 53.

³⁵ Interview with Gertrud Hirsch on 27 August 2009.

The evidence therefore suggests that the impact of, and responses to, mass sexual assault which followed the collapse of the Third Reich took a number of forms amongst the interviewees in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. On the one hand, the majority of the male interviewees responded with a sense of utter impotence and powerlessness, with some privately yearning for revenge against the Soviet occupiers. On the other hand, the majority of the female interviewees, who appear to have been fortunate enough to avoid experiencing sexual assault themselves, paint a picture, sixty years later, of themselves as relatively resourceful agents who, together with the support of their communities, managed to outwit the Soviet soldiers despite the constraints of occupation.

However, these oral history interviews cannot be considered to be characteristic of the range of responses to Soviet rapes amongst women in Brandenburg more generally. Many tens of thousands of East German women were exposed to violent sexual experiences on the arrival of the Soviet army in 1945 and were sometimes unable to deal with the trauma, instead resorting to extreme measures. For instance, in Brandenburg/Havel, Dr Edith Dorn's aunt and her two cousins committed suicide as a result of being raped by Soviet soldiers.³⁶ Similarly, the *Volksgeschichtshof* files from Fürstenwalde between May and August 1945 depict how the arrival of Soviet soldiers was followed by a wave of desperation and despair, where a significant number of local women responded to repeated sexual assaults by carrying out acts of filicide and suicide.³⁷ Thus, in reality the room for manoeuvre of local Brandenburgers tended to be extremely restricted in 1945 and in fact, combined with the other existential challenges which were facing the population at this time, the retaliatory violence carried out by some Soviet soldiers created an enormous fear amongst the population, thereby gradually eclipsing notions of guilt at the crimes previously committed by Germans on the Eastern front.³⁸

The grassroots impact of, and responses to, the occupation of Brandenburg by the Soviet army also took other forms and especially in the initial months following the collapse of the Third Reich, Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde

³⁶ Dorn, 24.06.09.

³⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2060, no pag. The sexual violence of the immediate post-war period could also potentially have a long-term influence on the generation which followed. For examples of this in relation to sex education in the GDR see McLellan, *Love*, pp. 34-36.

³⁸ Bessel, *Germany*, p. 167.

were marked with looting and lawlessness. As Richard Bessel has highlighted, ‘liberation meant looting’ and Germans now found themselves ‘transformed from practitioners of violence to objects of violence’.³⁹ Local German police forces had been established in both towns within a week of occupation, yet in the early post-war period the police had severe difficulties in controlling looting Soviet soldiers and civilians. These difficulties were compounded by an initial ban on carrying arms as well as severe material shortages, which in the case of Fürstenwalde paradoxically meant that the local *Ordnungspolizei* were initially forced to wear dyed former *Wehrmacht* uniforms.⁴⁰ Combined with such shortages, the local police forces in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde were compelled to deal with a high number of assaults, larcenies as well as murders by Soviet military patrols, Russian soldiers, Russian civilians and Eastern *Zwangsarbeiter*.⁴¹ Moreover, German police forces were not permitted to use what few weapons they had against Allied soldiers, and the archival evidence indicates that beatings and muggings of German police officials by Soviet soldiers were not uncommon. In one instance, a local police constable from Brandenburg/Havel was badly beaten by Soviet soldiers when he attempted to intervene against plundering by Russian civilians, while at the end of June 1945, Russian soldiers on patrol in the town were reported to have openly mugged locals of watches and leather jackets, despite the presence of German police officials.⁴²

Tensions between the Soviet occupiers and local Germans also flared over the use of local waterways in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. In a state such as Brandenburg, which consists of over 3,000 lakes and 30,000 kilometres of waterways, much of the local infrastructure and commerce had traditionally relied on this resource. Especially in the case of Brandenburg/Havel, these issues became acute with the realisation that the newly established water police was not in a

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 148.

⁴⁰ By November 1945 the Fürstenwalde police was in possession of a total of five truncheons and four pistols, KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/321, ‘Verwaltungsberichte 1945-1950’, no pag. This was despite the fact that the SMAD only permitted the police to arm itself in 1946, Richard Bessel, ‘Grenzen des Polizeistaates. Polizei und Gesellschaft in der SBZ und frühen DDR, 1945-1953’, in Bessel, *Grenzen der Diktatur*, p. 227. On material shortages of the police in Brandenburg/Havel see: SAB RdS/BI, 2.0.4.6/117, ‘Berichte und Meldungen der Polizeiverwaltung 1945-1946’, p. 17. On the *Ordnungspolizei* in Fürstenwalde see: KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/321, no pag.

⁴¹ See SAB RdS/BI, 2.0.4.6/117, pp. 1-35, for a large number of examples.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

position to protect either the fish stocks or fishermen from Soviet incursions.⁴³ In the summer of 1945, Brandenburg/Havel's magistrate responded by complaining to the President of the Provincial administration in Potsdam, using the racially loaded term 'umherwildern' to describe the Russians.⁴⁴

Despite the SMA Order no. 35 issued on 29 August 1945, which stated that all fisheries were to be removed from military control and returned to their previous owners, with the owners in turn being obliged to sell one third of their stock to the troops, problems continued to persist. When on 5 October District Mayor Eichler organised a meeting with local fishermen in Brandenburg/Havel's city hall, they voiced a large number of complaints, claiming that individual Russian commandos were still confiscating entire catches, closing off waterways, and fishing with explosives which continued to deplete the dwindling fish stock.⁴⁵ Whilst these fishermen did take some action by publicly voicing grievances against the Soviet troops in an attempt to safeguard their livelihood, the archival material does not provide evidence that they were able to have any direct impact on the immediate situation.

The enormous difficulties encountered by both the terrestrial and water police forces in their attempts to negotiate the transition from the Third Reich with local Soviet troops in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, suggest that it was not just the local population whose room for manoeuvre was severely curtailed. This lack of ability of the local police forces to adequately respond to crimes committed in their communities served not only to partially undermine their local legitimacy, but also on occasion to heighten anti-Soviet sentiment amongst some members of the newly created force.

Loss of control and the widespread post-war violence and lawlessness in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde was also a salient theme amongst the oral history interviewees, many of whom emphasised the unpredictable violation of their notions of justice through arbitrary violence. For instance, Dr Edith Dorn recalled

⁴³ The water police had been established in Brandenburg/Havel in May 1945 and had been charged with guarding the waterways and weirs, the securing of flotsam and cargo, cleaning the waters, patrolling fishing activities and uncovering corpses in the water. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2. 61/61, 'Oberbürgermeister- Schriftverkehr mit dem Statistischen Amt und anderen Dienststellen: 1945-1952', pp. 88-90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90. Such problems were compounded by a continued severe shortage of available resources for the water police: BLHA, Rep. 202A/39, 'Tätigkeitsberichte der Abt. I Inneres, des Ministerium des Innern und seiner Abteilungen 1946-1948', p. 242.

that she felt: ‘Fear, fear, fear. They shot indiscriminately; they arbitrarily took men or women from the street’.⁴⁶ In fact, some recounted encounters marked by extreme violence. For instance, Karl Schmidt, twenty-four years old in 1945, had the experience that ‘the Russians’ burned down his family home in a small village outside Brandenburg/Havel.⁴⁷ Former *Jungvolk* member Arnold Schulze from Fürstenwalde experienced a most harrowing personal event when his parents were murdered by pillaging Soviet soldiers in the winter of 1945:

At the end of November, at night, when everything was essentially over, they shot my parents [...] when I came home they were both lying on the ground and everything had been plundered [...] there I was at fourteen [...] everything was gone.⁴⁸

Traumatic recollections such as these underscore the devastating personal impact of this seemingly arbitrary violence and utter sense of powerlessness against some members of the Soviet occupation army who both sought revenge and demanded access to the possessions and material resources of Brandenburgers in the initial post-war period.

However, although the room for manoeuvre of Brandenburgers against the retaliatory Soviet measures in the immediate post-war period was extremely restricted, perceptions and attitudes towards the Soviet occupiers were not always congruent. For instance, given the severe shortage of commodities and transport in the post-war period the stealing of a bicycle by a Russian soldier forcibly reminded the local Germans of their powerless position as a defeated and occupied nation and oral history interviewees often recalled this threat with fear. Former *Jungmädels* Christine Küster from Fürstenwalde, fourteen in 1945 recalled that ‘one didn’t dare to cycle anywhere because the bicycles were being stolen’.⁴⁹ Similarly, a number of other interviewees recalled dangerous encounters with Russian soldiers stealing bicycles at gun-point.

On the other hand, the widespread anecdotal evidence of the Russians’ inability to actually cycle seemed to reinforce some aspects of pre-conceived racial stereotypes of Russian inferiority from pre-1945 in terms of technological backwardness and ineptitude. Dr Siegfried Reinke recalled: ‘they stole my bicycle

⁴⁶ Dorn, 24.06.09.

⁴⁷ Interview with Karl Schmidt on 10 June 2009.

⁴⁸ Interview with Arnold Schulze on 2 September 2009.

⁴⁹ Interview with Christine Küster on 1 September 2009.

too, but they of course didn't know how to cycle and looked terrible [...] they had never had bicycles at home'.⁵⁰ Likewise, Gertrud Hirsch remembered: 'They really were stupid, they couldn't even cycle and they thought that if the Germans can cycle they can take the bicycle and they can do it too'.⁵¹ These oral history memories of 'stupid Russians' who 'had never had bicycles at home' support Naimark's observations that numerous contemporary commentators noted the persistent arrogance of the Germans in face of 'the backward Russian, whose cultural level was supposed to be so much lower'.⁵² Such sentiments therefore illustrate the complex hybrid between German physical powerlessness towards the victors on the one hand, and a continued sense of internal superiority on the other hand. Yet although these jokes about Russian ineptitude may have offered some small solace to local Germans in the face of utter chaos and collapse, the reality was that Brandenburgers' daily lives were not only massively constrained by hunger, homelessness, disease, looting and lawlessness during this early post-war period, they also had to simultaneously deal with the grassroots impact of the initial Soviet policies of dismantling and displacement.

2.4 Punitive Soviet policies at a grassroots level: dismantling and displacement

Already in the summer of 1945, Soviet commanders began dismantling local factories and industrial plants in order that they could be transported to the Soviet Union as reparation payments. Yet these actions conflicted with the interests of the local populations and their German administrators, and frequently led to the stratification of post-war society not along political affiliation (Soviets banding with German KPD administrators) but along nationalities (Soviet vs. German interests).

During this period, both case study towns experienced a 'process of de-industrialisation'.⁵³ In Fürstenwalde, the local administration expressed dissatisfaction in July 1945 at the fact that: 'in Fürstenwalde and its surrounds not one factory survives, regardless if it had had a part to play in the war effort or not'.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Reinke, 23.06.09.

⁵¹ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

⁵² Naimark, *Russians*, pp. 114-15.

⁵³ Bessel, *Germany*, p. 378.

⁵⁴ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/994, no pag.

In Brandenburg/Havel, 70% of the town's industrial facilities had disappeared by late 1945 as a result of the effects of the war or due to dismantling.⁵⁵ In fact, local German administrators were often at the mercy of the whims of local commanders and as a consequence the manner in which administrators were able to respond was relatively curtailed, particularly in the first two years after occupation. For instance, in January 1946 a barracks in Brandenburg/Havel, which had originally been set aside by the local KPD as an orphanage, was being dismantled by Russian soldiers, who were now using it as fire-wood.⁵⁶

Similarly, in Fürstenwalde in September 1945, the town commander had given the order that reinforced glass which remained in the local 'Julius Pintsch' factory should be removed, in order to be made available to the surrounding schools and hospitals. Yet the Soviet commander of the 'Pintsch' factory required the glass for his own purposes and refused to place it at the disposal of the town. The KPD mayor of Fürstenwalde, Wilhelm Zernicke, was therefore forced to write to the central command in Potsdam for clarification. These grassroots frustrations increased and in January 1946 the new KPD mayor, Berthold Wottke, wrote to the SMAD in Karlshorst begging them not to dismantle the glass bulb production sector of the 'Pintsch' factory, on the basis that the bulb production could not, he claimed, be classified as a 'part of the Nazi war machine'. His intervention proved unsuccessful and by November 1946 local reports indicate that the machinery in the 'Pintsch' factory had been almost entirely dismantled by the occupying army.⁵⁷

The sense of powerlessness created by dismantlement in Brandenburg was also a common theme in the recollections of some of the oral history interviewees, particularly for the male interviewees. For instance, Hans Gericke had been forced to work as a dismantling engineer for the steelworks in Brandenburg/Havel, while former Hitler Youth member Gunther Dietrich, who was eighteen in 1945, recalled watching with dismay how the steelworks in Brandenburg/Havel were dismantled at the time: 'within three weeks the large tank hangar had virtually disappeared'.⁵⁸ There was also indignation at the manner in which dismantled equipment was handled. Kurt Michel, fourteen in 1945 and a former *Jungvolk* member, claimed that

⁵⁵ Klaus Heß, 'Besatzungszeit und SED-Herrschaft (1945-1989)', in Heinrich, et al., *Stahl*, p. 153. See also Naimark, *Russians*, pp. 12, 170.

⁵⁶ SAB RdS/BI, 2.0.4.6/117, p. 102.

⁵⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2077, 'Industrie 1945-46', no pag.

⁵⁸ Gericke, 09.06.09. Interview with Gunther Dietrich on 11 June 2009.

his cousin had witnessed how expensive machinery in the flagship Adam Opel factory in Brandenburg/Havel had been turned into scrap metal in Russia due to 'Russian incompetence'.⁵⁹ Whether or not this was actually the case, such memories at the style and the perceived manner in which dismantling was apparently conducted are consistent with the complex and often paradoxical hybrid between an utter sense of defeat and a concomitant inner sense of technical superiority towards the Russians. Whilst these memories may perhaps be consistent with pre-1945 negative Russian stereotypes of ineptitude, it should also be noted that the salience of this theme in the interviews may have also been reinforced by more recent post-reunification discourses on the discrepancy between West and East German industrial achievements and a possible need to underscore the hardships suffered by East Germans in the face of Soviet retaliation.

Tensions between local East Germans and the Soviet occupiers in the immediate post-war period were not only heightened by the dismantlement of industry, but also as a result of the confiscation and occupation of private property for personal use by members of the newly arrived Red Army. This occurred not just in Brandenburg, but also in many other towns in the Soviet zone where large apartment houses were sequestered by the Soviet authorities for their personnel, and whole streets were taken over by the army, their German residents expelled.⁶⁰ Unlike the property expropriation of former Nazis, which was carried out as part of denazification and will be discussed in chapter four, this confiscation of property for use by the Soviet occupation troops was politically indiscriminate. This was compounded by the fact that the displacement of Germans from their homes could occur with less than 48 hours' notice. The range of grassroots responses to this particular Soviet incursion varied. In particular, they affected local KPD/SED administrators who were forced to attempt to mediate between Soviet actions and German citizens as they grew increasingly concerned about the negative impact which these practices could have on the political sentiment of the population. A local opinion report written from Brandenburg/Havel by the KPD Lord Mayor Lange on 28 February 1946 illustrates the extreme uncertainty created by this Soviet policy:

Agitation is being reinforced on a daily basis through the fear of losing one's apartment. In February, as a result of an order by the town's commanders, 98

⁵⁹ Interview with Kurt Michel on 10 June 2009.

⁶⁰ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 95.

apartments in the Fouquestraße had to be forcibly vacated. This was also the case for the nursing home in the Magdeburgerstraße as well as the Pestalozzi school [...] After every inspection of new buildings by the *Kommandantur*, a new rumour of course begins that the surveyed house will also now be confiscated.⁶¹

Whilst this report underscores just how politically indiscriminate these confiscations could be, as not only ordinary citizens in the Fouquestraße, but also the most vulnerable in society, elderly residents and young children, were forcibly evicted, it also illustrates the potentially destabilising effect which these Soviet actions could have on grassroots communities, thereby creating problems for the new German administration locally. Given that a quarter of the population in Brandenburg/Havel had lost their homes in 1945, grassroots resentment at these evictions was further increased when three months later a large number of the confiscated apartments in the Fouquestraße had been partially dismantled.⁶² Yet despite this continued severe housing scarcity for the local population, the local commander's office announced in September 1946 that an additional 135 apartments in the Fouquestraße were to be vacated of German families.

Such developments worried local SED officials, concerned with the impact it could have on grassroots political sentiment, and numerous attempts were therefore made at intervention at all levels, from Lord Mayor Lange to the district branch of the SED, as well as various other local bodies. For instance, District Mayor Eichler responded by writing to Brandenburg/Havel's commandant on 21 September 1946 emphasising that the Brandenburg population had proven in the local election on 15 September 1946 that they were 'sensible and had a willingness for reconstruction' and warned that 'we would destroy the previous moral conquests if we are unsuccessful at finding a tolerable expedient'.⁶³ It is unclear from the archival material whether these interventions were successful.

Similar patterns of Soviet occupation of property could be observed in Fürstenwalde, despite the fact that 45% of the town's buildings had been extensively damaged. By October 1945, the Red Army had occupied 47 properties in the town's

⁶¹ SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292, 'Vorbereitung, Durchführung und Ergebnisse der Wahlen am 15.9.1946 und der Landtagswahl am 20.10.1946', pp. 9-10.

⁶² Brekow, *Havelstadt*, p. 146.

⁶³ SAB RdS/SOB, 2.0.3.8/102, 'Schriftverkehr mit Abteilungen und der Stadtkommandantur 1945-49', pp. 2,3,6. By autumn 1946 there were 19,417 habitable apartments available in Brandenburg/Havel for a population of almost 70,000. On the September 1946 election results in Brandenburg/Havel see SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292.

fifth district alone, with a possible 22 more which were planned to be vacated. In response, the district warden wrote to the Mayor of Fürstenwalde complaining that many of these confiscations were not even being condoned by the Soviet commanders, and instead were unauthorised ‘incursions by Russian officers’.⁶⁴ By April 1946, over 50 houses and 112 apartments had been confiscated by the Red Army in Fürstenwalde, and by October the following year, out of a total of 12,858 apartments in Fürstenwalde, not including those which had been damaged or destroyed, the Red Army had confiscated 1,096.⁶⁵ Yet those Brandenburgers who were displaced, despite the constrained room for manoeuvre available to them given the circumstances, nonetheless were not all completely acquiescent. Some were so outraged by their treatment that they officially complained to local administrations.⁶⁶ Others, who were unsuccessful in their protests and were forced to vacate their homes, responded by stripping their homes of light switches, wiring, sockets, windows and doors before leaving.⁶⁷ Such actions may reflect both the dire post-war shortage of commodities, as well as a discernible spitefulness amongst those Brandenburgers who were given no other choice but to leave their homes. Therefore, similar to some of the other early Soviet punitive activities, the on-going property confiscations by the Soviet Army further aggravated post-war difficulties at a grassroots level, thereby reinforcing a sense of defeat and victimhood amongst local Brandenburgers in relation to the occupying army.

Many of the oral history interviewees also recalled evictions by the Red Army within their localities. For instance, Gertrud Hirsch remembered how a large number of her neighbouring houses in Fürstenwalde were confiscated by ‘the Russians’. Yet part of this recollection involved ridiculing the Soviet soldiers and portraying them as cultural barbarians who did not appear to understand the concept of a lavatory: ‘they also occupied a very nice local apartment and they made a hole in the ground, in the flooring, and they defecated in there!’⁶⁸ In contrast, Carmen Jung’s retrospective account revealed a strong sense of resignation and defeat: ‘There were a few villas, which were vacated [...] it wasn’t nice what they did there

⁶⁴ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2043, ‘Akte Wohnungsamt 1945’, no pag.

⁶⁵ BLHA, Rep. 250/361, ‘Wohnraumbesetzung durch Angehörige der Roten Armee 1946’, no pag. and KALOS F/RdS/43, ‘Eingemeindung und Arbeitsvermittlung von Umsiedlern 1947-48’, no pag.

⁶⁶ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2043, no pag.

⁶⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2129, ‘Bekanntmachungen 1948’, no pag.

⁶⁸ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

[...] it was like that, whatever could be taken they took it [...] it wasn't right, but one couldn't do anything'.⁶⁹

Despite the perceived hegemony of the Soviet troops during these displacements, the oral history evidence also suggests that a certain room for manoeuvre did occasionally exist at a grassroots level and local agents could also succeed in carving out a compromise. For instance, former Hitler Youth member Fritz Krause, who was fifteen when the war ended, recalled that when Russian soldiers occupied his house in Fürstenwalde, his father managed to successfully negotiate that the family could live in the basement.⁷⁰ In fact, some encounters of Soviets living in German homes appeared to have been quite positive, helping to break down some of the barriers between occupied and occupiers. Reinhold Rösner recalled that a Russian soldier was assigned living quarters in his family home immediately after the end of the war: 'I had a very friendly relationship with him. He wanted to learn a little bit of German'.⁷¹

Local tensions were further reduced when, after it had transpired that occupation would be more long term, small remunerations were often negotiated at a local level from late 1946 onwards, helping to partially ease at least some of the strains at a grassroots level.⁷² In addition, such points of local friction were further reduced when, increasingly from the autumn of 1947 onwards, members of the Soviet army were moved into newly created isolated settlements, with the effect that contact with the German population was steadily restricted.⁷³

2.5 Grassroots perceptions of the Soviets in the initial post-war period

Consistent with Richard Bessel's argument that 'an appreciation of the importance of hatred seems crucial to understanding the post-war transition' the following section will further explore these negative sentiments at the grassroots level in

⁶⁹ Jung, 09.09.09.

⁷⁰ Krause, 09.09.09.

⁷¹ Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁷² These arrangements for rental payments by the Brandenburg administration were based on SMA Order no. 245. See KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2151, 'Aufstellung von besetzten Häusern durch russische Besatzung 1946-1948', no pag.

⁷³ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 31.

Brandenburg.⁷⁴ Amongst the wider Brandenburg public, the archival evidence illustrates that in the initial post-war years, the fear of Soviet lawlessness and violence continued to persist amongst wide sections of the population. This fear can be seen in some of the panicked rumours which were proliferating at a grassroots level. For instance, in early February 1946 the rumour was circulating in Brandenburg/Havel that the Russians were to be replaced by the British army, before which the Soviets would be able to ‘plunder freely’ between 7 and 9 of February.⁷⁵ Rumours such as these were twinned with the spread of satirical anti-Soviet rhymes at a grassroots level. This particular poem was discovered by the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior to be circulating in the district of Luckenwalde, south-east of Brandenburg/Havel in July 1947:

*Willkommen Befreier, ihr nehmt uns die Eier, die Milch
und die Butter, das Vieh und sein Futter.
Auch die Uhren und Ringe und sonstige Dinge,
befreit uns von allen, Maschinen und Hallen
nehmt mit auf die Reise, Maschinen und Gleise.
Von all diesen Wundern habt ihr uns befreit.
Wir weinen vor Freude, wie helle ihr seid.
Wie schön ist's doch heute und gut,
willkommen ihr hässliche Brut.⁷⁶*

This rhyme aptly illustrates the principal points of conflict which had developed between local Brandenburgers and the Soviet ‘liberators’ by 1947 – the grievance that the Soviet army was supposedly responsible for the severe food shortages as well as the experiences of the often violent seizure of ‘watches and rings and other things’, and the palpable anger at the dismantling of ‘machines and hangars’. Whilst the ironic uses of ‘liberator’ and ‘liberation’ from Nazism are juxtaposed with the ‘tears of joy’ at how ‘bright’ the new occupiers are, the final line drops all irony and instead denigrates the Russians to a ‘hideous spawn’. This satirical rhyme therefore provides an interesting political barometer for the manner in which some elements of the grassroots sentiment towards the Soviets were constructed and perceived in 1947. Here, the occupiers are portrayed as the active and all powerful party, whilst the Germans are clearly presenting themselves as the victims of this process, whose actions have been reduced to verbal protest at Soviet incursions. Yet whilst this

⁷⁴ Richard Bessel, ‘Hatred after War: Emotion and the Postwar History of East Germany’, *History & Memory* 17.1/2 (2005), 195-216 (p. 195).

⁷⁵ SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292, p. 7.

⁷⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202A/39, p. 66.

rhyme emphasises a sense of passivity in these processes, the successful circulation of this poem also suggests the existence of unofficial grassroots networks of information which were difficult if not impossible for the SMAD or SED to control. In this manner then, the illicit dissemination of satirical rhymes such as these appears to have provided Brandenburgers with a narrow vent to air some of their frustrations in a highly constrained context in which they were otherwise relatively impotent to respond to Soviet retaliatory violence and the punitive policies of dismantling and displacement.

Similar negative sentiments at the plethora of grassroots difficulties were also reflected in many of the interviewees' memories of their perceptions of how they viewed the Soviets in the immediate post-war period. Thirteen of the interviewees claimed that they continued to have a 'very negative' attitude towards the 'Russians' in the months following occupation while four interviewees claimed that they had 'quite a negative' attitude. One aspect of this negative attitude was the interviewees' perceptions of the 'Russians' as varyingly barbaric, primitive and inept as has been seen above in relation to the retaliatory violence and punitive Soviet measures. Often these experiences appear to have affirmed aspects of the National Socialist propaganda with which the interview cohort had been bombarded prior to 1945. For instance, Arnold Schulze, unsurprisingly given his post-war experiences, recalled that he perceived the Red Army as 'savage, savage, terrible'.⁷⁷ Another important aspect of this negative attitude was the strongly emotive memory that the 'Russians' were perceived as a victorious enemy in the initial post-war period which illustrated associated feelings of defeat and powerlessness created by these constraints. Wilhelm Fiedler felt that 'the Russians were the occupying army which stood at every corner and carried out checks, and particularly in the early period would harass the people at night and that was often dangerous'.⁷⁸ Hans Gericke recalled that he continued to perceive the Russians as a 'brutal enemy' both before and in the months which followed occupation.⁷⁹ In some instances such 'pre-existing cultural templates' of pre-1945 anti-Soviet propaganda, often combined with subsequent

⁷⁷ Schulze, 02.09.09.

⁷⁸ Fiedler, 25.06.09.

⁷⁹ Gericke, 09.06.09.

severely traumatising experiences, appear to have strongly influenced opinions toward the Soviet occupier in the immediate months after German capitulation.⁸⁰

A further factor which appears to have contributed to these negative attitudes towards the Soviets was the dire nutritional situation which continued into the post-war years. Many of the interviewees recalled that the ration cards provided by the authorities were ‘*zum Sterben zu viel und zum Leben zu wenig*’ and these shortages were frequently blamed on the inability of the new policy makers to provide for the populace. Indeed, local archival evidence from Brandenburg/Havel indicates that in the summer of 1945 panicked rumours frequently erupted that food supplies were about to run out, and by August the local public in Brandenburg/Havel responded by blaming the shortages on the Red Army.⁸¹ Furthermore, it appears that this was also to have a negative impact on the manner in which not just the Soviet occupiers, but also subsequently the SED, were viewed in the years which followed the collapse of the Third Reich.

By mid-1947 food supplies in parts of Brandenburg were still considered to be inadequate, with a report from Forst in southern Brandenburg concluding that at the local level ‘everything is revolving around food’.⁸² Similarly, the state police of Brandenburg reported the following month that ‘a certain discontent still dominates in the population which is a result of the scarcity of foodstuffs and the shortage of clothing’.⁸³ Whether this was indeed the main factor affecting the popularity of the new political administration or not, a brief glance at a further contemporary satirical rhyme permits an insight into how this accusation that the new political elite was responsible for much of the post-war privation could manifest itself. This particular political poem was found by the Brandenburg government to be circulating in Rathenow, thirty kilometres north of Brandenburg/Havel, in May 1947:

*Deutschland, Deutschland ohne alles,
Ohne Butter, ohne Speck,
Und das bisschen Marmelade frisst uns die Verwaltung weg.
Die Preise hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen,*

⁸⁰ Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 34.

⁸¹ SAB RdS/OB. 2.0.2.63/63 ‘Oberbürgermeister: Berichte von Abteilungen und Organisationen 1945-51’, pp. 4, 7. See also: SAB RdS/OB. 2.0.2.74/74 ‘Oberbürgermeister: Schriftwechsel mit der Stadtkreisleitung der KPD 1945-1946’, p. 1.

⁸² BLHA, Rep. 202A/30, ‘Berichte und Mitteilungen des Amtes für Informationen 1946-1948, 1950’, pp. 10, 89.

⁸³ BArch DO1/25368, no pag. In fact, it would take till 1951 until the East German mortality rate had returned to its pre-war level. Felix Robin Schulz, ‘Disposing of the Dead in East Germany, 1945-1990’, in *Mass Death and Individual Loss*, p. 115.

*Die Not marschiert mit ruhig festem Schritt.
 Es hungern alle Volksgenossen,
 Die Grossen hungern mehr im Geiste mit.
 Hände falten, Köpfe senken!
 Immer an die Einheit denken!
 Komm, Wilhelm Pieck, sei unser Gast!
 Und gib uns, was Du versprochen hast!
 Doch nicht Rüben oder Kohl,
 Sondern was Du isst und Grotewohl.
 Nichts auf dem Tisch, nichts auf dem Teller!
 Nichts auf dem Boden, nichts im Keller!
 Es gibt nicht mal Klosettpapier!
 Hoch, SED, wir danken Dir!*⁸⁴

Interestingly the first section of this satirical rhyme parodied the beginning of the first verse of the nineteenth century German anthem. Here Germany's former unity was now contrasted with the current shortage of foodstuffs; while the anthem's erstwhile brotherly solidarity in the protection and defence of the nation was juxtaposed with the new post-war administration who were allegedly eating all the jam. The second stanza then derided the well-known 'Horst-Wessel-Lied' which had established itself as the second national anthem throughout the Third Reich. Here the word 'prices' replaced 'flag' and the 'SA' was substituted with 'hardship', while the Nazi concept of '*Volksgenossen*' was used to describe the hungry masses. The final section of this rhyme consisted of various versions of German mealtime prayers. Interestingly, these had also been previously parodied in the Third Reich, only now the '*Führer*' was replaced with '*Einheit*'. Moreover, the original invitation to Jesus Christ to join the table, which had been substituted with Robert Ley during the Third Reich, was now extended to Wilhelm Pieck, while Otto Grotewohl displaced Hermann Göring within the parody (Göring had previously been rhymed with *Hering*).⁸⁵ This satirical verse was not only limited to western Brandenburg – evidence exists that variations of it spread across the post-war Soviet zone.⁸⁶

The content of this political poem is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Its main reference points – the nineteenth century notion of a unified and strong

⁸⁴ BLHA, Rep. 202A/30, p. 17.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Der Flüsterwitz im Dritten Reich* (München: Paul List, 1963) for a comparison.

⁸⁶ Evidence of the authorities commenting on versions of this poem already circulating around Berlin in 1946 are also referenced by Steege, *Black Market*, pp. 86-87, while in July 1947, two months after the above report from Rathenow, a different Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior report discovered that a similar version of this song was circulating in Luckenwalde, sixty kilometres south-east of Brandenburg/Havel. BLHA, Rep. 202A/39, p. 66.

Germany, the militaristic denotations of the Third Reich and the traditional religious piety of saying grace – are all aspects of the past which appeared somewhat remote for many in the chaos of the post-1945 collapse. The bitterness at the dire nutritional and commodity situation is palpable, as is the sense of disillusionment, not only with the new leadership, but also at the alleged inequality between ordinary East Germans and the socialists now in power who claimed to mark a departure from their Third Reich predecessors. Nonetheless, the self-proclamation of the grassroots population as ‘*Volksgenossen*’ suggests a linguistic and conceptual longevity of aspects of National Socialism after 1945, despite the destruction which the Third Reich had left in its wake. Moreover, the post-war dissemination of such satirical rhymes appears to indicate the presence of a seemingly effective grassroots network of communication which at the very least reached across Brandenburg and Berlin, despite serious infrastructural damage, which the political powers were relatively powerless to influence or regulate. Whilst the spread of political parodies of this type indicate discernible anger and frustration amongst the grassroots populace, they also suggest that this resulted not necessarily in apathy, but rather in a significant level of disillusionment and a subsequent reticence to engage constructively with the new political system and its socialist leadership. It therefore appears that the dire post-war nutritional and commodity situation, as well as the manner in which both the Soviet and German administrators were perceived to be dealing with these challenges, created a limiting factor for the new authorities in their attempts to cement their political legitimacy at a grassroots level in post-war Brandenburg.

However, whilst these negative attitudes towards the Soviet occupier were a predominant theme across both the oral history interviews and the archival material, evidence also emerged that for some interviewees an apparent shift from a predominantly negative pre-1945 attitude to a more differentiated or positive perception of the Russians took place in the early post-war period. For instance, Gertrud Hirsch, who had felt that ‘the fear of the Russians was tremendous’ before May 1945, recalled that her attitude in the immediate post-war period was ‘of course negative’; nevertheless, she also maintained that there were some soldiers who also protected the Germans.⁸⁷ In fact, three of those interviewed in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde claimed to have had a predominantly positive attitude towards the

⁸⁷ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

Russians in 1945, while especially the younger interviewees conceded that the soldiers exhibited kindness to children. Wolfgang Heinrich, twelve years old in 1945 and the youngest of the interviewees, recalled: ‘I have to say as children we only had good experiences, whenever we came somewhere where there were Russian soldiers they always gave us something to eat’.⁸⁸ Even Karl Schmidt, whose family home had been set alight by Soviet soldiers in 1945, emphasised how positive the Russian soldiers behaved towards children, which for him offered glimpses of their humanity: ‘The Russians had respect for children, one has to say that honestly [...] I said that one could see that they weren’t the worst people’.⁸⁹

Other interviewees also recalled positive personal interactions with Soviet soldiers in the months which followed occupation. For instance, Erika Schulz remembered how a Russian soldier helped them repair windows in her house.⁹⁰ Similarly, Fritz Krause recalled that his aunt had bandaged a Russian soldier who in return wrote a message above the front door, which kept the women in the house safe.⁹¹ The retrospective perceptions of some of the other interviewees presented the Soviets as liberators from ‘fascism’. Alfred Wegewitz, who was eighteen at the end of the war and returned to Fürstenwalde after a period of time as a POW in England, recalled that: ‘I had no hostile feelings but rather I assumed that they had liberated us from Hitler and that the Russians had played a substantial part and made big sacrifices’.⁹² Whilst these particular interviewees claimed that this shift was a result of experiences of positive personal encounters in the period which followed occupation, a more parsimonious explanation may be that these memories have also been shaped by forty years of pro-Soviet rhetoric in the GDR.

In sum, in the majority of cases pre-1945 anti-Soviet convictions and fears appear to have persisted. Interestingly, however, a number of the interviewees also claimed that whilst they generally had a negative opinion in the months following occupation, they also recalled personal anecdotes of positive encounters with individual Soviet soldiers. This spectrum of both stagnant and gradually shifting attitudes towards the Soviets underscores the complex nature of the Soviet-German dynamic after the immediate collapse of the Third Reich in 1945 and will be further

⁸⁸ Heinrich 01.09.09.

⁸⁹ Schmidt, 10.06.09.

⁹⁰ Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁹¹ Krause, 09.09.09.

⁹² Interview with Alfred Wegewitz on 7 September 2009.

explored in relation to subsequent patterns of political transition in part two of this thesis.

2.6 Sites of contested memory: official and unofficial commemoration of war dead

The reverberations of the collapse of National Socialism, and the ensuing Soviet occupation, also had another impact at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. In their attempts to punish the ‘fascist’ soldiers of the Third Reich and revise their legacy by rewriting the recent past and creating a new officially sanctioned and imposed historical discourse, the SMAD and later the SED aimed to not only limit the influence of National Socialism in the immediate post-war period, but also to legitimise the new political elite. Memory and power are closely linked, and as Irina Sherbakova has highlighted ‘for the Soviet regime, memory itself was intrinsically a serious threat’.⁹³ Similarly, Aleida and Jan Assmann maintain that ‘*Herrschaft braucht Herkunft*’ (rulers need roots) and thus rulers attempt to legitimize themselves retrospectively, and immortalize themselves prospectively, by producing their own version of past events and dominating official memory.⁹⁴ In this context, the construction of monuments, particularly those which honoured war dead, provided an opportunity not only to redefine and reshape the memory landscape, but also to transmit an entirely new official political discourse of Soviet victory and sacrifice in order to facilitate the transition from Nazism to socialism. As John Bodnar argues, ‘official culture relies on “dogmatic formalism” and the restatement of reality in ideal rather than complex or ambiguous terms’, while these memorials, Silke Satjukow contends, were intended to ‘simultaneously symbolise both mourning and triumph’.⁹⁵

During the Third Reich the German war dead had been placed on a heroic pedestal of bravery and sacrifice for the collective good of the German nation.⁹⁶ In

⁹³ Irina Sherbakova, ‘The Gulag in Memory’, in Perks and Thomson, *Oral History*, p. 521. On the related issue of how symbolic political representations and strategies of legitimation changed over the course of Soviet history see Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

⁹⁴ Aleida and Jan Assmann, *Das Gestern im Heute*, p. 124.

⁹⁵ John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 13-14. Silke Satjukow, *Befreiung? Die Ostdeutschen und 1945* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2009), p. 19.

⁹⁶ Black, *Death*, pp. 69-110.

this context, the newly prescribed policies were to perform a dual function. Not only were the new monuments to perform a didactic function for local East Germans; by removing German war dead from the official discourse and utilising Soviet built monuments as sites of officially sanctioned memory and annual rituals, it was intended to construct an entirely new metanarrative of the Third Reich by creating physical symbols of socialism's victory over 'fascism' (and of course Soviet hegemony).⁹⁷ As a result, various forms of Soviet war memorials sprung up all over East Germany in the immediate post-war period. In total, roughly 850 Soviet memorials and cemeteries, commemorating the lives of more than 420,000 Soviet citizens, continue to be scattered across most towns and villages of the former GDR, the most well-known of which is the elaborate Soviet war memorial in 'Treptower Park' in Berlin built in 1949.⁹⁸ The following section explores the grassroots responses to this revised form of war commemoration in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde in the immediate post-war period, amongst an interview cohort in which an average of two family members had been conscripted to the German military between 1939 and 1945, half of them to the Eastern front.⁹⁹

In Brandenburg/Havel, a cenotaph was erected at the 'Steintor' bridge in May 1945, next to which over 200 fallen Soviet soldiers were interred. It consisted of a ten metre high obelisk surrounded by four bronze statues representing the infantry, artillery, air force and tank drivers of the Red Army. Yet already by March 1946, the Russian town commander, Colonel P.A. Wolkow, complained to the local German town administration that the Red Army memorial was in a state of disarray and demanded that a local gardener be hired on a full time basis in order to ensure that the complex be kept to a 'high standard'.¹⁰⁰ By the summer of 1946, the wooden markers and memorials were made more permanent and replaced with marble and strong cement, and on 20 May 1949 the SMA officially handed over the Soviet

⁹⁷ Here 'sites of memory' is used in the traditional sense of that developed by Pierre Nora. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp. 7-24. An expanded form of this to include other forms of *Erinnerungsorte* will be further explored in chapter four.

⁹⁸ Satjukow, *Befreiung*, p. 41.

⁹⁹ Only three interviewees reported no conscriptions in their families.

¹⁰⁰ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.48/48, 'Oberbürgermeister - Schriftverkehr mit Abteilungen 1945-1948', p. 7. The SMAD had given orders in the spring of 1946 that local German administrations were to be responsible for the upkeep of Soviet memorials and cemeteries. See Satjukow, *Befreiung*, p. 42.

memorial and cemetery to the town of Brandenburg.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, in honour of the first annual ‘Day of Liberation’ on 8 May 1950, a rally was organised in Brandenburg/Havel which was attended by 12,000 people, after which a ceremony of wreath-laying took place at the Soviet memorial.¹⁰² The anniversary of 8 May subsequently became anchored in the newly founded GDR, following the political pattern of the Soviet’s victory celebrations, and until 1989 the local Soviet memorial was utilised as a site of ritualised remembrance and performance.¹⁰³ Such rituals, as Jan Assmann has shown, intended to ‘dramatize the interplay of the symbolic with the corporeal’.¹⁰⁴

The memories surrounding the presence and impact of this highly visible Soviet memorial and cemetery in the centre of Brandenburg/Havel ranged from positive to neutral to negative. Hans Gericke felt that it was justified that the Soviets erected a war memorial because ‘those soldiers had also lost their lives’.¹⁰⁵ Former Hitler Youth member Paul Gärtner, who was fourteen in 1945 and later became an ardent SED member, also stated that he viewed the memorial as positive and was grateful to all the young Soviet soldiers who had given their lives to free Germany from National Socialism: ‘It was emotional for me to honour the people who fell in Brandenburg/Havel [...] we Germans weren’t in the position to shake off the fascist yoke’.¹⁰⁶

Others perceived the presence of the cenotaph with mixed emotions, emphasising the asymmetric commemoration in the official discourse of the time. Kurt Michel felt ‘that they could honour the Russian dead but one can’t forget that ours need to be honoured too’.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Berol Kaiser-Reka, who had been in the *Jungvolk* and was fifteen at the end of the war, also felt that the Russian soldiers had the right to be honoured, but would have found it fairer to have a joint German-Soviet graveyard: ‘I mean every person has the right to be interred decently, and then

¹⁰¹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.87/87, ‘Sowjetische Befehle mit deutschen Übersetzungen der SMA der Provinz Brandenburg und der Verwaltung der Militärkommandantur der Stadt Brandenburg 1945-47’, p. 87.

¹⁰² BLHA, Rep. 202A/31, ‘Berichte und Mitteilungen des Amtes für Informationen 1950’, p. 168.

¹⁰³ See Satjukow, *Befreiung*.

¹⁰⁴ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural memory: Ten Studies*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ Gericke, 09.06.09.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Paul Gärtner on 27 June 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Michel, 10.06.09.

to be denied that just because he was on the wrong side which wasn't his fault'.¹⁰⁸ Wilhelm Fiedler, whose half-brother had been killed in the war, was also ambivalent, sympathising with the Russian soldiers who were buried in foreign soil, comparing it to the similar fate of 'so many German soldiers', while at the same time still feeling strong resentment towards 'the enemy army which had destroyed Brandenburg/Havel'.¹⁰⁹

The Soviet monument was also highly disputed amongst some interviewees in Brandenburg/Havel who deplored the attempted imposition of an official narrative which denigrated German soldiers as criminals. Gunther Dietrich viewed the Soviet war memorial as negative because he could not reconcile his own image of his father, who had been drafted into the *Volkssturm*, with the official Soviet doctrine and as a result he adamantly refused to attend the ceremonies at the local memorial:

My father wasn't a criminal, he was a poor sod who was driven to his death, just like the Russian soldiers too [...] unfortunately the Russian was always elevated [...] of course it's the Russian style to build such memorials, but to erect it in the town centre, we didn't think that was so nice.¹¹⁰

Dr Edith Dorn, whose cousin had been killed in the war, recalled the sense of passivity of the local German population when it came to the Soviet memorial in Brandenburg/Havel and the feeling of resentment that their own war dead were not being honoured:

People said 'they built a memorial for their own fallen and what about ours?' [...] Every year on the Day of Liberation all the factories had to march to the memorial and lay wreaths [...] thank God it didn't take long and one could quickly go home again [...] the tenor was as follows: it was tolerated, because one couldn't do anything about it.¹¹¹

These retrospective accounts thus illustrate a range of responses in relation to the erection of the cenotaph at the 'Steintor' bridge. In contrast to some of the above interviewees who claimed to have welcomed, or at least tolerated, the official celebration of Soviet sacrifices, the emphasis here is on the perceived impotence ('one couldn't do anything about it') and the frustration that their own relatives were vilified in the official doctrine and discourse ('my father wasn't a criminal').

Similar patterns of memory politics could also be observed in Fürstenwalde. Here a Soviet cemetery and war memorial was established in a large central square

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Berol Kaiser-Reka on 16 June 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Fiedler, 25.06.09.

¹¹⁰ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

¹¹¹ Dorn, 24.06.09.

in October 1949; roughly one hectare in size, there was an eight metre monument in the middle. The town of Fürstenwalde was to pay for the annual upkeep of the cemetery.¹¹² This particular square had a long and varied history of memorials, illustrating the plasticity of monuments, meaning and memory across ideological epochs, in which monuments were to function as ‘ideological signifiers’, with the intention of coercing viewers ‘to adopt the normative belief system’ they stood for.¹¹³ In the nineteenth century, this Fürstenwalde square had briefly been known as ‘Kaiserplatz’ due to the unveiling of the busts of Wilhelm I and Friedrich III in 1883. A short time later, war memorials were erected in honour of the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870-71 and the square was subsequently renamed ‘Denkmalsplatz’. From the years 1919 to 1933, the square was known as ‘Platz der Republik’, during which time an additional monument was added for the First World War. During the Third Reich, its previous name of ‘Denkmalsplatz’ was restored and it regularly became the site of National Socialist mass gatherings.¹¹⁴

After 1945, when 366 fallen Soviet soldiers were interred in the western section of the square, the cemetery was used regularly for celebrations, especially on ‘Liberation Day’ in May, and the anniversaries of the October Revolution in November, when mass gatherings took place. The nineteenth century war memorial was torn down, while the spire monument from the First World War received a new inscription honouring the victims of the Third Reich, with the square receiving the new name of ‘Platz der Opfer des Faschismus’.¹¹⁵ The square was later renamed ‘Ottomar-Geschke-Platz’ after the Fürstenwalde born communist.

Here too, similar to Brandenburg/Havel, the reaction to the visible presence of a difficult past was tangible in the interviews. Some, such as Ulla Beck and Erika Schulz, recalled the monument and cemetery in neutral terms, while Carmen Jung was also neutral, remarking ‘one passed by it’.¹¹⁶ Others, such as Alfred Wegewitz, recalled how he had mixed feelings on the monument, seeing it as ‘part of the power dynamic of a dictatorship’ and ‘tacky’, while at the same time acknowledging that

¹¹² KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2169, ‘Dolmetscher/ Übersetzungsarbeiten 1945-50’, no pag.

¹¹³ Ladina Bezzola Lambert and Andrea Ochsner, eds., *Moment to Monument: The Making and Unmaking of Cultural Significance* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009), p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Regina Scheer, *Der Umgang mit den Denkmälern. Eine Recherche in Brandenburg* (Brandenburg: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Forschung und Kultur des Landes Brandenburg, 2003), p. 56.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

¹¹⁶ Beck, 27.08.09., Schulz, 28.08.09., Jung, 09.09.09.

the Russian war dead deserved to be remembered.¹¹⁷ Others entirely rejected the official state discourse and perceived the symbolic meaning of the monument as problematic. Gertrud Hirsch felt that the Russian soldiers were unimportant for the local Fürstenwalde population.¹¹⁸ Christine Küster felt it was wrong that graves for the Second World War soldiers did not exist and how it was a ‘disgrace’ that the new Soviet graveyard was placed where the old war dead monument from the *Kaiser* period had stood claiming that: ‘I must say that even the comrades didn’t think it was good’.¹¹⁹ In contrast, Wolfgang Heinrich, later an ardent SED supporter, felt that it was events post-1990 which were negative and stated that he was frustrated that the German graveyards and monuments were now getting ‘all the attention’, while the Russian monuments were being neglected: ‘That of course is the exact opposite of what prevailed in the GDR’.¹²⁰

Thus, with the clear exception of Wolfgang Heinrich, the predominant sentiment in the oral history interviews from Fürstenwalde was one of relative emotional detachment toward the Soviet soldiers themselves, whilst the manner in which they were commemorated garnered a stronger emotional reaction. Particularly in Fürstenwalde, where by knocking down one monument and altering the inscription on another, the new Soviet memorial had, quite literally, usurped the previous German commemorative site for those who had died in the Prussian wars against Denmark, Austria and France as well as those who lost their lives in the First World War, the resentment of some respondents was palpable. Moreover, a number of the interviewees claimed that the fallen German soldiers from the *Kaiser* period, some of whom had been buried at the memorial site, had been publicly disinterred by the local Soviet troops before interring the Soviet war dead in their place. By doing so, the occupiers were perceived to be not only neglecting the memory of German soldiers of the Second World War like in Brandenburg/Havel, but also to be deeply disrespecting the burial site of some of Fürstenwalde’s ancestors. As Monica Black has shown, ‘the practices of death are embedded within a complex web of values, attitudes, and sensibilities’ that ‘allow individuals to know, almost unconsciously, what to do and *what not to do* where the dead are concerned’.¹²¹ Here, the new

¹¹⁷ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

¹¹⁸ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

¹¹⁹ Küster, 01.09.09.

¹²⁰ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

¹²¹ Black, *Death*, p. 2.

Soviet memorial was clearly perceived by many of the respondents to be crossing the line of ‘what not to do’ with German war dead, thereby alienating a proportion of locals and preventing them from personally engaging with the tragic fate simultaneously suffered by so many young Soviet soldiers.

Likewise, the archival evidence suggests that the controversial nature of the Soviet monuments, as well as the associated ritualised memory practices and ceremonies, reinforced a sense of contested victimhood amongst elements of the East German population. For instance, a report from the Brandenburg Ministry for Information to the Brandenburg Minister President from 23 February 1950 on the ‘Day of the Soviet Army’ noted that during the laying of wreaths ‘there were once again people who were of the opinion that one should also honour the German war dead’.¹²² Similarly, in May 1950 in the Saxon village of Friedersdorf, wreaths which had been laid in the local Soviet ‘heroes-cemetery’ had been removed at night and strewn across the road, reflecting Alf Lüdtke’s observation that ‘commemorations at the same time stimulate and conceal anti-commemoration’.¹²³ Similarly, Jan Assmann argues that politicised forms of remembering often transcend into ‘irreconcilable, mutually opposed memories of the winners and losers’.¹²⁴ This was particularly palpable in post-war East Germany where the socialist army were victorious and honourable, while the ‘fascist’ army were clearly defeated and their soldiers were thereby politically and morally discredited.

Yet, given that twelve of the interviewees had lost relatives in the war, and the remainder knew friends or neighbours who had fallen, how did they respond to the omission of German war dead from the officially prescribed commemorative politics in post-war East Germany? In fact, the retrospective accounts indicate that there was a wide range of reactions to the elimination of German war dead from the official discourse. Some respondents who later enthusiastically supported the new dominant ideology in the GDR claimed that the issue was no longer salient after 1945. Paul Gärtner, despite the fact that his father had fought on the Eastern front, proudly recalled how in Brandenburg/Havel ‘we had antifascist days of

¹²² BLHA, Rep. 202A/31, p. 52.

¹²³ Alf Lüdtke, ‘Histories of Mourning: Flowers and Stones for the War Dead, Confusion for the Living - Vignettes from East and West Germany’, in *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations*, ed. by Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (London: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 149-179 (p. 174). See also SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, ‘Band 3 - Berichte vom Landesverband NDPD Brandenburg 1950’, p. 96.

¹²⁴ Jan Assmann, *Religion*, p. 7.

remembrance, of the liberation from fascism in 1945', stating that 'no-one occupied themselves' with German war dead.¹²⁵ Likewise, in Fürstenwalde, Wolfgang Heinrich, whose father had also fought in the war, now felt that 'there were no monuments erected for the soldiers who took part in the fascist war against other nations [...] and it did not engender any resistance amongst the population'.¹²⁶ This retrospective evidence suggests that at times the official Soviet and SED doctrine may have been successful in influencing and shaping attitudes at grassroots level.

In other instances, interviewees described how they and their families acquiesced to the officially prescribed norms, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Wolfgang Fried, whose father had died on the Eastern front, recalled that his mother did not inscribe his father's name on the family gravestone because he was a soldier, thereby essentially eliminating him from official family history.¹²⁷ In other cases, it was the state authorities that physically eliminated the graves. Gunther Dietrich, whose father had been killed in the *Volkssturm* in Brandenburg/Havel, remembered how for ten years after the war ended he and his mother would visit his father's final resting place in a mass grave in a *Lazarett* cemetery where his name had been marked on a wooden cross: 'and then one day everything was gone – my mother was shocked'.¹²⁸

These actions were in line with general state policy throughout the GDR which continually attempted to minimise any form of public commemoration of German war dead. It was only in the Halbe cemetery in Brandenburg, which was established in the early 1950s at the site of a bloody battle at the end of the war and which would remain the only German military cemetery within the GDR, where a commemorative compromise was reached.¹²⁹ Yet Alf Lüdtke has shown that even in Halbe public acts of mourning were tightly regulated, as right until the late 1980s the laying of wreaths at individual graves was banned.¹³⁰ These policies illustrate the long-term persistence of a simplified official victim-perpetrator dichotomy not just in the immediate post-war period, but also throughout the lifetime of the GDR.

¹²⁵ Gärtner, 27.06.09.

¹²⁶ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

¹²⁷ Fried, 25.06.09.

¹²⁸ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

¹²⁹ Black, *Death*, pp. 191-197, 276. Halbe was established as a compromise – on the one hand, the state wanted to discourage commemoration but, on the other hand, they also aimed to dispel the myth that German dead were in Soviet camps and would return.

¹³⁰ Alf Lüdtke, *Histories*, pp. 153-4.

However, the oral history material provides evidence that this official discourse did not necessarily successfully penetrate all aspects of society in Brandenburg, as grassroots strategies and responses developed which served to somewhat moderate and shape the impact of Soviet policy on individual lives. It appears that particularly for a generation which had been exposed to high levels of various forms of violence both before and after 1945, that the question of honouring their own dead developed as a deeply emotive issue for many of the interviewees, despite, or perhaps also because of, the fact that it was not sanctioned in the post-war political context. As a result, various forms of what Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have termed ‘arenas of articulation’ existed which in some cases appear to have included the wider community and groups of friends, whilst in other cases these arenas of articulation seem to have been restricted to family networks.¹³¹

In this context, one quarter of the interviewees felt that one could openly talk about the German war dead within their localities in the post-war period and many of the interviewees painted a picture of a strong and supportive community spirit which appears to have provided an arena for the articulation of unofficial memories of the German war-dead. For instance, Gertrud Hirsch recalled how the widows and the orphans of those soldiers who had died were treated with sympathy, ‘just like after the First World War’ and were supported by the local community.¹³² Likewise, this support also appears to have extended to the families of those soldiers who remained missing after 1945. Christine Küster recalled that people openly spoke about what may have happened to those men who had not returned, including the unknown whereabouts of her own missing grandfather.¹³³ Furthermore, the evidence also suggests that when men were missing in action, unofficial group rituals developed at a grassroots level in which grieving relatives sought support from fortune tellers and the occult world. For instance, Ulla Beck remembered how both of her aunts, similar to many other local women, used superstitious tricks and tarot cards to discover whether their husbands were still alive. They were advised to:

[...] place down a photo of him, tear out a strand of hair and dangle their wedding ring over the photo, and if the ring would start to oscillate that

¹³¹ These refer to those ‘socio-political spaces within which social actors advance claims for the recognition of their specific war memories’. They maintain that ‘the articulation of memory involves struggles to extend, or alternatively to limit, the arenas within which specific memories are able to circulate, and hence make claims for recognition’. Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 17.

¹³² Hirsch, 27.08.09.

¹³³ Küster, 01.09.09.

would mean that he is still alive [...] One also went to the fortune-teller quite often [...] the times were like that [...] one still wanted to somehow have hope.¹³⁴

Such unofficial ritual acts of turning to the occult to receive news to fill the vacuum created by a lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of family members appear to have been popular throughout the Soviet sector, and ran counter to the official attempts to establish newly prescribed public rituals which were to remember the Soviet, and not the German war dead, in local Brandenburg communities.¹³⁵

This preoccupation with the German war dead appears to have also been manifest in the unofficial tending of German soldiers' graves in the locality, thereby indirectly defying the norms prescribed in the new official discourse. For instance, Wilhelm Fiedler claimed that despite the lack of officially sanctioned war graves, private war graves existed in the cemetery in Brandenburg/Havel which were cared for by families.¹³⁶ Similarly, in Fürstenwalde, Alfred Wegewitz maintained that there were German war graves in a cemetery in the north of the town in which Walter Ulbricht's brother was said to have been buried. According to Wegewitz, on one occasion even Ulbricht himself came personally to pay his respects.¹³⁷ In addition to the unofficial tending of German soldiers' graves in the locality, it appears that in some cases relatives exhibited a strong tenacity to discover the graves of their loved ones. For instance, Reinhold Rösner recalled that for many years his mother attempted, via the French church, to get information on her fallen son, finally managing to receive photographs of her son's grave in the 1960s.¹³⁸ These retrospective memories appear to support Frank Biess's findings that a collective sense of identification with missing soldiers, 'prevented many ordinary East Germans from cutting emotional ties'.¹³⁹ Similarly, these particular interviewees claimed that a collective sense of identification and connection to the dead and missing German soldiers remained extremely salient within communities for many years and could be openly talked about, despite the fact that the GDR state attempted to enforce an official discourse which elevated Soviet sacrifice.

¹³⁴ Beck, 27.08.09.

¹³⁵ Black, *Death*. On séances and spiritual mediums see p. 64 and on the consultation of fortune-tellers see p. 174.

¹³⁶ Fiedler, 25.06.09.

¹³⁷ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

¹³⁸ Rösner, 10.09.09.

¹³⁹ Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 197.

In contrast to these perceptions of the degree of latitude which existed within communities to mourn their dead despite the new official discourse, half of the interviewees instead emphasised recollections of the strong political constraints which developed in the post-war period in this regard. This group of interviewees claimed instead that grieving for their war dead was restricted to the arena of articulation of the familial and personal sphere. Dr Edith Dorn, who had lost one of her four conscripted cousins in the war, felt that people only cried in private, with the dead soldiers being viewed as victims, not perpetrators: ‘I have to be honest we did not view them as war criminals, we saw them as victims and that they had been lured’.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Arnold Schulze, who had lost two uncles and three cousins in the war, also recalled that they continued to be mourned within families, while Alfred Wegewitz also agreed that mourning was a private affair which took place all the time: ‘That mourning took place within the family and that the fallen soldiers were spoken about, that was always the case’.¹⁴¹ Likewise, Carmen Jung, who had lost her father and three cousins in the war, also recalled that the issue of German war dead was addressed ‘in a conscious way in the family’.¹⁴²

The fact that the memory of the dead was kept alive in families, particularly those who had lost loved ones in the war, is not all that surprising. However, in doing so, as Frank Biess has argued, ‘many East Germans flouted the official boundaries between “citizens” and “criminals”’.¹⁴³ Therefore, the evidence from the oral history interviews suggest that counteraction to the officially imposed historical discourse of Soviet suffering and sacrifice created unofficial counter-memories at a grassroots level, which, even if they were pushed into an increasingly personal sphere, still remained salient to the present day. Likewise, Ashplant, Dawson and Roper maintain that ‘even where there is direct and pervasive control of war commemoration from above in authoritarian societies, this may serve to preserve private memory as a counter-force’.¹⁴⁴ As the East German Jewish sociologist Irene Runge recalled in 2000:

The relatives of my childhood friends, and even teachers in the early 1950s would chat now and again about the ‘good old days and about experiences as a soldier’. ‘My adults’ responded in a sensitive manner, and I was only to

¹⁴⁰ Dorn, 24.06.09.

¹⁴¹ Schulze, 02.09.09. Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

¹⁴² Jung, 09.09.09.

¹⁴³ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 197.

¹⁴⁴ Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 30.

play with people of my kind. It was not befitting to be in other people's apartments where photos of men in uniforms graced the sideboards.¹⁴⁵

In fact, Jewish cemeteries were also neglected in favour of Soviet victims of Third Reich violence.¹⁴⁶ In Fürstenwalde, where 195 Jewish residents had still lived in 1933 and where a Jewish cemetery had existed since 1829, some initial attempts at renovation had taken place in 1947.¹⁴⁷ Yet it was only in 1988, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the November pogrom, that an official plaque was finally erected which remembered the Jewish victims of Nazism.¹⁴⁸ In Brandenburg/Havel, where 401 Jewish residents had lived in 1933, some local initiatives could also be observed to commemorate the Jewish victims of Nazism, but in general such attempts remained reserved.¹⁴⁹ The memory of Jews was not just largely neglected for many decades in official state discourse; it was also secondary to many people at a grassroots level in these years. As Richard Bessel has argued: 'However tragic the plight of the Jews, it was rather marginal to the concerns of most Germans in 1945, particularly those who themselves were uprooted and who remained preoccupied with their own problems'.¹⁵⁰

This lack of commemoration of Jewish victims is also reflected in the oral history interviews where the majority considered themselves to have been removed from, and passive, in local anti-Semitic developments prior to 1945. Carmen Jung recalled that 'this whole Jewish thing here, I didn't really realise it [...] I was still too small'.¹⁵¹ Likewise, Gunther Dietrich recalled 'the night of terror against the Jews we did experience that, but more at the periphery'.¹⁵² In the wake of the violence and mass death experienced by so many millions of people as a result of the actions of the Third Reich, it appears that many individuals in Brandenburg were so concerned

¹⁴⁵ Irene Runge, 'Sind Einsichten Ansichtssache? Oder: Das Verkennen der jüdischen Frage', in *Rassismus, Faschismus, Antifaschismus- Forschungen und Betrachtungen: Gewidmet Kurt Pätzold zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Manfred Weißbecker and Reinhard Kühnl (Köln: PapyRossa Verlag, 2000), p. 358.

¹⁴⁶ On the history of Jewish cemeteries in the GDR see Michael Brocke, Eckehart Ruthenberg and Kai Uwe Schulenburg, *Stein und Name: die jüdischen Friedhöfe in Ostdeutschland (neue Bundesländer/DDR und Berlin)* (Berlin: Inst. Kirche und Judentum, 1994).

¹⁴⁷ On 11 November 1947 the mayor of Fürstenwalde wrote to local former 'active' NSDAP members informing them that the Fürstenwalde town council had unanimously decided that the local active Nazis would carry the financial cost to fix and tidy up the Jewish cemetery in the Frankfurterstraße. A sum of money was named which was to be paid in two weeks. The payment was said to be seen as a 'voluntary reparation'. See KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/106, 'Entnazifizierung 1945', no pag.

¹⁴⁸ Scheer, *Denkmälern*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁹ Demps, *Die Provinz Brandenburg*, p. 625.

¹⁵⁰ Bessel, *Germany*, p. 270.

¹⁵¹ Jung, 09.09.09.

¹⁵² Dietrich, 11.06.09.

with their own immediate personal plight, that it left little room for a wider confrontation with notions of collective guilt at the crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* in the east (and the west), as well as the horrific proportions of the Holocaust.

As a consequence, it seems that the utilisation of soldiers' monuments as a mnemonic tool to create a revised historical discourse in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde often had limited success amongst individuals of this particular age cohort, who were old enough to have made their own personal and emotional experiences. The Soviet policy on this matter diverged so radically from the needs at the grassroots level to mourn their loved ones that the administration's attempt to impose a new, officially sanctioned metanarrative of heroes and villains served to instead alienate a substantial proportion of individuals, forcing many of these issues into the personal sphere where they continued to remain salient. Nonetheless, despite the fact that some of these issues may have remained salient at a grassroots level in Brandenburg, the local population was ultimately unable to alter the imposition of these monuments and associated official discourse in the public sphere.

2.7 Conclusion

The initial wave of Soviet retaliatory violence and punitive measures which greeted the majority of the grassroots population in Brandenburg in 1945 marked the first stage of the post-war political transition. The existential threat of starvation and homelessness, combined with the freshly inverted power dynamic between occupiers and occupied, meant that the room for manoeuvre available to the grassroots population to respond to Soviet incursions was extremely restricted and generally elicited feelings of passivity and victimhood. The impact of these experiences of forced subordination and loss of control in turn often led to the eclipsing of German crimes under National Socialism as people themselves now struggled to survive. Whilst grassroots attempts were made to somewhat moderate the immediate impact of punitive Soviet measures on their lives, particularly as people desperately struggled to survive and defend their own interests, they were nonetheless unable to successfully challenge the manner in which Soviet punitive measures were implemented in the immediate post-war period. However, whilst the grassroots populace could not change the manner in which these particular punitive policies

were implemented, the persistence of anti-Soviet attitudes and counter-memories of war and defeat had implications for the SED's attempt to politically integrate grassroots Brandenburgers in subsequent years.¹⁵³ These will be explored in further detail in part two of this study.

¹⁵³ See also Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 224-25.

Chapter III: Grassroots responses to NKVD activities in the post-war period

3.1 Introduction

In addition to the punitive Soviet measures explored in the previous chapter, in 1945 the Soviet secret police, ‘The People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs’ (NKVD), rapidly established a network of special camps and operative prisons across East Germany in order to remove ‘fascist elements’ from the public sphere. This chapter examines the local impact and the ways in which grassroots responses to these Soviet policies attempted to challenge the imposition of these punitive measures by the NKVD.

Since the first autobiographical texts of former NKVD prisoners appeared in West Germany in the 1950s, this genre has held a prominent position within this research field, and as a consequence has often been rather emotive and politicised.¹ In the last two decades, much of the historiographical literature has emphasised the structural aspects of NKVD operations focusing particularly on the internal workings of the special camps. For instance, in the well-known anthology by Mironenko, Niethammer and Plato the contributors used a combination of Soviet documents and eye-witness accounts to reconstruct internal camp life and to explore the network of NKVD activity across the Soviet zone.² Furthermore, much of the emphasis to date has been on the former NKVD operations in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and to a lesser extent Bautzen, and the treatment, or lack thereof, of the competing memory of these prisoners in GDR commemorative policies.

Rather than examining the more well-known NKVD camps, this chapter focuses on NKVD institutions in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. Some local

¹ For an overview of the autobiographies of former NKVD prisoners which have appeared over the decades see Bettina Greiner, *Verdrängter Terror. Geschichte und Wahrnehmung sowjetischer Speziallager in Deutschland* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), pp. 377-458.

² *Sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland 1945 bis 1950: Band 1, Studien und Berichte*, by Alexander von Plato, Sergej Mironenko, Lutz Niethammer (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998). A second volume with documentary evidence was also published. For a historiographical overview on special camps prior to the appearance of this anthology in 1998 see Bodo Ritscher, ‘Die NKVD/MWD- “Speziallager” in Deutschland. Anmerkungen zu einem Forschungsgegenstand’, in *Die geteilte Vergangenheit: Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, ed. by Jürgen Danyel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. 163-179.

studies have already appeared, yet to date these have focused on the internal workings of the camps and prisons and have neglected the impact of these operations on the surrounding communities as well as local responses.³ This chapter also utilises eye-witness accounts from three of the oral history interviewees who were themselves imprisoned by the NKVD. In addition, it also aims to adopt a different perspective by exploring the interactions between these institutions and their local surroundings in Brandenburg and highlighting the grassroots responses of bystanders to the camps and prisons. In doing so, it attempts to build on some of the studies of the Third Reich which have explored the issue of bystanders in relation to concentration camps, but which have thus far been largely unexplored in similar studies of post-1945 East Germany.⁴ Yet in focusing the attention on bystanders, this chapter does not aspire to provide a comprehensive account of the infrastructural and practical links between the NKVD institutions and surrounding communities on a daily basis.

The first part of this chapter explores the impact of the physical presence of these NKVD institutions as well as the repercussions of arrests amongst bystanders. It then considers some of the experiences and memories of the three local Fürstenwalde interviewees who were themselves arrested by the NKVD in 1945 and assesses the insights which these provide about how the camp interacted with its locality. Following this, grassroots public responses to this punitive Soviet measure will be examined and the room for manoeuvre available to actors in this context will be explored. Lastly, the chapter addresses the issue of the integration of internees into East German society post release as well as the role and the legacy of the NKVD institutions both in the GDR and in the present day in order to illustrate some of the current political discourses which may have had a potential impact on the manner in

³ See, for example, Renate Lipinsky and Jan Lipinsky, *Die Straße, die in den Tod führte: Zur Geschichte des Speziallagers Nr. 5 Ketschendorf/Fürstenwalde* (Leverkusen: Kremer-Verlag, 1999).

⁴ See, for instance, Gordon Horwitz, *In the Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen* (London: I.B. Tauris&Co. Ltd, 1991) and Jens Schley, *Nachbar Buchenwald: Die Stadt Weimar und ihr Konzentrationslager 1937-1945* (Köln: Boehlau, 1999). For a more recent survey of the historiography of Nazi camps in their local social context, see Karola Fings, 'The public face of camps', in *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories*, ed. by Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 108-126. Helga Schatz's examination of the perception of the East German administration, the SED and some petitioners in Saxony is a notable exception to this, however this takes place without the use of specific case study towns or oral history interviews. Helga Schatz, 'Die gesellschaftliche Wahrnehmung der sowjetischen "Speziallager" in der Nachkriegszeit', in *Internierungspraxis in Ost- und Westdeutschland nach 1945: Eine Fachtagung*, ed. by Renate Knigge-Tesche, Peter Reif-Spirek and Bodo Ritscher (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Hessen, 1993), pp. 90-110.

which the oral history interviewees may recall and represent their memories in the present day.

3.2 Background of NKVD internment camps and operative prisons in post-war East Germany

While the occupation of East Germany by the Soviet Army was proceeding, Lavrenty Beria, the head of the NKVD, established a network of special camps and operative prisons through Order no. 315 on 18 April 1945.⁵ With this order a separate administration, ‘The Department of NKVD Special Camps of the USSR in Germany’, was established, which was under the direct control of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior.⁶ This NKVD network consisted of an extensive series of small operative prisons, a number of bigger special prisons and ten large special camps numbered 1-10: Mühlberg, Buchenwald, Hohenschönhausen (Berlin), Bautzen, Ketschendorf (Fürstenwalde), Jamlitz (Lieberose), Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg, Torgau, Neubrandenburg and Werneuchen (Weesow). These institutions were in operation for almost five years with the last camps dissolved in March 1950. Yet they were not formally acknowledged until 1990 and were to become a ‘blank spot’ in the official discourse and history writing in the GDR.⁷

The NKVD institutions had been established with the official intention of interning NSDAP and state functionaries as well as others deemed a threat to the occupying forces, and, according to Bettina Greiner, functioned as a form of ‘political prophylaxis’, or collective punishment which was justified on the basis of both real and perceived security risks.⁸ There is substantial evidence which suggests that a proportion of the resulting prisoners had indeed been low-ranking NSDAP

⁵ Under Lavrenty Beria, the NKVD established offices in the Soviet zone that operated independently of the military government. Naimark, *Russians*, p. 25. In March 1946 the Soviet government was restructured and the People's Commissariats were re-designated as Ministries. Accordingly, the NKVD of the USSR was renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). As the special camps kept the name of their original founders, they are referred to as NKVD special camps in this study. On the post-war activities of Soviet secret service organs, including a large number of translated documents from Russian archives, see also Jan Foitzik and Nikita W. Petrow, *Die sowjetischen Geheimdienste in der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1953* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009).

⁶ Eva Ochs, “Heute kann ich das ja sagen”: *Lagererfahrungen von Insassen sowjetischer Speziallager in der SBZ/DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), pp. 3-4.

⁷ ‘Blank spot’ is in reference to the colloquial German phrase ‘Ein weißer Fleck auf der Landkarte’, a metaphor for an area which has not been investigated or explored. This term is often used by both former prisoners as well as historians in reference to the history of NKVD camps in East Germany.

⁸ Greiner, *Verdrängter Terror*, p. 85.

functionaries. However, there were also other reasons why local East Germans were interned by the NKVD. In particular, the legacy of Goebbels' idealised propaganda on a partisan *Werwolf* movement had an effect on the patterns of the waves of arrests of youths in 1945.⁹ Indeed, a large number of youths, predominantly innocent of partisan activities, were interned by the NKVD on this basis in 1945 and 1946. From 1946 onwards the internees also increasingly included perceived political opponents such as Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals, while Dieter Pohl contends that from 1947 onwards even certain SED members were not immune to arrest by the NKVD.¹⁰ Denunciations, as well as a significant level of arbitrary arrests, could also result in internment in an NKVD special camp, yet only a very small proportion of those imprisoned ever appeared in front of a Soviet military tribunal or were officially charged and tried. This lack of judicial transparency has led some observers such as Ulrich Herbert and Olaf Groehler to claim that the Soviets 'instrumentalised denazification', while Michael Klonovsky and Jan von Flocken maintain that this form of denazification was utilised in order to discredit thousands of opponents of Stalinism – the best way to discredit people in 1945 was 'to make Nazis out of them'.¹¹

These NKVD attempts to remove the Nazi political legacy, as well as other potential political opponents had the consequence that between 122,000 and 158,000 Germans were interned from May 1945 to March 1950.¹² Hermann Weber, utilising Soviet archival documents, concludes that 14,202 of these prisoners were later handed over to the GDR Ministry of the Interior, 12,770 people were brought to the USSR, a further 6,680 people were transferred to POW camps, 756 people were sentenced to death by military tribunals, 212 prisoners escaped and a total of 42,889

⁹ Despite a small number of incidents the *Werwolf* campaign was a short-lived phenomenon. Arno Rose, *Werwolf 1944-1945* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1980), pp. 97-100.

¹⁰ Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 86.

¹¹ Ulrich Herbert and Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1992), p. 19.

Michael Klonovsky and Jan von Flocken, *Stalins Lager in Deutschland 1945-1950: Dokumentation, Zeugenberichte* (München: DTV, 1993), pp. 13-14.

¹² Whilst many historians conservatively estimate around 122,000 prisoners, Günther Wieland, a former public prosecutor for the Attorney General of the GDR from 1963 to 1990, has concluded that the number is around 158,000. Günther Wieland, 'Die Ahndung von NS-Verbrechen in Ostdeutschland 1945-1990', in *DDR-Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung Ostdeutscher Strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen. Verfahrenregister und Dokumentenband*, ed. by C.F. Rüter (München: Saur Verlag, 2002), pp. 53-54.

prisoners died during this period.¹³ Similarly, Alexander von Plato has found that approximately 35% of the German internees did not survive imprisonment in the camps.¹⁴ In the context of Brandenburg, Dieter Pohl has found that the extent and scale of Soviet arrests has not yet been fully researched, but nonetheless contends that the number of Brandenburgers interned is certain to be in the tens of thousands.¹⁵

The post-war Brandenburg province was home to special camps no. 5 Ketschendorf, no. 6 Jamlitz, and no. 7 Weesow/Sachsenhausen, as well as a large number of smaller operative prisons. In the case of Fürstenwalde, the special camp no. 5 Ketschendorf was in operation from the end of April 1945 until early 1947. Established within a former housing complex for industrial workers of the 'Deutsche Kabelwerke' (DEKA), the camp lay at the outskirts of Fürstenwalde with the main Berlin to Frankfurt/Oder Autobahn running to its south. The perimeter of the makeshift camp consisted of guard towers as well as 2.5 metre high wooden and barbed wire fences. The internees ranged in age from 12 to 72 years. During the time that it was in operation, 4,620, or 44%, of the approximately 10,400 inmates died.¹⁶

Brandenburg/Havel had become notorious for its prison *Zuchthaus Brandenburg-Görden* both pre- and post-1945. During the Third Reich the large prison had housed political, religious and racial opponents, and over 2,500 prisoners were executed here.¹⁷ In addition to Erich Honecker, Fritz Lange, the future Lord Mayor of Brandenburg/Havel, was amongst the prisoners who were freed on the arrival of the Soviet Army in late April 1945. The prison was subsequently utilised by the NKVD and the Soviet military authorities to imprison suspected National Socialists and collaborators (predominantly from the Russian Liberation Army) until the late 1940s and executions as a result of rulings by the Soviet Military Tribunal

¹³ Hermann Weber in the introduction to Achim Kilian, *Einzuweisen zur völligen Isolierung: NKWD-Speziallager Mühlberg/Elbe 1945-1948* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 2000), pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ Alexander von Plato, 'Sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland 1945 bis 1950: Ergebnisse eines deutsch-russischen Kooperationsprojektes', in *Speziallager in der SBZ: Gedenkstätten mit 'doppelter Vergangenheit'*, ed. by Peter Reif-Spirek and Bodo Ritscher (Berlin: Christoph Links, 1999), p. 125.

¹⁵ Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 87.

¹⁶ The housing complex had originally only been built for 500 residents. KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung-Museum/757, 'Das "Speziallager Nr. 5 des NKWD" in Ketschendorf - Zwischenbericht für den "Runden Tisch" 26.04.1990', no pag. See Figures 4 and 5 in the Appendices.

¹⁷ See Walter Uhlmann, *Sterben um zu leben: Politische Gefangene im Zuchthaus Brandenburg-Görden 1933-1945* (Köln: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 1983).

were carried out here.¹⁸ In addition, an NKVD operative prison had also been established in a villa in Brandenburg/Havel's Neuendorfer Straße 89 in 1945.¹⁹ Known locally as the 'GPU Keller', after the Soviet secret police agency, it was here that local Brandenburgers who had been arrested were often interrogated for days or weeks before being sent to one of the NKVD special camps. In fact, although the name GPU existed only from 1922 until 1934, after which it was renamed NKVD, the continued popularity of the term 'GPU Keller' in the post-war period can perhaps be attributed to the 1942 propaganda film from the Nazi period with the same name.²⁰

3.3 Experiences and memories of the impact of post-war NKVD operations in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde

The immediate physical presence of NKVD operations in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde raises the question of how bystanders on the ground perceived and responded to this punitive measure. The large majority of the interviewees claimed to have known about the existence of NKVD camps and operative prisons at the time. In fact, a substantial number claimed to have known someone personally who was imprisoned by the NKVD in the post-war period, and many personal recollections of these waves of arrests in Fürstenwalde and Brandenburg/Havel still exist, with the memories taking a number of forms.

The interviewees all emphasised the perceived arbitrary nature of the waves of arrest during which friends, classmates, neighbours, community members and relatives randomly disappeared and the resulting impotence of local bystanders. For instance, Arnold Schulze recalled of his schoolmates in Fürstenwalde: 'it was often

¹⁸ The prison was handed over to the East German Ministry of the Interior in the late 1940s, who continued to use it to detain National Socialists, war criminals, political opponents, as well as ordinary criminals. After 1990, the prison was transferred to the Brandenburg Ministry for Justice and continues to operate to this day. See Günter Morsch and Sylvia de Pasquale, *Perspektiven für die Dokumentationsstelle Brandenburg. Beiträge zur Tagung in der Justizschule der Justizvollzugsanstalt Brandenburg am 29./30. Oktober 2002. Materialien der Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten 2* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004). Pohl, *Justiz*, pp. 85, 88. See Figure 2 in the Appendices for locations of NKVD activity in Brandenburg/Havel.

¹⁹ The villa had been built for an industrialist in 1895. It became the headquarters of the town's NKVD operative group from 1945 until 1950; after this it served as the offices of the district MfS until December 1989. Anne Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns: Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007), p. 157.

²⁰ Alexander von Plato, 'Zur Geschichte des sowjetischen Speziallagersystem in Deutschland: Einführung' in *Sowjetische Speziallager*, p. 62.

the case that someone was missing in the mornings: ‘Where is he gone?’ and someone would answer: ‘they arrested him at night’.²¹ Similarly, in Brandenburg/Havel, Dr Edith Dorn recalled that two girls from her class were arrested, as well as her best friend’s father, who never returned.²² In addition, many interviewees recalled not just the arrest of their own peers, but also local adult community members. For instance, Kurt Michel recalled that in the vicinity around Brandenburg/Havel many people were brought to camps, including the local teacher, headmaster, tailor and pig dealer:

They were picked up off the street. And sometimes you really had the feeling that the Russian commander said that he needed twelve more people and that then they could only find ten people [...] and then they just picked up two others to take their place.²³

In other cases, the arrests by the NKVD had an even more direct personal impact on families. Two of the interviewees, Kurt Michel and Dr Siegfried Reinke, had uncles who were imprisoned in Sachsenhausen after the war, while Gunther Dietrich and Arnold Schulze had cousins who were imprisoned by the NKVD.

In addition, both the oral history and local archival material provides evidence of the unsettling impact which the physical presence of NKVD institutions had at a grassroots level. In Fürstenwalde, the presence of NKVD special camp no. 5 had a significant impact on the surrounding community. For instance, Alfred Wegewitz recalled that its presence acted as a warning within the community: ‘the threat that you yourself could end up in the camp constantly hung over people’.²⁴ Carmen Jung recalled feeling utterly powerless in the face of NKVD operations, believing that there was little point in going to take a look ‘because one couldn’t help anyway’.²⁵

In Brandenburg/Havel, interestingly, no clear memory appeared to exist for the *Zuchthaus* in Brandenburg/Havel amongst the oral history interviewees. Gunther Dietrich only recalled the *Zuchthaus* playing an active role during the Third Reich, while Wilhelm Fiedler recalled that there was little known about what went on behind the walls in Görden after 1945.²⁶ Instead, it was the NKVD interrogative

²¹ Schulze, 02.09.09.

²² Dorn, 24.06.09.

²³ Michel, 10.06.09.

²⁴ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

²⁵ Jung, 09.09.09.

²⁶ Dietrich, 11.06.09. Fiedler, 25.06.09.

prison in the Neuendorfer Straße which emerged as a much more salient memory throughout the interviews.

This was most likely a consequence of the fact that the operative prison in the Neuendorfer Straße had a more visible presence near the town centre as well as housing predominantly local Brandenburg prisoners, therefore having a more immediate impact on the population. For instance, Wolfgang Fried, whose own home was directly behind the notorious street, recalled the occupation of the Neuendorfer Straße by the NKVD. He remembered how the building beside his home was boarded up and that his family was henceforth forbidden from opening their windows which were all made opaque with white paint.²⁷ Similarly, Dr Siegfried Reinke recalled that the windows of the building had been covered with bars:

I knew that the NKVD had their cellar in the Neuendorfer Straße and when I walked home from my girlfriend's house in the evenings, I deliberately made a big circle around the Neuendorfer Straße, because you didn't want to run into the drunken NKVD officers.²⁸

The oral history recollections of uncertainty created by punitive Soviet policies are also reflected in local archival material found across Brandenburg. An opinion report by the SED Lord Mayor Lange on 9 February 1946 noted that one of the persistent rumours circulating around Brandenburg/Havel was that 'all young people aged between 18-25 years were being transported to Siberia'.²⁹ Furthermore, in a different opinion report on 28 February 1946 on local popular opinion, Lange noted with concern:

Last week the NKVD has ordered the vacating of a number of the best houses in the town in the Neuendorfer Straße. The entire population, including the antifascists, are appalled by what is now being done with the buildings. The window frames are being ripped out, the windows are being bricked up, walls are being built and a Russian military prison is being created in the middle of the town.³⁰

This report by the SED Lord Mayor is telling of just how negatively both the population and even 'the antifascists' perceived these punitive Soviet policies to be at a grassroots level, while at the same time both the oral history and archival

²⁷ Fried, 25.06.09. Being a hobby photographer at the time, Herr Fried even managed to capture some of the bricked up windows of the NKVD operative prison. See Fig. 3 in the Appendices.

²⁸ Reinke, 23.06.09.

²⁹ SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292, p. 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

evidence underscore the impotence of both the populace as well as the new administration in the face of these developments.

This uneasy atmosphere caused some people to take action. For instance, in early 1946, in response to the rumour that the Red Army intended to arrest local youths, the mayor of Fürstenwalde's neighbouring town of Hangelsberg, Fritz R., had gathered together a number of local youngsters and transported them to the English and American zones in Berlin.³¹ Similarly, Dieter Pohl has found that the arrests by the Soviet occupation forces 'constituted the most severe intrusion into Brandenburg's political and social order after 1945'.³² In the case of Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, this intrusion was most starkly felt through the daily uncertainty created by the arrest of family members, school-friends and neighbours as well as through the confrontation with the physical presence of NKVD institutions within local communities. As a result, both the retrospective oral history accounts and the archival material suggest that the grassroots climate in the immediate post-war period amongst these bystanders in Brandenburg was marked by extreme unpredictability in which the range of possible responses to these punitive Soviet measures was extremely limited.

3.4 On the wrong side of the fence: local memories of NKVD imprisonment

Of the twenty individuals interviewed, three from Fürstenwalde had personally been imprisoned in various NKVD camps, experiencing the impact of Soviet punitive policies in a different manner to that of their contemporaries on the other side of the fence. All three interviewees emphasised the absolute shock experienced on their arrests in 1945. Erika Schulz was arrested on 27 June 1945 when she was seventeen years old, for refusing to fraternise with the local Russian Lieutenant in Fürstenwalde, and was interned in Ketschendorf, Jamlitz and Mühlberg special camps until July 1948:

I never thought that the Russian lieutenant would send me to the camp, he had so many women who were throwing themselves at him [...] and even if I

³¹ KALOS F/RdS/688, 'Allgemeines 1945-46', no pag.

³² Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 95.

had known that I would be sent to the camp, I still would have not gone to bed with that man.³³

Fritz Krause was also arrested in the summer of 1945 when he was fifteen years old and was imprisoned in Ketschendorf, Jamlitz and Buchenwald special camps until 19 January 1950:

They thought that we were partisans, for the *Werwolf* [...] I had been warned by an uncle in advance [...] but I said I wasn't a Hitler Youth leader [...] then it happened in the night from Sunday to Monday, and fourteen days in the GPU cellar [...] I was terribly scared, I had never been away from home before.³⁴

Reinhold Rösner was arrested on 13 June 1945 when he was sixteen, accused of blowing up a motorway bridge, and was interned in Ketschendorf and Neubrandenburg camps until 1948:

I had of course already heard from friends that arrests had taken place [...] and people were saying if you can get away, or hide [...] but I thought, hey its already June, the main wave of arrests after the war are finished [...] one already felt a little safer [...] and then one afternoon an open truck with three soldiers and an officer came.³⁵

All three interviewees were subsequently taken to the nearby Ketschendorf special camp where they were greeted by abysmal hygienic and living conditions as a result of extreme overcrowding. Despite the poor living conditions, the number of camp prisoners nonetheless continued to grow rapidly, increasing from 4,646 in August to over 8,600 in October 1945.³⁶ The interviewees recalled that food rations were minimal and that no additional clothing was provided. For instance, Reinhold Rösner recalled that:

The way I was arrested, with my short trousers, my short-sleeved shirt and my sandals [...] I lived like that in the camp in the winter also [...] for a time I wore my friend's underwear, he had been arrested on the same day as me and had died of pneumonia in the camp [...] his were in slightly better condition than mine because he had already been in the infirmary for such a long time.³⁷

Illness and death as a result of disease were ubiquitous in Ketschendorf. In 1945 alone, the number of prisoners in the infirmary increased from 620 in July, to over

³³ Schulz, 28.08.09.

³⁴ Krause, 09.09.09.

³⁵ Rösner, 10.09.09.

³⁶ Lutz Priß, 'Ketschendorf (Fürstenwalde) - Speziallager Nr. 5', in *Speziallager des NKWD: Sowjetische Internierungslager in Brandenburg 1945-1950*, ed. by Jörg Morré (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), 43-49 (pp. 44-45).

³⁷ Rösner, 10.09.09.

4,000 in November 1945.³⁸ Memories of disease and death are also strongly reflected in the oral history interviews. Fritz Krause recalled that:

From the window I could look over the camp fence and could see how the dead were buried. A huge hole was dug in the ground and then a truck full of approximately 50 to 55 to 60 corpses [...] every day burials took place.³⁹

The vividness of these recollections underscores the extent of the trauma experienced by the interviewees and the sense of utter helplessness in the face of imminent and persistent existential threats.

For those who managed to avoid the infirmary, life in the camp was monotonous, as the internees did not undergo any political re-education programmes nor were they permitted, with some rare exceptions, to work. NKVD regulations indicate that they instead intended to utilize the special camps to ‘completely isolate’ the prisoners from developments in the outside world.⁴⁰ Reinhold Rösner recalled that ‘one wasn’t allowed to do anything in the camp – one wasn’t allowed to write or read, there was nothing to do’.⁴¹ Erika Schulz also recalled: ‘Nothing! Nothing! That is the absurd thing, for all intents and purposes, one should have tried to somehow denazify the people’.⁴² Whilst such recollections suggest a sense of total bewilderment and frustration at the lack of any consistent denazification strategy on behalf of the Soviets, they perhaps also reflect and reinforce post-1989 debates on the arbitrary nature of arrests and Soviet internment which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Despite emphasising the arbitrary nature of their own arrests the three former internees did acknowledge that there were other prisoners who had indeed been active in the National Socialist regime. In fact, according to the Soviet administration, out of the 5,125 internees in Ketschendorf in October 1946, 2,313 had been NSDAP functionaries.⁴³ For instance, Reinhold Rösner remembered that: ‘of course there were also NSDAP members in the camp [...] we had chairmen of local farmer’s associations, we had factory managers, we also had journalists and detectives, but they were all small functionaries [...] there were no big Nazis’.⁴⁴ This

³⁸ Prieß, *Ketschendorf*, p. 46.

³⁹ Krause, 09.09.09.

⁴⁰ Jörg Morré, ‘Einleitung: Sowjetische Internierungslager in der SBZ’, in Morré, *Speziallager*, p. 14.

⁴¹ Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁴² Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁴³ Lutz Prieß, ‘Das Speziallager des NKVD Nr. 5 Ketschendorf’ in *Sowjetische Speziallager*, p. 355.

⁴⁴ Rösner, 10.09.09.

claim that it was only the ‘small Nazis’ who were exposed to the Soviet punitive policies in the camp is also supported by some historians such as Klonovsky and Flocken, who maintain that there were ‘rarely really important Nazis’ in these East German camps.⁴⁵

The sense of arbitrary justice, which was a consequence of the fact that a significant number of those imprisoned were either innocent prisoners or supposedly ‘only small Nazis’, was further heightened by the lack of transparency within the camp system. Communications with the wider world were also patchy and variable. Lutz Prieß maintains that family members fundamentally did not receive any notification from the NKVD as to the whereabouts of their loved ones, while Manfred Wille makes anecdotal reference to the utterance of a former resistance fighter, and SED member, who stated that ‘even with the Nazis at least his wife had known which KZ he was in’.⁴⁶ Similarly, Fritz Krause claimed that his parents, who lived less than three kilometres away in Fürstenwalde, knew nothing about the whereabouts of their son for three years.⁴⁷

In contrast, despite Soviet attempts to hermetically seal the prisoners away from the outside world, the two other interned interviewees claimed that they both made differing attempts to contact their parents, only a few kilometres away, from the other side of the Ketschendorf fence. Reinhold Rösner was able to secretly drop a written message from the truck during his transport to Ketschendorf: ‘the slip of paper was found, and because of that my mother knew where I was’. Consequently, in the initial weeks of his imprisonment, Reinhold Rösner claimed to have used an uncovered window to signal to his mother who, along with other relatives, would walk up and down the road outside of the camp trying to catch a glimpse of her son. Yet he was soon caught and henceforth the window was covered up.⁴⁸ This suggests that the actions of prisoners such as Reinhold Rösner forced the Soviet guards to respond by literally closing off ‘windows’ into the camp of which they had previously been unaware. Meanwhile, Erika Schulz attempted, along with other internees in Ketschendorf, to smuggle out messages in the false base of a waste bucket which was brought outside the camp. The operation, although it had

⁴⁵ Klonovsky et al., *Lager*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Prieß, *Ketschendorf*, p. 48. Manfred Wille, *Entnazifizierung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945-48* (Magdeburg: Helmuth-Block-Verlag, 1993), p. 165.

⁴⁷ Krause, 09.09.09.

⁴⁸ Rösner, 10.09.09.

apparently been successful in the past, was intercepted, and Erika Schulz, along with the others, was punished with thirty days in ‘the scratcher’.⁴⁹

Whilst Fritz Krause represented himself as an entirely passive prisoner in this regard, Reinhold Rösner’s and Erika Schulz’s testimonies suggest that some prisoners attempted to utilise any weakness, such as the uncovered window or the waste bucket, in the camp’s security system to their advantage. Even if their successes were only short-lived, it appears that these actions may have ensured that at least some information was transported to the bystanders in the surrounding community. However, the claim to have challenged Soviet authority may have also been a reflection of the interviewees’ attempts to present themselves in a more powerful role as NKVD prisoners than may actually have been the case and therefore needs to be interpreted with great caution.

3.5 Windows into the NKVD camp in Ketschendorf

Interestingly, despite attempts to officially screen the camps from the public eye, the oral history evidence from the bystanders also suggests that, especially in the early stages of the Ketschendorf camp, there were indeed some fleeting points of contact between the camp’s internal world and its external surroundings. In the case of Ketschendorf, particularly those living locally in Fürstenwalde appeared to have had a significant advantage over people from other regions when it came to getting information, however sparse. In fact, the oral history interviews provide evidence that in the case of Ketschendorf there were three main windows into the NKVD special camp no. 5 which existed between 1945 and 1947: the proximity of neighbouring houses, the mass burial ground and the occasional work details.

The first window into the camp was provided by the neighbouring houses close to the perimeter fence. Arnold Schulze recalled that his uncle lived close to the Ketschendorf camp ‘in the second last house in the old cable settlement’ and was therefore frequently able to identify his interned son through the ‘family whistle’ on the other side of the fence.⁵⁰ Christine Küster remembered how the garden of her friend, whose own father was interned, was very close to the Ketschendorf camp and was used as a meeting point for people to try to see into the camp and to get

⁴⁹ Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁵⁰ Schulze, 02.09.09.

information.⁵¹ The fact that groups such as these appear to have regularly congregated together to gather and disseminate information reflects perhaps both the desperation and resultant resourcefulness on behalf of some locals in their attempts to glean what knowledge they could about missing loved ones.

The second window into the camp, and incidentally also out of the camp, was provided by the burials which took place outside of the camp's perimeter. In Ketschendorf, the dead were buried in a small wooded area between the camp and the *Autobahn* which on occasion provided some of the locals in Fürstenwalde with a glimpse of what was happening on the other side of the fence. Christine Küster recalled in her interview:

The camp was fenced in with these watchtowers [...] one event which I experienced personally: it was talked about that many people had died there [...] my parents and I went by bicycle, it was actually quite illegal [...] there was still a path which locals used when they wanted to cross the motorway, and there was a small wood there that one had to pass through, it was already a little overgrown, and we went along the path [...] and there we saw a group of people who were digging, and we were really quiet [...] and then some people came and they were carrying stretchers [...] and they dropped the dead bodies into these pits.⁵²

Here the interviewee represents herself and her parents as brave and inquisitive actors. Despite having claimed to have heard that 'many people died there' and that their actions were 'illegal', they nonetheless ventured to the camp's perimeter in order to try and catch a glimpse of what went on inside. Whilst this retrospective account is perhaps somewhat idealised, this notion that some bystanders witnessed mass burials is also corroborated by the imprisoned Reinhold Rösner, who described how the burials provided a window in as well as out of the camp:

I was a member of the burial detail, I had to bury the dead out there in the wood [...] the motorway was nearby [...] and the barber that I had gone to before 1945 lived in the next village and he would walk to Ketschendorf early in the morning, around six or half six, and he would often see me early in the morning at the burials [...] he recognised me and went to my house [...] and because of this my mother knew that I was still alive.⁵³

These brief encounters provided the prisoner with a glimpse into his life before 1945, while it also presented bystanders, in this case the barber, with information which

⁵¹ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Rösner, 10.09.09.

they could pass on to others in the vicinity, thereby somewhat undermining the official taboo surrounding NKVD operations.

The third window into special camp no. 5 was provided by occasional prisoner work details. Given that her previous attempt at smuggling out a message had failed, Erika Schulz's parents believed that she had been taken to Siberia in the summer of 1945 and were unaware that she was in fact interned in the Ketschendorf camp, just three kilometres from her home. It was only in 1946 that they discovered by chance that their daughter was alive. She had been briefly allowed to leave the camp under armed guard with a group of other women to harvest potatoes and happened to be spotted by her aunt and her friends as she walked along the motorway behind the camp:

And I jumped out of the line and I shouted to her at the top of my voice 'Aunt Marie!!' The women all stopped and a Russian guard held a machine gun to my back, but my aunt had already recognised me and she turned around and went to find my parents; and after about an hour my father and mother appeared on bicycles. My mother spoke to the guards in Russian and bribed each of them with a bottle of schnapps and so they were content to let us sit down in the forest beside the camp and talk [...] And then on the second day we went out of the camp again to harvest potatoes, and you wouldn't believe what had happened within those twenty-four hours. That second morning there were everything from small cars to a large truck stopped on the side of the motorway, and they all appeared to have flat tyres. We thought this was all rather strange, but as we walked past the cars, people began whispering names to us from within the cars. One man searching for information about his sister whispered to us: 'Hildchen Schulze, Hildchen Schulze' and I said 'yes, she is in the camp, she is there and she is in good health'. Word had spread so quickly! Everyone was there and they had all pretended to get flat tyres – and no one could do anything to stop this. But there was a snitch in our group; and this particular woman reported everything to the Russians, and on the third day I was no longer allowed to leave the camp.⁵⁴

In retrospectively presenting the protagonist as a young and fearless agent who took action despite being threatened at gunpoint, while the Russian guards are portrayed as stereotypes who were content to be bribed with a bottle of spirits, the story exhibits certain clichés. Yet it also provides an insight into how rapidly information could apparently be spread in 1946, despite severe infrastructural difficulties and material shortages. The effectiveness of an informal network of communication in grassroots Brandenburg appears to be evidenced by the fact that already the

⁵⁴ Schulz, 28.08.09.

following day a large number of individuals supposedly managed to stage a collective break-down which the authorities were powerless to stop.

These informal channels of communication about NKVD prisoners also took others forms. Erika Schulz claimed that after this potato harvesting incident, the local bar which her parents owned in Fürstenwalde became a centre point for other parents whose children were also imprisoned, organically developing into an unofficial meeting place where they would discuss their worries as well as share information. Furthermore, she described how her father had contacts with the local rail workers in the town and appeared to manage to disseminate information to others about prisoner transports in cattle cars to other camps from 1947 onwards: 'Because of this my father became increasingly well-known and became a bit of a hero in everyone's eyes'.⁵⁵ Whilst Erika Schulz's retroactive accounts of her capable and resourceful father who subverted the desired taboo surrounding NKVD operations in Fürstenwalde are no doubt somewhat idealised, they nonetheless describe effective local networks of information which are also reflected by the reporting of the West Berlin 'Radio Broadcasting in the American Sector' (RIAS) and 'Combat Group against Inhumanity' (KgU) in the early post-war period.

At this time, the media in the Western zone had gradually begun to deal with the issue of internment camps in the Soviet zone. Yet given the early Cold War context, this reporting was tightly linked with its own political agenda.⁵⁶ According to Wolfram von Scheliha, in general there were very few reports in West German newspapers in the immediate post-war years on special camps due to a combination of foreign policy considerations, a general lack of information, as well as the fact that the Western allies themselves had camps in the former concentration camps of Dachau, Esterwegen and Neuengamme after 1945. Nevertheless, Scheliha maintains that with the establishment of the anti-communist KgU in West Berlin in 1948, the system of information surrounding the camps was professionalised.⁵⁷ The KgU was

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Wolfram von Scheliha, 'Die sowjetischen Speziallager- ein Symbol des kommunistischen Unrechts in der publizistischen Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ost und West bis zum Bau der Berliner Mauer 1961', in *Instrumentalisierung, Verdrängung, Aufarbeitung: Die sowjetischen Speziallager in der gesellschaftlichen Wahrnehmung 1945 bis heute*, ed. by Petra Haustein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), pp. 14, 16.

⁵⁷ Scheliha, *Speziallager*, p. 17. For a comparative discussion of the Allied post-war internment camps see Lutz Niethammer, 'Alliierte Internierungslager in Deutschland nach 1945. Vergleich und offene Fragen', in *Von der Aufgabe der Freiheit: Politische Verantwortung und bürgerliche*

not only anti-Soviet and anti-communist, but was also fiercely critical of the special camps and it chiefly highlighted the apparently arbitrary nature of arrests in the Soviet zone, with the intention of destabilising the political system in East Germany.⁵⁸ In addition, the RIAS station played an important role in the dissemination of information about NKVD operations, as it worked in close cooperation with the KGU at this time.⁵⁹

In those areas of the Eastern zone where RIAS could be received, the oral history evidence suggests that its broadcasts appeared to provide information on missing people and were actively used as a method of communication. These windows into NKVD operations proved particularly valuable for those people who did not live in the immediate vicinity of the camps and did not have the same regular glimpse into camp life as the bystanders appear to have had in Fürstenwalde. Dr Siegfried Reinke from Brandenburg/Havel recalled the role of Western media in relation to his uncle imprisoned in Sachsenhausen:

Every night on the radio at 12 a.m. the ‘Combat Group against Inhumanity’ announced the names of those people who had died in Sachsenhausen [...] and one night my uncle’s name was read out and I was the one who was able to give my relatives in Pomerania the news that he had died [...] it was me who always had to listen at 12 a.m. because we could receive West Berlin radio, while my relatives could not.⁶⁰

The evidence suggests that these small windows in and out of the NKVD operations were utilised to the fullest extent possible at a grassroots level in order to acquire as well as redistribute information. Although these networks were by definition informal, they provide evidence of effective grassroots mobilisation and network creation and highlight the small room for manoeuvre available to certain local East Germans within a political process which was intended to pacify, intimidate and disempower.

Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Hans Mommsen zum 5. November 1995, ed. by Christian Jansen et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), pp. 469-492.

⁵⁸ Andrew H. Beattie, *Innocent victims of Red KZs? West German Representations of Soviet Internment 1945-55*, (European University Institute Working Papers, Max Weber Programme 2007/39), p. 4. Greiner, *Verdrängter Terror*, p. 346. See also Roger Engelmann, ‘Die Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit’, in *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR* ed. by Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 183-199.

⁵⁹ Scheliha, *Speziallager*, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁰ Reinke, 23.06.09.

3.6 Written complaints to the authorities

The manner in which some locals in Brandenburg responded to NKVD incursions also took other forms. Despite official denials in the East German media in August 1946 at Western accounts of protesting parents on the arrest of local youths in the Brandenburg Spreewald region, the archival evidence illustrates that a significant number of relatives chose to actively complain to the East German authorities about the arrest of their family members by the NKVD.⁶¹ One of the most frequent addressees of these grassroots appeals was Dr Karl Steinhoff, the Brandenburg Minister President from 1946-1949.⁶² It is likely that the combination of his legal credentials as well as his long-time SPD background, and the assumption that his judicial rationality and political moderation could be counted on, made him appear to be a suitably sympathetic figure to whom one could address acts of perceived injustice and arbitrariness. One such complainant from Brandenburg was Max H., a KPD member prior to 1933 and an SED member after the war, who wrote to Dr Steinhoff on 26 February 1948 protesting about the arrest of his son by the NKVD:

On 5 November 1945 my son was arrested in Luckau by the Russian police without a reason, and to this day I have received no news about his fate [...] You will be aware of the fact that thousands of innocent boys and girls are being held captive! In our town alone it is ten boys, all from working class families. The parents are afraid to do something for their children, because they fear that they will be arrested themselves. A result of the Nazi dictatorship! But all this will not stop me from continuing to appeal for the release of my son.⁶³

In this emotional appeal, the petitioner attempts to legitimise himself to Dr Steinhoff through his left-wing political credentials and emphasises the politically indiscriminate nature of Soviet actions by highlighting the unjust arrest not only of his own son but also of other ‘working class’ youths. Yet, in addition to the palpable desperation of this father the tone towards the Brandenburg Minister President is also accusatory – rather than asking, he assumes that Dr Steinhoff is aware of these

⁶¹ Scheliha, *Speziallager*, pp. 14-15. In fact, letter writing to the authorities had already been ‘a much favoured form of citizen activity’ in the Third Reich. Robert Gellately, ‘Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic’, in *The Journal of Modern History*, 68, (1996), 931-967 (p. 950).

⁶² Karl Steinhoff earned his doctorate in law in 1921, joined the SPD in 1923, and became active in various ministries and government bodies until 1933. In 1945 he became the president of Brandenburg’s provincial administration, and subsequently became Minister President until 1949. He had joined the SED in 1946 and later became Minister of the Interior from 1949-52. Helmut Müller-Enbergs, Jan Wielgoß, Dieter Hoffmann and Andreas Herbst, eds., *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein Lexikon ostdeutscher Biographien* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006, 4. Ausgabe. Band II), p. 974.

⁶³ BLHA, Rep. 203/313, ‘Bearbeitung von Beschwerden und Richtlinien 1948-1952’, p. 289.

developments. Yet he does, however, shirk from explicitly blaming the widespread fear on the new administration in the Soviet zone, and instead his recriminations are carefully directed towards the 'Nazi dictatorship'. This particular appeal also suggests that this petitioner's complaint is perhaps not reflective of the majority of affected parents who, according to the petitioner, felt so constrained and fearful by the circumstances that they felt powerless to act.

Whilst these complaints to authorities may not be representative of the responses of all relatives affected by NKVD measures, the archival evidence nonetheless suggests that a significant proportion did choose to react in this manner. In fact, not all appeals were by individual authors and some petitions to Dr Steinhoff were written by groups. For instance, on 15 March 1948 a group of parents from Jacobsdorf, twenty kilometres east of Fürstenwalde, wrote:

Where are our children who were arrested in 1945? Are they in a camp in the state of Brandenburg, or were the boys and girls brought to Russia? [...] Is it possible, Herr Minister President, to find out something about the whereabouts and fates of our children? They are not criminals.⁶⁴

This appeal employs rather similar strategies to those of the petitioner in the previous example. The parents also assume that Dr Steinhoff has knowledge about the whereabouts of the interned youths, even if in this case the appeal is somewhat more deferential, perhaps a reflection of the fact that the parents did not have the same political credentials as the previous petitioner.⁶⁵ Moreover, both parental appeals emphasise how young these prisoners are through repeated usage of references such as 'boys and girls' and 'children', while also clearly asserting their innocence. Moreover, it was not just parents who officially complained about Soviet arrests, but also the children of internees. One such petitioner was a girl from the small town of Lindow, who wrote to the President of the Brandenburg legislative assembly on 26 February 1948 enquiring about the whereabouts of her father who had been arrested in March 1946. In this case the daughter emphasised the innocence of her father by claiming that he had merely been a 'nominal' NSDAP member, and that the arrest was therefore unjustified.⁶⁶ Whilst such appeals from family members constituted an important group of petitioners, they were by no means the only people who

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁶⁵ This assumption that the German authorities had influence on the Soviet organs of power can also be seen in similar petitions from Saxony. Schatz, 'Wahrnehmung', pp. 93-94.

⁶⁶ BLHA, Rep. 203/313, p. 283.

responded to incursions by the NKVD by officially complaining to the newly established East German authorities.

It was also common that solicitors, local groups, work colleagues, local mayors, local party functionaries and local branches of mass organisations from across Brandenburg submitted complaints to the authorities challenging the Soviet internment of a certain individual or group.⁶⁷ The central committee of the SED managed many of these complaints, both at an individual and at a party level. In turn, top ranking SED members then petitioned the SMAD in order to attempt to secure the release of specific individuals from NKVD imprisonment, providing evidence that these grassroots complaints could in fact have some cumulative impact. For instance, SED requests sent to the SMAD in 1947 contained lists of individuals that had been amalgamated from petitions from local and regional SED branches, as well as containing complaints from private individuals who had contacted the SED headquarters looking for disappeared family members and friends.⁶⁸ Yet a communiqué sent to Walter Ulbricht on 4 June 1947 by the Department of Security Issues in the Central Committee of the SED informed him that that these petitions by the SED to the SMAD were only enjoying a limited success. Furthermore, it stressed the detrimental impact which these arrests were having at a grassroots level, as well as the wider negative repercussions they were having on the SED across East Germany:

The arrests appear to be causing much concern to our local branches [...] The lack of any possibility for communication between the prisoners and their families is also problematic. The strain on the Party that has occurred as a result of the arrests of youths in particular is in part extraordinarily large, especially since in many cases members of our Party have been directly affected. It would be greatly welcomed if the Soviet occupation force could be compelled to ease their current practices.⁶⁹

This internal report illustrates the extraordinary pressure which local SED branches, and in turn the SED central committee, came under in their attempts to win support and legitimacy, in a political climate in which the SMAD and NKVD were frequently carrying out what were perceived as arbitrary arrests. Yet despite these behind-the-scenes attempts by the senior echelons of the SED to campaign for the

⁶⁷ BLHA, Rep. 203/625, 'Berufungen, Beschwerden u. Einsprüche'.

⁶⁸ BArch, DY30/IV 2/11/158, 'Überprüfungen von Anträgen auf Freilassung von der SMAD Inhaftierter Personen 1947-48'.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

release of certain individuals, their overall influence over the decision-making of the SMAD was limited. This relative powerlessness of the SED is also reflected in some of the responses which petitioners received. In March 1948, for example, the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior wrote to Arthur G. in response to his complaint about the arrest of his son, stating that: ‘because the internment was carried out by the occupying forces, I regret to inform you that the German authorities have absolutely no influence over his release’.⁷⁰ Max H., the SED member who had sent the aforementioned appeal to Dr Steinhoff the previous month, received a similar response from the Brandenburg authorities in March 1948.⁷¹

This relative impotence of the SED in relation to NKVD activities is also reflected in the oral history evidence. Erika Schulz recalled that during her internment in Ketschendorf her father joined the SED and personally wrote to Wilhelm Pieck to complain against the imprisonment of his daughter and other local youths in Fürstenwalde:

Wilhelm Pieck wrote back, that he was a comrade and that he knew about the things that had occurred in 1945 and that he felt especially sorry for the young people [...] but that he had no influence over the occupation force.⁷²

Appealing to Wilhelm Pieck was not unusual, as he represented a sympathetic paternal figure for some East Germans. Furthermore, his supposed frank admission ‘that he had no influence over the occupation force’, corresponds with the archival evidence that, similar to some of the Soviet incursions described in the previous chapter, the SED was relatively powerless in the early post-war period to mediate the impact which Soviet punitive policies were having at a grassroots level.

However, the mass and arbitrary nature of the arrests did not go uncontested even within the SMAD. Yet Dieter Pohl maintains that it was not the arrests themselves which were deplored, but the reactions among the public and the resulting difficulties this created in the political climate.⁷³ Moreover, given the increasing grassroots pressure, the SED progressively appealed to the Soviets to soften their strategy and on 26 March 1948 Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl finally spoke to Stalin on the issue of NKVD arrests. The decree by the Council of Ministers which followed on 31 March 1948, ‘clearly articulated the wishes of the

⁷⁰ BLHA, Rep. 203/313, p. 286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁷² Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁷³ Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 95.

SED'.⁷⁴ This suggests that whilst individual grassroots complaints may not have been successful, their cumulative impact may have been arguably one of the contributing factors in pushing the SED to negotiate a more moderate policy with the Soviet leadership.

Nonetheless, Scheliha emphasises that the subsequent publicity campaign surrounding the promised liberalisation and future transparency of the special camps was, in part, a failure. By the time prisoners were released from the camps in the late summer of 1948, the Berlin blockade was already underway and the Western press now began to publicly denounce the special camps as 'Soviet KZs'.⁷⁵ As a consequence of this international backlash combined with the fact that the Soviet policies were clearly unpopular in the Soviet zone, the East German authorities now attempted to erase this contentious and potentially damaging legacy of special camps from future public discourse in order to facilitate the successful transition from Nazism to socialism. Nevertheless, the legacies of these NKVD institutions were to develop their own dynamic at a grassroots level in Brandenburg.

3.7 The grassroots legacy of NKVD institutions from the late 1940s onwards

Given the extremely negative grassroots opinion of NKVD punitive measures by 1948, the SMAD and the SED attempted to avoid any further detrimental sentiments which could potentially destabilise the process of political transition in East Germany. Thus, those prisoners who were gradually released quietly back into the Soviet zone were sworn to secrecy as part of the attempt to erase the legacy of NKVD institutions from public discourse. On his release from Neubrandenburg special camp in the summer of 1948, Reinhold Rösner was given a military coat from the *Luftwaffe* by the Soviet authorities in which he was to travel home incognito. He recalled that: 'we were instructed not to speak about our time in the camp, and if we were to talk about it we would end up back there', claiming that despite the curiosity of friends and neighbours once he had returned to Fürstenwalde,

⁷⁴ Sergej Mironenko et al., *Sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland 1945 bis 1950* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), p. 83.

⁷⁵ This was largely due to the fact that firstly people were only released after four months, secondly the promise of contact with interned family members never materialised, and thirdly the prisoners who were released to the Western zones told their stories to the media. See Scheliha, *Speziallager*, pp. 21-22.

he kept his silence.⁷⁶ Similarly, Erika Schulz recalled that after she had returned home in the summer of 1948 she went to the local dance hall where the disc jockey suddenly stopped the music and announced:

‘We welcome the daughter of the house who has returned home from a Russian camp’. Everyone clapped, everyone was delighted, and I ran out, I was afraid that they were going to arrest me again [...] that’s the way it was, always that huge fear breathing down your neck.⁷⁷

Alfred Wegewitz also maintained that when former internees started to return home to Fürstenwalde it quickly became known for the bystanders in the locality that the former prisoners had been ‘bound to secrecy’.⁷⁸ However, although the memory of the camps was not kept publicly alive after 1948 by former prisoners themselves, the memories which existed amongst their relatives and within local communities began to take new forms after the closure of the camps.

Local archival evidence, combined with some of the accounts which emerged in the oral history interviews conducted, suggests that this grassroots memory creation not only had an impact on local knowledge of the NKVD camps and prisons in later years, but also persistently challenged the officially imposed historical discourse, which strenuously denied the camps’ existence.

Similar to the two anti-Soviet poems discussed in the previous chapter, one manner in which these counter-memories of NKVD activity in the post-war period manifested themselves was through satirical rhymes. To borrow from Monica Black, it may be argued that these rhymes were ‘subterranean and impossible to police’, and were therefore much more ‘potentially subversive’ than other forms of protest.⁷⁹ The following political poem was circulating in Brandenburg in late 1949 and parodied the well-known nineteenth century children’s verse.⁸⁰

*Zehn Berliner fahren in den Ostsektor, Und wollten sich erfreu’n,
Der eine hat keinen Ausweis mit, Da waren ’s nur noch neun.
Die neune war’n im Kino dann, Und haben laut gelacht,
Als sie den ‘Augenzeugen’ sahen, waren ’s nur noch acht.
Die achte haben heimlich still, Gar eifrig aufgeschrieben,
Den neusten Witz von Hennecke, Da war’n es nur noch sieben.
Die sieben spielten darauf Skat, Und dachten an nichts schlechtes,
Der eine rief, der Pieck muss raus, Da waren ’s nur noch sechs.*

⁷⁶ Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁷⁷ Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁷⁸ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

⁷⁹ Black, *Death*, p. 198.

⁸⁰ Interestingly, this old children’s rhyme had previously also been satirised in the Third Reich, in this instance making reference to Dachau concentration camp. Gamm, *Flüsterwitz*, p. 39.

*Die sechs hatten Westgeld mit, Und steckten 's in die Strümpf;
 Der eine wird dabei erwischt, Da waren 's nur noch fünf.
 Die fünf gingen ins Lokal, Und tranken Schnaps und Bier
 Und sangen dann das Deutschlandlied, Da waren 's nur noch vier.
 Die viere fuhr'n zum Hamstern raus, Recht fröhlich, frisch und frei.
 Der eine las den Telegraf, Da waren 's nur noch drei.
 Die drei drehten leise dann, An einem Radio
 Und stellten auch den RIAS an, Da waren 's nur noch zwei.
 Die zwei dachten sich alsdann, Die Arbeit hat keinen Zweck,
 Da wird doch alles demontiert, Da war noch einer weg.
 Der letzte fuhr nun nach Karlshorst, Wollt' nach den andern seh'n.
 Man bracht' ihn nach Oranienburg, Da waren 's wieder zehn!*⁸¹

The mention here of 'Berliner' and 'Westgeld' suggests that this rhyme may have originated in West Berlin. However, had this rhyme's message not also reflected aspects of the daily reality in Brandenburg at the time, it is unlikely that it would have been disseminated across the region to the point where the authorities took notice; its contents thus permit an insight into the range of reference points which appear to have been salient for some Brandenburgers in 1949. Its mention of 'den Augenzeugen' refers to the news bulletin, *Der Augenzeuge - die Wochenschau* which began to be shown in cinemas across the Soviet zone from spring 1946 onwards. This 'loud laughter' at the manner in which the news was portrayed appears to be a critique of the lack of credibility of official news reporting. Similarly, the ironic mentions of Wilhelm Pieck and Adolf Hennecke, the miner who the previous year had sparked off the 'Hennecke movement' through the ambitious fulfilment of his quota, suggests a certain cynical contempt for these new socialist celebrities. Moreover, the satirical portrayal of the forbidden 'Deutschlandlied' (by this stage the new GDR anthem 'Auferstanden aus Ruinen' had already been introduced) indicates perhaps a certain reticence about rejecting all aspects of Germany's recent past. Yet it is the final two lines which most strongly emphasise the perceived ubiquity of Soviet punishment, as all of the ten characters are eventually interned by the Soviets (who were headquartered in Berlin-'Karlshorst') in special camp no. 7 Sachsenhausen in Oranienburg which was in operation until 1950. Not only does this attest to the notorious reputation which the NKVD operations had established in West Berlin, Brandenburg, and in all likelihood across the Soviet zone by 1949, it also supports the previous oral history evidence which

⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1460, 'Bd. 6 Arbeit des Landesverbandes NDPD Brandenburg 1949-1951', p. 2.

indicates the persistent nature of grassroots networks of information and counter-memories, despite top-down attempts to remove the special camp issue from public discourse.

Similarly, the oral history interviews in Brandenburg/Havel indicate that the grassroots memories of NKVD activities could not be suppressed in the public sphere as quickly or as effectively as would have been desirable, as public references to the post-war ‘*GPU Keller*’ continued well into the 1950s. Yet it was the grassroots actions in Fürstenwalde, where a plot of mass graves had remained behind after the Ketschendorf camp was dissolved in 1947, which posed a much greater threat to official discourse and the desired smooth political transition in the late 1940s and early 1950s. After the closing of the Ketschendorf camp in February 1947, flowers and wreaths began to appear at the site of the mass graves which had been left behind, laid down by family members and friends who guessed that this was where their loved one was buried.⁸² Reinhold Rösner recalled:

When I came home in 1948 and I sometimes walked there, I saw that sometimes flowers lay there, and then I found out that the police always cleared them away, and that many people came from Berlin and beyond that brought flowers, because word had spread that the dead had been buried there.⁸³

As Monica Black has shown in her illuminating study of death in Berlin, care for the dead in the immediate post-war period was expressed in deeds – the marking of a grave as a grave with plants or stones or flowers. ‘The absence of these social rituals was “wrong” and caused anxiety’.⁸⁴ This form of commemoration of the dead German prisoners in Ketschendorf therefore represented an intrinsic cultural and personal need of people to publicly display their sorrow and, to borrow from Alf Lüdtke, to appropriate ‘sites and rites of mourning’, in order to reclaim at least some of what had been taken from them.⁸⁵ Yet the fact that these flowers and wreaths were constantly removed indicates that such acts of public commemoration could be perceived by the authorities, who were concerned with the de-stabilising effect such grassroots action could have on the emergent German socialist state, as political.

⁸² Similar developments of wreath laying could also be observed around other sights of former NKVD camps across the GDR right up till 1990.

⁸³ Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁸⁴ Black, *Death*, p. 136.

⁸⁵ Lüdtke, *Histories*, pp. 151,175.

One interesting archival case study, which highlights both the interplay between individuals and the authorities as well as the impact which the grassroots issue of the burial site of the former Ketschendorf camp could have at a local, regional and national level in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is that of Mr Konrad H., whose teenage son was imprisoned and died in the Ketschendorf camp. On 11 September 1949, one month before the official founding of the GDR, the Registrar's Office in Ketschendorf received a letter from Konrad H. from the Brandenburg town of Cottbus, who enquired whether those who had died in the camp had now been re-buried in local municipal cemeteries.⁸⁶ On 20 September the mayor of the Municipal Council in Ketschendorf forwarded on Konrad H.'s query to the District Council of Beeskow-Storkow, requesting that they deal with the matter.⁸⁷ The District Council in turn wrote to Konrad H. on 13 October stating that they would like to assist him in finding his relatives and invited him to appear personally for a face to face conversation 'in the hope that he would not respond to this letter'.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, Konrad H. replied to the District Council of Beeskow-Storkow on 25 October stating:

In response to my enquiry last year, the parish of Ketschendorf has already informed me that no records exist of those who died in the camp. My investigation did not lead to a positive result. It has come to my attention however, that the graves of the dead have been levelled out and that now settlers are even cultivating the land over these graves, an impiety which doubtlessly cannot be surpassed.⁸⁹

Konrad H.'s retort illustrates how he resourcefully and persistently employed multiple avenues and sources in order to find out where his son had died and was buried. Yet his tone is one of outrage at the District Council, who he felt had failed to prevent the current irreverent treatment of the graves in Ketschendorf. At this point, rather than responding themselves, the District Council took the decision to forward the case to the Minister of the Interior of the State of Brandenburg on 17 November requesting 'a decision and notification on how we should react, so that we can respond to other possible future enquiries'.⁹⁰ By December 1949 the District

⁸⁶ BLHA, Rep. 203/799, 'Gräber der im Lager Ketschendorf 1945-47 verstorbenen Häftlinge 1949-51', p. 1.

⁸⁷ KALOS F/RdK/964, 'Volksvertretung Kreistag Sept 1949-Aug 1953. Enthält auch Schriftwechsel über Gräber, der im Lager Ketschendorf verstorbenen Häftlingen: Streng Vertraulich', no pag.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸⁹ BLHA, Rep. 203/799, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Council had still not yet received a response from the Brandenburg Minister of the Interior, and sent a second letter on Christmas Eve which repeated its request for instructions on how to proceed in this matter.⁹¹ Konrad H., also growing impatient, wrote to the authorities again on 26 January 1950.⁹² During this time, however, the case of Konrad H. had travelled beyond the regional level to the highest echelons of the GDR government. On 14 March 1950, the GDR Ministry of the Interior sent a clear written statement to the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior: ‘What decision should be taken by us? After all this is a local matter which falls under your jurisdiction’, requesting nonetheless that they be given further information on the issue of camp graves in Ketschendorf.⁹³

As a result, the case was catapulted straight back down to the grassroots level and an investigation was initiated. The District Council instructed the SED mayor of Fürstenwalde, Paul Papke, to compile a report on the Ketschendorf issue, which he submitted on 21 July 1950:

Individual relatives of the dead must have found out about the burial place from near-by residents. As a result, small individual mounds appeared which were decorated with wreaths. By order of special authorities the mounds had to be flattened and the wreaths removed [...] We are now in the difficult position that we are in no way able to satisfactorily answer the many enquiries from relatives of the deceased and at any rate, as a result of orders from above, the existence of a burial place always had to be denied.⁹⁴

This local report not only supports the bystanders’ accounts in the oral history interviews of previous windows into camp life which permitted them to know where the dead were buried, it also illustrates how this information was then successfully passed on to others who came from further afield. Moreover, its reference to ‘the many enquiries from relatives’ indicates that Konrad H.’s petitions were not an isolated case, despite the official denial of the existence of mass graves as a consequence of ‘orders from above’. This evidence suggests that despite the political and structural constraints, individuals nonetheless exhibited a certain *Eigensinn* which manifested itself in the illegal commemoration of the dead in Ketschendorf. Yet this flouting of the taboos surrounding the existence and the whereabouts of mass graves at a grassroots level in Fürstenwalde was considered to have the

⁹¹ KALOS F/RdK/964, no pag.

⁹² *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁹⁴ BLHA, Rep. 203/799, p. 13.

potential to destabilise the political transition for the population in the newly established East German state.

In their own additional report on the issue of the Ketschendorf graves on 24 July, the District Council of Beeskow-Storkow noted with unease that ‘the burial ground is directly beside the motorway and the decorated graves continually provide conversation matter for people driving past’.⁹⁵ Similarly, six months later on 6 February 1951, in response to the continuing stream of enquiries by relatives, the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior finally sent their own inspectors to examine the site of the former Soviet camp in Ketschendorf. They noted with concern:

Relatives of the deceased have come from all over the GDR, from West Berlin and West Germany and have constructed haphazard mounds which they continually decorate with wreaths and flowers on anniversaries [...] The area is accessible to everyone and can be seen from the nearby motorway. Due to the current state of affairs, the image and prestige of our antifascist, democratic system is being seriously damaged.⁹⁶

What is quite remarkable here is just how effective unofficial networks of communication were in reaching across both East and West Germany, although by 1951 these rumours were also no doubt strengthened by Western media, which by now had begun to use eye-witness accounts from former prisoners for Cold War propaganda purposes. Yet given the impact that these individual and collective acts of grassroots commemoration of the dead were having on the newly-born GDR state, by the early 1950s the authorities were forced to find a strategy to put an end to the last public reminders of the punitive post-war Soviet policies in Fürstenwalde.

In 1952 building work on new apartment blocks took place on the former grounds of the Ketschendorf camp. Many of the interviewees contend that the new housing settlement had been deliberately planned in order to end the private attempts at remembrance of the deceased with wreaths and flowers. Yet during these excavations, the local builders came across a surprisingly large number of human remains, and building work had to be temporarily halted. Between December 1952 and October 1953, under the watchful eye of the MfS, 4,499 of these bodies were re-interred anonymously in the military cemetery in Halbe.⁹⁷ Recollections of these

⁹⁵ KALOS F/RdK/964, no pag.

⁹⁶ BLHA, Rep. 203/799, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Lipinsky, *Straße*, p. 277. The dead of Ketschendorf were re-interred in Halbe under the guise of having fallen in April 1945. Rainer Potratz and Meinhard Stark, eds., *Ernst Teichmann, Pfarrer vom Waldfriedhof Halbe: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1950 bis 1983* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), p. 10.

attempts to remove the legacy of NKVD operations from the official public sphere are also found in some of the oral history interviews. In the early 1950s Christine Küster had worked as a typist in a local building company in Fürstenwalde which had been commissioned to carry out the building work in Ketschendorf:

Back there, behind the camp, new houses were being built in order to cover the whole thing up [...] and the first houses were being built and the workers came and said 'we are stopping work – we have found human bones'. Then the whole thing was tidied up [...] and one of the apartment blocks was never built, I still know today where that is, there is a gap between the buildings, there must have been a great number of dead there [...] and then they dug up the remains, they were brought to Halbe, and only then did they continue to build [...] we talked about it, people knew about it [...] but not the extent [...] it was never spoken about officially.⁹⁸

Similarly, Arnold Schulze, who, in the early 1950s, had been employed as a gardener for a Fürstenwalde landscaping company at the Ketschendorf site, recalled how the building work was suddenly interrupted when the employees stumbled upon the mass graves.⁹⁹ Thus, the oral history evidence suggests that despite attempts by the authorities to cover up the graves, the gaps in the buildings acted as an enduring and persistent reminder of the impact of post-war NKVD operations for some of the bystanders in Fürstenwalde. In addition to erasing the physical traces of the past, attempts were also made to remove linguistic references to Ketschendorf. Whilst the incorporation of Ketschendorf into Fürstenwalde in 1950, subsequently being renamed Fürstenwalde-South, was publicly justified on the basis of more general administrative reforms, the prevailing consensus amongst the interviewees was that Ketschendorf's notorious image was to be henceforth removed from public discourse and therefore the district had to be given a new name.

Yet although attempts were made to remove these traces from the official state narrative, the remaining physical remnants of these institutions continued to have an impact on those former prisoners who chose to stay living in the surrounding area, even until the present day. Erika Schulz, who remained in Fürstenwalde, recalled that she sometimes came into direct contact with the former Ketschendorf camp grounds in later years:

I sometimes had to go to there as part of my job. There was a bunker in the tyre factory in Ketschendorf, one could drive down there and there was a big garage and our trading organization was allocated a large garage there [...]

⁹⁸ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁹⁹ Schulze, 02.09.09.

and I felt it was awful that I had to go there [...] I avoided the tyre factory complex.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, Reinhold Rösner recalled that in later years there was a restaurant in the former NKVD prison at the train station in Bad Saarow where he had been imprisoned before being brought to the Ketschendorf camp in 1945: ‘The restaurant is still there today [...] three years ago I was at a function there and I had to go down to the beer cellar and I saw the cell where I had been imprisoned’.¹⁰¹

Notwithstanding the continued physical presence of former NKVD institutions, many ex-prisoners made the decision to remain in the GDR and rebuild a life for themselves in the new political context. Yet the oral history evidence suggests that some could only achieve this transition by remaining silent about their experiences; this silence amongst former prisoners permeated not just the public sphere of work colleagues, but often also the personal sphere of families. For instance, Fritz Krause recalled that he did not tell his children about his internment in the camp until they were teenagers, in order to not bring them into conflict ‘with what they were learning about German-Soviet friendship in school’.¹⁰² This corresponds with what Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have found in relation to war memories. They argue that when an authoritarian state seeks to enforce a dominant narrative, ‘the intensity of repression may reach down to disrupt even the habitual mechanisms for transmission of memory between generations within the family’.¹⁰³ It also suggests the extent to which Fritz Krause may have believed that the boundaries between the public and private sphere in his family had become diffuse in the GDR. Similarly, Reinhold Rösner claimed not to have spoken about his experiences in special camps until 1990. He recalled that during his working life in the GDR: ‘Whenever you applied for a job, you had to fill out a questionnaire and there were always those missing three years [...] and these cadre heads, they had obviously been informed that these camps had existed [...] they registered it silently but didn’t talk about it’.¹⁰⁴ It is thus apparent that some of the former internees somehow succeeded in living with the contradiction between their personal experiences and the official state narrative.

¹⁰⁰ Schulz, 28.08.09.

¹⁰¹ Rösner, 10.09.09.

¹⁰² Krause, 09.09.09.

¹⁰³ Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Rösner, 10.09.09.

Yet despite this silence of some former NKVD prisoners, as well as the ‘cadre heads’ in the SED, the oral evidence of some of the bystanders indicates that networks of information (and gossip) in relation to the NKVD internees continued to persist throughout the GDR, suggesting that in some instances the subject matter may not have been as taboo at a grassroots level as was desired by the SED. For instance, Ulla Beck recalled that she ‘had been told’ that her boss in the department store had also been in ‘one of those camps, but she never spoke about it [...] instead she made an effort to do what was expected of her [...] I don’t know what goes on in the minds of those kind of people in those circumstances’.¹⁰⁵ This bewilderment at the transformation of some locals in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde from NKVD prisoner to subsequent carrier of the GDR regime was also expressed in some of the other interviews. Gertrud Hirsch remarked about an acquaintance who had been interned in a camp: ‘how those people who they arrested then go into the Party [SED] is beyond me’, while Arnold Schulze recalled that ‘I knew someone who was imprisoned there and when he was released he went to the *Volksarmee* and became a big officer’.¹⁰⁶ Such instances from the oral evidence suggest that the existence of official taboos on the NKVD institutions throughout the GDR should be perceived in a differentiated manner. In some cases, it forced a proportion of former prisoners into silence, even within families, as no public discourse, or arena of articulation, existed within which they were able to articulate and frame their experiences and memories. This may have been for a number of reasons, including the fear of possible reprisals against them, or perhaps also a private sense of shame. There is also the question of whether memories of traumatic events were simply too painful. On the other hand, those who were less personally affected by a camp experience, and analogously are likely to have felt less fear, did not just erase their personal memories of the presence of NKVD institutions from the post-war period – information swapping and curious gossip could not be entirely stamped out.

Nonetheless, when it came to the legacy of the NKVD at a grassroots level, essentially the room for manoeuvre, both for former prisoners as well as local bystanders, was minimal. Overall, the evidence suggests that from the early 1950s at

¹⁰⁵ Beck, 27.08.09.

¹⁰⁶ Hirsch, 27.08.09., Schulze, 02.09.09. For a similar example of a former NKVD special camp prisoner who later joined the SED as well as becoming a district secretary of the DSF, see the extract on Wolfgang Goszczak in Andreas Weigelt ed., *Berichte über sowjetische Speziallager in Deutschland* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008), pp. 97-144.

the latest, public references to these institutions were no longer at all tolerated in official GDR public discourse, whilst the possibility to communicate privately about memories and experiences was greatly diminished. Nevertheless, as Lynn Abrams has highlighted, ‘dominant interpretations of the past shift and alter as formerly marginalised voices are heard and incorporated’, and as we shall see, once the wall collapsed in 1989, these marginalised voices were quick to resurface, suggesting that they had been lurking below the surface all the while.¹⁰⁷

3.8 Post-unification grassroots initiatives for memorialisation of post-war NKVD institutions in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde

After the fall of the wall, the official taboos surrounding NKVD activity in post-war East Germany were finally lifted and grassroots attempts at memorialising the victims started afresh. In Brandenburg/Havel, as a result of an initiative by the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft ehemaliger politischer Häftlinge* (AEPH), a commemorative plaque was erected at the Neuendorfer Straße 89 in October 1992.¹⁰⁸ In Fürstenwalde moves to commemorate the former NKVD prisoners began even before the official end of the GDR. In March 1990 the *Initiativgruppe Internierungslager Ketschendorf e.V.* was established by former internees of the special camp and on 8 May 1990 the first public memorial service took place in Ketschendorf with approximately two thousand participants. Since this time they have been active in erecting memorials and commemorative plaques, both in Ketschendorf and Halbe, with partial financial assistance from the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V.* and the state of Brandenburg. They have also played an important role in researching the names and burial places of the dead as well as in supporting former victims and their families. To this day they continue to organise an annual memorial event.¹⁰⁹

Two of the three interviewees who had been interned by the NKVD, Erika Schulz and Reinhold Rösner, became active in this local group after 1990. Their involvement appears to have had an influence on how they view Soviet policies of the time today. Similar to Reinhold Rösner, Erika Schulz maintained that she

¹⁰⁷ Abrams, *Oral History*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁸ Kaminsky, *Orte*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

harboured no hatred against the ‘Russians’ and instead blamed the contemporary political framework: ‘we didn’t have any hate towards the normal Russians, because they hadn’t done anything to us [...] it was Stalinism which did us harm’.¹¹⁰ In contrast, Fritz Krause, who did not join any victim groups, still felt strongly bitter and resentful at his fate:

I savoured German-Soviet friendship, from behind barbed wire! [...] That was the entire purpose of the whole thing, that we should be killed, it was purely a method of revenge on the part of the Russians, because so many had died at the hands of the *Wehrmacht*.¹¹¹

A more in-depth study of stagnating and shifting attitudes amongst former prisoners would be required in order to determine to what extent involvement in these victim groups may have facilitated a more differentiated view on personal post-war experiences with the NKVD. Without wanting to descend too far into speculation, it would appear that on the part of these two interviewees at least, involvement in victim groups since 1990 have allowed at least a partial healing process to take place.

On the other hand, however, these commemorations have not gone unchallenged at a grassroots level. In 1991 the Ketschendorf memorial was vandalised, while on the night before Christmas Eve in 1994 crosses were knocked over and flowers were strewn about.¹¹² This reluctance to memorialise NKVD prisoners is also reflected in the interviews, particularly amongst those who had become avid supporters of the GDR state in later years and who continue to justify NKVD punitive policies, even in the present day. Paul Gärtner maintained that: ‘Stalin was an idol for the Russians until 1953 [...] if people drew a moustache on Stalin then that was an act of provocation to the nation which had twice placed itself at the frontline to destroy fascism’.¹¹³ Similarly, Wolfgang Heinrich argued that some aspects of the camp system may have been regrettable, but that they were understandable and justifiable errors in the context of the crimes which had been previously committed by Germans against the Soviet Union: ‘That some people slipped into the camps who actually did not belong there, where does that not happen, where is it any different? It’s always like that [...] with such a large

¹¹⁰ Schulz, 28.08.09.

¹¹¹ Krause, 09.09.09.

¹¹² Scheer, *Denkmälern*, p. 165.

¹¹³ Gärtner, 27.06.09.

operation [...] everything is chaotic'.¹¹⁴ Yet he maintains that the large majority of NKVD prisoners were 'big Nazis and functionaries' who had supported the aggressive and expansionist policies of the Third Reich and had been justifiably punished.

In the decades since unification, former prisoners of NKVD institutions have often continued to exist in a state of competing victimhood between Nazi and Stalinist crimes. On the one hand, victims of Nazism are concerned that National Socialist criminals and functionaries amongst the NKVD victims could be honoured, and therefore not held to account. On the other hand, those persecuted by Stalinism often perceive themselves to be 'second-class victims' and exist in a 'diffuse grey zone'.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Alexander von Plato maintains that while former NKVD prisoners were perceived as welcome witnesses against the Soviet Union in the Cold War context in West Germany in the 1950s, he contends that from the 1970s onwards, with a growing shift towards emphasising the victims of the Holocaust, NKVD prisoners began to view themselves as being 'second-class victims'.¹¹⁶

This contested victimhood is also apparent in the interviews with the former internees. Although National Socialist concentration camps had fundamentally differed from Soviet NKVD camps, in both their conception and execution, the comparison between both punitive systems emerged as an important and salient reference point.¹¹⁷ The three former prisoners interviewed all perceived Ketschendorf to be one of the worst of the special camps because of the absence of even the most basic of physical provisions. Fritz Krause recalled his transfer from Ketschendorf to Jamlitz camp: 'We lived a bit more civilised in Jamlitz. The Germans had built wooden bunks for the Jews in the concentration camp [...] at least we could lie on bare wooden boards there'.¹¹⁸ Reinhold Rösner also contended that in comparison with the other special camps, Ketschendorf had the direst living conditions and highest death rate, as, unlike the others, it was not a purpose built

¹¹⁴ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

¹¹⁵ Scheliha, *Speziallager*, p. 7 and Greiner, *Verdrängter Terror*, p. 415.

¹¹⁶ Alexander von Plato, 'Sowjetische Speziallager' in *Erinnerungsorte*, p. 95.

¹¹⁷ Unlike the National Socialist concentration camps, the NKVD special camps were not extermination camps: there was no apparatus to carry out mass murder, and no policy of extermination through physical labour. Morré, *Sowjetische Internierungslager*, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ Krause, 09.09.09.

camp from the Third Reich: ‘we all slept on the floor in Ketschendorf, like sardines [...] that’s why Ketschendorf had the highest death rate’.¹¹⁹

These diverse representations of the NKVD past contribute to the fact that the contested victimhood surrounding East German internees of the Stalinist period still remains an emotional and contentious topic, playing a significant role in the post-1990 legacy of NKVD institutions at a public and personal level and in this light the oral history evidence must be interpreted with great caution.¹²⁰ As Eric Langenbacher has observed, ‘Today, multiple histories and collective memories – of German crimes, German suffering and German communism – circulate and vie for influence’.¹²¹ Yet notwithstanding these debates, amongst contemporary grassroots populations, the impact of these contested memories of the Ketschendorf camp appear to be gradually disappearing within the consciousness of a younger, unburdened Fürstenwalde generation. Today, local maps listing landmarks in the town illustrate the location of the ‘McDonalds’ restaurant, but not the site of the former NKVD special camp. The bungalows of the old industrial housing settlement, which once functioned as prisoner barracks for the NKVD, are now inhabited by new generations of Fürstenwalde residents. The streets on which they live are called ‘Ring der Freundschaft’ and ‘Straße der Einheit’, while only discreet signs point to the modest memorial marking the plot where the dead were buried behind the houses and apartments. It appears therefore that, two decades after the *Wende*, much of the memory politics surrounding this camp are increasingly being conducted in a realm that is often far removed from a younger Fürstenwalde generation, on whom the post-war NKVD operations had no personal impact.

3.9 Conclusion

In light of some of the post-1989 discourses which have been explored in the previous section, the oral history evidence on the grassroots responses to post-war

¹¹⁹ Rösner, 10.09.09. On the issue of ‘moral capital’ in relation to these discussions see Bettina Greiner, ‘Der Preis der Anerkennung: Zur Debatte über den Erinnerungsort der Speziallager’, in *Instrumentalisierung*, pp. 114- 132

¹²⁰ For a discussion of competing victimhood including an analysis of post-*Wende* autobiographical texts of special camp internees see Greiner, *Verdrängter Terror*, pp. 377-458.

¹²¹ Eric Langenbacher, ‘Still the Unmasterable Past? The Impact of History and Memory in the Federal Republic of Germany’, in *German Politics*, 19(1), (2010), 24-40 (p. 35). On the controversial role which interned German communists played in relation to other prisoners in Buchenwald, see also Lutz Niethammer ed. *Der ‘gesäuberte Antifaschismus’. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald. Dokumente* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994).

NKVD measures need to be interpreted with great caution. However, the combined use of oral history interviews with archival material revealed a strong convergence of findings between these two sources. The findings suggest that the NKVD activities had a severely disruptive impact at a grassroots level in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. Local people's fear was compounded by what was perceived as the arbitrary nature of many of the arrests and the sense that the 'small Nazis' were being punished in the place of the 'important Nazis' who had fled. This was especially the case with Ketschendorf, where grassroots opinion found it difficult to equate the arrest of seemingly innocent youths with an effective and just denazification process. Unsurprisingly, this sentiment was strongest amongst those youths who themselves had been interned in Ketschendorf, without perceiving themselves to have been guilty of a crime. This negative sentiment in turn appears to have reinforced a sense of German victimhood and, similar to issues discussed in the previous chapter, solidified the notion of East Germans banding together against the perceived arbitrary injustice of the Soviet occupation.

Whilst the internees literally had no room for manoeuvre in the face of immediate existential threats, the concern of the bystanders and relatives from all over Brandenburg for their loved ones elicited a range of grassroots responses and actions despite the severe practical and political constraints. These grassroots responses manifested themselves as informal networks of communication, support groups and written complaints to authorities. However, these acts of *Eigensinn* cannot be overstated and may also be a function of the limits of the authorities to exercise control in the immediate post-war years. These grassroots complaints crossed regional and party lines with some SED functionaries, both at local and state levels, intervening on behalf of other East Germans thereby inadvertently blurring the loyalty which was demanded of them in the official political rhetoric. These grassroots responses were not in themselves effective in altering the manner in which these punitive Soviet policies were carried out. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that both the NKVD arrests and the cumulative protests by some East Germans placed the SED leadership under a certain amount of pressure and, notwithstanding other domestic and foreign policy considerations, arguably acted as one possible contributing factor in compelling the Soviet authorities to change course from the late 1940s onwards.

It seems that only after the establishment of the GDR when the last special camps were closed, where East Germany's antifascist future was more firmly in German hands, was there a concerted effort by the SED to remove the potentially threatening legacy of the NKVD institutions at a grassroots level. The evidence suggests, however, that this went against the emotional needs of relatives. In the case of Fürstenwalde, these counter-memories physically manifested themselves in persistent unofficial commemoration with wreaths and flowers. Whilst these acts of *Eigensinn* were not necessarily intended to be political, the unofficial grassroots commemoration of the dead in camps and informal networks of communication constituted a threat to the official legitimising narrative of German-Soviet friendship and liberation of the emerging socialist dictatorship. Correspondingly the authorities developed new strategies in order to clamp down on unofficial discourses and eventually succeeded in removing the issue of post-war NKVD activities in Brandenburg from the official public sphere by the mid-1950s.

Chapter IV: Grassroots responses to attempts to remove the physical, political, economic and social legacy of the Third Reich

4.1 Introduction

In the *Reichstag* elections of March 1933, 52.4% of the population in the Brandenburg province had voted for the National Socialists and when the war ended in 1945, there were still roughly 1.5 million NSDAP members in the Soviet Occupation Zone, whilst many more had actively or passively participated in one of its many organs.¹ By the time the Third Reich collapsed, East Germans had therefore experienced a wide variation of political socialisation depending on a variety of factors such as age, gender, class, religion and urban-rural divides, and the new administrations were now confronted with attempting to denazify the post-war society of the Soviet zone.

For many decades, much of the historiography on denazification has adopted a top-down focus which emphasised the instrumentalisation of denazification in order to assert Stalinist hegemony.² Analogously it was also frequently assumed that political cleansing was carried out in a more thorough fashion in the East than in the western sectors of post-war Germany.³ Such assumptions had been propagated by East German historians themselves, such as Wolfgang Meinicke, who declared in

¹ In the same election 20.3% of Brandenburgers had voted for the SPD and 10.8% for the KPD. In Brandenburg/Havel, 43.5% had voted for the NSDAP in March 1933. Demps, *Die Provinz Brandenburg*, p. 620. This was compared to an average of 43.9% of NSDAP voters across the *Reich* in March 1933. Materna et al., *Geschichte*, p. 278. Clemens Vollnhals, 'Die "doppelte" Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: ein Vergleich', in *Politische motivierte Verfolgung: Opfer von SED-Unrecht*, ed. by Ulrich Baumann and Helmut Kury (Freiburg: edition iuscrim, 1998), 343-366, (p. 350).

² Fricke, *Opposition*, p. 25.

³ See, for instance, Christian Meyer-Seitz, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Straftaten in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone* (Berlin: Verlag A. Spitz, 1998). For a good overview of denazification and the legacy of National Socialism in West Germany see Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die politisch-justizielle Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur nach 1945* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003). For an examination of West German attempts to overcome the Nazi past through legislation, as well as the issues surrounding war criminals and political discourse, see Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (München: DTV, 1999).

1984 that a 'rigorous denazification' had taken place in the GDR.⁴ Similar conclusions have also been drawn by some western historians such as John H. Herz, who argued that because such a large proportion of the prominent Nazis had 'left for the West anyhow', denazification and the hunting down of war criminals 'were hardly problems in the East'.⁵ Likewise, Ulrich Herbert and Olaf Groehler maintain that denazification was 'markedly more thorough in the East than it was in the West'.⁶

Recently, however, a number of empirical studies have appeared which have explicitly or implicitly challenged such polarised simplifications by providing a more differentiated analysis of the realisation of denazification in East Germany. Helga Welsh maintains that one of the main features of denazification in the Soviet zone was its selective handling, whilst Thomas Widera has emphasised the 'double character of denazification' in the Soviet sector.⁷ Other studies have focused the lens on particular professional groups. Joachim Petzold has examined the denazification of teachers in Saxony, while more recently Charles Lansing explored the process of political transition for teachers in Brandenburg/Havel.⁸ Such studies have helped to illustrate that denazification practices in 1945 varied considerably in different regions.⁹ For instance, Damian van Melis has shown that denazification in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was 'particularly rigorous' and due to the post-war absence of large landowners and a lack of unions and large private industry in the north, it was possible for the authorities to enforce control 'particularly quickly and successfully'.¹⁰ Somewhat different conclusions have been drawn by Timothy Vogt

⁴ Reprinted in its original form in: Wolfgang Meinicke, 'Die Entnazifizierung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1948', in *Wendezeiten- Zeitenwände: Zur 'Entnazifizierung' und 'Entstalinisierung'*, ed. by Rainer Eckert, Alexander von Plato and Jörn Schütrumpf (Köln: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1991), 33-52 (p. 49).

⁵ John H. Herz, 'Bürde der Vergangenheit oder: Wie die Deutschen mit der Nazi- Hinterlassenschaft fertig wurden', in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte*, XIX (1990), 13-32 (p. 13).

⁶ Herbert and Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, p. 19.

⁷ Helga Welsh, 'Entnazifizierung in der DDR und die 'Wende'', in Eckert, *Wendezeiten*, p. 68. Thomas Widera maintains that 'the most important instrument for integration was denazification'. Thomas Widera, *Dresden 1945-1948. Politik und Gesellschaft unter sowjetischer Besatzungsherrschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), p. 383.

⁸ Joachim Petzold, 'Die Entnazifizierung der sächsischen Lehrerschaft 1945', in *Historische DDR-Forschung: Aufsätze und Studien* ed. by Jürgen Kocka (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993). Lansing, *Schoolteachers*. His research examines the legacies of the Third Reich on the Brandenburg teaching community, and the influence which these had on the creation of the East German Communist state.

⁹ Bessel, *Germany*, p. 199.

¹⁰ Damian van Melis, *Entnazifizierung in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: Herrschaft und Verwaltung 1945-1948* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999), pp. 323, 332. Also, Damian van Melis, 'Denazification in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', in *German History*, 13 (1995), pp. 355-370.

in relation to Brandenburg who has challenged notions of a successful ‘monolithic plan’ and instead emphasises the ‘confusion and indecisiveness’ as well as the ‘limited nature of SED control’ on the denazification process in the province.¹¹

In this context, this chapter intends to examine the responses to various denazification measures and whether these grassroots responses, combined with a multitude of other factors, had any effect on the manner in which denazification policies were implemented in Brandenburg after 1945. These denazification measures took the form of attempting to erase National Socialist and military references from the public sphere, removing former National Socialists from their jobs as well as sequestering property belonging to former National Socialists.

By exploring denazification commissions at a local level, this study intends to build on Vogt’s previous approach on Brandenburg. It also further contributes to the historical literature by investigating other aspects of the denazification process which have thus far frequently been neglected in historical research. Whilst Vogt has focused on the importance of local commissions in the denazification process, he failed to explore the wider grassroots impact of these developments as well as the responses of those affected by the ruling of a commission and the influence which regional commissions had on local decision making. Therefore, in order to attempt to bridge this gap in the historical research, I created a database of individuals using information found in both local and regional archives from both case study towns. Whilst this data is not representative of local Brandenburgers more generally, it does permit an insight into the fate of over four hundred locals in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde who were denazified, as well as over one hundred local individuals whose property was sequestered.

Moreover, although some studies have explored the expropriation process in Brandenburg towns, to date none have examined the grassroots responses to these policies amongst local communities and this chapter therefore intends to provide an insight into some of these processes at a grassroots level. Furthermore, this chapter also addresses some of the responses to attempts to remove the physical reminders of Nazism from the public domain in Brandenburg that have often been overlooked in previous research.

¹¹ Vogt, *Denazification*, pp. 4-5, 123.

4.2 Attempts to remove the physical reminders of Nazism

Given the terms agreed by the Allies at the Yalta conference, one of the primary and most urgent tasks of the new administration in the Soviet zone was the removal of the physical legacy of National Socialism. At a grassroots level in Brandenburg in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Third Reich, this took the form of attempting to destroy the physical traces of the regime in the form of National Socialist literature, toys, memorabilia and placards as well as renaming streets and eliminating the militarism which had been closely linked with the previous regime. In fact, these attempts at political revisionism constituted an effort to destruct and subsequently reconstruct 'sites of memory' across East Germany. This concept of sites of memory is based on an expanded notion of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* which Etienne François and Hagen Schulze subsequently developed in relation to Germany's '*Erinnerungsorte*'.¹² Based on this conception, today German sites of memory include classic material sites such as buildings and monuments, as well as incorporating things such as objects, books and ideas. It is the grassroots responses to attempts of reconfiguring the physical political landscape in Brandenburg by removing National Socialist sites of memory which will be explored in the following section.

Immediately after the war, local Soviet commanders across Brandenburg began to issue top-down commands in order to commence with the removal of the physical reminders of the National Socialist regime. The eradication and monopoly of media forms such as literature was made an important priority. Following SMAD Order no. 39 on 8 September 1945 on the confiscation of Nazi and military literature, Order no. 7 was issued by the local commandant Captain Schekurow in Fürstenwalde on 22 September 1945. He dictated that in order to 'swiftly root out Nazi and militarist ideas' all owners of private libraries or book shops, as well as private individuals, were to immediately hand in all 'fascist, anti-Soviet and

¹² Étienne François, and Hagen Schulze, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte, Band I-III* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001). The three volumes include contributions by over one hundred authors on a wide range of sites of memory including objects, concepts and events. More recently, other historians have also adopted this wider conception of sites of memory. See for instance, Bill Niven and Chloe Paver, 'Introduction', in *Memorialisation in Germany since 1945*, ed. by Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 1-12, who focus on sites which 'exist as marks on the physical and temporal landscape', be these traditional memorials, memorial sites, commemorative days and rituals, street names or exhibitions. While Martin Sabrow has used the term to explore material places and objects as well as myths and values in the GDR: Martin Sabrow, *DDR*, pp. 9-25.

Wehrmacht-literature'.¹³ These top-down orders were followed by further directives by the military governor of the Soviet zone Marshal Georgy Zhukov, with threats of punishment for non-compliance.¹⁴ Over the following months hundreds of now prohibited book titles were confiscated in Fürstenwalde.¹⁵ From May 1946 onwards these orders were framed within the Allied Control Council's Order no. 4, and efforts to remove offending literature at a grassroots level were subsequently intensified, with the SMAD publishing a list of prohibited Nazi literature that same month.¹⁶ Following Order no. 109 by the SMA in Brandenburg on 22 May 1946 which ordered an audit on the progress of confiscation of Nazi literature, in July 1946 the Brandenburg military commander, Colonel Isakow, demanded that the Lord Mayor of Brandenburg/Havel utilise the 'best antifascists' as well as the police apparatus to confiscate all remaining Nazi literature by 20 August 1946.¹⁷

In Fürstenwalde, the continued widespread retention of illegal 'fascist and military literature' in August 1946 resulted in the public punishment of offending locals with large monetary fines, with the intention not only to publicly humiliate, but also to act as a deterrent.¹⁸ Yet the archival material indicates that these attempts to remove literary sites of memory from the Third Reich at a grassroots level proved to be slow and tedious, as the continued unearthing of offending National Socialist material beyond the officially imposed deadlines suggests. For instance, in Brandenburg/Havel in October 1946 over 1,500 copies of 'fascist' and military books, as well as a large number of newspapers from the Hitler period were reported to have been found in Brandenburg/Havel's local museum, while the local School of Arts was found to be harbouring over a thousand copies of 'fascist' and military literature and many other objects of 'Hitler propaganda'.¹⁹ This sluggish outcome can be attributed to a combination of practical challenges, including the recruitment of sufficient manpower to carry out such book cleansings, as well as a lack of public support and cooperation. These continued difficulties in executing such top-down

¹³ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung./2169, no pag.

¹⁴ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2075, 'Nazi Organisation 1945-46', no pag.

¹⁵ KALOS F/RdS/739, 'Liste beschlagnahmter Bücher 1945-46', no pag.

¹⁶ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.87/87, p. 60 and Margaret F. Stieg, 'The Postwar Purge of German Public Libraries, Democracy, and the American Reaction', *Libraries & Culture*, 28 (1993), 143-164 (p. 152).

¹⁷ Geßner and Sacharow, *Befehle*, p. 101. Also, SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.87/87, p. 118.

¹⁸ See Order no. 11 issued by the town in conjunction with the local Soviet commander Major Matwejew. Fifteen locals were subsequently publicly fined between 300 and 500 RM. KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2083, 'Bekanntmachungen 1946', no pag.

¹⁹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.87/87, p. 255.

demands for the removal of Nazi literature from the grassroots public sphere are illustrated by the fact that even by spring 1948 various local libraries in Brandenburg/Havel continued to be in possession of a significant number of prohibited book titles.²⁰

These efforts to purge political literature were also carried out in conjunction with attempts to remove German militarism from the civilian sphere. At the end of August the Allied Control Council ordered a ban on uniforms and military emblems. However, archival evidence from Fürstenwalde indicates that at a grassroots level this practice nonetheless continued throughout late 1945, particularly as the weather grew colder.²¹ In fact, as warnings in public notices issued by the Fürstenwalde mayor Paul Schmidtchen in spring 1947 highlight, the customs of wearing uniforms and uttering military greetings had not disappeared entirely from local public life.²² Part of this continued hangover from the Third Reich was simply due to the practical issue of post-war material shortages. Both in Fürstenwalde and in Brandenburg/Havel the ban on National Socialist uniforms was often circumvented by dyeing the fabric a politically non-offensive colour. Similarly, Konrad Jarausch has found that this ban, which was intended to ‘break the defeated population’s emotional bond to the military’, was difficult to implement and the saying ‘dye or die’ (*färben oder sterben*) spread quickly in the vernacular.²³ However, the continued public use of military greetings from the Third Reich indicates how challenging it was to alter some of the established linguistic and cultural habits at a grassroots level in Brandenburg.

These attempts to eradicate Third Reich militarism in the wider civilian sphere were intended not only to prevent potential partisan activity but also to cement the rule of the new administrations, and the possession of weapons and Nazi memorabilia of any kind was therefore also strictly forbidden. The archival evidence from Brandenburg indicates that both the local Soviet and German authorities were greatly concerned about the prevalence of munitions ownership and subsequent grassroots punishments for non-compliance were frequently severe. For instance in Fürstenwalde, a local resident, Max H., was publicly sentenced to death in August

²⁰ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.6/6., ‘Protokolle der Arbeitsbesprechungen in der Abt. Volksbildung Nov 1947- März 1949’, pp. 20, 26.

²¹ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2169, no pag.

²² See public notice no. 5/III/1947 by the mayor of Fürstenwalde on 21 March 1947 in: KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2124, ‘Polizei Bekanntmachungen 1946-48’, no pag.

²³ Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilising Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 29.

1945 for the possession of weapons in his basement.²⁴ This harsh sentence was intended to coerce the local population into handing in remaining munitions to the occupying forces. Nonetheless, capital punishment appears in some cases to have been an insufficient deterrent, as reports of persistent non-compliance amongst some sections of the Fürstenwalde population in January 1946 indicate.²⁵ Similarly, in Brandenburg/Havel a large group of youths were arrested for possession of numerous weapons in December 1945.²⁶ Throughout the late 1940s the police across Brandenburg were continually faced with confiscating both weaponry and memorabilia which had been hidden away after the collapse of the Third Reich.²⁷ These instances underscore the difficulties not only of implementing change in the public sphere, but also of removing remnants of the Nazi past in the personal sphere.

As part of the attempts to remove all physical remnants of the Third Reich and militarism across East German society the purges also simultaneously focussed on the previous inculcation of militarism among children, and the Allied Control Council's Order no. 4 included a prohibition on the sale of military style children's toys. Non-compliance was threatened with a military court appearance and possible death sentence. Yet despite such threats, throughout 1946 the Brandenburg government was faced with continued non-compliance in a niche which was difficult to monitor and regulate.²⁸ Moreover, given that many children had been exposed to combat and violence in the final phase of the war, as well as being currently in the presence of an occupying army, grassroots civilian life was still strongly marked by militarism in 1946, and the attempted prohibition of military toys in post-war Brandenburg appears to have been a drop in the ocean at a time when remnants of the war were still ubiquitous.

The difficulties encountered by the East German administration to rid Brandenburg of National Socialist sites of memory and memorabilia are also evident in the oral history interviews. Twelve of those interviewed in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde described how they had kept banned objects from that period,

²⁴ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2169, no pag.

²⁵ See warnings by Colonel Kitschigin in: *Ibid.*, no pag.

²⁶ The local authorities claimed that they were planning the assassination of local political figures, see: SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292, p. 7.

²⁷ See, BLHA, Rep. 202A/39, pp. 205-241, 152 and BArch, DO1/25369, 'Berichte und statistische Analysen über die Kriminalpolizeiliche Arbeit Brandenburg. Band 2', no pag.

²⁸ See Circular Decree no. IV/149 by the President of the Brandenburg Provincial Administration in November 1946 in: KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2099, 'Amtliche Festlegungen 1946-1948', no pag.

throughout the GDR years and even to the present day. Many stated that they still had photos of themselves in Hitler Youth and BDM uniforms, while others kept literature and other memorabilia from the Third Reich. Wilhelm Fiedler kept several magazines as well as some medals which he had been awarded in the war, while Gertrud Hirsch also kept some books as well as all of her father's military medals and insignia.²⁹

In fact, some interviewees claimed to have gone to great lengths to disguise and hide their National Socialist memorabilia after 1945. Gunther Dietrich declared that he had deliberately kept all his books and magazines from the *Luftwaffe*, colouring in the swastika on the planes with a black pen after the Third Reich had collapsed. He recalled that in early 1948, after a tip-off, his house was ransacked by special police looking for incriminating Nazi literature, but he proudly stated that he had hidden all of this in a metal box, under some straw, in his shed.³⁰ Some of the other interviewees also claimed to have taken significant risks by retaining their memorabilia, apparently due to a strong emotional need to retain personal sites of memory irrespective of changed political parameters. Hans Gericke admitted that he still had a sabre from the Hitler Youth hanging in his study today, as well as various pictures and a book by Goebbels which he had hidden in his basement. He recalled that: 'It was of course dangerous if one merely had a stamp with the swastika and some politician or Russian came and said "you Nazi, you Nazi"'.³¹ Kurt Michel proudly claimed that he had kept everything from this period: 'I didn't throw away anything [...] *Wehrmacht* books and all those kinds of things, odds and ends, scrapbooks that one used to have', jokingly adding 'I was a proper German, a German collects everything'.³² These vivid recollections suggest that memorabilia from the Third Reich were still very salient and treasured objects for these interviewees despite their exposure to the memory politics and official political discourse of the GDR for forty years.

In contrast, others such as Wolfgang Heinrich claimed to have destroyed everything due to political conviction, illustrating what Konrad Jarausch has termed 'self-denazification'.³³ However, Jarausch's notion of self-denazification did not

²⁹ Fiedler, 25.06.09. Hirsch, 27.08.09.

³⁰ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

³¹ Gericke, 09.06.09.

³² Michel, 10.06.09.

³³ Heinrich, 01.09.09. Jarausch, *After Hitler*, p. 46.

always occur as a result of political conversion, as the interviews illustrate. Wolfgang Fried did recall tearing up some of the most incriminating Nazi books which he had in his possession in 1945, but not, he claimed, out of personal political conviction but simply ‘so that the Russians would not find them’.³⁴ Nonetheless, the continued presence of these Nazi *lieux de mémoire* in the personal sphere amongst a proportion of the interviewees, suggest a salience of personal positive memories of the Third Reich amongst this interview cohort which managed to transcend two twentieth century political transitions. These developments support the above archival findings and suggest that the difficulty in implementing change was not just salient in the post-war period, but in some cases continued for many years to come.

There were, however, areas of public life and sites of memory which lent themselves more easily to political revision. National Socialist monuments and museums were to be liquidated under Allied Control Council Directive no. 30 from 13. May 1946.³⁵ Likewise, street names and inscriptions in shops, newspapers and public buildings were also to be altered to remove all traces of ‘fascism’. The renaming of streets which had reflected National Socialist maxims constituted an attempt to erase the Third Reich from official public memory as well as a prescription of new, politically sanctioned, reference points. As Maoz Azaryahu has argued, in order for a particular version of the past to be part of the social realm, it must operate in the ‘semiosphere’, and he maintains that street names, which serve as a ‘vehicle for commemorating heroes and glorious events’, are a ‘conventional mechanism for inserting the official version of the past into the semiosphere’.³⁶ Likewise, archival evidence from Fürstenwalde reveals a radical revision of National Socialist street names. For instance, in spring 1946 the ‘Sudetendeutscher Platz’ was changed to ‘Moskauer Platz’ and ‘Leo-Schlageter-Straße’, which had commemorated the *Freikorps* martyr, was renamed ‘Karl-Liebnecht-Straße’.³⁷ This form of revisionism reflects what Rainer Pöppinghege describes as the ‘partial amputation of collective conceptions of history’ in public spaces.³⁸ However, Maoz

³⁴ Fried, 25.06.09.

³⁵ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.87/87, p. 123.

³⁶ By operating in the semiosphere he means ‘to be part of the mechanisms of generating and distributing meanings that are constantly at work in the networks of social communication’. Maoz Azaryahu, ‘Renaming the Past: Changes in "City Text" in Germany and Austria, 1945-1947’, *History and Memory*, 2 (1990), 32-53 (p. 33).

³⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2083, no pag.

³⁸ Rainer Pöppinghege, *Wege des Erinnerns: Was Straßennamen über das deutsche Geschichtsbewusstsein aussagen* (Münster: agenda Verlag, 2007), p. 13.

Azaryahu maintains that part of the success of choosing this medium to alter sites of memory is that through changed street names the new version of the past becomes ‘omnipresent’ and is interwoven with daily life, thus gaining the ‘appearance of naturalness’.³⁹ This form of revision of National Socialist street names continued in both Fürstenwalde and Brandenburg/Havel, and was additionally expanded by the *Politbüro* of the SED in the early 1950s to further remove street names which were by then considered to be ‘no longer palatable’.⁴⁰

In sum, an examination of the attempts to eliminate the physical legacy of the Third Reich in the immediate post-war period in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde illustrates the generally difficult nature of this task. The removal and revision in areas such as literature, uniforms, weaponry and toys as well as the renaming of streets did have some success.⁴¹ Nonetheless, on the basis of both the archival and the oral history evidence it appears that these policies found it harder to permeate the personal sphere and that a significant number of individuals either ignored or adapted only somewhat to the newly prescribed political parameters. Some appear to have done so as a result of post-war commodity shortages and practical considerations, whilst others out of emotional need which is evidenced by the fact that this memorabilia from the Third Reich appear to still be salient today. These developments in turn suggest the existence of limited opportunities for grassroots action which permitted some actors to exercise *Eigensinn* by flouting the new officially prescribed norms despite the new political constraints and thereby illustrate some of the challenges encountered in the implementation of these top-down policies at a local level.

³⁹ Azaryahu, *Renaming*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ KALOS F/RdS/715, ‘Sammlung von wichtigen Aktenstücken für die Chronik geeignet 1933-1964’, no pag. SAB RdS/SOB, 2.0.3.10/104, ‘Berichte zur weiteren Demokratisierung der Verwaltung 1952-1956’, p. 75. See Circular Decree no. 10/50 issued by the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior in: BLHA, Rep. 203/791, ‘Entfernung von Reklame und anderen Aufschriften aus der Zeit vor 1945, 1950-1951’, p. 3. Johanna Säger, *Heldenkult und Heimatliebe. Straßen- und Ehrennamen im offiziellen Gedächtnis der DDR* (Jena: Dissertation, Friedrich-Schiller-Uni, 2005), p. 97. For a further illustration of these transformations in the DDR see Maoz Azaryahu, *Von Wilhelmplatz zu Thälmannplatz: Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991).

⁴¹ However, the evidence also suggests that the drawing of swastikas in public places nonetheless continued in subsequent years across East Germany. Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), p. 159.

4.3 Early vetting attempts: the first and second periods of denazification from 1945-1946

In addition to the attempts to remove the physical remnants and sites of memory of the Third Reich in East Germany, in line with the Potsdam Agreement legislation was also passed to vet former adherents of National Socialism in order to lessen their economic, political and social influence after 1945. This legislation consisted of four relatively distinct phases, each of which had a differing impact on former National Socialists living in the Soviet sector.⁴² The first period of denazification demonstrated severity towards former National Socialists. In Brandenburg, the first vice-president of the provincial administration, Bernhard Bechler, was principally responsible for denazification in the province.⁴³ At a meeting of district administrators and Lord Mayors from across Brandenburg which took place in Brandenburg/Havel on 17 July 1945, Bechler demanded that all former NSDAP members, irrespective of whether they had been active or nominal, should be removed from local administrations.⁴⁴ This was followed by the announcement of Order no. 42 on 27 August 1945, which envisaged a general and thorough denazification in the Soviet zone, whilst newspaper articles from autumn 1945 promised ‘severe punishment for the Nazi criminals’, as it was considered that individuals who had been ‘politically and morally infected by fascist ideology’ could in many cases ‘never be won back, and certainly not in a matter of weeks or months’.⁴⁵ Denazification commissions were established in an attempt to process the large number of National Socialist members and functionaries, and by April 1946 commissions in Brandenburg had examined 46,759 public servants – 10,714 of

⁴² Welsh, *Entnazifizierung*, pp. 66-67.

⁴³ Interestingly, Bernhard Bechler (1911-2002) had previously been an NSDAP member and Major in the *Wehrmacht*, becoming one of the founding members of the NKFD and BdO on his capture in Stalingrad. On his return to Germany in 1945 he joined the KPD/SED, becoming the first Vice President of the Provincial Government of Brandenburg. From 1946-1949 he then held the post of Minister of the Interior of Brandenburg and subsequently had a successful career in the NVA. Müller-Enbergs, *Wer war wer: Band 1*, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁴ However, Helle maintains that the majority of district administrators and lord mayors in Brandenburg ignored these demands due to an urgent need for qualified staff. Helle, *Nachkriegsjahre*, pp. 83-85.

⁴⁵ Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Politik und Justiz in der DDR: Zur Geschichte der politischen Verfolgung 1945-1968. Bericht und Dokumentation* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft&Politik, 1979), p. 29. See also BArch, NY/4036/717, ‘Wilhelm Pieck, Die Blockpolitik der Partei: Antifaschistisch-demokratischer Block- Juli 1945- Sept 1949’. Michael Buddrus, ‘A generation twice betrayed: youth policy in the transition from the Third Reich to the Soviet Zone of Occupation (1945-1946)’, in *Generations in Conflict: Youth revolt and generation formation in Germany 1770-1968*, ed. by Mark Roseman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 247-268 (p. 254).

whom were classified as former NSDAP members and fired.⁴⁶ However, until mid-1946 the majority of these denazification rulings were merely decided on the basis of written documents. Moreover, former adherents of National Socialism were not completely removed from economic life; instead the relevant employment centre was subsequently deployed to assist those who had been made redundant to find jobs in 'material production' as manual labourers.⁴⁷ It was considered that here they would have less influence and power in the workplace, as well as simultaneously contributing to the physical rebuilding of the Soviet zone.

In contrast, the second denazification phase in the summer of 1946 consisted of a relatively conciliatory approach. One primary reason for this change of attitude were the upcoming municipal elections to be held in autumn 1946, as a result of which the leadership intensified its efforts to win the support of former Nazi Party members.⁴⁸ At the end of June 1946, the Brandenburg Provincial Administration stated that all former NSDAP members currently working in the public state administration had 'proven through their actions' that they had contributed to the rebuilding of Germany, and were thus considered to be rehabilitated.⁴⁹ At a grassroots level in Brandenburg/Havel local dynamics and initiatives played an important role in this rehabilitation process. In September 1946, the local electoral committee found that numerous residents had apparently been 'mistakenly accused' of being active in the NSDAP and SS and were subsequently exonerated by local officials, in some cases even re-labelled as 'antifascist' and were thereby permitted to partake in the upcoming local and regional elections.⁵⁰ Thus, until the autumn of 1946, the vetting procedures against National Socialists were generally haphazard, while the attempts by all the political parties to win over former NSDAP members for the elections, had by the end of 1946 given the impression that denazification was coming to an end.

⁴⁶ Geßner and Sacharow, *Befehle*, p. 22. It must be noted however, that this phase of denazification was carried out differently from one region to the next – Damian van Melis has found that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern fulfilled the quotas for the removal of Nazis quicker than the other states in late 1945. Melis, *Entnazifizierung*, p. 323.

⁴⁷ Wille, *Entnazifizierung*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ Buddrus, *Generation*, p. 254.

⁴⁹ BLHA, Rep. 230/9, 'Überprüfung der ehemaligen Mitglieder der NSDAP auf Weiterbeschäftigung 1945-46', no pag. See also BArch, NY/4036/749, 'Wilhelm Pieck, Kampf um die demokratische Einheit Deutschlands: die Schaffung der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Ordnung und die Gründung der DDR: Entnazifizierung Jan 1946- Sept 1947', p. 21.

⁵⁰ SAB RdS/BW, 2.0.19.1/292, pp. 70-71.

4.4 The third period of denazification: the implementation and impact of Directive no. 24 at a grassroots level

The third denazification phase began with a delayed implementation of the common directives of the Allied Control Council on denazification, Directive no. 24, which had already been agreed upon on 12 January 1946, but which only came into official effect in the Soviet zone on 9 December 1946 due to foreign policy considerations.⁵¹ The main objective of Directive no. 24 was to be the ‘removal from office and from positions of responsibility of Nazis and of persons hostile to Allied purposes’. According to Article 2, persons to be targeted were those who had held any office or been active in the NSDAP or affiliated organisations as well as those who were ‘avowed believers in Nazism or racial and militaristic creeds’. Article 10 then included an extensive list of those who should be immediately removed.⁵² The SMAD perceived this new wave of denazification as an opportunity to unify the various denazification attempts of the provinces in the Soviet zone. This wave of denazification was intended to vet entire ministries, institutions and offices in the public service, and the individual provinces were ordered that numerous nominal NSDAP members, who had previously been reinstated in their jobs, were to be re-examined.

During the harsh winter of 1946-47 a central provincial denazification commission for Brandenburg was established in Potsdam and thirty local district commissions were created across the region by early 1947. In Fürstenwalde cases were to be examined by the ‘Commission for Directive no. 24’ in the administrative district office in Seelow, thirty kilometres north-east of the town, while Brandenburg/Havel was to have its own town denazification commission. These commissions were to consist of a panel of five members: the chair was to be held by either the district administrator or the Lord Mayor, while the other four commissioners were to be recruited from the SED, CDU, LDP and FDGB. Examination of the archival material reveals that roughly one fifth of those who were summoned in front of the local denazification commissions responsible for

⁵¹ Wille, *Entnazifizierung*, p. 135.

⁵² For a contemporary discussion on the clauses contained within Directive no. 24 see Elmer Plischke, ‘Denazification Law and Procedure’, in *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1947), pp. 807-827.

Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde throughout spring 1947 were fired right away in accordance with Article 10.⁵³ A different picture emerges, however, if we shift the focus to the fates of the remaining large majority who appeared in front of the commissions and the manner in which Directive no. 24 was interpreted and applied on the ground.

In exploring the grassroots responses to this third wave of denazification it becomes clear that a combination of the vague wording of the Allied Control Directive, combined with varying local factors, provided wide latitude for interpretation and application, resulting in an inconsistent application of Directive no. 24 at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Disciplinary action varied greatly, and these rulings were rationalised using a broad spectrum of justifications, which were often based on local subjective interpretations of Directive no. 24. Building on Vogt's study of Brandenburg in which he maintains that district commissions were essentially the 'theatre stages' of local denazification and that their importance 'in the purge cannot be overemphasised', this section also explores the importance of specific local knowledge and factors in these proceedings in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.⁵⁴ Building on Vogt's work, this chapter seeks to integrate two additional aspects: the potential impact which individual grassroots complaints and petitions could have on the outcome of the local vetting process as well as the role which the regional commissions could play in this dynamic.

Opportunities for latitude in the interpretation of Directive no. 24 by the local commissions were provided particularly by Article 2e of the Directive which stated that some individuals who had been removed from public or semi-public office could on occasion be granted a license to continue in private employment in a subordinate role. Such leniency was often rooted in rising uneasiness about the high levels of redundancies of qualified experts and the consequences this would have for the running of the towns. In fact, Article 8 of the Directive actually permitted the retention of National Socialists in the public service, provided they had an essential role during the post-war shortage and were merely nominal and not 'hostile to Allied purposes'.

⁵³ See, for instance, KALOS F/RdS/79, 'Direktive Nr. 24 und Befehl 201. 1947-1948', no pag. and SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, 'Durchführung der Entnazifizierung aufgrund der Direktive 24 (1945-1947)', for a large range of cases.

⁵⁴ Vogt, *Denazification*, p. 114.

However, the archival evidence indicates that the subjective nature of the interpretation of what constituted nominal membership was often stretched by the commissions responsible for Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. This concern over a shortage of skilled labour was most pronounced in the vetting of specific specialised branches, and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the contemporary public health problems, this tendency was particularly palpable in the medical profession and the hospital systems in both Fürstenwalde and Brandenburg/Havel. In contrast to the Western zone, where the ratio of available doctors stood at 1:800 members of the population, across East Germany the doctor-patient ratio averaged at 1:1,400 by autumn 1946.⁵⁵ Brandenburg/Havel had 55 medical doctors at the end of 1945, a ratio of roughly one physician for 1,355 members of the population.⁵⁶ An even greater shortage existed in Fürstenwalde where the central hospital had been bombed on 16 April 1945, and the town had access to only nine medical doctors, a ratio of 1:2,218 of the population.⁵⁷

The impact of these local shortages can be seen in the form of frequent leniency in the denazification of the medical profession at a grassroots level in both towns. In one such example from Fürstenwalde the commission ruled that Dr Kurt A., a neurological specialist with his own practice in Fürstenwalde, was considered to be ‘irreplaceable in the current situation’. His memberships of the NSDAP and the SA since 1933 were excused by the commission on the grounds that they had been out of economic and not political considerations.⁵⁸ This was also the case for various other Fürstenwalde and Brandenburg/Havel doctors, nurses and hospital workers who received the sanction of their local commissions to remain in their posts, despite their memberships in the NSDAP and other various associated organs.⁵⁹

These reprieves did not just have a short term implications. Helga Welsh has found that across East Germany those employed in the medical sector were permitted to remain in their jobs in large numbers, while Anna-Sabine Ernst maintains that the medical profession remained extraordinarily resilient with respect to their social and

⁵⁵ Anna-Sabine Ernst, ‘Von der bürgerlichen zur sozialistischen Profession? Ärzte in der DDR, 1945-1961’, in *Die Grenzen*, p. 27.

⁵⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202E/23, ‘Bevölkerungsstatistik der Stadtkreise der Provinz Mark Brandenburg 1945’, p. 2.

⁵⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2097, no pag. and KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/994, no pag.

⁵⁸ BLHA, Rep. 203/596, p. 160. See also SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-331. See also BLHA, Rep. 203/592, ‘Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (Sitzung 134-143, 1947)’ and SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27.

professional standing.⁶⁰ In fact, by 1949, there were still a total of 13,222 doctors in the Soviet zone, or seven doctors for every 10,000 inhabitants, almost the identical doctor-patient ratio which had existed before denazification.⁶¹

The concern over a severe shortage of qualified labour in Brandenburg/Havel also spread to other sectors such as veterinarians and local engineers, many of whom were treated with leniency by the local denazification commission, despite falling under Directive no. 24.⁶² In fact, an archival examination of the decision making by the local commission from January to late March 1947 indicates that of those Nazis who clearly fell under Directive no. 24 in Brandenburg/Havel, only 40% were actually fired, while in Fürstenwalde this figure is even lower. It is probably not all that surprising that these local commissions showed great leniency in areas where technical qualifications were most scarce in their towns. Yet this development is interesting for two reasons. Firstly it somewhat challenges assumptions of a thorough East German denazification process, when in actuality a large number of qualified former Nazis were able to slip through the net and continue their professional trajectories. Secondly these frequent benign rulings illustrate that in certain instances, former NSDAP members did not need to exert much effort to retain their professional positions. In these cases, the post-war dynamic, defined by severe shortages, ensured the continuation of their secure positions and this leniency had the effect of partially ameliorating the possible destabilising impact which denazification could potentially have within communities.

Moreover, the archival evidence on denazification cases in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde indicate that commissions could opt to retain former Nazis in employment without utilising the exemption clause no. 8, which was reserved for specialists in short supply. The commissions could instead base their judgement on Article 6 on 'discretionary removal and exclusion' which was intended to address the large number of individuals who were neither clearly active and devout Nazis nor completely lethargic members. In some cases this allowed the commissions to defend their leniency, particularly if the individual in question had

⁶⁰ Welsh, *Entnazifizierung*, p. 72. Ernst, *Von der bürgerlichen*, p. 25.

⁶¹ Ralf Rytlewski and Manfred Opp de Hipt, *Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik in Zahlen 1945/49 – 1980: Ein sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch* (München: C.H. Beck, 1987), p. 148. This is bearing in mind that some doctors absconded to the West during this period, whilst others returned from POW camps.

⁶² SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 102–224.

presented themselves as actively engaging with the new political parameters.⁶³ Similarly, those individuals who claimed that they had proven their willingness to make themselves immediately available to the re-building of the town in 1945 often received favourable treatment. This was the case for numerous employees in Fürstenwalde's town administration and various local organs such as the forestry department and cemetery workers as well as electricians, carpenters, locksmiths, pipe-fitters and engineers, who were all said to have 'made themselves available as workers after the collapse in 1945'.⁶⁴ Likewise, perceived co-operation with the Red Army on their arrival in 1945 was also rewarded by the local denazification commissions. For instance, some of the engineers and skilled tradesmen working in Fürstenwalde's power station and water supply works were permitted to remain in their posts, despite long-term NSDAP memberships, because they were said to have defied orders at the end of the war to destroy the infrastructure under their control.⁶⁵ Such examples illustrate the wide latitude available to grassroots commissions through the ability to decide on discretionary removal, which in turn somewhat moderated the impact of the actual implementation of Directive no. 24 in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.

Yet there were also numerous additional factors which influenced the vetting process at a local level beyond mere economic considerations as the effect which local, grassroots knowledge often had on the outcome of some of the commission's deliberations is striking. Often, especially in the case of Brandenburg/Havel, where the commission was made up entirely of local individuals, memories and perceptions from before 1945 greatly influenced the commission's decisions. One such individual was Heinrich D., an engineer and member of the NSDAP since 1933, who was allowed to keep his trading license as the local commission felt that he had retained a 'positive political stance' throughout the Hitler period.⁶⁶ Yet, local knowledge could also work against individuals who appeared in front of local commissions. Gottfried R., the owner of a retail firm which dealt in textiles and

⁶³ See, for instance, cases where an attempt to join the SED was evaluated favourably: BLHA, Rep. 203/584, 'Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (7. Januar-20. März 1947)', pp. 367, 551.

⁶⁴ BLHA, Rep. 203/585, 'Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (21. März-11. April 1947)', pp. 266, 316, 354-359.

⁶⁵ These local rulings were endorsed a short time later by the regional commission. *Ibid.*, pp. 313, 315.

⁶⁶ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 9-10, 49.

wallpaper in Brandenburg/Havel, appeared in front of the local commission in February 1947, who reminded him that during the war the shop windows of his business had been utilised for National Socialist propaganda by exhibiting war images such as maps with miniature flags and soldiers.⁶⁷ Particularly in the case of Brandenburg/Havel, Lord Mayor Lange frequently pursued individual local cases, often with an explicit personal vendetta, in some cases even leading to official complaints against him personally at a regional level.⁶⁸ Yet given that local knowledge and memories could often negatively impact the outcome of a person's hearing, the opposite was sometimes also the case, especially when it came to expellees from the former Eastern German territories. Here, it was often difficult or impossible to receive incriminating information on persons originating from these regions, resulting in numerous favourable rulings at a local level for some expellees whose political background could not be verified in 1947.⁶⁹

Timothy Vogt's study has found that 'policies handed down from the centre were frequently implemented in the towns and villages in ways that were unforeseen by the policy makers'. He claims that 'by giving decision-making power to local commissions staffed by long-time local residents and by encouraging these commissions to work in a bipartisan manner, the central authorities had created a system impervious to central control'.⁷⁰ Although the findings above from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde are consistent with some of Vogt's conclusions on the importance of grassroots factors and actors on the outcome of denazification under Directive no. 24, this thesis also challenges Vogt's notion that the local commissions were 'impervious to central control' by examining the treatment of some of these local cases at a regional level and providing evidence that grassroots Brandenburgers attempted to bypass local commissions in order to receive a more favourable outcome from the regional commission in Potsdam. A fully systematic comparison of all the individual cases vetted in both towns is beyond the scope of this study; nonetheless, using the aforementioned database, a preliminary comparison between the local and regional archival material suggests that the local commissions were not as immune to outside influence as Vogt maintains. In fact, a

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

⁶⁸ See, for instance, his pursuit of local nurse Martha V. in: *Ibid.*, pp. 241-248. See also the case of Susanne S. at a local level in: *Ibid.*, p. 216, and the subsequent progression of the case at a regional level in BLHA, Rep 203/625, p. 469.

⁶⁹ See SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27.

⁷⁰ Vogt, *Denazification*, pp. 4, 141.

substantial number of local rulings were subsequently re-examined by the central provincial commission in Potsdam, under whose jurisdiction the district denazification commissions fell. Without a full comparative study of the thousands of denazification cases in Brandenburg it is unclear how many cases underwent this reassessment at regional level; however, the evidence from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde suggests that a significant proportion were re-examined, both as a routine procedure and as a result of complaints from members of the local population who challenged a negative outcome by the local commissions.

In the case of Fürstenwalde, the regional Brandenburg commission reviewed over 70 cases in 15 sittings between late February and late March 1947. In a substantial number of instances, the regional commission upheld the decisions made by the local commission, but they also overruled other cases, judging them to be either too lenient or too harsh.⁷¹ Similarly, half of the 23 cases from Brandenburg/Havel which appeared in front of the regional commission on 16 April 1947 were rescinded.⁷² When on 22 February 1947 the case of Walter J., a local businessman and long-time member of the NSDAP, had come in front of the commission in Brandenburg/Havel, the SED representative on the commission testified from personal experience that his sons had ‘belonged to the most vicious of SA thugs’ and the town commission therefore unanimously ruled to revoke his trading license.⁷³ But interestingly, when the case was appealed before the Brandenburg state commission two months later, which was staffed by individuals who were not personally acquainted with the defendant, the local evidence was disregarded, and it was instead decided that Walter J. was in fact permitted to continue working.⁷⁴ This also happened in the case of Gustav B., the owner of a nursery, who was considered by the local commission in Brandenburg/Havel, many of whom knew him personally, to be ‘highly anti-Semitic and anti-Marxist’.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, two months later the regional commission overturned two previous local decisions and permitted Gustav B. to continue working.⁷⁶ Similar patterns

⁷¹ See, for instance, KALOS F/RdS/79, no pag. and compare with files from BLHA, Rep. 203, nos. 584, 585, 589, 590, 591, 592, 596 and 597.

⁷² Compare local decisions in SAB RdS/OB. 2.0.2. 27/27, with the subsequent rulings towards the same individuals at a regional level in BLHA, Rep. 203/586, ‘Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (Sitzung 65-89, 1947)’.

⁷³ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 17-18, 117.

⁷⁴ BLHA, Rep. 203/586, p. 518.

⁷⁵ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 9-19, 29.

⁷⁶ BLHA, Rep. 203/586, p. 518.

could also be observed with other local individuals, such as opticians, engineers and textile and furniture dealers, where local negative judgements were overruled with leniency at a regional level.⁷⁷ Such rulings suggest that local grassroots actors were able to successfully bypass a negative ruling by the local denazification commission by complaining to the district commission in Potsdam.

However, there were also cases where local party functionaries were unsuccessful in protecting members of their community from a negative ruling by the regional commission. Frequently such party interventions came from either the CDU or LDP, yet it was also not uncommon for local SED functionaries to act as exonerating witnesses. This was, for instance, the case of a local doctor in Fürstenwalde during whose denazification process the SED mayor, as well as numerous locals and politicians, attempted in vain to prevent his removal from the Fürstenwalde hospital, as their petitions were rejected at a regional level.⁷⁸

In fact, these differences and discrepancies of opposing rulings made by commissions at local and regional level sometimes manifested themselves as outright tension. This was particularly evident in the case of Lord Mayor Lange who explicitly challenged verdicts by the provincial Brandenburg government, as well as personally vehemently defending some of the decisions which had been made by his own local denazification committee in Brandenburg/Havel.⁷⁹ Such developments illustrate not only the grey area between top-down initiatives and their reception and implementation at a local level but also that the post-war rifts did often not always manifest themselves as the SED versus the people, but instead as local resentment at interference from central organs.

There were also a further group of actors who should be considered when addressing the grassroots impact of the implementation of this third phase of denazification at a grassroots level: the responses of those who themselves were denazified. In fact, the archival material from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde indicates that many of those who were fired from their jobs by the two local commissions petitioned against the local verdicts, while others appealed for clemency directly from top SED members.⁸⁰ Some of these complaints proved

⁷⁷ Compare SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 9-19, 46 and BLHA, Rep. 203/586, p. 518.

⁷⁸ BLHA, Rep. 203/589, 'Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (Sitzung 110-116, 1947)', pp. 60-61, 67, 76.

⁷⁹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 55-57.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, the appeals to Wilhelm Pieck. BArch, NY/4036/749, pp. 25-38.

fruitless. For instance, Ernst W., a labourer in Fürstenwalde's treasury office had two appeals rejected by the district commission in February 1947, despite his attempts to argue and prove through witness statements that his memberships of the NSDAP and the SS had been as a result of 'political pressure'.⁸¹ Likewise, Erich W., a clerk in Fürstenwalde's social welfare office who had belonged to the NSDAP and SA, also had two appeals rejected by the district commission in the same month. Similar complaints were also lodged unsuccessfully by other members of Fürstenwalde's administrative organs.⁸² In Brandenburg/Havel some individuals also tried to challenge local verdicts without success, while others sought out legal guidance in order to dispute the ruling of the local commission in vain.⁸³

Conversely, others had more success with their complaints to the denazification commissions. In February 1947 Max B, a tax accountant in Fürstenwalde's town administration and NSDAP member since 1937, successfully appealed the local commission's first negative ruling, convincing them at his second hearing that he was merely nominal and had made himself 'available for active duty' in the administration since 1945. Similarly, Herman R., a caretaker in a Fürstenwalde school, who was also an NSDAP member since 1937, persuaded the commission to overturn their first negative ruling on the basis that he had only been a nominal Nazi and was now a member of the FDGB.⁸⁴ Such instances provide evidence that grassroots Brandenburgers, when faced with the immediate existential threat of losing their jobs, could on occasion successfully challenge local and regional rulings of denazification commissions, thereby somewhat affecting the manner in which Directive no. 24 was ultimately implemented at a grassroots level.

The implementation of Directive no. 24 should have been completed by 28 February 1947 and the government exerted pressure on the local and regional commissions to submit a final report by 15 March 1947.⁸⁵ Yet, by the summer of 1947 dissatisfaction in the population was constantly increasing, compounded by the fact that governmental bodies were flooded with applications for appeal, with which the administrations could no longer cope. Moreover, the implementation of Directive no. 24 did very little to address the issue of the many National Socialist functionaries

⁸¹ KALOS F/RdS/79, no pag.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸³ See for instance: SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, pp. 9-19, 56-58.

⁸⁴ Other similar cases were also recorded in February 1947: KALOS F/RdS/79, no pag.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no pag.

who had failed to return to their previous hometowns after May 1945. By 1947, sixty prominent local Nazis had not yet returned to Fürstenwalde.⁸⁶

Nonetheless, between January and early autumn 1947 the 21 district commissions and 9 town commissions in Brandenburg had recorded 15,539 people who were considered to fall under Directive no. 24.⁸⁷ Yet, the archival evidence suggests that the implementation of, and responses to, the third denazification phase in both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde in the form of Directive no. 24 appears to have been influenced by a plethora of factors and considerations which went well beyond a mere consideration of an individual's political background. Interestingly, it was not merely economic determinants, such as the need for qualified experts and a shortage of skilled labour, which played a role in the vetting of former National Socialists at a grassroots level; rewards and punishments for past behaviour were also dispensed by the local commissions. Discordances between local and regional rulings were also notably present, highlighting the often subjective and lax interpretation of Directive no. 24. As a consequence of these differing interpretations of Directive no. 24, combined with extreme post-war shortages, it appears that a certain room for manoeuvre existed in which grassroots Brandenburgers could challenge the outcome of rulings both at a local and regional level. Furthermore, the large number of complaints and appeals contributed to a delay in the implementation of the vetting procedure in Brandenburg throughout 1947.

4.5 The fourth period of denazification: the implementation of Order no. 201 at a grassroots level

The fourth and final denazification period was carried out within the framework of SMAD Order no. 201 between August 1947 and February 1948. This SMAD order from 16 August 1947 was to replace the implementation of Directive no. 24, and now attempted to make a clear differentiation between active and nominal Party members. The accompanying handbook issued on Order no. 201 stated that:

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸⁷ BArch, DO1/25432, 'Dvdl(K5). Befehl der SMAD 1947-48', p. 5.

A general judicial arraignment of all former nominal, non-active members of the Nazi Party would only harm the democratic rebuilding of Germany and contribute to the strengthening of remnants of fascist, military reactionism.⁸⁸

The former commissions for Directive no. 24 were therefore to be replaced with new denazification commissions which were to be established in the Brandenburg state government, as well as in all towns and administrative districts.⁸⁹ These commissions were to have the same political constellation as the previous commissions with the addition of representatives from mass organisations such as the DFB, FDJ and VVN.

The judiciary was also to play an important role in the execution of Order no. 201 as it was envisaged that investigations into National Socialist crimes would be intensified and subsequently be transferred to German courts for processing.⁹⁰ Order no. 201 was also to affect the police bodies in the Soviet zone, and by September 1947 moves were underway to establish investigative organs in which the K5 (forerunner to the MfS) squads and commissariats were to play a central role.⁹¹ In fact, Order no. 201 was to serve as a significant weapon for politicising the police and the K5, while it also considerably strengthened the Ministry of the Interior who had the right to be informed about all proceedings.⁹² In this manner, the implementation of Order no. 201 was to play an important role in the post-war political transition process.

In Brandenburg, a state denazification commission was established on 25 September 1947. It had its seat in Potsdam and consisted of ten people, eight of whom were members of the SED and ranged from Minister Bernhard Bechler, who was by now the Minister of the Interior, to ordinary workers.⁹³ In Brandenburg/Havel members were also recruited from the various parties and antifascist organisations. Suitability to sit on the commission was decided on the candidate's demonstration of their 'democratic views' and whether it was deemed

⁸⁸ BArch, DO1/25420, 'K5: Befehl 201 der SMAD. Handbuch zum Befehl 201 16.08.1947. Akte: 1947-1950', p. 1 of excerpt from Order 201.

⁸⁹ BLHA, Rep. 203/583, 'Durchführung des SMAD-Befehls Nr. 201 vom 16. Aug. 1947 über die Bildung von Entnazifizierungskommissionen 1947', p. 3.

⁹⁰ See Pohl, *Justiz*, pp. 161, 163 and Wieland, *Ahndung*, p. 25.

⁹¹ In Brandenburg a main central department had been set up by August 1947 consisting of four central departments and 27 deployment locations, while 242 police-staff and 43 secretarial staff had been made available. BArch, DO1/25368, 'Berichte und statistische Analysen über die kriminalpolizeiliche Arbeit: Brandenburg, Band 1, 1947-49', no pag. BArch, DO1/25422, 'Kriminalpolizei K5:Befehl 201 der SMAD 1947-48', p. 159.

⁹² Naimark, *Russians*, p. 361. Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 164.

⁹³ BArch, DO1/25431, 'Dvdl(K5). Befehl der SMAD 1947-48', pp. 8, 9, 18.

that they were ‘morally and politically capable of making the right decisions’.⁹⁴ Yet subjective interpretations of what constituted adequate ‘moral and political’ competencies led to conflicts in Brandenburg/Havel when the CDU candidate, who had been approved by the SMA and state government in Brandenburg, was vetoed by Lord Mayor Lange at a local level.⁹⁵ Despite these tensions, by 30 September 1947 commission building in Brandenburg/Havel had been completed and consisted of eight people, six of whom were SED members, the other two representing the CDU and the LDP.⁹⁶ Here the first public hearing took place on 14 October 1947. Public notices had been previously hung up in the town on official notification boards requesting that the population provide political background information on those on the denazification list.⁹⁷ In the district of Lebus, which was responsible for Fürstenwalde, the denazification commission consisted of seven people by the end of September 1947. Five members were in the SED, including the district administrator Berthold Wottke who had previously been the mayor of Fürstenwalde in late 1945 and 1946, while the others included ordinary workers and a housewife.⁹⁸

By mid-October 1947 the Brandenburg state denazification commission had carried out ten sittings in which they examined 141 cases; yet the progress of the various denazification commissions at a local level varied considerably.⁹⁹ By early November 1947, some commissions in the state of Brandenburg were reported to be handling only eight or ten cases a week, prompting the Minister of the Interior, Bechler, to voice concern at the ‘lack of antifascist consciousness’ of some commissions.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the work carried out by the Brandenburg/Havel commission was considered by the Ministry of the Interior of Brandenburg to be ‘good’ by late 1947.¹⁰¹ Here, the commission continued to be headed by Lord Mayor Lange and hearings took place on a regular basis. Nonetheless, even here, the local

⁹⁴ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.89/89, ‘Bildung einer Entnazifizierungskommission mit Verfahrensordnung, gemäß Ausführungsbestimmungen Nr 2. zum Befehl 201 des Obersten Chefs der SMAD und Protokollen der Sitzungen des Stadtkreises Brandenburg 1947-48’, p. 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-35.

⁹⁶ BArch, DO1/25431, pp. 9, 20.

⁹⁷ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.89/89, pp. 37, 56.

⁹⁸ Similar to Brandenburg/Havel, the CDU candidate was forced to withdraw at the last minute as he was found to fall under Directive no. 24 see BArch, DO1/25431, pp. 12, 30.

⁹⁹ 92 of these were rejected, while in 42 cases the previous rulings of the district and town commissions were reversed. The remaining three cases were forwarded to investigative organs. BArch, DO1/25432, p. 71.

¹⁰⁰ BArch, DO1/25444, ‘Arbeitsergebnisse der Landespolizeibehörden zum SMAD-Befehl 201 – Statistiken und Berichte Brandenburg 1947-50’, no pag.

¹⁰¹ BArch, DO1/25432, p. 102.

commission was forced to deal with difficulties such as the frequent unreliability of witness statements, as well as false written declarations on biographical forms in which certain events and previous political allegiances were often re-written or left out altogether.¹⁰² It is therefore conceivable that in other local commissions which were less well-organised and efficient, that these problems were even more pronounced.

In Fürstenwalde, numerous citizens were also called to appear in front of both the district commission in Lebus, as well as the Brandenburg state denazification commission.¹⁰³ Fürstenwalde mayor Paul Schmidtchen, a former SPD member and successor to Berthold Wottke, erected public notices containing lists of the locals due to be denazified, and encouraged the general Fürstenwalde population to participate at these hearings, either as audience members or as prosecuting and exonerating witnesses.¹⁰⁴

However, the establishment of these local denazification commissions appears to have had little impact on the memories of the oral history interviews, the majority whom felt that the denazification commissions had played only a minor role or no role at all at a local level. For instance, Ulla Beck recalled: 'That didn't happen in Fürstenwalde, if it did, then it took place in Berlin or something – I don't know anything about such a campaign'.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, most of the interviewees claimed that they were much more interested in other personal matters rather than the vetting of former Nazis, as Gunther Dietrich recalled: 'We didn't run into town to look at notice boards, we had our own problems'.¹⁰⁶ Whilst this supposed lack of interest may be attributable to the young age of the interviewees, the archival evidence also suggests that the wider Brandenburg population, provided they were not personally affected, generally responded to this denazification wave with apathy and lack of interest.

Reports from the Ministry of the Interior from across Brandenburg in the winter of 1947 emphasised concern that the participation of the population in the

¹⁰² SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.89/89, pp. 70-286.

¹⁰³ BLHA, Rep. 203/599, 'Listen der gemäß SMAD-Befehl Nr 201 von der Entnazifizierungskommission des Landes Brandenburg überprüften Personen 1948-49', pp. 16-426.

¹⁰⁴ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2099, no pag.

¹⁰⁵ Beck, 27.08.09.

¹⁰⁶ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

denazification process was considered to be ‘very weak’.¹⁰⁷ Often the audience members at the hearings were almost entirely made up of friends and relatives of the accused, as well as former National Socialists themselves who were surveying developments in advance of their own upcoming hearings. The files of the central criminal police indicate that in Hohenleipisch in the south of Brandenburg, the audience, which was said to have consisted of a large number of NSDAP members, allegedly clapped when exonerating evidence was presented and voiced their disapproval when prosecuting evidence was heard.¹⁰⁸ Such evidence suggests that elements of the grassroots population in Brandenburg attempted to carve out a certain room for manoeuvre for themselves within these denazification attempts. By submitting false witness statements and untruthful biographical information, as well as publicly ridiculing prosecuting evidence, these acts of *Eigensinn* clearly attempted to undermine the vetting procedure at a local level.

In addition to these grassroots attempts to impair the denazification process, throughout late 1947 and 1948 other serious barriers emerged in the implementation of Order no. 201 across Brandenburg. Principally, the lack of supporting physical infrastructure as well as the passivity of the political parties at a grassroots level proved problematic. In autumn 1947, the offices of the Brandenburg state investigative organs were located in an attic with a leaking roof without access to heating or light, resulting in over half of the clerks becoming ill.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, by early November 1947 a general lack of grassroots support and coordination was causing widespread delays to the execution of Order no. 201. In the Brandenburg district of Teltow, hearings had not yet begun, while across the board the Ministry of the Interior was extremely concerned that the parties were not showing sufficient cooperation and the police investigations were only progressing slowly.¹¹⁰ The situation was similar for the K5 in Brandenburg who, by the winter of 1947, were also increasingly irritated that the local SED branches were reluctant to forward cases, whilst alleging that local CDU and LDP functionaries were ‘showing no co-operation whatsoever’.¹¹¹ These problems continued to multiply and by June 1948

¹⁰⁷ BArch, DO1/25435, ‘Berichte über operative Arbeit zum SMAD-Befehl 201 in nachgeordneten Dienststellen 1947-48’, no pag.

¹⁰⁸ BArch, DO1/25434, ‘Dvdl(K5). Befehl der SMAD, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰⁹ BArch, DO1/25444, no pag.

¹¹⁰ Moreover, many former NSDAP members were going unrecorded as they lived in one district but worked in another. BArch, DO1/25432, pp. 5-9.

¹¹¹ BArch, DO1/25444, no pag.

the Ministry of the Interior was gravely concerned that constructive co-operation of the local parties and other organisations in the denazification process in Brandenburg ‘had halted completely’.¹¹² In addition, internal reports indicate that local SED functionaries and the local branches of bloc parties and mass organisations regularly defended individuals accused of National Socialist involvement.¹¹³ Throughout 1948 in Brandenburg local SED district administrators, SED mayors, SED police commissioners, SED lawyers as well as leaders of local SED factions and Party functionaries acted as exonerating witnesses or campaigned for milder sentencing.¹¹⁴

Such initiatives were not just limited to local functionaries — grassroots attempts to campaign on behalf of local community members being denazified can also be seen, for example, in relation to teachers in Brandenburg. For instance, in December 1947 a group of 148 parents in Königs Wusterhausen, 35 kilometres west of Fürstenwalde, wrote to the Brandenburg government challenging the classification of the local teacher, Miss Schulze, as ‘*Minderbelastet*’, claiming instead that she had never been politically active and should be ‘at most be classified as a nominal Nazi’. They unanimously praised her pedagogical abilities and strongly requested that she should be allowed to continue her job.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Veronika K., a twelve year old from Ketschendorf, wrote to the state denazification commission in Potsdam on 25 January 1948 regarding the dismissal of her teacher under Order no. 201:

He is our only *Altlehrer* and we all like him very much. The other teachers are all *Junglehrer* whom we don’t respect. My father is a member of the VVN and he says that Mr Schüler wasn’t a Nazi and did a lot for the poor people in Ketschendorf. We Ketschendorf children sincerely ask you to return the teacher Schüler to our school.¹¹⁶

In highlighting the unpopularity of introducing new inexperienced teachers who are ‘not respected’, this young petitioner reveals her scepticism at the wisdom of removing *Altlehrer* in the first place.¹¹⁷ Moreover, by utilising her father’s assertion that ‘Mr Schüler wasn’t a Nazi’, whose opinion is legitimised as a consequence of

¹¹² *Ibid.*, no pag.

¹¹³ In one particular case in Thuringia a local SED branch was said to have collected over one hundred children’s signatures on behalf of a Nazi teacher. See BArch, DO1/25432, pp. 62-63. On the longer-term unreliability of low-level functionaries at the GDR’s grassroots see: Ross, *Socialism*, in particular, p. 204.

¹¹⁴ See, for instance, BArch, DO1/25439, ‘DVdI, K5. Berichte aller Art der LBdVP Brandenburg zur Arbeit gem. Befehl 201’, pp. 28-30. Also BArch, DO1/25444, no pag.

¹¹⁵ BLHA Rep 203/625, p. 283.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹¹⁷ On the issue of *Neulehrer* who were to fill the void created by the denazification of teachers in the Soviet zone see: Petzold, *Entnazifizierung*.

his persecution by the Nazi regime, this twelve year old girl is simultaneously disputing the accuracy of the ruling by the denazification commission. Finally, by shifting the plea as being representative of the children of Ketschendorf, the individual petitioner attempts to add collective weight to her request. Whilst the handwriting clearly indicates that this letter was written by a young girl, unfortunately the evidence at hand cannot offer a definitive answer as to whether Veronika K. was particularly *eigensinnig* and contacted the Brandenburg state commission of her own volition, or whether she was encouraged to do so by a third party. This negative sentiment towards the new teachers who were to replace those who had been denazified is also reflected in a contemporary rhyme which was reported to be circulating in Brandenburg around this time: *'Im Keller keine Kohlen, auf den Schuhen keine Sohlen, Die Neulehrer können kaum das ABC, das ist das Werk der SED'*.¹¹⁸

Further examination of the archival evidence reveals that numerous state bodies in Brandenburg received a wide variety of complaints about the denazification of the school system during this period.¹¹⁹ It would therefore seem that a certain room for manoeuvre did exist for grassroots actors, be they parents, children, or the teachers themselves, to voice grievances that arose from the denazification of teachers in Brandenburg. Nonetheless, it is extremely difficult to assess the extent to which petitions such as these may or may not have affected the manner in which the policy to denazify teachers was implemented in Brandenburg. The secondary literature does suggest however, that certainly as a result of practical shortages the vetting procedure of teachers was forced to undergo some compromises in the long-run.¹²⁰

Likewise, the vetting of industry of Nazi remnants under Order no. 201 in late 1947 and 1948 faced numerous grassroots challenges when it came to the implementation of this policy in Brandenburg. This sluggish progress reflected not only political apathy as well as a fear of losing coveted skilled labour, but also camaraderie and loyalty amongst colleagues against what was perceived to be

¹¹⁸ BLHA, Rep. 202A/39, p. 66.

¹¹⁹ BLHA, Rep. 202A/326, 'Bearbeitung von Beschwerden 1948-1950'.

¹²⁰ Brigitte Hohlfeld has found that many *Neulehrer* eventually left the teaching profession, resulting in approximately 8,000-10,000 denazified 'old teachers' being re-employed in the GDR in 1951. Brigitte Hohlfeld, *Die Neulehrer in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1953: Ihre Rolle bei der Umgestaltung von Gesellschaft und Staat* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1992), pp. 348, 417-418. See also Lansing, *Schoolteachers*, in particular, p. 131.

unnecessary outside interference in many factories across Brandenburg. Reports compiled by the Ministry of the Interior throughout 1947 and 1948 indicate that both management and employees often appeared disinclined to denounce possible former Nazis within the factories, and that this reluctance amongst factory workers in turn had an effect on the thoroughness of the denazification attempts.¹²¹ Attempts to remove qualified experts during a time of extreme post-war shortage also appear to have had an impact on grassroots morale across Brandenburg more generally. For instance, in the Brandenburg district of Luckau, the K5 discovered that rumours were circulating in December 1947 that the recent removal of too many former nominal NSDAP members from the *Reichsbahn* was resulting in an increase in train accidents in the region.¹²²

The Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior had been instructed to complete vetting under Order no. 201 by 10 January 1948, yet progress lagged behind while continued appeals were being lodged against rulings by the town and district commissions.¹²³ Across Brandenburg there were also concerns about what was happening with the former National Socialists who had been removed from their posts. Most of the ‘active fascists’ who had lost their jobs were being treated along the guidelines of SMAD Order no. 153 which stipulated that ‘fascists’ were only to be deployed for physical labour.¹²⁴ Yet at a grassroots level, a lack of willingness to work in manual labour was claimed by Ministry of the Interior reports to have been relatively widespread, and it was frequently noted that a large number of local doctors across Brandenburg assisted in declaring former National Socialists to be ‘unfit for manual labour’.¹²⁵ Irrespective of the individual motivations of these doctors – be it bribery or altruistic notions of a grassroots community spirit – declaring some former NSDAP members to be unfit for physical work, in practice this somewhat undermined the implementation of these Soviet regulations at a grassroots level, further illustrating how these policies may have been realised on the ground in a different manner than originally intended.

Nevertheless, despite these barriers to the implementation of Order no. 201 some results could certainly be reported across East Germany. In the entire Soviet

¹²¹ See, for instance, the case of ‘Synthesewerk Schwarzwalde’ in Brandenburg. BArch, DO1/25432, pp. 107-108, 143. Also, Naimark, *Russians*, pp. 191-192 and BArch, DO1/25434.

¹²² BArch, DO1/25432, pp. 145-146.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

zone, over 70% of a total of 100,214 cases had been processed by the end of January 1948.¹²⁶ By early April 1948, the Brandenburg denazification commissions had dealt with 93% of the 16,365 cases which had been received. On average, 58% of these individuals in Brandenburg had been declared to have been nominal National Socialists.¹²⁷ Yet even amongst these final figures, an enormous discrepancy in the declaration of nominal status for former National Socialists remained at a local level. Brandenburg/Havel had the lowest declaration of nominal cases across all the Brandenburg districts at 24.2%, while the Lebus commission, which was responsible for Fürstenwalde, had declared 64.2% of their Nazis to have been nominal by March 1948.¹²⁸ This indicates that local factors may have played an important role in the manner in which Order no. 201 was implemented on the ground in Brandenburg. Furthermore, a high regional variation was also evident in the percentage of criminal cases passed on to investigative organs for formal prosecution. In Brandenburg a mere 3.2% of cases against National Socialists were forwarded to the judiciary whilst in Mecklenburg 18.5% of cases were classified as Nazi criminals and were presented for formal prosecution.¹²⁹

By early 1948 there was an increasingly strong push for an end to denazification, resulting in the issuing of SMAD Order no. 35 on 26 February 1948 which commanded that the work of the denazification commissions be brought to an end by 10 March 1948.¹³⁰ Furthermore, on 18 March 1948, under the guise of the 100 year anniversary of the 1848 revolution, the SMAD announced Order no. 43 declaring a general amnesty for certain prisoners being held under Order no. 201.¹³¹

In summary, the implementation of Order no. 201, in ways similar to its predecessor, was also plagued with numerous practical challenges in its attempt to

¹²⁶ BArch, DO1/25603, 'Durchführung des SMAD-Befehls 201. Statistische Berichte über die Arbeit der Entnazifizierungskommissionen. 1948', p. 7.

¹²⁷ BArch, DO1/25602, 'Durchführung des SMAD-Befehls 201. Statistische Abschlussberichte der Landes-Entnazifizierungskommissionen. 1948', p. 19. In fact, in some months the percentages found by the regional commission to be nominal were much higher than this final average suggests. For instance, from November to late December 1947, almost 80% to appear before the Brandenburg regional commission were declared to have been merely nominal Nazis in the Third Reich. BArch, DO1/25432, pp. 148-155.

¹²⁸ The highest declaration of nominal status was in Eberswalde with 91.5% nominal Nazis. Vogt, *Denazification*, p. 118. See also SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.89/89, pp. 70-286, and BArch, DO1/25432, p. 148.

¹²⁹ BArch, DO1/25603, p. 10. This is also reflected in Damien van Melis findings that denazification in Mecklenburg was particularly rigorous. Melis, *Entnazifizierung*, p. 323.

¹³⁰ BArch, DP1/VA/7480, 'Weisungen und Befehle der SMAD 1946-49', no pag.

¹³¹ BArch, DO1/25448, 'Amnestie gemäß Befehl 43 für Häftlinge nach SMAD-Befehl 201 (1947-49)', no pag.

remove remnants of the political influence of the Third Reich in post-war Brandenburg. The execution of Order no. 201 did assist in some aspects of formalisation and mobilisation of the judiciary and the police, helping to solidify their influence on the post-war political transition in the medium term. Nonetheless, the implementation of Order no. 201 also highlighted the lack of grassroots cooperation of the public, as well as the blurring of the officially prescribed loyalties of the parties. The evidence therefore suggests that, combined with the enormous physical and practical challenges of implementing the vetting process in post-war Brandenburg, grassroots responses were able somewhat affect how this policy was implemented on the ground.

4.6 The sequestering and expropriation of property belonging to former National Socialists

In order both to punish former adherents and carriers of the Third Reich as well as to facilitate the post-war transition from Nazism to socialism, alongside the various denazification attempts described above, the East German administration also endeavoured to sequester and expropriate private businesses and residential property which were deemed to be associated with the National Socialist regime.¹³² Much of the focus in the historical research on sequestering in the Eastern zone in the last twenty years has been on industrialists and large factories, with a particular emphasis on Saxony.¹³³ Aside from top-down studies such as the assiduously researched work by Torsten Hartisch, which examines the process through the lens of the Brandenburg regional administration, little research has been conducted to date into sequestering and expropriations in urban areas in Brandenburg.¹³⁴ This section therefore intends to contribute to the historical literature by examining the grassroots responses to this policy in Brandenburg as well as exploring whether these responses

¹³² These processes were closely linked with a subsequent attempt at socialising ownership in the GDR, despite contemporary claims to the contrary. See, for example, Brandenburg/Havel's Lord Mayor's comments from November 1947 in which he claims that those who equated sequestration with socialisation were 'politically illiterate', in: SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.89/89, p. 24.

¹³³ See, for instance, Winfrid Halder, *'Modell für Deutschland'. Wirtschaftspolitik in Sachsen 1945-1948* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001) and Frank Schulz, 'Elitenwandel in der Leipziger Wirtschaftsregion 1945-1948. Von den Leipziger "sächsischen Industriefamilien" zu Kadern aus dem Leipziger Arbeitermilieu', *Comparativ*, 5 (1995), pp. 112-126.

¹³⁴ Hartisch, *Enteignung*.

had an effect on the manner in which sequestering and expropriation were implemented on the ground.

The post-war East German administration adopted the definition of ‘fascism’ which had been coined by the Bulgarian ‘Comintern’ functionary Georgi Dimitroff in 1935, whereby ‘fascism’ was described as ‘the openly terrorizing dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperial elements of finance capital’. As Andreas Dorpalen has argued, ‘fascism’ was thus seen as a phenomenon of the late phase of capitalism, by which that ‘historically obsolete and declining system seeks to preserve and strengthen its weakened rule’.¹³⁵ Therefore, the land reform and the destruction of financial monopolies were to constitute a destruction of the foundation of capitalism.¹³⁶ Consequently, in July 1945 the assets of East German banks and building societies were taken over, while in September 1945 the expropriation of landholdings over 100 hectares began under the populist slogan ‘*Junkerland* into farmland’.¹³⁷ These changes were to have a lasting impact on rural social structures.¹³⁸

It appears that given that both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde were primarily urban areas, they remained relatively protected and removed from land reform and confiscation during the post-war period. Of the 1,773 estates over 100 hectares in size which had been expropriated in the state of Brandenburg by October 1947, only one was in Brandenburg/Havel, while in Fürstenwalde no large landholdings had been expropriated.¹³⁹ Instead, the post-war sequestering and expropriating of private property and businesses of individuals who were deemed to have been Nazi and war criminals, which was carried out parallel to the larger scale land reform movement, played a more significant role in the urban centres of Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde. Although this sequestration process, just like the land reform, also had its roots in the communist definitions of ‘fascism’, these

¹³⁵ Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (London, I.B. Tauris&Co, 1985), pp. 393-394.

¹³⁶ Bernd Siegler, ‘Rechtsextremismus in der DDR und den neuen Ländern’, in *Handbuch Deutscher Rechtsextremismus*, ed. by Jens Mecklenburg (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1996), p. 622.

¹³⁷ Oskar Schwarzer, *Sozialistische Planwirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR: Ergebnisse eines ordnungspolitischen Experiments 1945-1989* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999), p. 33, and *Meining, Judenpolitik*, p. 81.

¹³⁸ Arnd Bauerkämper, ‘Die Bodenreform in der Provinz Mark Brandenburg. Wandel und Beharrung in der Agrarwirtschaft und ländlichen Gesellschaft 1945’, in *Brandenburg im Jahr 1945*, ed. by Werner Stang and Kurt Arlt (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1995), 265-296 (p. 265).

¹³⁹ BLHA, Rep. 203/1525, ‘Maßnahmen gegen enteignete Großgrundbesitzer gemäß Befehl 6080 der SMA vom 23. August 1947 (1947-49)’, p. 22.

policies also constituted an attempt not merely to punish large capitalists and industrialists, but also to reduce the influence of local National Socialists at a grassroots level.

Sequestering of National Socialists began in a sporadic manner at a local level almost immediately following the collapse of the Third Reich. Already in the early post-war months, first confiscations of private property belonging to adherents of the National Socialist movement were carried out in a non-systematic manner by local dismantling troops, antifascist committees and local governments across the state of Brandenburg, while in the summer of 1945 local self-governing bodies such as mayors and district administrators began to sequester businesses and private property, albeit without a legal basis.¹⁴⁰ These developments reflected the power vacuum of the summer of 1945, when local authorities had wide latitude to exercise authority.¹⁴¹

While the Allied Potsdam Conference was still deliberating on Germany's future path, the mayor of Fürstenwalde, Wilhelm Zernicke, a former town councillor for the KPD, ordered on 27 July 1945 that all assets belonging to 'leading and active National Socialists' were to be confiscated and transferred to municipal ownership. He maintained that these actions were 'carried by the wishes of wide circles of the population who desired retaliation and reparations for the hardship and misery which the National Socialist regime had brought upon the German people'.¹⁴² At this local level, direct personal hangovers from the Third Reich often played a significant role when it came to which private property was to be confiscated in these initial post-war months. Denunciations as a result of the Fürstenwalde decree on 27 July 1945 appeared to have been common, leading to a difficulty in differentiating between justified grievances and personal vendettas.¹⁴³ This predominantly haphazard method of confiscation at a local level quickly led to waves of complaints which spread to a regional level. Already in August of 1945 the provincial administration in Potsdam was forced to deal with numerous written grievances concerning unlawful

¹⁴⁰ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 171. On the *Antifa-Gruppen* in Brandenburg see Jeannette Michelmann, *Die Aktivisten der ersten Stunde. Die Antifa 1945 in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone zwischen Besatzungsmacht und Exil-KPD* (Jena: Dissertation Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, 2001), pp. 110-129. Also Gareth Pritchard, 'Schwarzenberg 1945: Antifascists and the "Third Way" in German Politics', *European History Quarterly* 35/4 (2005), 499-522. Also, Hartisch, *Enteignung*, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Vogt, *Denazification*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁴² KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2098, 'Nazi Ordnung 1945-1946', no pag.

¹⁴³ See *Ibid.*

sequestrations by local district administrators and mayors.¹⁴⁴ In both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, hundreds of petitions were filed which claimed wrongful expropriation of property and belongings in the immediate post-war period.¹⁴⁵

These relatively chaotic circumstances required a formalisation of the sequestration and expropriation process, leading the SMAD to issue Orders no. 124 and 126 on 30 and 31 October 1945 respectively. Order no. 124 focused on the confiscation of assets which had belonged to officials, members and influential supporters of the NSDAP and its organs, while Order no. 126 concentrated on the confiscation of Third Reich assets, as well as those belonging to associated organisations, agencies, companies, businesses and private individuals.¹⁴⁶

In a further attempt to co-ordinate and facilitate the sequestering and expropriation of former National Socialists, the SMAD announced the establishment of the 'Central German Commission for Sequestering and Confiscation' (ZDK) through Order no. 97 on 29 March 1946. The ZDK was the highest organ of the East German self-governing bodies in issues of sequestering and confiscation.¹⁴⁷ In order to harmonise and integrate the disjointed activities of the numerous sequestering bodies, the ZDK convened a conference on 12 April 1946. It was agreed that the states and provinces would from here onwards forward all documents pertaining to the sequestering of businesses and other assets to the ZDK.¹⁴⁸ Subsequently, in order to further strengthen the efforts of the ZDK, in early May 1946 the Lord Mayors and district administrators in Brandenburg were instructed to establish a 'District Commission for Sequestering and Confiscation' in every town and rural district. With the appointment of these district commissions and their brief to review all registered cases, it was intended that the mistakes which were made in the hectic work of the winter of 1945-46 should be eliminated.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Friederike Sattler has argued that these district commissions were also created in order to politicise the

¹⁴⁴ Hartisch, *Enteignung*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/931, 'Beschlagnahmen, Sicherstellungen 1945', no pag. Also, Vogt, *Denazification*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ BArch, DO3/135, 'SMAD-Befehle', pp. 72-73.

¹⁴⁷ Hartisch, *Enteignung*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁸ Yet it quickly became apparent that this process would be extremely hampered by enormous practical and organisational difficulties. BArch, DO3/136, 'Sequestrierungen, Anteilsenteignungen und Eingaben Band I 1945-49', p. 126.

¹⁴⁹ Hartisch, *Enteignung*, p. 89.

decision making process.¹⁵⁰ Despite central attempts to unify these developments, by the summer of 1946, problems with thoroughness and consistency in the expropriation process continued to persist across the state of Brandenburg and it was not uncommon for the Provincial Commission in Potsdam to examine 200 or 300 cases per day, causing concern within the ZDK.¹⁵¹

While this work of the provincial and district commissions in Brandenburg was only beginning in June 1946, preparations for a referendum in Saxony on 30 June 1946, with the intention of legitimising and establishing public consensus for the ‘dispossession of war criminals and Nazis’, had already been well under way. Attempts were made to mobilise the population with slogans such as ‘War – never again. We want butter instead of canons, that’s why dear parents – vote yes!’¹⁵² The referendum was eventually passed with 77.6% of the yes vote and the outcome was officially celebrated by the SED leadership as a success. Yet Widera contends that internally the SED were especially concerned about the ‘lack of class consciousness’ among Saxons in particular, and East Germans more generally.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, this result was in turn utilised as a legal basis for the continued expropriation of National Socialist property in the remaining East German states and provinces, despite the fact that no referenda were carried out there.

The ZDK gradually made some inroads into co-ordinating regional sequestration and expropriation methods, yet even by 1947 the practical implementation of the SMAD orders continued to be fraught with difficulties. In January 1947 the ZDK in Berlin expressed concern that the wording of Order no. 124 was not as concrete as the land reform laws, and for this reason ‘was more reliant on the political qualities of those executing the Order’.¹⁵⁴ By October 1947, during an inspection of the sequestering process in the state of Brandenburg, it was noted by the ZDK that the sequestering department within the provincial government continued to produce ‘unsatisfactory organisational work’, as a result of ‘inadequate staff, both qualitatively and quantitatively’.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, despite these internal

¹⁵⁰ Friederike Sattler, *Wirtschaftsordnung im Übergang: Politik, Organisation und Funktion der KPD/SED im Land Brandenburg bei der Etablierung der zentralen Planwirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR 1945-52* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), p. 267.

¹⁵¹ BArch, DO3/136, p. 83.

¹⁵² Widera, *Dresden*, pp. 326-327.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

¹⁵⁴ BArch, DO3/136, p. 126.

¹⁵⁵ BArch, DO3/137, ‘Sequestrierungen, Anteilsenteignungen und Eingaben’, p. 117.

problems, the confiscation and sequestering of industries, businesses and residential properties in Brandenburg did proceed at a grassroots level, albeit not without some difficulties. These sequestrations and expropriations of factories and businesses were to have an impact in both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde given that both been important industrial armament centres and garrison towns before 1945.

In Brandenburg/Havel, ‘Adam Opel AG’ had relocated their truck manufacturing plant to the town in 1935, while the ‘Arado’ aircraft factory had established important manufacturing plants here. The ‘Brennabor’ factory, which had produced baby carriages, bicycles, cars and motorbikes since the nineteenth century also began to manufacture grenades and gun carriages. Similarly, the large local steel-mill had aided in the production of aircraft bombs, while the ‘Jute’ spinning-mill had produced yarn for the *Wehrmacht*.¹⁵⁶ As noted in chapter two, by late 1945 a significant number of the larger industries such as ‘Adam Opel AG’, ‘Arado’ and the ‘Brennabor’ factory had already been dismantled by the Red Army.¹⁵⁷ Between May 1946 and spring 1948 the links with National Socialism of the remaining industries and businesses which were still intact were examined by a local sequestering commission in Brandenburg/Havel. During these expropriation rulings, the local CDU and LDP representatives frequently abstained from voting or would vote against a specific expropriation altogether. Yet despite these interventions, on 12 February 1947 the local magistrate issued a list of companies intended for expropriation which included dozens of local businesses such as a toy manufacturing plant, building firms, furniture shops, cafes, restaurants, pharmacies, bakeries, a printing business, a shipyard and a concert hall.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, in Fürstenwalde industry and businesses were also significantly affected by the sequestering and expropriation campaign after the war. Here the main pre-1945 industrial base had been a subsidiary of the ‘Julius Pintsch’ company which had settled in Fürstenwalde in 1872, manufacturing light bulbs and gas meters and establishing it as an important industrial centre of the region. By the Second World War, ‘Pintsch’ and surrounding factories had employed roughly 12,000 people, many of them forced labourers from the Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen satellite camps. After the war, the dismantled ‘Pintsch’ factory, as well as local

¹⁵⁶ Klaus Heß and Anke Richter, ‘Die Stadt Brandenburg im Jahre 1945’, in Stang, *Brandenburg*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁷ BArch, DO3/159, ‘Abschluss der Sequestrierungen 1946-1948’, p. 18.

¹⁵⁸ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.48/48, p. 49.

chemical factories, a machine factory and other additional mills were placed under the ownership of the provincial government.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the remaining local factories and businesses in the town underwent a vetting process in which a sequestering commission was to evaluate links with the National Socialist regime. These included furniture factories and carpentry workshops, a printing business, restaurants, the 'Schultheiss' brewery, a metal-ware business, a stove factory, chemical plants and a timber mill.¹⁶⁰

The uncertainty these sequestrations created for the commercial middle-class at a grassroots level in Brandenburg was considerable.¹⁶¹ Local administrators frequently reacted by stepping in to defend businessmen, in an attempt to secure commercial stability within the community. For instance, former NSDAP member since 1935 Fritz H., the owner of a factory producing agricultural machinery as well as a small shipyard in Brandenburg/Havel, was threatened with the sequestering of his property in 1946. Not only did Fritz H. write a large number of complaints himself, but he also secured the support of the local district mayor Eichler, who submitted a statement defending Fritz H. claiming that he was:

[...] happy to confirm that Herr H., already in the first days after the arrival of the Red Army, had supported the rebuilding process [...] As we should be anxious to support all forces who are willing to advance forward, I would regret if Herr H. would be deprived of the opportunities to be active in Brandenburg/Havel commercial life and if it were no longer possible to continue to make use of his strengths.¹⁶²

Interventions such as these illustrate how local business and community interests sometimes appeared to supersede the importance of central punitive approaches to removing the economic legacy of the Third Reich. Moreover, a certain room for manoeuvre also appears to have existed for the expropriated business owners themselves, many of whom submitted complaints, either personally or through solicitors, to various administrative bodies. Another such complainant was the wife of a local hotel-owner in Brandenburg/Havel who, in May 1946, protested about the expropriation of the hotel, claiming that her husband had only been a nominal

¹⁵⁹ KALOS F/RdS/299, 'Industrieberichte 1946', no pag. The local tension created by the Soviet dismantlement of the 'Pintsch' factory has also been explored in chapter two.

¹⁶⁰ BLHA, Rep. 202A/316, 'Kabinettsbeschlüsse Nr. 83, 105 und 107 über die Enteignung sequestrierter Vermögenswerte 1948', pp. 53, 149-151.

¹⁶¹ Pohl, *Justiz*, p. 74.

¹⁶² BArch, DO3/702, 'Eingaben und Überprüfungen Kreise Brandenburg/H, Band 7 1946-48', p. 151.

member of the NSDAP and the hotel had never been a ‘Nazi haven or propaganda organ’.¹⁶³

Some of these complaints by business owners in Brandenburg/Havel appear to have enjoyed a limited success and in February 1947 the local sequestering commission in Brandenburg/Havel was forced to overturn a number of previous rulings. This included Erna B., who owned a textile business in Brandenburg/Havel, as well as Alfred E., the owner of a local tobacco shop.¹⁶⁴ In addition, by early 1948 the Cabinet of the Brandenburg government had reversed further previous rulings by local commissions.¹⁶⁵ In fact, by March 1948, just over 20% of sequestered businesses had been returned to their former owners in Brandenburg/Havel by the state government.¹⁶⁶ These developments illustrate similar trends to those which have been explored in relation to the implementation of Directive no. 24 earlier in this chapter. Not only does a preliminary comparison of local, regional and central archival material suggest the existence of discrepancies between local and regional judgements, they also imply that in certain cases the petitioning by some local business owners was able occasionally to enjoy some small success.

A further comparison between the local, regional and federal archives in relation to both the denazification and sequestration of local business owners in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde uncovers a significant number of inconsistencies in the rulings of the local commissions. For instance, Karl G., the owner of a cabinetmaker’s shop in Fürstenwalde and member of the NSDAP from 1934-45, appealed to both local and regional denazification commissions three times between early 1947 and February 1948, and was finally granted permission to continue working in a non-executive role in private enterprises. In contrast, the following month the sequestration commission of the Brandenburg state government, which functioned in a separate capacity, considered Karl G. to have been an influential supporter of the NSDAP and therefore permanently expropriated his business.¹⁶⁷ Rulings such as this may be relatively unsurprising given the central

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹⁶⁴ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.48/48, p. 49. See also Barch DO3/420, ‘Sequesterlisten A,B & C. Brandenburg, Bd.1’, p. 30, and Barch DO3/423, ‘Sequesterlisten A,B & C. Brandenburg, Bd. 4, 1946’, p. 30.

¹⁶⁵ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.48/48, p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202A/319, ‘Kabinettsbeschlüsse Nr. 84 und 106 mit Listen (B) 1948’, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Compare BLHA, Rep. 202A/316, p. 53, with BLHA, Rep. 203/597, ‘Sitzungsprotokolle des Ausschusses bei der Provinzial-Landesregierung zur Durchführung der Direktive 24 (Sitzung 92-10, 1947)’, p. 197 and KALOS F/RdS/79, no pag.

administration's dual desire at this stage to both integrate the majority of the workforce on the one hand and gradually establish state control of the means of production on the other hand.

Yet what is more remarkable is that the inverse trend of this is also apparent. For instance, Paul U., the owner of a clothes factory in Brandenburg/Havel and long-time NSDAP member, had his trading license revoked by both the local and state denazification commissions in spring 1947, despite submitting a number of appeals and complaints.¹⁶⁸ Yet in contrast, the files in the federal archives indicate that in October of the same year, although half of his factory's output during the war had been for the *Wehrmacht*, Paul U.'s expropriated factory was returned to him by the state commission after a number of appeals.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the aforementioned Fritz H. was eventually found guilty of falling under Directive no. 24 by the local denazification commission, but concurrently was found not guilty by the regional sequestering commission and had at least his shipyard returned to him.¹⁷⁰

In some cases repeated appeals against both denazification and sequestration rulings appear to have been doubly successful as some local individuals managed to get both their jobs and their businesses back. For instance, NSDAP member Paul D., an optician in Brandenburg/Havel, separately had both his trading licence revoked and shop sequestered by the local denazification and sequestration commissions in the town in 1947, only to have both returned to him by the respective regional commissions by early 1948.¹⁷¹ Similarly, drugstore owner Paul L., a long-time NSDAP member from Brandenburg/Havel, was eventually permitted to continue working by the local denazification commission in March 1947 despite the defendant's 'strong NS attitude'. Yet whilst the federal archives indicate that Paul L.'s pharmacy had also been sequestered in the post-war period, it was returned to him by the Brandenburg state government in March 1948.¹⁷² Overall, across the state

¹⁶⁸ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27, p. 229 and BLHA, Rep. 203/626, 'Berufungen, Beschwerden u. Einsprüche gegen Entscheidungen der Entnazifizierungskommissionen sowie deren Überprüfungen 1947-48 (Personen U-Z)', p. 24.

¹⁶⁹ Barch DO3/137 p. 117.

¹⁷⁰ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27. Barch DO3/420, p. 30.

¹⁷¹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27. pp. 12-19, Barch DO3/420, p. 30, BLHA, Rep. 203/586, p. 518. BLHA, Rep. 202A/319, p. 5.

¹⁷² Lord Mayor Lange, the CDU and LDP representatives voted for the continuation of his trading licence, while the SED and FDGB representatives voted against. SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.27/27. pp. 139-140. Barch DO3/420 p. 34 and BLHA, Rep. 202A/319, p. 5.

of Brandenburg, out of the roughly 1,400 businesses which had been expropriated, 573 were later returned to their original owners.¹⁷³

Whilst, as Thomas Widera has argued, ‘the German communists’ main aim was the transformation of the political system’ therefore ‘intending to instrumentalise political cleansing for their own aims’, this archival evidence suggests that in actuality these delineations were often not as clear-cut in post-war Brandenburg.¹⁷⁴ These inconsistencies between local and regional sequestration bodies, as well as between denazification and sequestration commissions, also reflected the contemporary worries of the ZDK in October 1947, when they showed great concern that the district organisations in Brandenburg, with few exceptions, ‘had not recognised the political purpose of Order no. 124’, which was to be ‘particularly blamed’ on Brandenburg’s regional commission.¹⁷⁵ These apparent limits of the Brandenburg regional commission to control the implementation of Order no. 124 as desired by the ZDK should be considered as a contributing factor in the ability of grassroots actors, in some cases quite successfully, to exert *Eigensinn*. Yet these examples from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde are not necessarily representative of wider developments across the state, and a larger-scale comparison would need to be undertaken in order to assess the extent of these discrepant and ‘non-political’ rulings across Brandenburg as well as in the Soviet sector more generally. Nonetheless, these preliminary archival findings suggest that due to variations in the interpretation and implementation of Soviet directives, the sequestering of businesses in Brandenburg may not have been as monolithic as previously assumed, resulting in a limited room for manoeuvre through repeated appeals and complaints which was utilised by businesses owners in Brandenburg in an attempt to moderate the impact of post-war policies on their livelihoods.

Although some factory and business owners were able to negotiate a better deal for themselves with various commissions, a total of 71 businesses in Brandenburg/Havel remained permanently expropriated without compensation by May 1948.¹⁷⁶ The memories of the oral history interviewees suggest that these

¹⁷³ Vogt, *Denazification*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Widera, “...eine gute saubere anständige politische Gesinnung”. Entnazifizierung als Instrument der Diktaturdurchsetzung in Dresden 1945’, in *Diktaturdurchsetzung*, p. 271.

¹⁷⁵ BArch, DO3/137, p. 119.

¹⁷⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202A/316, pp. 4, 29-31. In fact, out of the total of roughly 1,400 expropriations of businesses which took place across Brandenburg, Brandenburg/Havel was to be the town with the highest number. Heß, *Besatzungszeit*, p. 159.

expropriations had an impact, not just on the businesspeople involved, but also on the wider locality as local traditions were seen to be lost and previous pillars of society slowly disappeared. Whilst this may have indeed been the case, this sense of destabilisation and loss may have been particularly pronounced for this young age cohort. Dr Edith Dorn from Brandenburg/Havel recalled that:

We had a wool factory here and a shipyard, they don't exist anymore, they were expropriated too. There had been big shops here, a department store, they were also expropriated and the family went to West Germany [...] The man who owned that wool factory, he was said to have been a really decent man who really looked after his employees [...] why should he not be allowed to continue to operate his business, especially because there was so much shortage.¹⁷⁷

This incomprehension at punishing local 'decent' business owners for Third Reich crimes was also reflected in a large number of other interviews from both towns. Moreover, some of the memories, such as those of Reinhold Rösner, were more personal. He recalled his impressions when his childhood friend's family business, which had produced transmission and fan belts prior to 1945, was sequestered in Fürstenwalde:

They took away their business and they weren't given any compensation, as a result of which they had a very miserable existence [...] they didn't get any financial support from the state [...] they ended up going to the West, around 1950 [...] They had owned a large apartment, and I remember that they had had a big electric train set that ran through three rooms [...] That's why they went to the West because they had no more money. The people were certainly not treated well.¹⁷⁸

This repeated mention of going 'to the West' points to the range of responses which were open to expropriated business owners beyond merely writing petitions and complaints, even before the authorities began to grow concerned about *Republikflucht* in the early 1950s. Furthermore, the evidence of the interviews suggests that these local business owners were perceived as victims of punitive measures rather than perpetrators accused of supporting the Nazis' war efforts. Instead, such expropriations, naturally combined with other factors of post-war tumult, appeared to have contributed to memories of the de-stabilisation and disintegration of the social fabric which constituted local, traditional economic and social hierarchies. On the one hand, these memories appear to somewhat converge

¹⁷⁷ Dorn, 24.06.09.

¹⁷⁸ Rösner, 10.09.09.

with the archival material in emphasising a sense of victimhood at the supposed unfair expropriation of Brandenburg business owners. On the other hand, however, these memories also appear to diverge somewhat from the archival material, by perhaps painting a more negative picture by not acknowledging that in a significant proportion of cases commercial properties were indeed returned to their owners.

In addition to the expropriation of commercial properties, the sequestering of residential property owners incriminated by their involvement with National Socialism also played a role in the post-war transition in Brandenburg. Numerous private property owners from Brandenburg/Havel appeared in front of the 'Provincial Commission for Sequestration' in Potsdam throughout the spring and early summer of 1947, where frequently over half the properties were expropriated.¹⁷⁹ In Fürstenwalde, similar confiscations under Order no. 124 also took place in the post-war period, and sittings of a local sequestering committee were held throughout 1946, where often more than half of the properties were also suggested for permanent expropriation.¹⁸⁰ Given that by the summer of 1946, over 40% of residential buildings in Brandenburg towns remained uninhabitable, residential property was an important commodity in both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde and these attempts to economically punish individuals associated with the Third Reich did not go entirely uncontested.

The Fürstenwalde town council received a stream of petitions throughout 1946 and 1947 which often followed a similar pattern where former membership of the NSDAP was presented as being forced on the individual in question.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the authorities also received a large number of petitions from expropriated residential property owners in Brandenburg/Havel. One such complainant was Fritz N., who, on 15 July 1947, challenged the expropriation of his house on the basis of his nominal NSDAP membership:

If you don't wish that I, my wife and my two sons lose our belief in justice, then you will only adjudicate in our case after you have considered the enclosed statement and have listened to witnesses who genuinely know me and my family.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.72/72, 'Schriftverkehr mit der Abteilung Wirtschaft und Verkehr 1945 bis 1949', pp. 10, 13-14.

¹⁸⁰ KALOS F/RdS/319 'Berichte 1955-1956', no pag. and KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2114, 'Sequestrierung freigestellter Grundstücke lt. Befehl Nr. 124/64, 1945-1949', no pag.

¹⁸¹ KALOS F/RdS/316 Band 1, 'Enteignung und Rückgabe von Grundstücken Band 1', no pag.

¹⁸² BArch, DO3/702, p. 284.

As with many other of these local petitions, the manner in which this complaint is expressed insinuates a strong sense of victimhood in the face of perceived arbitrary injustice by the sequestration commission.

On 27 January 1948 the Brandenburg state government established centralised complaints offices within its ministries. It was intended that such a formalised complaints system would ‘firmly strengthen the trust’ of the population in the administration.¹⁸³ By the following year, this complaints (or ‘*Eingaben*’) system had become embedded in Article 3 of the 1949 constitution. Numerous ministries within the Brandenburg state administration were now instructed to deal with written complaints and monthly petition statistics were then to be sent to the Brandenburg SMA in Potsdam. The submission of petitions and complaints from the general public on sequestering and appropriations in the state of Brandenburg continued to be substantial, particularly throughout 1948 and 1949. Out of the 601 complaints received by the Minister President in the month of June 1949 alone, a large majority were to do with expropriations and the confiscation of motor vehicles, machines, materials, furniture, miscellaneous furnishings and foodstuffs.¹⁸⁴ Likewise, the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior received a constant stream of complaints over a quarter of which were to do with ‘confiscations of all types’, while the Brandenburg Ministries for Justice and for Employment and Social Affairs received a large number of petitions about forced evictions, rehousing and confiscations.¹⁸⁵

In a manner similar to the patterns of complaints which the Fürstenwalde town council received in 1946 and 1947, these petitions also provide evidence that the large majority of these NSDAP members presented themselves as politically passive throughout the Third Reich, in some cases even as victims of the National Socialist regime. This corresponds to Mary Fulbrook’s finding that such denazification proceedings tended to elicit narratives which emphasised a ‘lack of agency during the Third Reich’, and that individuals portrayed themselves as ‘having been forced to conform’.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, many of these petitioners in Brandenburg attempted to persuade the reader of their own innocence on the one hand, as well as clearly distancing themselves from potentially politically incriminating relatives or

¹⁸³ The Minister President of Brandenburg, Karl Steinhoff, subsequently issued decree no. 0330/21/48 on the processing of petitions and complaints on 9 February 1948. BLHA, Rep. 202A/316, p. 216.

¹⁸⁴ BLHA, Rep. 202A/326, p. 15.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-37, 80, 82, 198-270.

¹⁸⁶ Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 281.

associates on the other hand. Some other petition writers adopted a judicial approach and penned repeated complaints in an effort to provide evidence that there was no legal basis for their expropriation.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, it was not uncommon for individuals to exhibit tenacious resourcefulness and *Eigensinn* by complaining to local, district and regional sequestration commissions simultaneously.¹⁸⁸ Arguably, by establishing centralised complaints offices within its ministries in January 1948, the Brandenburg state government was both recognising the high levels of dissatisfaction at punitive Soviet policies, while at the same time attempting to appropriate this sphere of action by closely monitoring developments in an effort to control how grassroots complaints were vented in Brandenburg society.

The expropriation of residential property of those accused of active National Socialist involvement proved to be a persistently emotive political, economic and social issue and as a result not just private individuals but also political parties increasingly involved themselves in the process of petitioning both against, and in favour, of certain expropriations. From mid-1947, numerous party branches began to submit petitions on issues of expropriation and sequestering to the German Economic Commission (DWK) which had been established in June 1947 through SMAD Order no. 138.¹⁸⁹ Particularly grassroots functionaries of the CDU and LPD protested to them in cases of perceived unfair expropriation, while the NDPD also sought to protect its members from sequestering, frequently intervening on their behalf.¹⁹⁰

Eventually, from 1948 onwards, the Brandenburg sequestering commission began the process of restitution of certain residential properties sequestered under Orders no. 124 and 126. As with the denazification rulings explored earlier in this chapter, these restitutions of residential property frequently caused tensions between local and regional authorities, where local knowledge of an incriminating political past was deemed insufficient to justify a decision to expropriate at a regional level.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ BArch, DO3/658, 'Eingaben und Überprüfungen 1946-50', no pag.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, the case of Auguste P. in: KALOS F/RdS/316 Band II, no pag.

¹⁸⁹ The DWK had been established in order to aid with the coordination of economic affairs; by February 1948 they had been accorded the power to enact directives and orders to other subordinate bodies.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, BLHA, Rep. 203/314, 'Eingaben und Beschwerden, v.a. von Privatpersonen A-Z 1950-1952', pp. 1-4. Such interventions by the NDPD will be explored in more detail in chapter five.

¹⁹¹ See BArch, DO3/1, 'Beratungen mit der SMAD Band I 1946-48', p. 254. Also see, for example, the case of Franz von H. whose property was returned by the state commission due to lack of

For instance, the restitution list included former NSDAP member Wilhelm L. from Fürstenwalde who had his property returned on appeal to the regional commission on the basis that previous local claims that he had taught neighbourhood children the Hitler salute were not considered by the regional Brandenburg commission to constitute ‘political activity’ but merely ‘friendliness’, illustrating the subjective political interpretations which were often at play in the expropriation process.¹⁹² Moreover, unverifiable claims which had sufficed as a justification for expropriation at a local level were frequently later rejected as unsubstantiated by the regional commission, as was the case with Fürstenwalde resident Max M., whose property was returned after his appeal with the explanation that: ‘The allegation that back then Max M. was to have declared that he “would donate a *Tonne* of beer for every murdered communist” cannot be sustained’.¹⁹³

Similarly, other appeals lodged by complainants from Fürstenwalde had been brought in front of the State Commission in Potsdam throughout 1948, and although many were placed under permanent sequester, some private properties in Fürstenwalde were also returned by the regional commission during this period.¹⁹⁴ Effectively, 98 of the 238 residential properties associated with National Socialism, which had been confiscated by Fürstenwalde’s administration between 1945 and 1946, were eventually returned to their original owners by early 1949.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, the Brandenburg state government decided to return a number of private properties in Brandenburg/Havel in 1948.¹⁹⁶

Similar to the examples above, these developments not only highlight the sense of *Eigensinn* among some former adherents of National Socialism who actively (and sometimes successfully) complained and appealed against these punitive measures, but also serve to illustrate the opportunities and room for manoeuvre which the post-war chaos and lack of a consistent application of Order no. 124 provided, as well as how these limitations were exploited wherever possible.

evidence, despite claims by the Fürstenwalde mayor that he had been an “extreme militarist” in: KALOS F/RdS/316 Band II, no pag.

¹⁹² KALOS F/RdS/316 Band I, no pag.

¹⁹³ This revision was partially based on positive testimony supporting Max M. by Carl Stoll, the former SPD mayor of Fürstenwalde from 1922-1933. *Ibid.*, no pag. [A ‘*Tonne*’ is an antiquated unit of measurement which in Prussia equaled approximately 114 litres of beer].

¹⁹⁴ See KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2114, no pag. and BLHA, Rep. 202A/317, ‘Kabinettsbeschlüsse Nr. 83, 105 und 107 über die Enteignung sequestrierter Vermögenswerte 1948 Kreise A-N’, pp. 82-88. Also BLHA, Rep. 202A/319, pp. 162-184.

¹⁹⁵ KALOS F/RdS/319, no pag.

¹⁹⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202A/319, pp. 128-130.

Nonetheless, although the archival material provides evidence that expropriation was often carried out in a different manner than may have been intended, it must also be noted that there were surely many other individuals who either remained passive in this process and chose not to intervene, or absconded to the West without any protest, therefore not appearing in the historical record.

In summary, the expropriation and sequestering of private property belonging to former National Socialists in the post-war period was not only designed as a form of punishment, but also intended by the central authorities to reduce the immediate economic, social and political influence of remnants of the Third Reich, thereby facilitating the transition from Nazism to socialism. However, initial confiscations through local initiatives were often considered illegal and haphazard and led to public complaints as early as summer 1945. The establishment of the ZDK in March 1946 made some inroads into co-ordinating the expropriation process in Brandenburg; nonetheless, the persistence of structural impediments in the form of practical difficulties and physical shortages led to a lack of mobilisation amongst commissions, as well as notable inconsistencies in decision-making processes, especially between the local and regional commissions. Although 40% of expropriated businesses were later returned to their owners across Brandenburg, the oral history evidence suggests that the sequestering of the remaining businesses and industries may have caused a certain level of de-stabilisation for both the commercial middle-class and disruption to the traditional fabric of both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde more generally.

When it came to the expropriation of residential property, many of the petitioners emphasised their passivity in the Third Reich, despite their NSDAP membership, which tended to mirror the wider contemporary public opinion at the grassroots where many could not reconcile the punishment of the 'small Nazis' with the war and genocide committed by the 'big Nazis'. This lack of comprehension is also reflected in the actions of some local party functionaries who frequently defended expropriated individuals in an effort to moderate the impact of this punitive Soviet policy on their own communities. Furthermore, preliminary comparisons between local and regional rulings illustrate the interplay between individual actions on the one hand, and structural weaknesses and limitations on the other hand; in turn, this dynamic frequently resulted in the dilution of the impact which this punitive policy had in post-war Brandenburg. Yet, although some of the impact of the

expropriation of businesses and residential properties could be somewhat moderated, ultimately SMAD Orders no. 124 and 126 appear to have had a significant effect on the social and economic fabric within local communities and played a considerable role in the post-war transition from Nazism to socialism in Brandenburg.

4.7 Conclusion

The East German administration's efforts to remove the physical, political, economic and social legacy of the Third Reich in post-war Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde proved challenging, complex and in some instances even contradictory. The attempts to eliminate the immediate physical remnants and sites of memory of the Third Reich were met with some success in the public sphere, particularly by the early 1950s. Yet, as both the archival and oral history evidence suggests, permeation of the personal sphere often proved arduous. The implementation of the initial attempt at denazification of the workforce proved to be somewhat sporadic, while the second phase prematurely offered the prospect of economic integration to former National Socialists in return for political allegiance. The practical realisation of the third and fourth denazification phases illustrated not just the wide latitude of interpretation of Directive no. 24 and the impact which grassroots factors and practical issues could have on the implementation of the denazification process, but also the apathy and negative responses, not just in the local civilian population, but also of grassroots political functionaries in Brandenburg. The sequestering and expropriation process was plagued with similar challenges of shortcomings when it came to adjudication, while the de-stabilisation the policy created at a grassroots level served to mobilise a substantial number of individuals to express discontent at perceived injustices.

The success of a notable proportion of individual complaints both against denazification and sequestering rulings in Brandenburg challenges Konrad Jarausch's observation that denazification in the Soviet Occupation Zone was pursued in 'disregard of the right to self-defence'.¹⁹⁷ Whilst this self-defence may have been relatively haphazard, non-transparent and subjective until the Brandenburg state government established centralised complaints offices in January

¹⁹⁷ Jarausch, *After Hitler*, p. 55.

1948, it nonetheless suggests that a certain room for manoeuvre, however restricted, was available to some individuals affected by the various denazification measures, thereby somewhat diluting the impact which at least this aspect of the post-war transition process had at a grassroots level in post-war Brandenburg. Nonetheless, the potential effect which grassroots challenges could have should not be overstated, and many thousands of individuals were affected by these punitive Soviet measures in these early years. All in all, by the time these policies were ended by the late 1940s, many facets of grassroots Brandenburg communities had been radically altered. Once the main wave of this deconstruction had been completed, the path was now cleared for the rehabilitation and reintegration of the majority of the populace in order to ensure a successful transition from Nazism to socialism. It is this new phase which will now be explored in the second half of this thesis.

Part 2: Grassroots responses within the context of rehabilitative measures in Brandenburg

As has been shown in part one of this study, the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945 had resulted in a significant rupture for many in Brandenburg. Even for those who may not have been active supporters of National Socialism, the official political parameters nonetheless shifted rapidly and required some level of readjustment. It is these processes of reorientation, rehabilitation and (re)integration which will be addressed in the second half of this thesis by addressing the question of the extent to which grassroots Brandenburgers participated in political organisations which were designed to integrate East Germans in the wake of the previous punitive measures and what impact these responses may have had on the post-war transition. Chapter five will explore the manner in which former NSDAP members and soldiers in Brandenburg responded to political overtures by the National Democratic Party (NDPD) and chapter six will explore grassroots responses to the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF). Both the NDPD and the DSF had been expressly established to challenge previous National Socialist sentiments and aid in facilitating the political transition from ‘fascism’ to socialism. Finally, chapter seven will focus on factors which may have both impeded and facilitated the process of post-war transition for the oral history interviewees and other local Brandenburgers. In turn, part two of this thesis argues that the rehabilitative stage, despite some grassroots challenges, generally provided a favourable system for grassroots integration in which the needs of the policy makers and a significant proportion of grassroots individuals somewhat converged, eventually contributing to the partial stabilisation of the emerging East German socialist state.

Chapter V: Grassroots responses to the National Democratic Party (NDPD)

5.1 Introduction

Within the bloc party system, the National Democratic Party (NDPD) was intended to act as an important facilitator in the process of political transition from National Socialism to socialism in post-war East Germany. Born directly out of the end of denazification in 1948, the National Democratic Party was officially established on 16 June, as the SMAD and the SED attempted to get thousands of former nominal NSDAP members out of political isolation and integrate them back into society. While up until 1947 the reduction of the power of traditional elites had been at the centre of the administration's policy, it now became important to integrate particularly the bourgeois and the petit-bourgeois groups within East German society, and the NDPD was therefore expected to act as a 'safety net for denazification', in order for the new state to succeed.¹ Because the NSDAP, at least in the early years, was believed to have had strong support among the middle-class, and a significant proportion of those denazified came from this stratum in society, it was decided to establish a middle-class-party that would act as a political transmission-belt to the middle-classes as well as taking members and voters away from the other bourgeois parties.²

Although the NDPD was the only party in East Germany which was established for, and expressly charged with, the integration of former National Socialists, soldiers and officers, this Party is under-researched in both German and English historiography. In an East German context, six dissertations occupied themselves to a greater and lesser extent with aspects of the NDPD throughout the GDR; however, all of these authors were functionaries or full-time employees of the Party.³ In the West German historiography, two dissertations were written by

¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1336, 'Gründung der NDPD 1948-1950', pp. 47-48. See also Dietrich Staritz, 'Die National- Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD)', in *SBZ- Handbuch: Staatliche Verwaltungen, Parteien, gesellschaftliche Organisationen und ihre Führungskräfte in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945-1949*, ed. by Martin Broszat, and Hermann Weber (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990), p. 574.

² Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 42.

³ These consisted of Udo Zylla (Leipzig, 1972), Hans Eisermann (Leipzig, 1973), Harry Hegler (Berlin, 1973), Fred Dumke (Berlin, 1981), Lothar Müller (Halle/Wittenberg, 1983) and Wolfram

Dietrich Staritz and Joseph Haas in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, while since reunification only a smattering of texts have been published as part of anthologies.⁴ Furthermore, the emphasis of research to date in this area has been on top-down political perspectives; the main aim of Staritz's work was to examine how the NDPD contributed to the SED transmission system and to appraise the system of rule within the GDR, while Haas focused on mapping the development of NDPD politics within the space in which the SED allowed the Party to manoeuvre.⁵ Since the appearance of these theses however, a wealth of archival material has become available in the federal archives in Berlin which to date has been markedly under-utilised.

Notwithstanding that this material contains much Party propaganda about its supposed successes, particularly when it comes to public congresses and pamphlets, these documents nonetheless provide a window into the conceptual and linguistic tenets used in the Party's attempts at an efficacious political self-representation. The majority of internal Party reports from the early years, both at a regional and central level, are also surprisingly frank and self-critical of the Party's problems and shortcomings, which can perhaps be explained by the desire to ameliorate difficulties so that the Party could successfully expand its support base. The archival material also permits an insight into the manner in which former NSDAP members and soldiers attempted to utilise the opportunities provided by the NDPD for personal advancement and gain as well as the grassroots responses to various political strategies.

The following chapter examines the extent to which former NSDAP members and soldiers participated in the NDPD in Brandenburg. An examination of the NDPD can provide an insight into the attempts made by the East German administration to redefine the public political sphere and rehabilitate, reeducate and reintegrate former NSDAP members and soldiers at an institutional level as well as also acting as a window into some of the grassroots opinion and activity amongst its membership and the room for manoeuvre available to this specific target group. In

Hoschke (Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1987). Bernd Gottberg, 'Die Gründung und die ersten Jahre der NDPD 1948-1954', in *'Bürgerliche' Parteien in der SBZ/DDR: Zur Geschichte von CDU, LDP(D), DBD und NDPD*, ed. by Jürgen Frölich (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995), 73-87 (pp.74, 85).

⁴ Staritz, *Beitrag*, and Josef Haas, *Die National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD). Geschichte, Struktur und Funktion einer DDR-Blockpartei* (Bamberg: Inaugural-Dissertation, 1987). There have also been briefer analyses with reference to other bloc parties, see, for example, Walter, *Es ist Frühling* and Gottberg, *Gründung*, pp. 73-87, which is written by a former NDPD member.

⁵ Haas, *NDPD*, p. 2.

general, the target group of the NDPD differed from the cohort of oral history interviewees, and instead expressly focused on NSDAP members and ‘former militarists’. This chapter thus illustrates the post-war political transition from a different perspective to that described by the oral history evidence in other chapters, and instead explores a microcosm of Brandenburg society which had arguably been the most active in the Third Reich as functionaries and carriers of the system.

5.2 The founding of the NDPD

The strategy of a ‘politics of alliance’, on which the bloc party system was based, had already been tested in a German context prior to 1945 with the establishment of the ‘National Committee for a Free Germany’ (NKFD) and the ‘League of German Officers’ (BDO) among German prisoners in Soviet POW camps in 1943. Although these organizations appeared to be spontaneous German ‘antifascist’ organizations, they were in fact tightly orchestrated by Russian communists and KPD exiles.⁶ Within these organizations, POWs had undergone a closely controlled system of re-education, with daily lessons which covered topics such as ‘The war is lost’ and ‘Fundamental Questions on Socialism’.⁷ These organizations were also charged with undermining support for Hitler and the war at home and became active in antifascist, anti-war propaganda, which included printing newspapers and pamphlets with headlines such as ‘I have recognized the truth’, as well as broadcasting radio programmes which urged Germans to halt combat, having ‘nothing to fear’ from the Red Army.⁸ Yet interestingly, nationalist patriotic sentiment, which may have remained among many German POWs in these organizations, was to be partly placated with the concession that German officers in the camps were permitted to continue wearing their uniforms and medals, while the flag of the NKFD consisted

⁶ For a discussion on the shifting image of the Russians in the NKFD and BDO see Paul Heider, ‘Zum Russlandbild im Nationalkomitee ‘Freies Deutschland’ und Bund Deutscher Offiziere’, in *Das Russlandbild im Dritten Reich*, ed. by Hans Erich Volkmann (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1994).

⁷ BArch, SgY12/238/1/9, ‘Berichte, Briefe und Flugblätter des Frontbevollmächtigten Leutnant Kehler 1944-45’, p. 3.

⁸ BArch, SgY12/238/1/5, ‘Flugblätter des NKFD an Offiziere und deutsche Soldaten 1944’, no pag. and BArch, SgY12/V238/3/101, ‘Nationalkomitee ‘Freies Deutschland : Sender Freies Deutschland-Tages-Verzeichnisse u. Manuskripte der Sendungen vom 26. April, 1945 bis 30. April 1945’, pp. 208-209.

of the imperial colours black, white and red.⁹ Such political concessions illustrated how a number of ideological layers and strands could co-exist within such a hybrid organisation and demonstrates the latitude afforded to former higher officers in the *Wehrmacht*.

Subsequent Cold War propaganda in both post-war German states later varied greatly in their portrayal of those POWs who decided to join the NKFD and BDO. The East German press highlighted the genuine disillusionment with Hitler and the war among many German soldiers after Stalingrad, while discourses in the West German Press tended to emphasise the POWs' opportunistic nature, arguing that they were given better food and less manual labour than non-members.¹⁰ With this approach of ideological re-education and reintegration of former National Socialists, the communists had already established a successful precedent for their post-1945 treatment of the wider East German population. This experiment proved that a socially heterogeneous group, with reduced political freedoms, could formulate common goals and develop political programmes under the hegemony of a group of Communist Party functionaries.¹¹ It was therefore this relatively successful 'politics of alliance' of the 'National Front' which was to act as a blueprint for the political bloc system in post-war East Germany and specifically for the NDPD.

While denazification in the Eastern zone was still in full swing, the SMAD, in a meeting with officers of the political department of the military administration of the provinces chaired by Colonel Sergej Tjulpanow, had already agreed on the establishment of a national-democratic party in late 1947. Subsequently, on 22 March 1948, a new newspaper entitled the '*National Zeitung*' appeared, which six months later became the press organ of the NDPD.¹² By 16 June 1948, the SMAD

⁹ BArch, SgY12/V238/3/21, 'Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland Moskau: Sender Freies Deutschland. Verzeichnis und Manuskripte der Sendungen 1.- 30. Nov 1943', pp. 214-215.

¹⁰ See, for instance, references to the NKFD 'neo-communists' in articles of '*Der Spiegel*'; 19 February 1949, 26 February 1949 and 12 March 1949, in: SAPMO-BArch, DY16/3472, 'Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland 1943, 1945-64'. On the further reception of the NKFD and BDO in West Germany see Peter Steinbach and Gerd R. Ueberschär, 'Die Geschichtsschreibung zum NKFD und BDO in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in den westlichen Ländern', in *Das Nationalkomitee 'Freies Deutschland' und der Bund Deutscher Offiziere*, ed. by Gerd R. Ueberschär (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1995), pp. 141-160. On the same phenomenon in the GDR, see Paul Heider, 'Das NKFD und der BDO in der Historiographie der DDR und die "Arbeitsgemeinschaft ehemaliger Offiziere"', in *Ibid.*, pp. 161-181

¹¹ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 14.

¹² The Party later also published two journals '*Forwards*' and '*The National Democrat*', as well also running its own publishing house '*Verlag der Nation*', see Elke Warning, *National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD) 1948 bis 1990. DY 16. Band 1* (Berlin, Vorläufiges Findbuch SAPMO, 2000). p. 12.

officially sanctioned the creation of the NDPD, and on 31 July 1948 the Party was entered into the *Volksrat*.¹³ In Brandenburg, the first public meeting of the NDPD took place in Brandenburg/Havel on 30 June 1948 and was organised by Dr Geissler, who would later become the chairman of the local party branch in the town. This was followed by the establishment of further district associations of the NDPD at a local level across the state of Brandenburg.¹⁴

Sergej Tjulpanow emphasised in his 1986 memoirs that ‘it was necessary that this Party was to be led by a strong and experienced leadership who would be able to win the trust of its members, whose ‘democratic convictions’ still varied greatly’.¹⁵ Therefore, Lothar Bolz, a former KPD émigré who had worked with the NKFD, was voted in as chairman.¹⁶ In the following months the make-up of the central committee and principal functionaries changed somewhat, as many of those NKFD officers who were still in the Soviet Union returned to Germany during the mass-release of prisoners in the second half of 1948 and 1949, significantly strengthening its leadership as well as boosting membership numbers.¹⁷

In fact, the entire NDPD Party leadership had some form of military experience, and the large majority of them had held positions of officers, or higher, in the *Wehrmacht*, illustrating the degree of political latitude available to some of those who were willing to undergo political conversion.¹⁸ For instance, in February 1949 Vincenz Müller, a former *Wehrmacht* general and NKFD and BDO member, took over the position of party whip. He was to become extremely influential both in the NDPD and in other organs of state in the years to come. Similarly, at the first party conference in June 1949, Dr Otto Korfes was officially voted into the central committee of the NDPD, becoming chairman of the Brandenburg district association of the NDPD in Potsdam. Dr Korfes had been a Major General in the *Wehrmacht* who had been taken prisoner after Stalingrad and became a founding member of the

¹³ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 59.

¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1285. ‘Erster Landesparteitag Brandenburg 1949’, pp. 6-10.

¹⁵ Tjulpanow, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege*, p. 268.

¹⁶ Staritz, *Beitrag*, pp. 55-56, 62. After the official establishment of the GDR on 7 October 1949, when the NDPD entered into government with fifteen representatives, Lothar Bolz was made minister of rebuilding and development. He would later also become the East German Foreign Minister from 1953 to 1965.

¹⁷ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 52.

¹⁸ On the structural continuities between the *Wehrmacht* and the NVA see Fingerle, Stephan, ‘Waffen in Arbeiterhand? Zur Rekrutierung der Offiziere der Nationalen Volksarmee’, in *Nationale Volksarmee- Armee für den Frieden: Beiträge zu Selbstverständnis und Geschichte des deutschen Militärs 1945-1990*, ed. by Detlef Bald, Reinhard Brühl, Andreas Prüfert (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995).

BDO and a member of the NKFD.¹⁹ This strong presence of former BDO and NKFD members played a significant role in helping to tightly orchestrate the actions of those in the Party's higher echelons.

The organisation structure of the NDPD was crowned by the Party Congress which was its highest organ and, in the early years, met annually. The rules and regulations of party politics were determined by the Party Council and together with the party whip, the Council was essentially in charge of the majority of decisions regarding the NDPD.²⁰ Grassroots branches were established quite rapidly across the Eastern zone and regional and local meetings of NDPD members were to occur monthly.²¹ By November 1948 the NDPD office in Brandenburg/Havel had officially established itself in the *Steinstraße*, just 350 metres from the local Soviet war memorial, while the NDPD regional office for the district of Lebus had its provisional headquarters in the *Clara-Zetkin-Straße* in Seelow, 30 kilometres north-east of Fürstenwalde and was initially responsible for the town until its own branch was established a short time later.²²

5.3 The 'practical politics' of the NDPD

As the NDPD had been founded specifically both to appeal to and reeducate former NSDAP members, soldiers, officers and the nationally-minded middle-classes, one of its most urgent tasks was to address some of the perceived inequities which were most affecting these groups in the post-denazification period after 1948. In its early years, the Party therefore committed a significant proportion of its resources to working with, and for, ordinary former nominal NSDAP members and soldiers on the ground by offering a combined form of political and professional rehabilitation. Throughout 1949 the NDPD sent recruiters to camps for POWs returning from the

¹⁹ Dr Otto Korfes (1889-1964) had previously worked as an archivist in the *Reichsarchiv* in Potsdam from 1920-1937. He later became the Director of the Central State Archives in Potsdam from 1948-1952 and subsequently worked as a Major General in the KVP from 1952-56. Müller-Enbergs, *Wer war wer: Band 1*, pp. 543-544; while former officer Heinrich Homann, later the long-time NDPD chairman, had joined the NSDAP in 1933. Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, *Die Partei der Ehemaligen*, p. 14. Similarly, General Arno von Lenski later became an NDPD deputy in the Volkskammer despite his involvement in the ruling of at least twenty death penalties as honorary assessor in the *Volksgerichtshof* from 1939 to 1942. Müller-Enbergs, *Wer war wer: Band 1*, pp. 607-8.

²⁰ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 99.

²¹ From November 1950 onwards an additional 'study evening' was established, the content of which was decided by the Party Council. Staritz, *Beitrag*, pp. 101-102.

²² SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1564, 'Schriftverkehr mit Landesverband Brandenburg NDPD 1948-49', p. 202. The regional office in Seelow was chaired by Siegfried Gerlach. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Soviet Union in an effort to increase membership numbers within this group, attempting, for instance, to entice new members by offering free legal counsel to the men.²³

They also began to intervene actively at a grassroots level on behalf of individuals who had been removed from their previous jobs or whose property had been sequestered. For instance, in April 1949 the political director of the NDPD in Brandenburg sent a list of petitions of former NSDAP members from across the region to the central committee of the NDPD in Berlin. Many of these individuals had been long-time members of the NSDAP, having joined the party before 1933. Yet the Brandenburg NDPD justified the proposed (re)integration into their previous posts and professions with phrases such as ‘this individual enjoys a lot of respect in his community’, or that ‘they would be better able to contribute to the community if they could once again practice their old profession’.²⁴ Claimed achievements by local Brandenburg branches of the NDPD in assisting in the reinstatement of a significant number of former NSDAP members in their jobs were heralded at the first Brandenburg Party Conference in June 1949.²⁵ Similar events were also occurring in the other East German provinces and the archival evidence suggests that regional NDPD branches across the Soviet zone had considerable successes in preventing and reversing job-losses and sequestering the property of National Socialists throughout late 1948 and early 1949, priding themselves in their successful ‘practical politics’, which enabled members of the target group to be reintegrated into their communities.²⁶

By early 1950 the NDPD in Brandenburg were continuing to assist their local members in finding employment in the wake of denazification as well as aiding them to regain possession of sequestered homes.²⁷ When the regional Party conference of the NDPD in Brandenburg took place in May 1950 it was attended by delegates both from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, including some who, only two years

²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/2568, ‘Aufbau der Partei: Gewinnung neuer Mitarbeiter: 1949’.

²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1353, ‘NDPD: Wiedereingliederung nomineller Mitglieder der NSDAP 1949-1950’, pp. 90-92. Some of these grassroots NDPD petitions challenged discrimination by local SED functionaries against former NSDAP members, see, for instance: SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1564, p. 13.

²⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1285, p. 23.

²⁶ See, for instance, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1739, ‘Rehabilitierung von ehemaligen Mitgliedern der NSDAP 1948-1949’ or SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1336, p. 52, for examples from Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

previously, had stood on local denazification lists.²⁸ Such instances illustrate the tandem advantages for both former NSDAP members and the NDPD in this arrangement. Former National Socialists were offered the possibility of (re)integration and social advancement, whilst the NDPD benefitted by being given the potential opportunity to politically instrumentalise their new recruits.

The eagerness with which this form of political redemption and the possibility of economic and social (re)integration was greeted among this subsection of society is also evidenced by the significant number of letters and petitions which were posted either directly to the NDPD or the SMAD by former NSDAP members and soldiers in both Brandenburg and the Soviet sector, in an attempt to win back their homes and their livelihoods. Many of these letters were relatively long and tended to follow a similar pattern. The individual usually highlighted the perceived injustice which had been committed against them, the hard-working nature of the individual and their family and the former political history of the individual, commonly containing such caveats as 'I held no post in the NSDAP or SA'. If a post was held, it was usually qualified with arguments such as 'this post was extremely unimportant' or 'I didn't get a higher promotion because the NSDAP or SA saw me as politically unreliable'. Furthermore, such letters also often contained references such as 'I was always against the war with the Soviet Union'. One such letter from a former SA member in Kleinmachnow, on the southern border of Berlin some fifty kilometres from Brandenburg/Havel, went as far as to state: 'It is widely known that the SA, in contrast to the SS, consisted of large numbers of people who were consciously against the anti-Soviet politics of the NSDAP [...] I in fact belong to the so-called circle of 'pro-Bolshevists'.²⁹ Many authors then concluded these appeals by emphasizing how active they had been in the local NDPD and in the rebuilding of Germany more generally.

Such grassroots responses from Brandenburg tell us much about the normative rules adopted by the petitioners as well as the manner in which they attempted to present themselves, tending to fall into the three categories of self-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142 for a list of local delegates in attendance.

²⁹ Letter from Paul L. in Kleinmachnow, from 22. August 1948 to Major Ischenkow in the Soviet commandant's office in Mahlow, Brandenburg. SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1353, pp. 107-108. On the similar use of antifascist assurances by former NSDAP members in Berlin in the immediate post-war period and the narrative styles used see Insa Eschebach, 'Zur Umcodierung der eigenen Vergangenheit. Antifaschismuskonstruktionen in Rehabilitationsgesuchen ehemaliger Mitglieder der NSDAP, Berlin 1945/46', in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster*, pp. 79-90.

representation after 1945 identified by Mary Fulbrook: claimed conversion from ‘fascism to antifascism’, claimed consistency that ‘one had always been privately against the Nazis’, or thirdly the continued implicit or explicit clinging to tenets of National Socialism. Fulbrook maintains that ‘vestiges of Nazism were often difficult to eradicate entirely and narratives can be found which combine all three strategies’.³⁰ Similarly, the archival evidence suggests that NDPD strategies condoned and offered a form of political conversion by emphasising and reinforcing a lack of personal *Eigensinn* and responsibility during the Third Reich in return for membership, support and a new-found agency to ‘do the right thing’ in the present.

Whilst these strategies were complemented with active campaigns to expand the Party’s base at the grassroots level, initial growth was nonetheless sluggish. By the end of August 1948, ten weeks after the establishment of the Party, the NDPD had only 80 members in the state of Brandenburg – 32 of these were in Brandenburg/Havel and none were in Fürstenwalde’s district of Lebus.³¹ A month later the NDPD had increased to 187 members in the state of Brandenburg – 32 of these were still in Brandenburg/Havel, while 8 were now in Lebus.³² By October 1948 the Party had grown to a mere 279 members in the state of Brandenburg out of a total of 1,376 across the Soviet sector.³³

Nevertheless, grassroots campaigns to attract local members continued, and at the first Brandenburg Party Conference the following year, it was proudly announced that between June 1948 and May 1949, 122 public NDPD meetings had been carried out across the region, attracting, it was claimed, ‘many thousands’ of listeners.³⁴ This pressure to expand continued, and at the NDPD Party Conference the following month it was announced that there was to be ‘no town without a local NDPD branch’.³⁵ This push for the creation of local branches was twinned with an attempt to expand existing ones. Subsequently, two large public meetings were held in Brandenburg/Havel – one on 27 July 1949 and the second on 19 October 1949 – attracting 450 attendees; here discussions were dominated by issues surrounding the

³⁰ Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, pp. 280-81.

³¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1564, p. 283. In contrast, by August 1948 the SED had 1,734 members, the CDU had 154 members and the LDP had 105 members in Fürstenwalde: KALOS F/RdS/133, ‘Parteien 1947-1950’, no pag.

³² SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1564, pp. 255, 283.

³³ Gottberg, *Gründung*, p. 77.

³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1285, p. 13.

³⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/3209, ‘Stenographisches Protokoll des Ersten Parteitages der NDPD Halle/Saale 23-25 Juni 1949’.

fate of former National Socialists.³⁶ Yet by September 1949, fourteen months after the establishment of the Party, the American paper in Berlin '*Die Neue Zeitung*' reported that the NDPD had attracted merely 16,900 members in the Eastern zone, 2,800 of whom were living in Brandenburg.³⁷

The archival evidence suggests that suspicion and scepticism about the true intentions and purpose of the NDPD remained at a grassroots level. For instance, in early 1950 the local NDPD branch in Müllrose, 30 kilometres from Fürstenwalde, was dealing with the accusation by local members that the NDPD was merely a tool with which to entice people out of their hideouts, only to 'lock them away at the right moment'.³⁸ Such reports provide an insight into the challenges in establishing credibility which the Party faced amongst the populace at a local level in Brandenburg. It would only be from late 1949 onward, after the creation of the GDR state and some legislative successes, that the Party would increasingly gain the trust of former NSDAP members and soldiers and gradually expand.

5.4 Political conversion in the NDPD

Although the NDPD were slowly beginning to attract new members, this did not necessarily mean that Nazi ideology had disappeared amongst the East Germans who did choose to join. Dietrich Staritz maintains that because the NDPD offered rehabilitation to former nominal NSDAP members, soldiers and members of the bourgeoisie, as well as the opportunity of resuming an interrupted career-path, or beginning a new one, this often led to opportunistic behaviour, but not necessarily to a fundamental change of consciousness or outlook.³⁹ The archival evidence also suggests that the complex political and ideological transition of former NSDAP members and soldiers was often heavily burdened by the legacy of their National Socialist past.

In Brandenburg, at the first regional Party Conference in June 1949, a speech by local Party member Hans L. acknowledged that the fact that many Party members had once belonged to the NSDAP resulted in certain difficulties, especially with

³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6205, 'Berichte/Informationen über die Arbeit der Landesverbände Brandenburg und Mecklenburg, 1949-51', no pag.

³⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/3279, 'Bd. 2 NDPD und West Presse 1949-56', p. 1.

³⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, p. 140.

³⁹ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 106.

respect to 'the overcoming of the National Socialist ideology'. 'I know from personal experiences', he confessed, 'I myself was an NSDAP member, how difficult it is to throw the entire ballast of the past overboard'.⁴⁰ Similarly, an article in the '*National Zeitung*' admitted in January 1949 that 'no one can claim that the National Socialist ideology promptly disappeared with German capitulation on 8 May 1945 [...] even today many Germans still believe in the National Socialist body of thought'.⁴¹ Therefore, if the NDPD was to transform their arrangement with former National Socialists and soldiers into an engagement with the new societal order, the NDPD leadership not only had to attempt to break down vestiges of the National Socialist ideology and 'middle-class attitudes', they also had to help these people overcome their views and encourage the conscious recognition of the new status quo.⁴² This new status quo was naturally determined by the SED and the Soviet occupying forces. Therefore, the NDPD had to walk a difficult political tightrope between placating former members of the NSDAP on the one hand, and yet still obediently toeing the political line of both the Soviet occupation forces and the SED on the other hand.

In order to help the Party overcome this political challenge of ideological transition and reorientation, they established a systematic ideological re-training programme for functionaries and members. This re-education of former NSDAP members, soldiers and officers in favour of the new political circumstances was to be based on the principle of the NKFD schools before 1945. On 28 March 1949 the 'School for National Politics' was opened in Buckow, near Berlin. The following year, five additional provincial party schools were opened, including one in Brandenburg.⁴³ These were designed to strengthen the organizational structure of the Party, especially at a grassroots level.

Much of the curriculum attempted to engage with the National Socialist '*Lebensraum*' concept, which had once again become an immediate issue after the permanent establishment of the Oder-Neisse border through the Görlitzer Agreement on 6 July 1950.⁴⁴ Moreover, based on a relatively realistic assessment by the Soviet administration as to the continued high levels of anti-Soviet sentiment among sectors

⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1285, pp. 138-139.

⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6340, 'Wiedereingliederung von ehemaligen Mitgliedern der NSDAP 1948-49', p. 47.

⁴² Staritz, *Beitrag*, pp. 106-107.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109.

⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6, 'Band 4 Sitzungen der NDPD 1950', pp. 2-3, 186.

of East German society, they also embarked on a systematic re-education offensive in order to combat the ‘legend’ of the ‘danger from the East’.⁴⁵ A large proportion of the curriculum therefore continued to focus on East Germany’s relationship to the Soviet Union, covering subjects such as ‘the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and their struggle for peace’. It was also expanded to address middle-class preoccupations with culture and education in particular, including subjects which dealt with Russian art, science, sport, health-care and architecture.⁴⁶ All the same, internal NDPD reports indicate that it was these particular aspects of the curriculum which often encountered the most resistance among students in the party schools across the provinces, highlighting the deep-rooted scepticism at political reform of a substantial number of NDPD students at the grassroots level.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the regional party schools were expanded into the local level and in April 1952 the NDPD in Brandenburg/Havel opened a district party school, while Fürstenwalde was to receive a similar school a short time later.⁴⁸ By mid-1953, 8,000 members had graduated from one of these Party schools, suggesting that the NDPD had some successes in their attempts to spread their message and to train cadres at a local level. However, the archival evidence also suggests that the Party had some difficulties in enforcing their new doctrines amongst grassroots members.

Beyond the Party’s school system for its existing members, the NDPD also continued their drive for popularity and growth in Brandenburg as well as across the Eastern sector. In order to achieve this they had to invest great energy into harnessing potentially dangerous political sentiments and utilising them for their own ends. It was for this reason that the NDPD was particularly keen to redefine and re-use key tenets of National Socialist ideology on nationalism and national identity and make them usable in the post-war present. Fulbrook maintains that ‘a sense of acceptable national identity is usually constructed, in part, by singing tales of heroes and martyrs’. Yet, she argues, ‘to do this in Germany after Hitler was an

⁴⁵ Tjulpanow, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege*, p. 192.

⁴⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/92, ‘Tagungen des Parteivorstandes der NDPD: 15-22 Sitzung, Oct-Nov 1952’, p. 56.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6365, ‘Hauptvorstandssitzung am 1.10.1948 bis Hauptvorstandssitzung am 7-8 Juli 1950’, p. 169 for grassroots dissatisfaction with the NDPD doctrine amongst members in Saxony-Anhalt in summer 1949. Similar developments were also reported from the other provincial party schools, see, for example, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/8, ‘NDPD Sitzungen Bd 2’, pp. 63 -64, for reports on Thuringia in spring 1950.

⁴⁸ On Brandenburg/Havel see: SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1397, ‘Auswertung von Tagungen des Landesausschusses Brandenburg 1952’, no pag. On Fürstenwalde see: SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1351, ‘Kreiskonferenzen von Landesverbänden Bd 2: Brandenburg 1952’, no pag.

extraordinarily complex matter, beset with potential pitfalls and sensitivities'.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the NDPD aimed to recycle National Socialist sentiments in order to reach out to potential members at a grassroots level. The emblem of the NDPD consisted of three oak leaves, thus directly tapping into the long-running symbolism of an oak leaf being used to represent German militarism and nationalism. The image of oak leaves had previously been used on German iron cross decorations, as well as later also appearing in a different form on the caps of the East German National People's Army (NVA).⁵⁰

The NDPD did not merely employ nationalist symbols, they also constantly modified their concept of 'national' in order to utilise these sentiments for a larger political purpose. In Brandenburg, at the first NDPD meeting in Potsdam in September 1948, Lothar Bolz called upon the Party to ensure that 'national' was at the core of all of NDPD politics in order to overcome other differences such as professional standing or one's own 'world view' (*Weltanschauung*).⁵¹ Such statements explicitly acknowledged the continued prevalence of nationalist sentiments in the Soviet sector three years after the collapse of the Third Reich. Similarly, in a 1948 pamphlet, the NDPD voiced its support for the 'healthy nationalist forces' within East Germany and advocated a 'politics of true nationalism' which every 'true German' should follow.⁵² This reference to the notion of 'healthy' suggests that adherents to Nazism would now be considered to be cured and thus rehabilitated, if only they were to invest their 'nationalist' energies into the rebuilding of the new Germany.

In a speech in June 1949 the party whip, Vincenz Müller, went so far as to declare that: 'we are not afraid to use the word 'national' with pride, and return honour to the word in a new political context. For us 'national' means the bringing together of all Germans to represent our rightful '*Lebensinteressen*''.⁵³ It appears astonishing that such references to exclusionary National Socialist notions of the

⁴⁹ Mary Fulbrook, 'Re-presenting the nation: history and identity in East and West Germany', in *Representing the German nation* by Mary Fulbrook and Martin Swales (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 177.

⁵⁰ There were strong links between the NDPD and the NVA. In fact, by June 1951, out of the 10,206 officers in the NVA, 3,391 had previously been members of the *Wehrmacht*. Wenzke, Rüdiger, 'Wehrmachtoffiziere in den DDR-Streitkräften', in Bald, *Nationale Volksarmee*, p. 144.

⁵¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1336, p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵³ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/657, 'Material zum Protokoll Erster Parteitag NDPD 23.-25. Juni 1949 Halle. Bd 3', p. 8.

‘Germans’ and linguistic allusions to concepts such as ‘*Lebensraum*’ could be used so publicly in order to entice former NSDAP members and soldiers into the Party. Nevertheless, the NDPD also attempted to circumvent direct references to the Third Reich by frequently emphasizing a German heritage which was instead viewed as being rooted in the period of the wars of independence.⁵⁴ Yet in their attempt at instrumentalising these tenets of National Socialist ideology in order to appeal to elements within the Brandenburg as well as the East German public, the NDPD not only invariably reproduced a new hybrid form of nationalism, they also created a space within which former adherents of the NSDAP could achieve political rehabilitation without necessarily fundamentally changing their entire belief system.

The latitude created by the Party for redefining acceptable nationalist sentiments nevertheless had its limits. When numerous individual and group initiatives by NDPD members, both in Brandenburg and across the Soviet sector, attempted to stretch the concept of national identity and pride in order to challenge taboos surrounding the commemoration of German war dead, they received meagre support from the Party echelons and the issue was increasingly side-lined from the public political sphere.⁵⁵ In this manner, it would appear that NDPD members were subject to the same official restrictions against commemorating German war dead as the local community members explored in chapter two.

5.5 The NDPD and the German-Soviet dynamic

Given the contested victimhood which existed between East Germans and Soviets in post-war discourses, especially at a grassroots level, the thorny area of German-Soviet relations was to prove the most challenging to the NDPD leadership. In order

⁵⁴ For instance, NDPD groups in Schwerin and Ludwigslust organised a memorialisation of Theodor Körner, who had been killed during the wars of independence against Napoleon in 1813, at his place of death in Gadebusch in 1953. Yet interestingly Körner had already been (re)discovered as a ‘German hero of freedom’ by the National Socialists, who had been instrumental in erecting another Körner memorial in 1938. Antifaschistisches Infoblatt, *Die Partei der Ehemaligen*, p. 15. See also René Schilling, ‘Das Erbe des Heroismus – Die Erinnerung an die Kriegshelden Theodor Körner und Otto Weddigen in den beiden deutschen Staaten von 1945 bis 1990’, in *Von der Kriegskultur zur Friedenskultur. Zum Mentalitätswandel in Deutschland nach 1945*, ed. by Thomas Kühne (Münster: LIT, 2000), pp. 94-109.

⁵⁵ These attempts at memorialisation included public speeches on the matter by local NDPD members see SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1315, ‘Verzeichnis von Ortsverbänden NDPD 1952-1957’, p. 13, as well as grassroots initiatives by local NDPD members across the Eastern zone to clean up graveyards and honour German war-dead, see, for instance, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1520, ‘Aktion “Ruf an die deutsche Frontgeneration Bd 2 1952”’, p. 23. This domain had been highly dominated on a political level by the Soviet war-dead after 1945 – see chapter two of this thesis.

to promote political transition for their members in the late 1940s, the treatment of German-Soviet relations had initially emphasised resigned and pragmatic rhetoric. In September 1948 a speech by the Chair of the NDPD, Lothar Bolz, had maintained that:

Our relationship with the Soviet Union is neither based on common political or economic doctrines, nor on shared social or philosophical doctrines [...] One can have as many differing opinions on the Soviet Union as one likes, but [...] we must not forget that the Soviet border is much closer to us than the American continent.⁵⁶

With this early interpretation of the German relationship to the Soviet Union in 1948, the Party leadership had soberly attempted to justify their stance. Yet by the early 1950s, the language of the NDPD on this issue had transcended into more emotive political rhetoric and the NDPD now attempted to emphasise the historical connectedness between the two states and legitimise their pro-Soviet stance by evoking the coalition victories during the Napoleonic Wars as well as Bismarck's strategic alliance system during the second German empire.

One is trying to scare you with Russia. One is therefore trying to scare you with politics that led to the national liberation of our German people between 1813 and 1815; with a politics which Bismarck himself recognised was essential to both his diplomacy and the *Reich*.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, anti-Soviet sentiment continued to remain an important challenge to the National Democratic leadership in their attempt at political re-education of their own members.

A significant number of NDPD members actively chose to reject these aspects of the Party's political revisionism. For instance, in February 1950, in the northern Brandenburg town of Wittenberge, two NDPD members, both men over seventy years of age, had left the Party because they 'could not reconcile themselves' with the Party's pro-Soviet language. Despite visits by local NDPD functionaries, the two men refused to reverse their decision.⁵⁸ In August 1951 at a main committee meeting of the NDPD, Vincenz Müller reported of a case from Malchin in Mecklenburg, 60 km from the border of Brandenburg in which a local NDPD

⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1336, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Speech at the fourth Party Conference in June 1952. SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6340, pp. 77-78. A similar sentiment was prevalent at the Fifth Party Conference of the NDPD in October 195, see SAPMO-BArch, DY16/589, 'Stenographisches Protokoll Fünfter Parteitag der National-Demokratischen Partei Deutschlands vom 16.-18.10.1953 in Leipzig', p. 1.

⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, p. 141.

member refused to stand guard at a local Soviet memorial. This, he claimed, created tension between the local NDPD and SED chapters in the small town. The SED demanded not only that the party withdraw his membership, but also ensured that the gentleman was fired from his job in the local *Volkseigener Betrieb* (VEB). The situation was further exacerbated when an SED member of the district council in the region insisted, as a result of this incident, that all members of the NDPD would be removed from employment in the VEB.⁵⁹ It is unlikely that such a blanket dismissal of local NDPD members actually came to pass; nonetheless it highlights not only that anti-Soviet sentiments amongst NDPD members at a local level could have a potentially damaging effect at a wider level, but also exemplifies some of the resulting local tension and in-fighting between the NDPD and SED at a grassroots level.

Grassroots challenges to the new political status quo could also take the form of group protest among local Party members in Brandenburg. For instance, on 28 February 1950, 154 NDPD members in Brandenburg, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt issued a joint statement in which they complained that they had joined the NDPD with the expectation that it would remain loyal to its founding edicts, particularly that it would remain anti-Marxist and anti-communist. They threatened that they would do everything in their power to dissuade other former NSDAP members from joining the Party.⁶⁰ This ambivalent attitude towards the Soviets was also reflected in membership figures of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF) which in some areas was often as low as 10% among National Democrats in Brandenburg.⁶¹ Even by 1951 the local NDPD branch in Brandenburg/Havel reported to the central political director in Berlin that its local members were behaving ‘passively’ towards the DSF and needed to be ‘steered’ in the right direction.⁶²

As noted above, the ratification of the Oder-Neisse border in July 1950 also developed as a contentious issue for the NDPD. Particularly in Brandenburg towns and villages which had been directly physically affected by the re-drawing of the new border, the Brandenburg NDPD showed great concern that ‘reactionary’ elements within local populations who protested against the border remained a

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1300. ‘19. Tagung Hauptausschuss NDPD 30./31.8.51 Leipzig’, pp. 16-17.

⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1460, pp. 1-2, 25-26.

⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366. pp. 1-2. This will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

⁶² SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1391, ‘Arbeit der Landesverbände Bd 2: Groß-Berlin und Brandenburg, März 1951’, no pag.

constant problem.⁶³ Active attempts were made by the Party to garner understanding and support for the issue across Brandenburg. In March 1951 the local branch of the NDPD in Fürstenwalde organised a public parish meeting entitled ‘German-Polish Friendship’.⁶⁴ Similarly, during the preparations for the month of German-Soviet friendship in 1951 in Brandenburg/Havel, the local NDP branch instructed all of its members not only to participate in DSF events, but also, for those who owned businesses and shops, to decorate their shop windows in a manner which ‘celebrated German-Soviet friendship’.⁶⁵ Notwithstanding these attempts, grassroots sentiment appears to have remained predominantly negative, affecting the Party at a local level; during the preparation for the second Party conference of the Brandenburg NDPD, when local district conferences took place in all 27 municipalities in Brandenburg, strong concern was expressed by the organisers that a lack of acceptance of the Oder-Neisse border as a ‘border of peace’ was causing difficulties and leading to extreme negativity in the local Party discussions.⁶⁶

Reluctance amongst some NDPD members to accept the Party’s pro-Soviet rhetoric was also evident in other spheres. POWs who had joined the ‘National Committee for a free Germany’ (NKFD) were still considered by some within the NDPD to have been ‘traitors’ who had supported the Soviet ‘enemy’. Particularly the chairman of the Brandenburg NDPD, Dr Otto Korfes, who had been active in the BDO and NKFD, remained a controversial figure for the NDPD in this regard. By the summer of 1949, party whip Vincenz Müller expressed concern about a number of Dr Korfes’ speeches, in which it was felt that ‘he sometimes goes too far in his statements about the Soviet Union, to the point that our members and other listeners cannot sympathise with him’. Müller instead instructed Dr Korfes that from now on he should keep to the NDPD Party literature which advocated a ‘sober policy’ towards the Soviet Union, as this slower, earnest approach was said to be ‘the first step which the majority of our members and friends need to take’ in order to be convinced of the pro-Soviet policy of the NDPD. He also cautioned Dr Korfes not to mention the NKFD, as the issue was still received by many with ‘suspicion and mistrust’.⁶⁷ Such internal self-censorship about a pro-Soviet organisation such as the

⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366.

⁶⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1391, no pag.

⁶⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY32/10428, no pag.

⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1460, p. 30.

⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1564, p. 1.

NKFD, within the Brandenburg NDPD, provides evidence that the transition of anti-Soviet NSDAP member to pro-Soviet NDPD member tended to be, at least initially, an ambivalent process for many individuals, forcing the Party into somewhat moderating its political rhetoric to the desires of its membership as it tried to affect and appropriate them. As a consequence, the attempts by the NDPD to water down their pro-Soviet stance when addressing their wider target group at local and regional meetings illustrates the existence of a considerable reticence to publicly revise certain tenets of the anti-Soviet ideology of the Third Reich.

5.6 Growth of the NDPD in Brandenburg

Despite such internal party problems at a grassroots level, the NDPD could also boast some early successes. One of the most urgent early tasks of the NDPD included the call for the complete political and economic equality of all former nominal NSDAP members and soldiers and the abolition of continued discrimination against this group. This was a vital element of public support for the Party, and along with their grassroots rehabilitation of local former NSDAP members, was a central cornerstone of their *raison d'être*, especially in the early years, and therefore required careful preparation by the Party. When on 11 November 1949, just over a month after the official founding of the GDR state, a first equality law restoring both active and passive voting rights to former nominal NSDAP members and officers was finally passed, the NDPD claimed this as its own victory.⁶⁸ This was a huge public boost to the Party as it could now legitimately claim to portray itself as truly representing the interests of former National Socialists. This success in turn became the basis of much of the Party's propaganda in the years which followed and at the third regional party conference of the Brandenburg NDPD, its president Dr O. Koltzenburg proudly announced that former NSDAP members who had joined the NDPD in Brandenburg had risen to become mayors, ministers and even members of parliament.⁶⁹

With the establishment of the GDR and the passing of this legislation, membership numbers also finally began to increase. Between 21 December 1949 and 20 January 1950 the membership across Brandenburg grew from 4,503 to 5,018 and

⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1353, p. 18.

⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1601, 'NDPD Landesparteitage 1952', p. 236.

the number of local branches in the region increased from 190 to 202.⁷⁰ In Brandenburg/Havel the NDPD had 187 members in January 1950, while Fürstenwalde's district of Lebus had 250 members.⁷¹ This was out of a total of 35,128 members across the GDR in February 1950.⁷² By this stage the NDPD in Brandenburg/Havel had managed to establish Party representatives in the district administration, in the local structural engineering office, the local communal enterprise and the tractor factory.⁷³ Yet in reality, not all of these members were politically active within the Party. For instance, between 31 March 1950 and 5 April 1950, 27 district party meetings were held by the NDPD across Brandenburg; however, in Brandenburg/Havel only 50% of the members attended, while in the district of Lebus merely 20% of members turned up.⁷⁴ Similarly, between 20 April and 20 May 1950, the NDPD carried out 288 members' meetings with 2,649 participants across the state of Brandenburg – an average of fewer than ten members per meeting.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, by July 1950, Brandenburg's NDPD had grown to 293 local branches with 7,539 members, of whom still only 8% were simultaneously members of the DSF.⁷⁶ In the same month, Brandenburg/Havel had 250 members, while in Fürstenwalde there were now 139 members of the NDPD.⁷⁷ By October 1950, Brandenburg's NDPD membership increased to 9,041, distributed across 397 local branches.⁷⁸ In Brandenburg/Havel membership numbers had risen to 282, and in Fürstenwalde they gradually increased to 202, while across the GDR membership had grown to 71,437 in January 1951.⁷⁹

The archival material indicates that internally the Party was dissatisfied with the standard of its grassroots network and political activity amongst its members in Brandenburg. In March 1951 the local NDPD branch in Brandenburg/Havel

⁷⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, p. 122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷² Gottberg, *Gründung*, p. 78. The age profile of members appeared quite evenly spread across the GDR. In May 1950, 8% were younger than 20 years; 26% were between 21-30 years; 21% were between 31-40 years, 23% were between 41-50 years and 22% were over 50 years of age. Haas, *NDPD*, pp. 53, 59.

⁷³ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6205, no pag.

⁷⁴ The average attendance across Brandenburg at these meetings was 42.5%, with the lowest turnout in Lebus and the highest in the border town of Guben at 78%. SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1460, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/2933, 'Zeitungsausschnitte zur Arbeit der Landesvorstände und Landesverbände Berlin, Brandenburg und Sachsen, 1950-51', no pag.

⁷⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, pp. 44-45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ On Fürstenwalde see: *Ibid.*, p. 11. On GDR membership statistics see: Gottberg, *Gründung*, p. 78.

admitted to the central political director in Berlin that although membership in the town had risen by 11% the previous month, an average of only 20 to 30% appeared at local members' meetings, while the turn out for the monthly study evenings was even lower, with one recent one being cancelled because only one speaker had showed up.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, in Fürstenwalde that same month the report-writing was somewhat less forthright, as here the local NDPD branch justified its failure to meet membership targets by claiming that although the local population of the town was said not to be 'adverse' to the NDPD, only 'a few' were taking the decision of actually becoming members.⁸¹ In fact, by spring 1951, with the exception of Prenzlau, none of the local NDPD branches across the state of Brandenburg had succeeded in reaching their internal targets for membership increases.⁸² Nonetheless, the NDPD across the state of Brandenburg could report a modest growth to 12,693 by spring 1951, and in order to continue to improve the presence of the Party at a grassroots level, the newspaper '*Brandenburgische Neueste Nachrichten: Das Blatt des Landesverbandes Brandenburg der National-Demokratischen Partei Deutschlands*' began to appear across the region that same year.⁸³

Despite these attempts to convince their target group of their form of political revisionism, the NDPD still had problems converting their own members. The regional chairman of the NDPD in the state of Brandenburg complained to the central political director in spring 1951 that some of the Party's representatives at a local level were still lacking the 'necessary political clarity' to convince reluctant members of the public of the validity of the new political system in the GDR.⁸⁴ And, notwithstanding the attempts to popularise the Party in the region, an internal report examining the progress of the NDPD in the state of Brandenburg in November 1951 noted that membership growth across the region was below the average of the other GDR states, where the total membership had reached 101,846 by December 1951.⁸⁵

Despite the unwillingness of the Brandenburg public to join the Party in their masses, grassroots activity amongst some of its members continued in the region, and by the early 1950s, the NDPD had become more firmly established in local

⁸⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1391, no pag.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1027, 'Überprüfung der Arbeit der Landesverbände Brandenburg, Sachsen, Thüringen sowie des Bezirksverbandes Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1951-54', no pag.

administrative organs, with members gaining seats as city councillors in Brandenburg/Havel.⁸⁶ Similarly, when the NDPD in Brandenburg held their annual conference in Potsdam on the 18-19 April 1952, it was once again attended by delegates from both Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.⁸⁷ Moreover, local NDPD business also increasingly involved close public co-operation with the SED. The NDPD district party conference which took place in Brandenburg/Havel later that same month was attended by the district head of the SED and the SED Lord Mayor of Brandenburg/Havel Otto Kühne, while at a similar district party conference in Fürstenwalde the following day the respective district party secretary of the SED was also present.⁸⁸ This presence of prominent local SED functionaries at these events in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde reflect the increasing role of the NDPD as a 'transmission belt' for the will of the SED, in which it was intended that strategies or tactics of the SED could, in principle, be conveyed to every stratum and group within the NDPD.

Attempts to package socialism in a more attractive manner to its predominantly middle-class followers were intensified after 12 July 1952 when the second Party conference of the SED decided on the 'Building of socialism', beginning a new phase of socio-economic transformation in the GDR. In an NDPD Party congress two months later, it was proclaimed that: 'we need to make it clear to the populace that socialism has nothing to do with uniformity, or joylessness, or a drab existence – not even with equal pay'.⁸⁹ Despite these NDPD attempts at explicitly mobilising their members for socialism from the summer of 1952 onward, it is difficult to assess what proportion of former National Socialists and soldiers in the Party in Brandenburg genuinely experienced a thorough political conversion. The archival evidence from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde suggests that once local NDPD members had achieved their goals at political and economic reintegration, their participation rates in the Party's daily activities on the ground also dropped substantially. This indicates that a significant proportion of members merely had a functional relationship to the Party, implying that many members were not necessarily convinced by its revisionist doctrine, but instead took advantage of

⁸⁶ SAB RdS/SOB, 2.0.3.10/104. pp. 1-2.

⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1397, no pag.

⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1351, no pag.

⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1288, 'Tagung des Hauptausschuss der NDPD. 25. Tagung September 1952. "Zur Lage der Frontgeneration und des Mittelstandes in Deutschland. Parteifreund Hennig"', pp. 137-138.

the room for manoeuvre which NDPD membership afforded them, and utilised the Party as a stepping-stone to achieving their own personal objectives.

The first legislative success in 1949 was to be followed less than three years later by a second, which further widened the room for manoeuvre within the new political system for former adherents of National Socialism in Brandenburg. On 25 June 1952 the NDPD passed a proposal to the government which concerned the complete abolition of discrimination against individuals who had been given more extensive rights in 1949. In an article in the '*National Zeitung*' on 9 July 1952, the NDPD publicly justified their stance, arguing that 'Germany now needs Germans, who will stand honestly beside their people. What is now important and decisive, is not that which a German once was, but instead what a German can or would do for Germany today'.⁹⁰ On 2 October 1952, the *Volkskammer* eventually passed the 'Law on the Civic Rights of Former Officers of the Fascist Army and Former Followers and Members of the Nazi Party'. Paragraph 1 of the law stated that all restrictions would now be lifted, with the exception of sentenced Nazi activists and those guilty of war-crimes.⁹¹ As a consequence, these legislative measures served to bestow the opportunity for acts of *Eigensinn* on disenfranchised former NSDAP members, in return for at least external political fidelity enabling them to integrate fully into political, economic and social life in Brandenburg. The NDPD utilised the adoption of this law as the basis of an extensive propaganda campaign and consequently membership numbers rose sharply. By 1954 membership had expanded to 172,000, overtaking the membership numbers of the CDU, LDPD and the DBD, making it the second largest Party in the GDR after the SED at the time.⁹²

After the initial post-war political transition phase had ended, from 1952 onwards the work of the NDPD, apart from the campaigns supporting collectivization, primarily consisted of mobilizing its members in the middle-classes for state initiatives such as the fulfilment of plans, and continued attempts at educating its target group to recognise the societal and political status quo of the GDR.⁹³ The drive to improve its members' relationship to the DSF was also

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY16/6340, p. 78.

⁹¹ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 76.

⁹² In 1954 the CDU had 136,000 members, the LDPD had 115,000 members and the DBD had 98,000. By 1966 the NDPD had 110,000 members, the same as the CDU and still more than the LDPD and DBD. Rytlewski et al., *Zahlen*, p. 130.

⁹³ Staritz, *Beitrag*, p. 7. In addition, the other parties also integrated former NSDAP members. By 1954 the SED had at least 8% former National Socialists in its Party, and only 6.5% former Social

continually intensified, and by 1953 the fourth district Party Conference of the NDP in Gross-Berlin was held in the ‘*Haus der Kultur der Sowjetunion*’ in order to express their ‘close and friendly connection to the Society for German-Soviet friendship’.⁹⁴

Indeed, the scope for the (re)integration of ‘converted fascists’ created by the NDPD, combined with parallel efforts by the other bloc parties, particularly the SED to also integrate former National Socialists, enjoyed some significant successes.⁹⁵ A considerable number of former NSDAP members were able to rise to high ranks in politics, government and society, despite their ‘brown past’. By 1958, the *Volkskammer* of the GDR included 56 members who had formerly been NSDAP members, while by the late 1950s, former members of the NSDAP and SS had joined the NVA, the Ministry for State Security, the Central Committee of the SED and the People’s and Border police, with others holding positions as mayors, in the foreign ministry and in the ministry for National Defence.⁹⁶ This also included former NSDAP member Kurt Schumann who became an NDPD member in 1948 and was subsequently made president of the high court of the GDR from 1949-1960.⁹⁷ Such instances of political and economic advancement illustrate the generous room for manoeuvre provided by the NDPD which enabled some former NSDAP members to rise to prominent positions, in exchange for outward political conversion.

However, amongst the oral history interviewees in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, none of whom ever became NDPD members, the grassroots memories of, and attitudes towards, the Party were heterogeneous, and conflicting assumptions and opinions about the NDPD emerged. The varied reactions amongst the interviewees mirror some of the different viewpoints and responses amongst the grassroots populace discovered in the archival material from the post-war period and range from negativity, to skepticism, to positivity. Gunther Dietrich’s opinion

Democrats, see Lutz Niethammer, *Deutschland Danach: Postfaschistische Gesellschaft und nationales Gedächtnis*, ed. by Ulrich Herbert et al. (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, 1999), p. 57.

⁹⁴ BArch, DY32/10907, ‘Zusammenarbeit mit Parteien (CDU, LDP, NDPD) 1952-1953’, no pag.

⁹⁵ On the legacy of the Third Reich in the SED more generally, see, for example, Henry Leide, *NS-Verbrecher und Staatssicherheit: Die geheime Vergangenheitspolitik der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2006), and Olaf Kappelt, *Die Entnazifizierung in der SBZ sowie die Rolle und der Einfluss ehemaliger Nationalsozialisten in der DDR als ein soziologisches Phänomen* (Hamburg: Inaugural Dissertation, Verlag Dr. Kovac, 1997).

⁹⁶ BArch, DY30/IV/2/17/7, ‘1945-50 Lösung von Komplexaufgaben’, pp. 1-5. See also Vollnhals, *Die doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, p. 352.

⁹⁷ Vollnhals, *Die doppelte Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, p. 352.

reflected the findings in the archival material that many individuals utilized the Party for social advancement, perceiving NDPD members as ‘opportunists and careerists’ who only joined the Party ‘in order to get a better position in their job’.⁹⁸ Erika Schulz, with her opinion that the NDPD was simply a ‘splinter party of the SED’, reflected the increased SED involvement in Party affairs.⁹⁹ Picking up on similar feelings of suspicion as to lack of independence of the Party from the powers that be, Alfred Wegewitz viewed the NDPD as an ‘artificial construction’ and felt that ‘no convinced National Socialist’ would want to join such a party.¹⁰⁰

In contrast, the majority of other interviewees highlighted the National Socialist and military backgrounds of NDPD members, providing different personal memories and interpretations of what role and impact this had. Kurt Michel claimed to have taken ‘no interest’ in the NDPD in the post-war period, being wary of the fact that its members were ‘former Nazis’.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Dr Edith Dorn felt that the Party was disliked because of the membership of former National Socialists.¹⁰² Moreover, similar to some of the findings in the archival material, a proportion of the interviewees believed that those who joined the NDPD were unable to entirely reject sentiments from the Third Reich. Ulla Beck felt that ‘the former Nazis in the Party remained Nazis’, while Dr Siegfried Reinke felt that perhaps the NDPD acted as a ‘cocoon for old bygone sentiments’.¹⁰³ Similarly, Hans Gericke saw the NDPD as having unrealistic goals: ‘Crazy! [...] they tried to do something which was clearly impossible [...] they couldn’t want to rebuild an idea just with a different name’.¹⁰⁴ Conversely, Wolfgang Heinrich and Paul Gärtner, who presented themselves as the most loyal to the SED state throughout their interviews, reproduced much of the GDR’s own language and propaganda on the NDPD. For instance, Paul Gärtner declared that the Party absorbed the former members of the ‘fascist army’ and became a melting pot for former officers with a ‘progressive attitude’.¹⁰⁵

Similar to the archival evidence, their range of responses to their memories of the NDPD unwittingly reflect the many facets of the post-war grassroots’ responses

⁹⁸ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

⁹⁹ Schulz, 28.08.09.

¹⁰⁰ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

¹⁰¹ Michel, 10.06.09.

¹⁰² Dorn, 24.06.09.

¹⁰³ Beck, 27.08.09. Reinke, 23.06.09.

¹⁰⁴ Gericke, 09.06.09.

¹⁰⁵ Gärtner, 27.06.09.

to the Party found in the archival material, thus highlighting the very mixed reactions to the political revisionism which the NDPD attempted to incorporate. Yet these perceptions in the oral history interviews on the NDPD must naturally also be qualified. This interview cohort had not carried functions in the Third Reich and had not been members of the NSDAP, and therefore did not constitute a target group for the Party, which consisted of a highly concentrated forum of former carriers of the Third Reich. The interviewees themselves would follow different paths of post-war (re)-integration which will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

5.7 Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this chapter indicate that amongst its specific target group of former NSDAP members and soldiers, significant inroads were made in redefining, reeducating and (re)integrating some of those who were available for political mobilisation in Brandenburg. In fact, the NDPD was somewhat successful in tying former NSDAP and military members to the new political and economic system and a significant number were happy to avail themselves of the new opportunity for political redemption. Furthermore, former National Socialist members were not merely given the scope for integration and re-socialisation, they were also often offered career-advancing opportunities, with the caveat of expected outer political conformity and a large number of individuals used this restricted room for manoeuvre in the new political system to their personal advantage.

Nevertheless, particularly at a grassroots level in Brandenburg, the NDPD was also confronted with a significant number of internal and external challenges in their attempts to politically reeducate and (re)integrate their 'post-fascist' clientele, illustrating some of the complexities associated with political and ideological revisionism for this particular target group. In some instances the Party adapted its strategy in order to deal with some of the negative grassroots responses, highlighting the partial effectiveness which various acts of grassroots *Eigensinn* could have, while in other cases the political system enforced rigid limits on what was acceptable in the public sphere which were non-negotiable for its grassroots membership. It appears that some Brandenburg NDPD members could nonetheless also exert their *Eigensinn* by increasingly withdrawing from public Party events once they had utilised the economic and social opportunities presented to them as part of the East German

transition from Nazism to socialism. As a consequence, it would seem that, despite some grassroots challenges and various degrees of participation on the ground, the NDPD generally succeeded in providing a favourable framework for grassroots political, economic and social integration for former NSDAP members and soldiers in the post-war period and thereby arguably played a role in contributing to the partial stabilisation of the GDR by the early 1950s.

Chapter VI: Grassroots responses to the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF)

6.1 Introduction

The ‘Society for German-Soviet Friendship’ (*Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*) was established as a mass organisation in 1949 in order to revise certain tenets of previous anti-Soviet pre-conceptions existent in the Third Reich which had, combined with post-war experiences of retaliatory actions and punitive measures, continued into the post-war period.¹ Given the nature of mass organisations, it was hoped that such a society would challenge not just anti-Soviet sentiment amongst former National Socialists, but also the latent anti-Sovietism prevalent in East German society more generally in the late 1940s. In this context, it was considered critical to create a positive public image of the Soviets as an occupying power in order to contribute to facilitating the transition from Nazism to socialism. Therefore, through the DSF, the SMAD and the SED embarked on an energetic marketing campaign in order to improve the image of ‘the Russians’ as part of the wider push, by the late 1940s, to politically integrate wide sections of the population back into society, both politically and economically.

Whilst some more general studies on the DSF have appeared, to date the DSF in Brandenburg and its reception at a grassroots level has been significantly under-researched.² This chapter therefore intends to contribute to the historical literature by using archival and oral history material in order to attempt to reconstruct the activities of the early DSF with particular emphasis on the grassroots responses to these top-down strategies to create a new dominant discourse of German-Soviet amity across Brandenburg. The first section concentrates on the grassroots responses to the DSF in relation to one particular target group – returning POWs – which

¹ David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 317.

² An exception to this is Anne-Marie Pailhes, who has used 19 oral history interviews in order to explore a *Mentalitätsgeschichte* of the DSF across generations in the GDR. Anne-Marie Pailhes, *Die Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft: ein biografischer Ansatz* (Université de Paris Ouest: Unpublished conference paper Bangor University Wales, 2009). Whilst Matthias Klingenberg and Jan C. Behrends, for instance, have produced interesting research on the early DSF, neither has specifically focused on Brandenburg or the responses to these policies at grassroots level.

appeared to be especially likely to be a potentially destabilising factor in the post-war political transition. The subsequent sections examine the responses of the wider grassroots population in Brandenburg to the DSF and explore some of the factors which influenced grassroots participation. The final section of this chapter provides a more in-depth understanding of the longer-term attitudes to the occupying army in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde outside of the officially sanctioned top-down activities of the DSF.

6.2 The establishment of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship (DSF)

The forerunner to the DSF, the ‘Society for the Study of Soviet Culture’ (*Gesellschaft zum Studium der Kultur der Sowjetunion*), had been founded in June 1947. This culture society aimed not only to combat anti-Soviet sentiment, but also to create ‘active friends of the Soviet Union’.³ On 17 November 1946, a ‘House of Culture of the Soviet Union’ had been established in Berlin through Decree no. 2498 by the Council of Ministers of the USSR. It was located in the former Prussian Ministry of Finance on Unter den Linden, and in the words of Colonel Sergej Tjulpanow was to ‘play an important role in the ideological re-education of the German population’.⁴ It was here that the founding meeting of the ‘Society for the Study of Soviet Culture’ took place on 30 June 1947. The central managing committee was made up of ten individuals, including the author Anna Seghers as well as academics, artists and directors, seven of whom were in the SED, while the remaining three were not affiliated to any party.⁵

The SMAD Department of Information Management assisted in financing the work of the Society, and in December 1947 and April 1948 made payments of 2.9 million RM and 190,000 RM respectively. Of this, over 2 million RM were spent on

³ Matthias Klingenberg, *Kultur als Vehikel: Zur Geschichte der Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft 1947-1953* (Heidelberg: Ruprecht-Karls-Universität, Magister; 2001), p. 4.

⁴ Tjulpanow, *Deutschland nach dem Kriege*, p. 284. For further information on the ‘Haus der Kultur der Sowjetunion’ see Maxim A. Perkow, ‘Haus der Kultur der Sowjetunion in Berlin’, in *SMAD-Handbuch: Die Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland 1945-1949*, ed. by Jan Foitzik et al. (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2009), pp. 269-272.

⁵ BArch, DY32/6189, ‘GDSF, ZV. Büro des Generalsekretärs: Listen der Mitglieder des engeren Vorstandes der Gesellschaft zum Studium der Kultur der SU und der Mitglieder der ZV der Gesellschaft für DSF 1947-58’, no pag.

subsidies for Brandenburg and the other regional organisations and 178,000 RM for ‘cultural propaganda activities’.⁶ In the post-Third Reich context the portrayal of Soviet superiority of culture was ‘particularly important, since for more than a decade the Nazis had denigrated Soviet culture as the low-grade product of the inferior Judeo-Bolshevik civilisation’.⁷ These cultural propaganda activities therefore included the staging of exhibitions in larger towns and villages on themes such as ‘Hitler and his Clique’, ‘30 Years Soviet Union’ and ‘Industrial, agricultural and cultural developments in the Soviet Union’.⁸ Through this emphasis on economic and cultural achievements, exhibitions such as these systematically attempted to begin to alter the East German public discourse in relation to the Soviet Union.

Yet growth of the Society and its desire to create ‘active friends’ of the Soviet Union remained modest, expanding from 2,200 initial members to 19,116 in spring 1948 and 69,707 members by March 1949.⁹ By the summer of 1949, the membership numbers had not yet increased to the level desired by the leaders of the Society, the SED and the SMAD, and at the second congress on 2 July 1949 it was decided to change the society’s name to the ‘The Society for German-Soviet Friendship’ (DSF).¹⁰ This name change was accompanied with a shift in rationale. As Naimark points out: ‘while the program of the Society for the Study of Culture spoke mostly of exchanges, exhibitions, publications, theatre, and Russian language courses, that of the Friendship society had a much more political edge to it’.¹¹ The new statute of the DSF set itself the task of ‘spreading the truth about the Soviet Union, to fight all forms of enmity and agitation, thereby strengthening and deepening the friendship of the German people with the people of the Soviet Union’. It was decided that all individuals over the age of fourteen could become members, irrespective of ‘party affiliation, world view, religion, education or social status’.¹²

The hierarchy of the organisational structure was divided into a central association, regional associations, district associations, local associations and primary units. The organs of the DSF consisted of a main congress, regional

⁶ BArch, DY32/10124, ‘Finanzierung der GDSF 1948-51’, p. 2.

⁷ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 398.

⁸ Klingenberg, *Kultur*, p. 84.

⁹ BArch, DY32/10024, ‘3. Kongress der Gesellschaft für Deutsch Sowjetische Freundschaft vom 20-22 Januar 1951 in Berlin, Band 3’, no pag.

¹⁰ Klingenberg, *Kultur*, p. 56.

¹¹ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 416.

¹² BArch, DY32/10125, ‘Aufbau der GDSF 1949-50’, p. 2.

delegates' conferences, district delegates' conferences, local delegates' conferences in towns and villages and members' meetings of the primary units.¹³ An increase in the number of factory branches was considered essential in the transformation of the Society into a mass organisation, and was therefore made an important goal, whilst the most successful tactic in attracting members was to be the annual introduction of a month of German-Soviet friendship which was to be carried out in conjunction with the parties and other mass organisations. In Brandenburg the first of these 'friendship months' took place in autumn 1949 and in the following years became a highly ritualised event, intended to break down vestiges of anti-Soviet sentiment and to contribute to creating a new dominant ideology as part of the political transition from Nazism.

6.3 The DSF and POWs in Brandenburg

Given that the period which followed the collapse of the Third Reich saw the return of a steady stream of many thousands of POWs to the Soviet zone, one of the primary tasks of the DSF in the early years, similar to the NDPD, was to aid in facilitating the political (re)integration and assimilation of this important target group so that they could be utilised to help to build up the new political system in East Germany.

The first mass repatriation of German POWs from camps inside the Soviet Union had already begun in mid-1946 and of the 1,125,352 POWs who were released from the Soviet Union, 387,839 were to stay in the Eastern zone.¹⁴ In Brandenburg/Havel 3,690 POWs had returned by January 1946, over 50% from the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Similarly, in Fürstenwalde 1,668 soldiers and 429 non-commissioned officers had returned by July 1947 from POW camps abroad, just under half from the Soviet Union.¹⁶ In addition, a camp had also been established in Fürstenwalde for returning POWs and by August 1946, 2,350 POWs were housed

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

¹⁴ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 45. For an illustration of how memories of POWs in the Soviet Union have developed in both East and West Germany in the last decades see Elke Scherstjanoi, ed., *Russlandheimkehrer. Die sowjetische Kriegsgefangenschaft im Gedächtnis der Deutschen* (München: Oldenbourg, 2012).

¹⁵ BLHA, Rep. 202E/16, 'Einwohnerstatistik der einzelnen Kreise 1945-1946', p. 11.

¹⁶ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/165, no pag.

there.¹⁷ Yet contemporary reports from the Ministry of the Interior indicate a grave concern that the political consciousness amongst some of the returning POWs in Fürstenwalde was ‘very weak’, and suggestions for an isolated barracks were therefore made in which ‘elements’ which were considered to be ‘infested with fascism or anti-Sovietism’ should be housed and kept under special observation, so that they would not have the opportunity to spread ‘subversive propaganda’ amongst other returning POWs in Fürstenwalde.¹⁸ Reports such as these illustrate uneasiness at the highest level of government at the destabilising effect which politically non-converted POWs could have at a grassroots level in Brandenburg.

Given this reluctance of some POWs to readily assimilate to the new political order, it was perhaps unsurprising that the official doctrine in the Soviet zone, which continued to demonise German soldiers in official rhetoric as ‘agents of fascism’, was gradually altered in order politically to accommodate this growing stratum. In contrast to the fallen German soldiers explored in chapter two, POWs returning to East Germany were increasingly given a more lenient treatment in order that they could be rapidly integrated into the new political system. This required a certain redefinition of perpetrators and victims within the National Socialist regime. As Frank Biess has argued:

East German officials gradually moved away from their earlier assertions of collective guilt and held an increasingly narrow segment of the German population responsible for Nazi crimes. Conversely, they attempted to build ideological bridges to the former *Wehrmacht* soldiers by incorporating them into the expanding community of Hitler’s victims.¹⁹

In this context, ‘returnee conferences’ were organised by the DSF across East Germany between June and October 1949. Scheduled around the formal founding of the German Democratic Republic on 7 October 1949, these conferences were intended to help facilitate not only conversion, but also the recruitment of new staff as well as propagandists and agitators for the DSF. Some of the returning POWs were to be employed full time, while the propagandists and agitators were to be organised into groups and deployed for local lectures in factories and businesses across Brandenburg as well as the remaining East German states.²⁰ These

¹⁷ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2099, no pag.

¹⁸ BArch, DO1/25227, ‘Dvdl: Personalabteilung. Lagerstab Fürstenwalde. Heimkehrerlager Fürstenwalde/Spree. 1948’, pp. 179, 194.

¹⁹ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 60.

²⁰ BArch, DY32/10058, ‘Heimkehrerkonferenzen in den Ländern der SBZ 1949’, no pag.

conferences ‘represented constitutive acts in the formation of the East German state’ as the returnee conferences ‘universalised the experience of antifascist POWs and applied it to the nation at large’.²¹ As noted in a DSF working plan:

The returnee conferences are of enormous importance for the propagation of German-Soviet friendship. The fact that at these conferences, masses of former POWs from the Soviet Union appeared and proclaimed an outright positive acknowledgement to the friendship with the Soviet Union, delivers a decisive blow against the anti-Soviet propagandists.²²

The orators at these conferences were therefore to epitomise this political conversion and spoke on themes such as ‘how I became a different person through Soviet imprisonment’, ‘the Soviet people know no hatred against us Germans’ and ‘the progressive culture of the Soviet Union’. These conferences were then presented to the local public under the slogan ‘the population asks: the returnees answer’ during which the returned POWs sat on stage and responded to audience questions.²³

In Brandenburg, the first ‘returnee conference’ took place in Potsdam in June 1949 and was attended by roughly 450 people. Subsequently, similar meetings took place in other towns across the region. In Brandenburg/Havel a ‘returnee conference’ took place in July with roughly 250 POWs participating. Pronouncements such as ‘the Soviet Union has no hatred against the German people — they want nothing but peace’, by POW participant Hermann S., were common. Another, Viktor L., declared that given the ‘widespread negative attitude towards the Soviet Union’, it was his ‘noble duty to spread the truth about the land of socialism’.²⁴ Biess maintains that such statements by seemingly reeducated and converted returnees from the East assumed a crucial role as ‘they illustrated the virtually unlimited ideological malleability of human beings on which the SED counted in its attempt to win over ordinary Germans’. Nonetheless, he highlights that, as in the denazification cases discussed in chapter four, individual admissions of guilt were absent in such confessions and instead ‘newly converted antifascist returnees portrayed themselves as passive objects of Hitler’s policies’.²⁵

Such a redemptive framework, which emphasised a lack of *Eigensinn* under Nazism, proved beneficial for both the DSF and those POWs who wished to benefit

²¹ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 127.

²² BArch, DY32/6163, ‘Konferenzen der ehemaligen deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in der Sowjetunion (Heimkehrerkonferenzen) 1949 Band 1’, no pag.

²³ *Ibid.*, no pag.

²⁴ BArch, DY32/10058, no pag.

²⁵ Biess, *Homecomings*, pp. 126-128.

from political conversion, and the returnee conferences continued to be utilised ‘for mass agitation’ throughout 1949. Yet some limits to the practical implementation of this campaign emerged when it transpired that the DSF suffered from a frequent shortage of adequate speakers at Society functions and events.²⁶ Nonetheless, the campaign finally culminated in 1949 with a large central conference in Berlin on 27 October, whose attendees included ten delegates from Brandenburg/Havel, as well as the Honorary President of the DSF, Wilhelm Pieck.²⁷ Here the campaign reached its rhetorical pinnacle when in the opening speech the society’s president, the historian Prof. Jürgen Kuczynski, declared: ‘They are returnees, who have experienced their political Damascus, the major turning point in their lives in the Soviet Union’.²⁸ This use of biblical imagery illustrates the portrayal of the returnees’ experience in terms of a ‘pseudoreligious progression leading from confession to conversion and redemption’.²⁹ Moreover, by evoking the parable of the road to Damascus and thereby comparing the former POWs to Saul, the former Pharisee who had ended his persecution of early Christians and instead became an apostle of Christ, the emphasis here was not just on personal redemption but that the POWs should from here on in act as missionaries for German-Soviet friendship.

Yet whilst the DSF invested huge energy in trying to harness the potential political power of the returning POWs in Brandenburg, these experiences of apparent political conversion are not necessarily representative of all POWs returning to the region. In fact, the archival material generated by the DSF often tended to omit the responses of both those POWs who returned from Western imprisonment as well as those who returned from Soviet POW camps, but chose not to join the DSF. As a consequence, the DSF archival material is somewhat limited in the range of experiences which it depicts. Nonetheless, by transforming some of these men from perpetrators into victims, the DSF created a rhetorical framework which enabled those POWs who desired this to experience at least outward political conversion. This in turn provided many of these men with the opportunity to therefore partake in

²⁶ BArch, DY32/10125, pp. 17-19.

²⁷ BArch, DY32/10057, ‘Zentrale Heimkehrerkonferenz am 29.10.1949 in der Deutschen Staatsoper Berlin 1949’, no pag.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no pag.

²⁹ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 127. On transformation narratives and frameworks in East Germany see also Christiane Angela Wienand, *Performing Memory. Returned German Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University College London, 2009), pp. 150-161.

the ‘successful’ transition from Nazism to socialism and avail themselves of associated economic and social opportunities within the new political system.

6.4 The DSF and the wider grassroots Brandenburg population

Whilst the DSF focused on gaining members amongst this particular target group of POWs and utilising them for propaganda purposes, they also aspired to build up membership within the wider population across Brandenburg and the Soviet zone. However, the initial membership statistics for 1949 indicate that these various public campaigns were initially proving only somewhat successful as the grassroots experiences did not necessarily match the political rhetoric of friendship propagated by the ‘Society for the Study of Soviet Culture’ and subsequently the DSF. In January 1949, the month the punishment for rape finally increased in severity and contacts between the Germans and Red Army were severely curtailed, the membership of the ‘Society’ in the Soviet zone stood at only 58,553.³⁰ Up to this point, sexual assaults by some Soviet soldiers had continued, often affecting women from all walks of life, irrespective of political affiliation. For instance, in late 1947 the central committee of the SED was still receiving reports on assaults and rapes of young female FDJ functionaries by Russian officers.³¹ Likewise, other contemporary reports from across the Soviet zone indicate that FDJ and KPD/SED functionaries were just as susceptible to being raped as other women.³² Although membership numbers of the DSF increased gradually to 158,311 in August 1949, the DSF did not provide a forum where such grievances could be aired and, as shall be discussed below, this was to have a significant effect on public support at a grassroots level.³³

In Brandenburg/Havel membership numbers of the DSF remained modest in August 1949 at 645.³⁴ Here factory branches had been set up in a local shipyard and tractor factory and the district secretary was an electrician named Kurt Hildenstein who had been imprisoned in a Soviet POW camp and had joined the SED on his

³⁰ BArch, DY32/10125, p. 23. On the increase in punishment for sexual assaults see Naimark, *Russians*, p. 96.

³¹ BArch, DY30/IV 2/11/158, p. 6.

³² Naimark, *Russians*, p. 117.

³³ On the membership for August 1949 see, BArch, DY32/10125, p. 23.

³⁴ BArch, DY32/10217, ‘Landesgesellschaft Brandenburg: Statistische Angaben über die Kreise 1949’, no pag.

release to Germany.³⁵ The majority of local DSF secretaries across Brandenburg at the time had in fact received their ideological training either in POW camps or in special SMAD or SED training schools, suggesting that the strategies for employing young former POWs explored in the previous section enjoyed some successes. Yet these considerable successes amongst this target group did not necessarily reflect on the wider population and, similarly in Fürstenwalde, where the district secretary was a young carpenter and SED member named Heinz Rabe, membership numbers of the DSF also remained sluggish by August 1949 with 262 members, a mere 1% of the population.³⁶

Yet two months later, with the founding of the GDR in October 1949, the tasks of the DSF began to change. Now the main aim was no longer to just improve the relationship of the population to the occupying power, but also to mobilise all strata of society in order to legitimise the new state.³⁷ The society's long awaited growth across East Germany finally came in late 1949 and early 1950 and by March 1950 the organisation had expanded to reach 986,003 members. This growth continued, increasing to 1,962,569 members by December 1950.³⁸ In the state of Brandenburg, the DSF had a total of 80,616 members by January 1950, organised into 295 local branches and 1,119 factory branches. Yet not all of these members appear to have been active as that same month, only 21,370 Brandenburgers were reported to have attended film screenings and 10,000 were to have attended exhibitions organised by the DSF.³⁹ Assuming that these attendees also included members of the general public as well as DSF members, it appears likely that only a relatively low proportion of members regularly engaged with the cultural activities of the DSF. Throughout 1950 the DSF embarked on an even more extensive public campaign printing placards, brochures, organising exhibitions, press and radio releases, film screenings, theatre performances and essay competitions in schools. They also printed books and literature for adolescents and children.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no pag.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no pag.

³⁷ Jan C. Behrends, *Die Erfundene Freundschaft. Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und der SBZ/DDR (1944-1957)* (Doctoral Thesis, Universität Potsdam, Historisches Institut, 2004), p. 183.

³⁸ BArch, DY32/10024, no pag.

³⁹ BArch, DY32/10086, 'Zentralstatistische Übersichten über den Mitgliederstand in den Landesgesellschaften der Gesellschaft für DSF. Jan. 1950-Dez. 1951', no pag.

⁴⁰ BArch, DY32/10024, no pag.

With these public campaigns across grassroots Brandenburg, growth continued to increase and by April 1950 the DSF had a total of 105,187 members in the state of Brandenburg, steadily growing to 189,649 in December 1950, reaching 246,958 members by May 1951.⁴¹ The Society's budget also increased as the membership numbers continued to rise. By 1951, the DSF had a budget of over 30 million Marks, 780,000 of which came from revenue from the sale of literature and merchandise such as flags, emblems, badges, books and brochures. However, the large majority of the financial support for the Society came from the GDR state, which by 1951 was making annual payments of over 28 million Marks to the Society. Of this budget of 30 million, the DSF in Brandenburg received 2.3 million Marks in 1951 which in turn funded events and functions, art and science, exhibitions, and 'general ideological expenses'.⁴²

By early 1952, the DSF had over 2.7 million members across the GDR, almost 300,000 of whom were in Brandenburg, making up 11% of the population of the state.⁴³ The DSF continued to remain active in their attempts to promote friendship between the German and Soviet peoples organising memorial events, lectures, films, concerts, theatres, study groups and language courses.⁴⁴ It had also expanded its lecture series in an attempt to connect with a wider audience of women and teenagers, covering issues such as 'Soviet pedagogy', 'the woman in the Soviet Union' and 'youth in the Soviet Union as a role model for the youth of the world'.⁴⁵ In the context of this 'politicised culture' much energy was also invested in the area of films in an attempt to utilise the post-war entertainment vacuum. Often educational and didactic films such as '*die große Wende*', or '*die russische Frage*' were screened as well as entertaining and children's films such as '*Aschenbrödel*' and '*der Zauberfisch*'.⁴⁶ Such strategies were designed with the clear intention of reaching target audiences beyond POWs to increasingly include East German children and their parents, marking a dramatic departure from the punitive occupation measures which had been exercised only a few years previously.

⁴¹ BArch, DY32/10086, no pag.

⁴² BArch, DY32/10024, pp. 56- 60.

⁴³ BArch, DY32/529, 'Zentralstatistische Übersichten und Analysen über die Mitgliederbewegung, 1952', no pag.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no pag.

⁴⁵ BArch, DY32/10125, p. 18.

⁴⁶ Klingenberg, *Kultur*, p. 84. See also, Naimark, *Russians*, p. 399.

As a result of its increased membership numbers, budget and cultural activities, the political influence of the DSF in Brandenburg began to grow and, by late 1951, the *Landtag* was adorned with a large Stalin portrait, a gift from the DSF.⁴⁷ Collaboration with the bloc parties had also begun to increase, particularly from 1950 onwards, as the DSF became tightly integrated into the political and institutional framework of the GDR, increasingly fulfilling its role as a transmission belt for SED policy.⁴⁸ At a grassroots level, the publicity campaigns, coupled with the growth of local and factory branches, appeared to have been somewhat successful and by December 1951, 17% of the population of Brandenburg/Havel had joined the DSF.⁴⁹

This anchoring of the DSF into political and work life at a grassroots level was also reflected in some of the oral history interviews. Despite their somewhat ambivalent memories of the post-war Soviet occupying army explored in chapter two, twelve of the interviewees from Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde became members of the DSF.⁵⁰ The analysis of the interviews revealed that the reasons for joining the DSF loosely fell into four main groups ranging from conviction on the one hand, to perceived fear of negative repercussions on the other hand.

The first group of DSF members amongst the interviewees were those who claimed to have been motivated both by personal persuasion as well as by the perceived improved employment chances and political advancement which membership in the Society would offer them. Berol Kaiser-Reka, a musician, joined the DSF because of the potential for increased job opportunities, while also claiming that he believed that friendship with another country ‘wasn’t a bad thing’.⁵¹ Likewise, Paul Gärtner, a manual labourer, became a member of the DSF because of his employment but simultaneously maintained that it was a ‘positive movement’, whilst Wolfgang Heinrich claimed to have joined both out of a personal ideological

⁴⁷ BArch, DY32/10375, ‘Schriftverkehr des Präsidenten Friedrich Ebert 1950-51’, no pag.

⁴⁸ Klingenberg, *Kultur*, p. 109.

⁴⁹ BArch, DY32/10428, ‘Monat der DSF vom 7.11-5.12.1951. Berichte der Kreisvorstände über den Verlauf, 1951-52’, no pag. By September 1952 membership in Brandenburg/Havel had increased to 15,902. See BArch, DY32/5629a, ‘Statistische Quartalsberichte der Bezirksorganisationen über die Mitgliederentwicklung vom 3. Quartal 1952 bis zum 4. Quartal 1953 Band. 2’, no pag.

⁵⁰ Across the GDR, half of the adult working population eventually belonged to the DSF; see Fulbrook, *Anatomy*, p. 85.

⁵¹ Kaiser-Reka, 16.06.09.

conviction as well as to pursue his career as a functionary in the FDJ in the late 1940s.⁵²

The second group within this interview cohort claimed that they joined the DSF as a strategy to avoid SED membership, as in this case it was perceived as the lesser evil. Dr Edith Dorn, a lecturer at a third level institution, claimed that she was ‘forced into the DSF’ in later years as she was not a member of the SED.⁵³ Likewise, Christine Küster, a business director in a construction factory in Fürstenwalde, joined in order to avoid joining the SED instead: ‘Later I became the chairwoman of the factory [...] and that was the only opportunity to not go into the Party’.⁵⁴ Here, amongst both the first and second groups, *Eigensinn* appears to have manifested itself in the form of joining the DSF either out of political conviction or to avoid other forms of political commitment in the SED which was presented as being even more politically stifling than the DSF.

The third group of DSF members amongst the interviewees claimed that they became members of the DSF because it was the expected norm. Dr Siegfried Reinke, an economist, recalled that he joined because he considered it to be his duty and that the GDR’s ‘specific structural system was evaluated on that basis’.⁵⁵ Ulla Beck recalled joining because she felt that it was ‘just the way things were’, claiming that she and her friends would only participate in the annual march on 8 May because of the fete which took place afterwards.⁵⁶ Alfred Wegewitz, a lawyer, recalled that he joined ‘unavoidably’ at the end of the 1950s, while Carmen Jung, an office clerk, claimed to have joined the DSF because ‘we had to, even though we didn’t think that highly of it, because it wasn’t a friendship in that sense’.⁵⁷

Finally, the last group of DSF members amongst the interviewees claimed that they only joined the DSF out of fear, feeling that they were forced to outwardly conform, while internally continuing to harbour an antipathy towards the Soviet occupier. For instance, Gunther Dietrich claimed to have joined the DSF out of a fear of negative repercussions if he refused, despite having an ‘aversion’ towards it.⁵⁸ Even Arnold Schulze, whose parents had been murdered by looting Soviet soldiers,

⁵² Gärtner, 27.06.09. Heinrich, 01.09.09.

⁵³ Dorn, 24.06.09.

⁵⁴ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁵⁵ Reinke, 23.06.09.

⁵⁶ Beck, 27.08.09.

⁵⁷ Wegewitz, 07.09.09. Jung, 09.09.09.

⁵⁸ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

reluctantly joined for a short period of time in the later GDR years due to work pressures, despite the fact that: ‘the concept was repulsive to me, this German-Soviet Friendship was a despicable organisation’.⁵⁹ Thus, here the third and fourth groups presented their membership as being constrained by social, political and economic expectations, emphasising a sense of coercion in retrospectively claiming that this was the only course of action available to them. Nonetheless, despite this general emphasis on constraint and a lack of possible alternatives during this process, it could also be argued that the interviewees may have enjoyed certain economic and political advantages through their DSF membership which might have otherwise been difficult to attain. In this manner, it is possible that some of the interviewees may not have been as entirely passive in their DSF membership as they may wish to present retroactively in the present day.

In fact, even taking into account the different jobs and employment grades of the interviewees, arguably this suggestion that there was some element of choice, no matter how restricted in the process, is supported by the fact that eight of those interviewed maintained that they successfully refused membership of the DSF entirely. Some such as Hans Gericke, an engineer who had been a member of the Hitler Youth and *NS Studentenbund* prior to 1945, stated that he never joined the DSF because he ‘wanted to be non-political’.⁶⁰ Amongst the majority of this group of oral history interviewees, the main motivation for refusing DSF membership appears to have been due to the long-term reverberations of personal, negative encounters with the Soviet occupier, in the form of rape, expulsion or imprisonment, during the post-war period, illustrating Richard Bessel’s observation that ‘politics does not occur in an emotional vacuum, and political commitment is based not just on rational calculation’.⁶¹ Wilhelm Fiedler, a teacher, refused to join the DSF throughout the GDR because of the rape of his fiancé in the post-war period, stating that he ‘couldn’t have feelings of friendship’.⁶² Similarly, Kurt Michel, an electrician, claimed that he did not join the DSF because his wife was an expellee, and he had witnessed her hardship first-hand.⁶³ All three of the former NKVD prisoners, despite being able to assimilate politically to some extent in later years,

⁵⁹ Schulze, 02.09.09.

⁶⁰ Gericke, 09.06.09.

⁶¹ Bessel, *Hatred*, p. 198.

⁶² Fiedler, 25.06.09.

⁶³ Michel, 10.06.09.

nonetheless claimed to have vehemently refused DSF membership. Erika Schulz recalled that when she was approached by her boss, cadre leaders and local DSF functionaries to join the organisation due to her management role she claimed to have responded: “‘I’m sure you know my cadre file and you know that I was arrested for 38 months by our friend” — ‘our friend’ was meant cynically [...] my boss turned a blind eye every year’.⁶⁴ Similarly, Fritz Krause never joined the DSF, while Reinhold Rösner also refused membership: ‘I couldn’t say, you know, I was locked up by the Russians for three years [...] and after that a friendship developed’.⁶⁵

This evidence suggests that these interviewees exercised their *Eigensinn* by refusing to participate in the DSF, despite the political and economic pressure to conform, and thereby illustrate that anti-Soviet feelings continued to be a critical impeding factor in the transition from Nazism to socialism. Whilst this refusal to join the DSF may be somewhat influenced by post-1989 narratives, the archival material below also provides evidence of how the ongoing difficulties created by the punitive post-war Soviet practices and policies explored in part one of this thesis, were to have longer-term reverberations on membership patterns of the DSF at a grassroots level across Brandenburg.

6.5 The DSF, the expellees and the Oder-Neisse question in Brandenburg

In addition to the punitive Soviet measures experienced by many in the immediate post-war period, there were two further issues which were to have a continued impact on German-Soviet relations and the DSF at a grassroots level in the early years – the question of expellees and the final drawing of the Oder-Neisse border. Given that Brandenburg had lost one third of its territory in 1945, uprooting a significant proportion of its population, these issues were particularly salient. Already by November 1945, 635,321 expellees (*Umsiedler*) had arrived in Brandenburg, not just from East Brandenburg, but from across the former eastern territories of the *Reich*.⁶⁶ Of these, just over 6,000 had settled in Brandenburg/Havel

⁶⁴ Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁶⁵ Krause, 09.09.09. Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁶⁶ Some of these expellees were in transit and not all remained living in Brandenburg. BLHA, Rep. 202E/14, ‘Mitteilungen des Statistischen Amtes der Provinzialverwaltung Mark Brandenburg 1945-

in the autumn of 1945, and some tentatively began to develop informal grassroots networks.⁶⁷ In one instance, it was discovered in November 1945 that an expellee, Hermann W., had been organising regular illegal local meetings of expellees which had attracted an average of over 800 people. The local authorities had been concerned that these meetings were fostering and continually ‘artificially breeding traditional excessive local patriotism’ amongst evacuated East Prussians, as well as inciting the population against the Soviet Union and preaching a ‘tremendous hatred against the Poles’.⁶⁸ This concern over the destabilising effect or ‘enormous explosive power’ which the expellee presence could have, meant that every effort was made to put a halt to future public gatherings and political meetings of any kind.⁶⁹ Yet despite such attempts by the SMAD and SED to eradicate this form of self-organisation in Brandenburg/Havel, Michael Schwartz has found that similar public mass meetings of expellees continued until at least 1953 across the Soviet zone.⁷⁰

Fürstenwalde also had a significant presence of expellees. By late 1947, the town was housing 2,790 expellees out of a total population of 22,616 inhabitants; while a further 3,000 expellees had been accommodated in a camp in the former ‘Waldlager Pintsch’.⁷¹ The authorities here also feared that the presence of these expellees could reinforce anti-Soviet sentiment and a sense of German victimhood at the loss of their homelands in the East, and so attempts were made to integrate and assimilate expellees as soon as possible. It was also hoped that such a rapid integration would aid economic as well as political stability. In order to facilitate integration, an ‘expellee week’ was declared in October 1947, in order to drum up support and empathy for the expellees. In advance of this event, guidelines were issued to the mayor of Fürstenwalde by the District Administrator in Lebus on running an advertisement campaign on the matter. Local cinemas were to carry slogans such as ‘You must all help!’ and ‘Create a new home for the expellees’,

46’, p. 20. On the political semantics behind the terms “Umsiedler” and “Vertriebene” see Schwartz, *Vertriebene*, pp. 3-6.

⁶⁷ BLHA, Rep. 202E/18, ‘Sonderfragebogen zur statistischen Erfassung u. Sesshaftmachung der Flüchtlinge in den Stadtkreisen der Provinz Mark Brandenburg 1945-46’, p. 4.

⁶⁸ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.18/18, ‘Schriftverkehr des Oberbürgermeisters 1945 bis 1948’, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Klaus Neitmann and Jürgen Theil, *Die Herkunft der Brandenburger: Sozial- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Beiträge zur Bevölkerung Brandenburgs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2003), p. 136.

⁷⁰ Schwartz, *Vertriebene*, pp. 413, 417.

⁷¹ KALOS F/RdS/43, no pag. and KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/2094, ‘Wohlfahrtsamt & Flüchtlingsstelle 1945-46’, no pag.

while the plight of the expellees was to be blamed on Hitler who had ‘gambled’ many people’s homes.⁷² Yet rather than blaming National Socialist aggressive expansionism for the displacement of millions of Germans, the archival evidence strongly indicates that it was the Soviets who were held responsible, resulting in the existence of a widespread reluctance to engage with the political and cultural work of the DSF in Brandenburg in the early post-war years. Particularly in Brandenburg’s border districts which housed a large number of expellees, the DSF frequently complained that the Society’s progress was ‘very poor’.⁷³ The evidence therefore suggests that the existence of a large number of expelled Germans served to limit the DSF project in Brandenburg, at least in the early years.

Moreover, by the late 1940s the issue of anti-Soviet and anti-Polish sentiment was further heightened in these regions by the permanent establishment of the Oder-Neisse border in July 1950. Uncertainty ensured that rumours, especially in affected border towns, were rife. This was particularly the case in Wilhelm Pieck’s birthplace, the Brandenburg town of Guben, which had, as a result of the drawing of the new border, lost both the town’s centre and the majority of residential housing to Gubin, the now Polish half of the town.⁷⁴ This physical reduction was further compounded by the fact that 60% of the town had already been destroyed by the end of the war.⁷⁵ The impact and climate of uncertainty created by this division of a town was strongly reflected in the contemporary archival material which displayed widespread anti-Polish and anti-Soviet attitudes. For instance, a Brandenburg Ministry for Information report on Guben from May 1950 had noted a conversation overheard in a dentist’s surgery in which rumours were circulating that ‘the Polack is keen on the abattoir and the railway station’.⁷⁶

Another report for the Brandenburg Ministry for Information had examined the political affiliation of railway workers in Guben in relation to the DSF in March 1950. Here, 72 people were employed in the railway freight department of whom 21

⁷² KALOS F/RdS/43, no pag.

⁷³ See, for example, BArch, DY32/10372, ‘Instrukteureinsätze in den Ländern Gross-Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen und in der Wismut: Analysen und Berichte 1951’, no pag.

⁷⁴ Katarzyna Stokłosa, ‘Integration durch Zwang 1948-1953’, in *Vertreibung, Neuanfang, Integration. Erfahrungen in Brandenburg*, ed. by Christoph Kleßmann, Burghard Ciesla and Hans-Hermann Hertle (Potsdam: Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam in Verbindung mit der Brandenburgischen Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2001), 74-88 (p. 75).

⁷⁵ Christiane Büchner and Jochen Franzke, *Das Land Brandenburg: Kleine politische Landeskunde* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2009), p. 20.

⁷⁶ BLHA, Rep. 202A/31, p. 180.

had previously belonged to the NSDAP. All of the employees were now members of the FDGB, while 16 were SED members. Yet every single one of the 72 employees, including the SED members, refused to join the DSF. The situation was said to be similar in the railway maintenance department and in the railway building itself, where 163 people were employed, including ten women, not one employee was a member of the DSF, although 128 were members of the SED.⁷⁷ In fact, the report found that only approximately 10% of the total number of 687 railway workers in the town of Guben and its hinterland were members of the DSF. The railway employees cited numerous reasons for their unwillingness to join the DSF which, consistent with the evidence of some of the above oral history interviewees, illustrated the longer term reverberations of Soviet retaliatory violence on patterns of participation in the DSF. The report found that the large majority of the Guben railway workers, including the SED members, remained bitter that ‘our women’ were raped in 1945. In addition, a train driver and stoker had been shot by Soviet soldiers at Christmas in 1949, to which one employee responded: ‘there you have your German-Soviet friendship and something like that wants to be our friend’. Moreover, the division of the town was also further spurring on these anti-Soviet attitudes and on a placard which had been erected in the Guben train station which championed the Oder-Neisse border as a border of peace, had been scrawled in capital letters the word ‘Never’.⁷⁸ Similar demonstrations of dissatisfaction at the new political status quo can be seen across Brandenburg in this period and the distribution of hand-written pamphlets protesting the Oder-Neisse border were a regular problem both for the local authorities and the DSF.⁷⁹

Uncertainties in a period of transition also played a role here. For instance, an internal public opinion report for the central administrative office in Fürstenwalde’s district of Lebus in July 1950 noted that amongst a certain percentage of the population the question of the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border as a border of peace was still ‘an urgent problem’. Interestingly the report employed a somewhat artificial binary distinction in order to differentiate between two apparent sub-groups in the region. The first group was seen to be ‘acting unwittingly’ and their negative attitude could be attributed to ‘political unclarity, a lack of national consciousness

⁷⁷ BLHA, Rep. 203/78, ‘Berichte des Amtes für Information 1950’, p. 195.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/1366, p. 111.

and indifference’, while the second group was said to be consciously taking a negative standpoint, deliberately carrying out ‘RIAS-propaganda and anti-Soviet agitation’, and intentionally influencing the first group. The report stated that ‘time and again one can notice in trains, in pubs etc. how many indifferent people fall victim to the enemy propaganda, whether it is broadcasted by RIAS or passed on through whisper propaganda’.⁸⁰ By creating this somewhat apocryphal delineation amongst individuals who held anti-Soviet sentiments, this district report credited only a small group within the population with active defiance, whilst the remaining larger group were considered to be suffering from a form of false consciousness. Yet by simplifying the issue into such polarised types, the report failed to acknowledge the enormity of some of the post-war problems in this regard, thereby disregarding the personal experiences which many in the Brandenburg population had made with the Soviet occupiers in the preceding five years and the subsequent negative impact which this could have on grassroots sentiment towards the DSF and the Soviets more generally.

Contemporary grassroots reports indicate that anti-Soviet sentiments in Brandenburg remained widespread throughout this period. For instance, in March 1948 a local school report in Brandenburg/Havel noted that in the local Wredowplatz secondary school, a class of sixteen year old students were given the task of writing a piece on Soviet culture. In response, the students were said to have handed their teachers a note with the signature of nearly all students in the class, bar three, on which they refused to participate in the given task as ‘it appeared to them to be too political’.⁸¹ In 1950, an entire *Abitur* class in a Potsdam secondary school were punished because they had disturbed Stalin’s birthday celebrations with jeering and clapping and had then played football with the Stalin portrait which had been hung up on the wall.⁸² Similarly, in September 1950, it was reported to the Office for Information in the Brandenburg State Government that a schoolgirl in Fürstenwalde, the sixteen year old daughter of a headmaster, had defaced a picture of the president

⁸⁰ BLHA, Rep. 250/53, ‘Informationsberichte, Stellungnahmen und Situationsberichte verschiedener Gemeinden 1947-51’, no pag.

⁸¹ SAB RdS/OB, 2.0.2.16/16, ‘Berichte der Abt. Volksbildung zum Beginn der Tätigkeit in den Schulen und Einrichtungen Mai 1945-März 1948’, p. 14. Resistance, both individual and collective, was not uncommon across GDR secondary schools – action ranged from destruction of posters and graffiti, to public acts of denouncement of the political system. For a selection of case studies see Thomas Ammer, ‘Widerstand an DDR-Oberschulen 1945 bis 1968’, in *Widerstand und Opposition*, pp. 125-136.

⁸² Hohlfeld, *Neulehrer*, p. 273.

of the newly founded GDR and Honorary President of the DSF, Wilhelm Pieck, in her schoolbook, by redrawing him as Hitler instead.⁸³

In their recent research on the East German population's 'iconoclastic reactions to intensively propagandized personality cults', Alexey Tikhomirov and Jacqueline Friedlander have argued that 'through their reactions, actors interpreted – then reconsidered – the boundaries of public rhetoric and the prescribed forms of behaviour and struggled to expand their social autonomy under the conditions of dictatorship'. They maintain that 'covert or anonymous iconoclasm' which 'ranged from taking down and ripping up the posters, banners, and insignia put up by the state to breaking shop windows displaying leaders' portraits' were widespread, yet contend that 'it was damage inflicted on visual images – specifically, on the facial features of political leaders – that constituted the most serious insult to the regime'.⁸⁴ Given the experiences of post-war retaliatory violence and punitive measures explored in chapter two, this persistence of anti-Soviet attitudes is perhaps unsurprising. However, what is noteworthy is that, despite the shifting political climate, in these instances these anti-Soviet sentiments were expressed in such an overt manner by refusing to partake in the propaganda projects in Brandenburg schools, or by desecrating hallowed Soviet or East German images. Similar to the example from Guben above, this anti-Sovietism amongst youths was also apparent in the mass organisations, and grassroots political reports from across the GDR in the early 1950s indicate that amongst some members of the FDJ there was a continued lack of support for German-Soviet friendship.⁸⁵

Indeed, at the DSF Congress in 1951 the President, Friedrich Ebert, was forced to admit that 'the fact remains that still a great many men and women are of the opinion that we cannot learn anything from the 'Russians'''.⁸⁶ In fact, regardless of all the publicity, in some years 80% of meetings for the DSF could not take place simply because not enough people turned up.⁸⁷ This recognition by Ebert that, despite the millions of marks spent on propaganda campaigns in the previous years,

⁸³ BLHA, Rep. 250/52, 'Stimmungsberichte des Kreises an die Landesregierung und der Gemeinden an den Kreis 1948-50', p. 6.

⁸⁴ Alexey Tikhomirov and Jacqueline Friedlander, 'Symbols of Power in Rituals of Violence: The Personality Cult and Iconoclasm on the Soviet Empire's Periphery (East Germany, 1945–61)', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13.1 (2012), 47-88 (pp. 50, 72-73).

⁸⁵ See, for instance, SAPMO-BArch, DY16/2949, 'Gesellschaft zum Studium : 1949-52', pp. 60-61.

⁸⁶ BArch, DY32/10024, no pag.

⁸⁷ Stöbel, *Positionen und Strömungen*, pp. 587, 620.

that the DSF was still encountering widespread negative responses, illustrates some of the clear limits to the attempts by the DSF to alter the public political discourse in relation to German-Soviet friendship and win members at a grassroots level.

Arguably one of the contributing factors to this significant lack of public support and engagement was to do with the highly regimented rhetorical framework with which the DSF operated. In fact, the evidence suggests that the DSF in many ways developed into a rather superficial organisation which did not aspire fundamentally to address the full spectrum of experiences between Brandenburgers and Soviets in the post-war period. For instance, after an initial period of public political discussion of rapes around 1948, the DSF rapidly stifled any further articulation in the official political domain; yet ‘although the rapes attained no explicit public articulation, “silent knowledge” of them was pervasive’, and continued to have an impact on patterns of DSF membership across Brandenburg.⁸⁸ Similarly, Silke Satjukow has found that the forced reconciliation so soon after the war, which was accompanied by simultaneous silencing of traumatic experiences on both sides, led to superficial compromises which were always to remain fragile. Moreover, she argues, the long-term politics of the DSF did not aspire to personal friendships between Russians and Germans; instead they attempted to create a ‘cognitive-political’ connection without ‘any intimacy’.⁸⁹

Therefore, whilst the oral history evidence suggests that a small proportion did join the DSF out of genuine political conviction, it also appears that many others joined as a mere formality in an attempt to use their membership as a vehicle for economic advancement, producing what Matthias Klingenberg describes as ‘file corpses’.⁹⁰ Moreover, the example of the railway workers in Guben is consistent with some of the oral history evidence in illustrating that a certain room for manoeuvre was available to some grassroots Brandenburgers in choosing *not* to join the DSF. As a consequence it appears that, outside of the campaign tailored to the returning POWs in the post-war period, the attempts by the DSF to re-write and alter the official historical and cultural discourse towards the Soviets was to have a

⁸⁸ On the ‘silent knowledge’ of rapes see: Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Satjukow, *Befreiung*, pp. 255,211,128. For example, the paradox of the propaganda was that marriage between Russians and Germans was in theory possible from 1953 onwards, but in practice filled with obstacles by the Soviet government.

⁹⁰ Klingenberg, *Kultur*, p. 63.

somewhat limited impact on Brandenburgers at a grassroots level more generally throughout the post-war period.

6.6 Reflections on longer term German-Soviet relations in the oral history interviews

Outside of the official friendship framework of the DSF, the interrelations between Germans and Russians appear to have developed their own dynamic at a grassroots level that was shaped by other factors which were not necessarily orchestrated by top-down DSF strategies. Although interaction between Soviets and Germans had been increasingly curtailed from late 1947 onwards, possible points of contact continued to exist, particularly through the officer families who were housed outside of barracks and ‘Russian-German relations in the zone were influenced as much, if not more, by the everyday interactions of Soviet soldiers and German civilians as they were by formal administrative arrangements’.⁹¹ In fact, the oral history interviews suggest that at times such everyday interactions could both moderate and mediate the occupation and helped to ease some of the tensions and stereotypes between the local Germans and the Soviet occupier at a grassroots level.

Of those interviewed, eight claimed that their initial negative attitude from 1945 changed towards ‘the Russians’ in the years following the collapse of the Third Reich, primarily as a result of increased daily contact with the occupying power. For instance, in Brandenburg/Havel Hans Gericke, although he did not join the DSF, recalled that with increased contact to the Red Army, especially with Russian officers, his attitude to the Russians became more positive.⁹² Similar shifts in attitudes are also evident amongst some of the interviewees who joined the DSF, although it is difficult to ascertain whether the increased positive contact at a grassroots level may have made them more amenable to DSF membership or whether DSF membership successfully managed to gradually change the previously negative attitude of the interviewees. For instance, DSF member Gunther Dietrich felt that his opinion towards the Russians changed positively as he got to know them on a personal level: ‘Beforehand we believed the propaganda, and then we got to

⁹¹ Naimark, *Russians*, p. 5.

⁹² Gericke, 09.06.09.

know the people'.⁹³ Similarly, DSF member Ulla Beck also recalled that through increased contact in the late 1940s, due to her employment with the Russians, that her fear of them diminished somewhat, especially through contact with one officer in particular: 'He would say "sing!" and we would have to sing German folksongs including one with a Russian melody which he also knew – he was so homesick'.⁹⁴ This increased empathy with the plight of individual Russians is also reflected in some of the other interviews. Dr Siegfried Reinke, also a DSF member, felt that particularly after 1953, relations improved:

With the end of the Stalin era something changed in the consciousness of the Russians [...] Stalin was at least as criminal as Hitler [...] such an ideology poisons individuals and manipulates their behaviour. In essence I often felt sorry for them [...] they suffered twice, once because of the Stalin era and once because of the war".⁹⁵

Here the negative actions by the Russians are blamed not on the individual soldiers themselves, but on their 'poisoning' through an ideology. In this manner, this presentation of the innocent German and Russian masses as victims of Hitler and Stalin who was 'at least as criminal' as his German counterpart, appears to reflect elements of the attempts by the DSF to move away from assertions of German collective guilt and place the blame with the political elites. Moreover, the appraisal of the Russians as victims ('I often felt sorry for them') seems to present a shift in the perceived power dynamic between occupiers and occupied away from the 'brutal' soldiers who had raped Dr Siegfried Reinke's neighbours or imprisoned his uncle in Sachsenhausen special camp, instead being portrayed as passive pawns of larger political developments. Whilst these recollections may also reflect post-1989 discourses, it is nonetheless conceivable that these positive interactions between Germans and Soviets from the late 1940s onwards, combined with aspects of the political rhetoric of the DSF, suggest that the East German leadership were able to make some inroads into reducing the perceived negative impact which Soviet occupation was having in local Brandenburg in the longer-term.

In contrast to this, twelve of the interviewees claimed that their negative attitude towards the Soviets remained unchanged throughout the post-war period as well as in the later GDR years. This solidification of negative sentiment appears to

⁹³ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

⁹⁴ Beck, 27.08.09.

⁹⁵ Reinke, 23.06.09.

have been primarily due to the long-term reverberations of Soviet retaliatory violence, punitive policies and NKVD operations which had previously directly impacted some of the interviewees in the immediate post-war period. Former NKVD prisoner Reinhold Rösner recalled somewhat ambivalently that: ‘I did not have hatred towards the Russians, but I was never able to forgive them’.⁹⁶ In fact, half of those interviewed claimed that they could not recall one event which influenced them positively towards the occupying army in the years after 1945. Those interviewees who still harboured negative sentiments to this day maintained that they completely avoided any interaction with the occupying army. For instance, Kurt Michel, who did not join the DSF, recalled that his opinion of ‘the Russians’ remained negative and ‘he never became friends with them’, while Dr Edith Dorn stated that despite her DSF membership she continued to ‘steer clear of them’.⁹⁷ Thus, by claiming to have refused any interaction with the Soviets, these interviewees, contrary to the first group, claimed to have endeavoured to moderate the impact of occupation on their daily lives as best they could by maintaining a clear delineation between the local German population and the Russian other without attempting to engage with the Soviet soldiers stationed in their towns in Brandenburg.

Satjukow’s research on the *Mentalitätsgeschichte* of East Germans towards their Soviet occupiers points out that the blanket term ‘the Russians’, which did not reflect the multitude of nationalities united under the Soviet army, continued to be loaded with negative connotations for many decades.⁹⁸ This lingering linguistic phenomenon can also be observed in the oral history interviews, where the term appeared, consciously and unconsciously, to be frequently utilised in a derogatory manner by a substantial number of interviewees. On the one hand, this may be a function of the negative personal experiences of some of the interviewees after the war. On the other hand, these negative stereotypes may also reflect the cultural template of Goebbels’s doomful propaganda in 1945. Yet it is also conceivable that Jeffrey Herf’s observations that the racial aspect of National Socialist ideology was not challenged by the East German leadership due ‘to a pessimistic assessment of racist anti-Slav sentiment’ among the East Germans may have also played a role in the

⁹⁶ Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁹⁷ Michel, 10.06.09. Dorn, 24.06.09.

⁹⁸ Silke Satjukow, ed. “*Die Russen kommen!*” *Erinnerungen an sowjetische Soldaten 1945-1992*, (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2005), p. 25.

manner in which some of the interviewees construed their experiences.⁹⁹ Similarly, the archival evidence from Brandenburg also suggests that official revision of anti-Soviet sentiment by the DSF, especially in the early years, focused on cultural overtures as well as political integration and instrumentalisation of potentially damaging forces in East German society, but did not attempt to fundamentally deconstruct the National Socialist ideology with respect to racial pre-conceptions. Moreover, the sense of internal cultural superiority which emerged in relation to the Soviets in some of the interviewees' post-war memories in chapter two was further reinforced by the fact that from the 1960s onwards, the standard of living in the GDR had risen above that in the USSR, thereby further reinforcing feelings of economic superiority amongst many East Germans.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, it appears that some inroads were indeed made into easing some of the animosity towards, and pre-conceptions about, Soviets in the decades which followed the collapse of the Third Reich. Yet despite some thaw in relations, both the archival and oral history evidence suggests that the notion of bilateral amity between the occupiers and the occupied remained emotionally loaded for many who still carried scars from negative post-war experiences. Whilst some people began to view the stationed Soviet soldiers with interest and even empathy, others continued to steer clear of them, thereby reinforcing a sense of otherness which continues to remain prevalent in the present day despite almost fifty years of co-existence in Brandenburg until 1994. This may in part reflect the fact that the DSF and the GDR authorities did not provide an adequate public forum in which to air grievances honestly, therefore somewhat missing the opportunity for a genuine reconciliation to take place on both sides. It perhaps also reflects the fact that outside of the official DSF rhetoric of German-Soviet friendship, in actuality the majority of ordinary Soviet soldiers, despite being stationed in East Germany, were given little opportunity to interact with the local Brandenburg population and, with the exception of official commemorative events, their daily lives remained mostly sealed off from the East German population.

⁹⁹ He maintains that the Second World War was labelled as a '*Raubkrieg*' (imperialist war), but not as a racist war. Jeffrey Herf, 'Multiple Restorations: German Political Traditions and the Interpretation of Nazism 1945-1946', in *Central European History*, 26(2), (1993), pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁰ Evemarie Badstübner-Peters, 'Ostdeutsche Sowjetunionerfahrungen. Ansichten über Eigenes und Fremdes in der Alltagsgeschichte der DDR', in *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970*, ed. by Konrad Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1997), 291-311 (pp. 309-310).

6.7 Conclusion

The establishment of the DSF in East Germany marked a clear departure from the punitive, retaliatory measures which had greeted many Brandenburgers in the wake of the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945. By the time that the GDR was officially established in 1949, the DSF was charged with altering the more general official political discourse on German-Soviet relations as well as providing a favourable rhetorical framework with which particularly the returning POWs from the Soviet Union could be integrated into society, both politically and economically. The evidence suggests that a significant number of POWs and wider sections of the population joined and availed themselves of the opportunities in the new political system. However, despite some successes by the DSF in making inroads into the anti-Sovietism of certain target groups the organisation failed to address the gulf between their own political rhetoric and the reality of grassroots experiences. It therefore missed the opportunity to engage meaningfully with a wider East German audience and somewhat limited the impact of their project on a significant proportion of the grassroots population. Indeed, both the archival and oral history evidence suggests that membership of the DSF was not necessarily matched with active participation within the organisation. In this manner, this mass organisation was only partially successful in fulfilling its statute's aim of 'strengthening and deepening the friendship of the German people with the people of the Soviet Union' and it therefore appears that the DSF only had limited success in facilitating the transition from Nazism to socialism, at least in the early years.

Chapter VII: Political transition, reorientation and integration for the oral history interviewees

7.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous two chapters have examined the political transition through the lens of two specific political organs, this final chapter aims to investigate the process of post-war political transition in grassroots Brandenburg from the perspective of the oral history interviewees who were aged between twelve and twenty-four in 1945. In 1945, the KPD had considered individuals in this age group to be an important cornerstone in attempts to remove the National Socialist ideology from the public sphere as they were not only considered to be the ones most influenced by Nazism, but also the future of the new state.¹ As Michael Buddrus highlights, by autumn 1945 leading KPD and SMAD youth officers agreed that for ‘pragmatic reasons’ German youth was to be given a general amnesty. The ‘Hitler Youth generation’, according to the new political formula, had been ‘misused by the Nazis’ and it was utterly inconceivable that young people might have had positive memories of the Third Reich’.²

Correspondingly, the aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which the present cohort of interviewees had negative or positive memories of the Third Reich and their patterns of response to the subsequent political caesura. Specifically, the question of how this cohort of young Brandenburgers experienced this political transition will be addressed as well as exploring factors which may have both impeded and facilitated the process of transition. Furthermore, the patterns of post-war personal and economic integration and their potential impact on processes of ‘normalisation’ will be examined.³ The final section of this chapter briefly explores the extent to which the Third Reich remained a reference point for the oral history

¹ BArch, NY/4036/718, ‘Wilhelm Pieck. Die Blockpolitik der Partei. Antifaschistisch-demokratischer Block: Juli 1945- November 1946’, p. 46.

² Buddrus, *Generation*, pp. 255-259.

³ For a theoretical discussion on the concept of ‘normalisation’ and how the term can be used to analyse the links between structural changes and the shifts in behaviour and discourse see Mary Fulbrook, ‘The Concept of ‘Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective’ in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?* ed. by Mary Fulbrook (Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), pp. 1-30.

interviewees after 1952 against the backdrop of the official antifascist discourse of the GDR.

7.2 Political transition and reorientation in the shadow of the Third Reich

This section will explore some of the personal processes and perceptions of ideological transition amongst this specific age cohort, thirteen of whom had been teenagers, while seven had been young adults in 1945. Whilst none of the interviewees had been old enough to become personally active as significant Third Reich functionaries, almost all had been previously involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in National Socialist youth groups. Whilst their personal experiences and memories of the Third Reich in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde had been heterogeneous, certain patterns did emerge.

Irrespective of their current political views, fourteen of the oral history interviewees stated that they had personally experienced the Third Reich as being a very positive or predominantly positive time, corresponding with Confino's findings that often 'people remembered the Nazi era positively in the private sphere and everyday life'.⁴ The most positive memories associated with pre-war Germany in the interviews revolved around the re-emergence of Germany as an economic power post-1933 and around childhood experiences of the *Jungvolk*, Hitler Youth and BDM. Especially the older males emphasised their positive recollections of the reduction of unemployment as well as the building of the *Autobahn* and the armament industry, which provided their fathers and uncles with job opportunities, as well as creating apprenticeship positions and future career paths for the interviewees themselves. Likewise, Widera has also found that for many people in post-war Dresden, memories of the National Socialist dictatorship were closely tied to the memories of the economic prosperity after the world economic crisis.⁵

Almost all of the twenty interviewees had been involved in the various National Socialist youth groups such as the *Jungvolk* or *Jungmädels*, while half of

⁴ Confino, *Telling*, p. 409. For a discussion on opinion surveys of views of National Socialism amongst both former GDR and BRD citizens see Karsten Stephan, *Erinnerungen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg: Zum Zusammenhang von kollektiver Identität und kollektiver Erinnerung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2006).

⁵ Widera, *Dresden*, p. 143.

them had additionally been a member of the Hitler Youth, the BDM or the *NS-Studentenbund* or a combination of these.⁶ It appears that particularly when the activities of these youth groups overlapped with games, theatre and music that the positive memories were most pronounced. By the time of the outbreak of the war in September 1939, the average age of the interviewees had been ten years, with the youngest being six years old and the oldest being eighteen years old. Some, especially those who had been young boys at the time, still recalled the excitement of perceived military victory and adventure. War, at least initially, had been perceived by the majority of the interview cohort as not necessarily negative and did not seem to be equated in the interviews with a re-evaluation of National Socialist ideology and foreign policy. For instance, Gunther Dietrich, who was aged eleven at the outbreak of the war, recalled that ‘we understood why Germany acted the way it did’.⁷ Three quarters of the interviewees reported that they had positive memories of the war, frequently recalling the infectious wave of enthusiasm about war which had spread across Germany with the quick victories in 1939 and 1940. The hero cult surrounding the *Wehrmacht* spread rapidly, and particularly amongst the males, the idealised image of pilots and flying became central to many memories of the Third Reich. This appeared to be closely linked to a ‘normalisation’ of military life and the expansion of its influence into the civilian sphere. For instance, Dr Siegfried Reinke recalled that ‘I remember that we were fanatical in the Third Reich [...] I was proud to walk through Brandenburg/Havel in my flak uniform at fifteen years of age [...] we were trimmed for the defence and preservation of the German Reich, our homeland’.⁸

This normalisation of violence was also adapted and integrated into daily children’s games in both towns, as a game called ‘fragment collecting’, where bomb fragments would be eagerly searched for and swapped amongst children, became immensely popular. Similarly, Paul Gärtner recalled with enthusiasm that: ‘the best thing was when you found a steel helmet [...] or a rocket propelled grenade [...] because they were all things we played with as children’.⁹ Common terminology also

⁶ See the table in the appendix for a breakdown of individual memberships during the Third Reich.

⁷ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

⁸ Reinke, 23.06.09.

⁹ Gärtner, 27.06.09. On the differing war experiences of children and youths (born between 1927 and 1945) see Margarete Dörr, “*Der Krieg hat uns geprägt*”. *Wie Kinder den Zweiten Weltkrieg erlebten* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2007). Also: Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives under the Nazis* (NY: Vintage, 2007).

existed across the interviews for the formation of the bombs which fell on Berlin, with a large number of the interviewees describing them as ‘Christmas trees’, an apparent paradox where the narrative of the symbol of peace and reconciliation is juxtaposed with the violence of civilian deaths. For most of the interviewees, it was only the very end of the war, bringing with it the bombing attacks on Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde, which finally appeared to have brought the reality of the magnitude of Third Reich violence home, as it became something utterly tangible and personal.

In 1945 the KPD and in particular Erich Honecker had high hopes that elements of this ‘Hitler Youth’ generation could be absorbed by both the five bloc parties as well as the mass organisations, specifically the FDJ.¹⁰ For this reason, significant resources were invested in building up the FDJ after the war, and by June 1946 its first parliament took place in Brandenburg/Havel, attended by roughly 1,000 delegates.¹¹ However, the historiography on the process of political transition from one ideological system to another on the other end of the political spectrum, especially among this younger so-called ‘Hitler Youth generation’, is divided.¹² Alan McDougall maintains that the transition to the FDJ ‘was relatively straightforward, helped in no small part by the age-based exoneration of the Hitler Youth generation’.¹³ In contrast, others such as Leonore Ansorg argue that ‘the FDJ was received by many youths with resentment – after their experiences with the National Socialist regime, they were more unwilling to join a new organization immediately and tie themselves to a new political idea’.¹⁴ Alexander von Plato has taken a more differentiated approach, maintaining that reactions varied, with a smaller proportion seeking a ‘new clear ideological framework’ within the new socialist movement, while many others found it ‘hard to accept the new political leaders’ and ‘resolved

¹⁰ Buddrus, *Generation*, pp. 255-259.

¹¹ It was here that Erich Honecker was named as chair of the organisation. Heß, *Besatzungszeit*, p. 156.

¹² On the ‘Hitler Youth generation’ see Dorothee Wierling, *Hitler Youth*, p. 307, and Fulbrook, *Concept*, p. 288.

¹³ Alan McDougall, ‘A Duty to Forget? The ‘Hitler Youth Generation’ and the Transition from Nazism to Communism in Postwar East Germany, c. 1945–49’, *German History*, 26 (2008), 24-46 (p. 27).

¹⁴ Leonore Ansorg, “‘Für Frieden und Sozialismus- seid bereit!’” Zur politischen Instrumentalisierung der Jungen Pioniere von Beginn ihrer Gründung bis Ende der 1950er Jahre’ in Kocka, *Historische DDR Forschung*, p. 171.

never again to join a political party'.¹⁵ For the oral history interviewees who, being aged between twelve and twenty-four in 1945, largely fell into this amnestied youth generation, this conversion process also appears to have developed in a differentiated manner, with the retrospective recollections of political transition varying greatly from negativity, through passivity, to positivity.

A proportion of the oral history interviewees claimed that they found both the transition from Nazism as well as the prescribed reorientation to socialism extremely difficult in the post-war period. Dr Siegfried Reinke, who was fifteen in 1945, and had previously recalled being an 'ardent patriot in the *Jungvolk* and in the Hitler Youth', now also felt that: 'It was difficult, it was difficult because one was still far too much connected with that which had come before'. He recalled his strong wariness at the rapid political shift which took place in Brandenburg/Havel in 1945:

It was an extremely difficult time. It was immediately the Stalinist doctrine, there were completely different administrative structures staffed with people who frequently did not have the necessary qualification, but were simply members of the KPD. My uncle was a builder and suddenly he was made a town councillor because he was in the KPD. I perceived it with great uneasiness and distrust.¹⁶

Dr Reinke, who in later years became an SED member, recalled that the realisation that 'fascism' had been a negative concept took time: 'it is a process [...] I didn't just wake up one morning [...] it took two or three years'.¹⁷ He claimed that the fact that the new political system had been brought to Brandenburg by the Soviets played an important role in his refusal to undergo political transition in the early years.

Eight interviewees claimed to have viewed communism in predominantly negative or very negative terms in the early post-war years. Whilst Dr Edith Dorn, also fifteen at the end of the war, claimed to have found the transition from Nazism relatively easy, she nonetheless also perceived the required reorientation towards socialism as being extremely problematic as the system had been 'forced' on them by 'the Russians': 'because we had experienced what we had [...] it would have been impossible for me to become a communist'.¹⁸ Similarly, Gertrud Hirsch, who was seventeen at the end of the war, stated that she found the transition away from Nazism quite straightforward, yet claimed to have rejected the new political system

¹⁵ Alexander von Plato, 'The Hitler Youth generation and its role in the two post-war German states', in Roseman, *Generations*, p. 217.

¹⁶ Reinke, 23.06.09.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ Dorn, 24.06.09.

outright: ‘we didn’t want anything to do with them because they were all too pro-Russian’, recalling that the newly converted antifascists in her workplace were ridiculed and considered to have been ‘smug and self-important’.¹⁹ Whilst these interviews suggest that anti-Soviet attitudes acted as an impediment to political conversion and mobilisation for some individuals in the post-war period, there were also some who claimed that they strategically accommodated themselves to the new political context, despite their antipathy towards both the Soviets and the communists. Wilhelm Fiedler, twenty-four at the time, claimed that he quickly adapted to the new political status quo, despite feeling frustration that ‘the Russian commander was in charge’, recalling that ‘I didn’t agree with the communist system [...] but it was about building up an existence’.²⁰

There were also those interviewees who claimed they had felt either powerless or apathetic about the new politics which were being introduced in their towns after 1945. Karl Schmidt, twenty-four at the time recalled feeling absolutely passive, believing that ‘there was nothing one could do’, while Ulla Beck, fourteen in 1945, felt that when it came to the political transition ‘that we were the defeated [...] and had to feel and act accordingly’.²¹ Alongside these feelings of utter passivity in the face of macro political developments were those who claimed to have been uninterested in the political transition which was taking place around them. Eight interviewees claimed that they had no opinion on the concepts of communism and antifascism in the post-war period, and did not occupy themselves with the issue as they felt that they were too preoccupied by more salient existential issues. For instance, Wolfgang Fried, eighteen years old in 1945, claimed that he was not interested in the political transition, while Arnold Schulze, fourteen at the time, claimed that he ‘didn’t even know what communism or antifascism were’.²² Similarly, Carmen Jung, seventeen years old at the end of the war, felt that ‘it was all about food’ and that this divergence of interests created a gulf between high politics and grassroots developments:

It was not an issue [...] not us little people, it was others who did that [...] the little person had to see how he would pull through [...] a new government

¹⁹ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

²⁰ Fiedler, 25.06.09.

²¹ Schmidt, 10.06.09. Beck, 27.08.09.

²² Fried, 25.06.09. Schulze, 02.09.09.

was established and then there was simply a new government there [...] we were happy that the war was over at long last.²³

Here the use of the term ‘us little people’ suggests a sense of disconnection from larger political developments and changes which were taking place in the Soviet zone. Instead, Carmen Jung emphasises a feeling of detachment as one government was replaced with another and the ‘little people’ were left to concern themselves with urgent existential matters while the big politics took place in a different realm. What appeared to matter most here was not the political system which was to replace Nazism, but rather the more immediate relief for a young woman that the war had finally come to an end in Fürstenwalde.

The third group within the group of interviewees were those who recalled the post-war political transition and reorientation in relatively positive terms. Gunther Dietrich, eighteen years old at the time, who recalled having believed in German victory until the very last days of the war, now claimed to have felt that ‘communism in principle was not bad’ and that ‘we would fight against fascism any time [...] that was strong’.²⁴ Similarly, Berol Kaiser-Reka, fifteen in 1945, who during the Third Reich had claimed to have ‘avoided the *Pimpfe* as much as I could’, now considered the political transition to be a new beginning and recalled: ‘It was like starting in a new school and learning a new subject which had hitherto been completely unknown to me’.²⁵ Paul Gärtner, fourteen at the time, was even more enthusiastic about the opportunity for political transition claiming that he found it easy to leave the previous political framework behind and quickly identify with and support the new political system: ‘One learned about Marx, one learned about Engels, one heard about Liebknecht [...] one learned that [...] just like we learned fascism [...] as a child you forget a lot afterwards [...] that is the past’. He went on to claim that on learning about communism and antifascism, he was ‘enthralled with the concepts’ and that ‘that was the school of my life’, later becoming an ardent member of the SED.²⁶

Yet, in addition to these outright positive recollections there were also those amongst the interviewees who claimed to have had positive attitudes towards socialism in principle, whilst maintaining that they were somewhat critical about its realisation in practice. These particular interviewees recalled that their attitudes

²³ Jung, 09.09.09.

²⁴ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

²⁵ Kaiser-Reka, 16.06.09.

²⁶ Gärtner, 27.06.09.

towards the post-war political transition were very much influenced by political sentiments within their families, especially the political convictions of their fathers. Hans Gericke, who was twenty-one in 1945 and had previously admitted that ‘the National Socialists certainly had excellent propaganda and a strong persuasive power’, recalled that: ‘My father was an avowed communist and we welcomed the fact that National Socialism finally came to an end’.²⁷ In contrast, those whose families had Social Democratic backgrounds appeared to find the transition somewhat more challenging. Alfred Wegewitz, eighteen in 1945, recalled that it was easy for him to leave National Socialism behind, but somewhat more challenging to embrace the new political status quo: ‘It was difficult because for many it was a leap from Weimar democracy [...] I think about my father [...] now suddenly he should be subservient to the communist ideology [...] He remained a Social Democrat’. He claimed that ‘as long as you take the [communist] theory by itself it’s wonderful’ but felt that ‘at some stage there is a point where it is demanded of you that you must believe’ and that in practice he could not convert to the new ideology.²⁸ Similarly, Kurt Michel, fourteen at the time, also recalled the difficulty of the transition for his socialist father who, as chair of the local SPD branch after 1945, supposedly boycotted the union of the SPD with the KPD.²⁹ Whilst this emphasis on the idealistic aspects of socialism in theory juxtaposed with the realisation of socialism in practice in the GDR may have indeed been the case for the interviewees and their families, it also appears to mirror aspects of what Sabrow has termed the ‘*Fortschrittsgedächtnis*’ which continues to vie for influence in current political and cultural discourses in united Germany.³⁰

Yet not all of the interviewees appear to have been cautious about the new official ideology in the GDR and whilst some seem to have been swayed by political attitudes within their families, the opposite was also the case. For instance, for Wolfgang Heinrich, twelve years old in 1945, a generational gap became evident, when his enthusiastic enrolment in the FDJ was met with caution and scepticism by his more conservative parents and grandparents.³¹ These interviews therefore suggest that familial political traditions could have a strong impact on the manner in which

²⁷ Gericke, 09.06.09.

²⁸ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

²⁹ Michel, 10.06.09.

³⁰ Martin Sabrow, *DDR*, pp. 16-18.

³¹ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

some of the interviewees claimed to have responded to the new political system in the early post-war years. However, familial influences could also be rebelled against, suggesting that different attitudes to the political transition could also create rifts within families and relationships.

These memories, which ranged from positively embracing the new ideology and the perception of a new beginning, to feeling politically lost, or reminiscing about the past, illustrate the diversity amongst recollections of post-war political transition. Furthermore, the oral history evidence suggests that a transition from a seemingly passive observer to an active political agent of the new ideology was limited amongst the interviewees, at least in the early post-war period. Seventeen of the twenty interviewees stated that they had felt that political engagement had been unimportant to them personally in the years which followed the collapse of the Third Reich.

However, despite their apparent lack of political interest, when one examines the political memberships amongst the interviewees all of them had become a member of a mass organisation or political party by the 1950s. In addition to the twelve who had become DSF members, fourteen had joined the FDGB, seven had become FDJ members and a further four had joined the *Kulturbund* and other mass organisations.³² The motivation for joining, or abstaining, appeared to differ from one mass organisation to another.³³ When it came to members of the FDGB, their self-representation was generally that of detached passivity, with the interviewees apparently being recruited knowingly or unknowingly through their jobs. Fritz Krause claimed: 'that was a given, we weren't asked', while Karl Schmidt joined the FDGB because of his job, comparing it to the 'apolitical' KdF in the Third Reich: 'That wasn't a political organisation'.³⁴ This claim that FDGB membership did not translate into political mobilisation or support of the new system was common across the interviews.

In contrast, the majority of those interviewees who had joined the FDJ claimed to have actively sought membership in order to avail themselves of related

³² In her theory of 'participatory dictatorship' Mary Fulbrook emphasises the 'huge area of overlap' between 'state' and 'society' in the GDR as 'literally millions of people were involved in one way or another with the activities of the state institutions, parties and mass organisations'. Fulbrook, *People's State*, p. 295.

³³ Across the GDR, virtually all of the adult working population had belonged to the FDGB, while half had belonged to the DSF; see Fulbrook, *Anatomy*, p. 85.

³⁴ Krause, 09.09.09. Schmidt, 10.06.09.

career advancing opportunities. Dr Siegfried Reinke recalled joining the FDJ in 1952 in order to improve his chances at getting a university place.³⁵ Likewise, Dr Edith Dorn claimed that she joined the FDJ in 1949 in order to be eligible for a university scholarship: 'It's not a noble reason, but many did that'.³⁶ In contrast to FDGB membership, where many of the interviewees claimed that they had become members against their knowledge or will, these particular interviewees appear to have used their *Eigensinn* in order best to utilise the opportunities available to them through the FDJ within a restricted political context.

Nonetheless, although all the interviewees became members of at least one mass organisation, only three claimed to have later joined a political party. Whilst Paul Gärtner and Wolfgang Heinrich enthusiastically joined the SED, subsequently becoming avid supporters of the GDR and its ideological system, Dr Siegfried Reinke, although later not being entirely averse to the new political system, claimed to have joined the SED for more pragmatic reasons in order to benefit from increased employment opportunities.

In sum, the impact of the ideological transition process for the interview cohort in the shadow of the collapse of the Third Reich appears to have been complex and marked with memories of negativity, passivity as well as positivity. Although fourteen of the interviewees claimed to have been, to a greater or lesser extent, positive towards National Socialism, twelve of the interviewees claimed to have found the transition away from the Third Reich relatively straightforward. Despite this claim, this was not necessarily matched by active political participation in the initial post-war years by the large majority of the interviewees. Instead, for most of the interviewees, gradual political mobilisation into mass organisations began to occur only in the early 1950s, corresponding with reaching adulthood as well as reflecting wider patterns of mass membership which, as in the cases of the NDPD and the DSF, began to occur more generally at this time. Yet when it came to engaging meaningfully with the new ideological message, the large majority of the interviewees claimed to have had feelings of either apathy or aversion. Only four of the interviewees recalled believing that communism was 'good' in the post-war

³⁵ Reinke, 23.06.09.

³⁶ Dorn, 24.06.09. This also corresponds to some of the narratives uncovered by Lutz Niethammer and his team in the late 1980s, in which the oral history interviews also provided evidence of people's instrumentalisation of parties and mass organisations for their own needs. Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato and Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), see, for instance, p. 23.

period, while the antifascist discourse appeared to have been conducted on an abstract plane, to which many could not relate.

The fact that only four interviewees claimed to have had a positive attitude to the new political system in the post-war period must be treated with an element of caution. By claiming that one joined organisations against one's will or without one's knowledge may perhaps also be used on occasion to distance the interviewee somewhat from complicity with the GDR regime today. Similarly, the claim that one simply used organisations like the FDJ in order to facilitate social and economic advancement presents the individual as an active agent rather than a passive participator. Whilst the potential for retroactive interference and conscious or unconscious embellishment of one's past actions applies to the oral history interviews throughout this entire thesis, arguably the question of political participation in the second German dictatorship has an even higher potential for retrospectively downplaying one's support of the socialist system and instead adapting one's past to fit better into current dominant political discourses. This applies both to the memories of how quickly the interviewees felt they were able to abandon National Socialist ideology as well as to how enthusiastically they may have partaken in the new socialist system.

Nonetheless, the oral history memories cannot be completely disregarded in this respect and the spectrum of the oral history responses appear to reflect Alexander von Plato's findings, cited above, that a proportion of the amnestied youth generation eagerly embraced the new ideological framework in the post-war period, whilst many others had difficulties in accepting the new political status quo and instead chose to disengage somewhat from the political system in the GDR. However, the post-war transition from Nazism to socialism did not just occur at a political level for the interviewees, and as shall be explored in the following section, opportunities for economic integration were also to play an important role in stabilising and cementing the passage from the Third Reich to the GDR in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.

7.3 The beginnings of normalisation and the resumption of daily life under new political parameters

Although a substantial number of the interviewees claimed to have been inactive in the newly imposed political sphere in the immediate aftermath of the Third Reich, they nonetheless often experienced a degree of integration after 1945, albeit in a personal and economic, rather than initially in a political, sense. The oral history interviews suggest that a desire for personal happiness and economic considerations frequently superseded more abstract reflections on contemporary political developments. This was perhaps unsurprising given that this age cohort averaged sixteen years of age in 1945, and was therefore often not burdened with the same responsibilities as their parents' generation. Despite the post-war violence, chaos and destruction, the interviewees recalled many memories of personal positive experiences from this period, focusing both on pleasant private experiences, as well as a resumption of scholarly and economic pursuits, reflecting a post-war desire to 'escape into everyday life'.³⁷ It was arguably these personal and economic factors which were just as effective as, or even more important than political re-education in aiding post-war normalisation and integration into the new political system for the oral history interviewees.

In contrast to the previous restrictions created by regimented Hitler Youth activities and the war, a substantial number of the interviewees emphasised having more free time and freedom in the immediate post-war period. Despite extreme material shortages, both Hans Gericke and Gunther Dietrich enthusiastically helped to rebuild their local rowing clubs by the river Havel, while Dr Siegfried Reinke recalled that he was happy that he could finish his apprenticeship.³⁸ The youthful wish of this generation to enjoy oneself once again could be most clearly seen in the repeated stories of going to dances, thereby attempting to overcome obstacles such as material shortages and the presence of Soviet soldiers, and in doing so illustrated the scope of action available to individuals despite the severely restricted context. Although the post-war scarcity of commodities was acute, Christine Küster recalled

³⁷ Richard Bessel, "Leben nach dem Tod"- Vom Zweiten Weltkrieg zur zweiten Nachkriegszeit', in *Wie Kriege enden: Wege zum Frieden von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Bernd Wegner (Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 239-258 (p. 247).

³⁸ Gericke, 09.06.09., Dietrich, 11.06.09. Reinke, 23.06.09.

with delight how her aunt had sewn a dress for her out of an old duvet cover, which was ‘white with pretty pink diamonds’ in order that she too could go dancing, while Ulla Beck recalled that in Fürstenwalde:

A large dance floor was built in the Goetheplatz [...] and we learned a little dancing amongst ourselves in school [...] I was allowed to go at six in the evening and the first boys came in FDJ blue shirts and asked the girls to dance [...] at night we weren’t allowed on the street on our own, that was dangerous, we always had to walk home from dancing in twos, if possible with two boys.³⁹

Similar to the collective precautions taken against sexual assaults explored in chapter two, this organised walking home in groups from dances emerged as a salient memory for the majority of the interviewees. In this manner, the interviewees appear to have attempted to adapt their desire to pursue their youthful wish for frolicking to the reality of the often dangerous incursions by some Soviet soldiers, thereby carving out a certain room for manoeuvre for themselves despite the confined post-war circumstances.

This desire for normalisation after experiencing often extreme violence during and after the war is also mirrored in the contemporary local media. A glance at the local ‘*Fürstenwalder Nachrichtenblatt*’ newspaper from the summer of 1949, for instance, reveals that the announcement section was dominated by advertisements for building materials, dances and classified ads from women seeking ‘a good husband’, suggesting that the most salient local concerns at the time were of a practical, personal and not overtly political nature.⁴⁰ Similarly, the oral history interviewees emphasised their own positive associations with the post-war period in connection with personal experiences of love and marriage which often occurred in this period. The mean year of marriage of the oral history cohort was 1953, and seventeen later had one or more children. Kurt Michel recalled that the post-war period was the time when he met his future wife and fell in love, while Ulla Beck also felt that the nicest thing about the post-war period was meeting her future husband.⁴¹ Similarly, Fulbrook has found that for those born in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the 1950s, despite political constraints, was a period of post-war

³⁹ Küster, 01.09.09. Beck, 27.08.09. Richard Bessel has found that: ‘It was deeply disturbing that young Germans displayed little inclination to behave as their elders and political leaders may have hoped’. Bessel, *Germany*, p. 328.

⁴⁰ ‘*Fürstenwalder Nachrichtenblatt*’, 17 June 1949, in Brandenburger Bildungswerk, *Hoffnung*, pp. 94-5.

⁴¹ Michel, 10.06.09. and Beck, 27.08.09.

‘normalisation’ for many, where a ‘sense of “normal” family life was accompanied by a renewed sense of personal agency’.⁴² Likewise, for many of the interviewees the emotional component of their post-war memories and the important caesurae of love and childrearing appeared to have been much more important in anchoring them in the early GDR and returning to a ‘normal’ daily life than were contemporary political developments. Moreover, this (re)building of personal and familial connections after 1945 was to be further strengthened by subsequent economic integration of the majority of the interviewees in Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde.

The economic sphere in both towns experienced changes as well as some continuity after the collapse of the Third Reich. Local administrative reports from Fürstenwalde indicate that already by July 1945, despite severe material shortages, smaller tradesmen and businesses such as cobblers, tailors, bricklayers, roofers and nurseries had slowly begun to start functioning again, while the larger industries continued to lie dormant as a result of war damage, dismantling and an acute supply shortage.⁴³ By October 1945, out of a total population of 2,478,369 in the state of Brandenburg, official figures indicate that unemployment was at 30%, while in Brandenburg/Havel, 50% of the 76,715 residents were officially unemployed.⁴⁴ Similar high levels of unemployment were also reported in Fürstenwalde in the ensuing period and these grassroots economic developments had an effect both on the parents of those interviewed as well as on the interviewees themselves.⁴⁵

In terms of the social and economic standing of the family, the interviews provide evidence of continuities, fissures and ruptures after 1945 often manifesting themselves in upward as well as downward social and economic mobility. Despite the multitude of structural changes associated with the post-war transition, more than half of those interviewed reported that their father held the same job after 1945. Dr Siegfried Reinke’s father returned to Brandenburg/Havel from the war in 1948 and once again worked in the railway station as a station master, despite the fact that the changed political situation and conditions ‘made it difficult for him’.⁴⁶ Christine Küster’s father began to rebuild his painting business after the war, but was soon

⁴² Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 339.

⁴³ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/994, no pag.

⁴⁴ BLHA, Rep. 202E/14, p. 25.

⁴⁵ KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung/165, no pag.

⁴⁶ Reinke, 23.06.09.

forced into a production co-operative, while Alfred Wegewitz's father experienced a promotion due to his political background as a Social Democrat and SED member, becoming head of the waterworks in Fürstenwalde.⁴⁷ In contrast, others such as Ulla Beck's father could not continue in his old job because the factory he had worked in was dismantled by the Russians, while Reinhold Rösner's father was also unable to continue in his previous job as the local cable works in Fürstenwalde were dismantled, later becoming a caretaker.⁴⁸ Downward mobility after the Third Reich had a negative effect on some of the interviewees. Ulla Beck from Fürstenwalde recalled the drop in social and economic standing for her family:

Previously we lived comfortably [...] and afterwards when we had nothing to eat I felt that we were poor people – that is a really, really terrible feeling, my father could no longer work and my mother had to work for a farmer, we really were poor people.⁴⁹

It was not just the parents of those interviewed, but also the interviewees themselves, who were forced to adjust to the changed employment situation in the new political system after the war. Many had to adapt to the new industrial demands as the economy shifted from war production to post-war reconstruction. Hans Gericke had worked in aviation prior to 1945; yet after the war the demand for his skills was no longer there, so he re-trained in the construction industry.⁵⁰ Likewise, Gunther Dietrich had aspired to be an aircraft engineer before 1945 but became a construction engineer instead.⁵¹ Many others had to adapt by showing flexibility and utilising entrepreneurial skills. Some, such as Reinhold Rösner, capitalised on his local pre-1945 connections in the tyre factory in order to find a job on his release from NKVD captivity.⁵² Gertrud Hirsch, seventeen when the war ended, resorted to working in many different jobs in the post-war period, from hard physical labour, to knitting, to being a typist in the local 'Gaselan' company (which had been rebuilt on the 'Pintsch' site) and various other local administrative positions.⁵³ Likewise, Carmen Jung, also seventeen at the time, had dreamed of becoming a draftswoman before 1945, yet instead was forced to work in a number of different unskilled jobs after the

⁴⁷ Küster, 01.09.09. Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

⁴⁸ Beck, 27.08.09. Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁴⁹ Beck, 27.08.09.

⁵⁰ Gericke, 09.06.09.

⁵¹ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

⁵² Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁵³ Hirsch, 27.08.09.

war and also moved from hard physical labour, to knitting, to various administrative positions.⁵⁴

Whilst the entire interview cohort subsequently integrated relatively well into the new economic system, it appears as though it was the youngest interviewees who experienced the most rapid levels of social and economic mobility due to the vacuum created after the Third Reich as a consequence of war deaths as well as the absconding of people to other German occupation zones. Arnold Schulze, fourteen in 1945, felt that ‘everything was new, the intelligentsia mostly fled to the West’, recalling that he therefore received a good lecturing post, despite feeling that he ‘really wasn’t very qualified’.⁵⁵ Likewise, the accountant Ulla Beck, also fourteen in 1945, recalled that her generation was ‘given the opportunity [for advancement] and those that were stupid, those that didn’t do that, that was their own fault’.⁵⁶ Similarly, Wolfgang Heinrich, twelve years old in 1945, recalled the opportunities which he received in the post-war period because he was from the ‘right’ kind of background: ‘It was wonderful [...] everything that you wanted was supported for you by the officials’. He was given the opportunity to attend an ABF (*Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultät*) which offered great chances for social mobility, becoming an engineer.⁵⁷ Consequently, Heinrich now viewed his political engagement in the post-war period as extremely important for his political, economic and personal advancement: ‘It was strongly linked to my development, it could not be separated’.⁵⁸

In this manner, a substantial number of the interviewees were presented with a large number of economic opportunities, albeit within a constrained political context, on which they were given the chance to capitalise. As a consequence, a proportion felt loyal to the new political system which had enabled their economic mobility. Alfred Wegewitz was able to use his family’s economic and political background to his advantage after his return from an English POW camp:

I could attend secondary school with exceptional permission of the communist *Ministerpräsident* of Brandenburg [...] I had of course written to

⁵⁴ Jung, 09.09.09.

⁵⁵ Schulze, 02.09.09.

⁵⁶ Beck, 27.08.09.

⁵⁷ Heinrich, 01.09.09. These ABF were in existence from 1949 until 1963 and provided youths from working-class and rural backgrounds the opportunity to attain an *Abitur*, thereby opening up the route of third level education. See Ingrid Miethe and Martina Schiebel, *Biografie, Bildung und Institution. Die Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultäten in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2008).

⁵⁸ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

him and said that my father was a member of the SED and that I belonged to the working classes, both were of course true, and as a result I got the special permission.⁵⁹

Yet, not all of the interviewees were offered this room for manoeuvre in the post-war period as the economic and political backgrounds of individuals and their families appear to have also acted as an impediment to climbing the economic ladder. Christine Küster was not given the opportunity to attend the ABF after the war because her father was a self-employed tradesman. Only in later years was she able to study engineering and economic construction in the 1960s and become a trading director. She claimed that these difficulties which she experienced as a consequence of being from a bourgeois background had a longer-term negative impact on her political attitude and activity in the GDR: ‘A party which only supports workers and farmers [...] and not the rest [...] I can’t follow such an ideology and I won’t join such a party’.⁶⁰ Similarly, former NKVD internee Reinhold Rösner later faced great challenges in economically integrating in the new political system: ‘I wanted to study and kept getting rejected and later could only study via distance learning [...] I always thought it was due to the fact that I was in the camp and was classified as a National Socialist perpetrator’.⁶¹ Nonetheless, despite these impediments, Rösner was successfully able to become an economist as the restrictions against him were increasingly relaxed in the later GDR years.

When one examines the entire biographical trajectories of this interview cohort in terms of employment, the significance of social mobility and shifting status becomes apparent. By the time the interviewees had reached retirement age, nine held high professional posts, eight had middle level jobs in supervisory or executive roles, while three had semi-skilled or skilled manual jobs. This stands in contrast to the positions of their fathers in the previous generation, none of whom had held a high professional post: half had worked in middle level jobs in supervisory or executive roles while the other half had worked in semi-skilled or skilled jobs. When compared with the interviewees’ mothers, the differences become even more apparent. Three quarters of the mothers had either been unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, three had been skilled manual workers, while only two had held a supervisory or executive position. Whilst these developments are in no way

⁵⁹ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

⁶⁰ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁶¹ Rösner, 10.09.09.

representative of wider Brandenburg society, they do, however, appear to reflect more general social trends, especially in relation to female economic mobility and emancipation, particularly in the GDR but also more generally across Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet the high level of social mobility, particularly between the male interviewees and their fathers, nonetheless point to the unusually large number of economic opportunities available to this generation as a result of the post-war vacuum as well as the absconding of people to the West. The interview evidence in turn illustrates the important role which economic opportunities seem to have had in anchoring this group of oral history interviewees within the new political system after 1945. Whilst self-representations such as these can perhaps partly be attributed to post-1989 discourses of having strategically accommodated oneself to the political system of the GDR without personally supporting the underlying ideology, the archival evidence indicates that a similar trend of using political membership simply as a stepping-stone and then disengaging from active participation was also evident in the NDPD and DSF during this period.

It therefore appears that where the interests of the new administration and the grassroots population most closely converged, there were the most positive effects in facilitating the post-war political transition for the interviewees. Yet given the fact that this interview group had, by definition, remained living in Brandenburg these developments are not reflective of the wider grassroots population at that time. Indeed, there were many, including those who were permanently excluded from their communities through denazification or sequestering and were not given this relatively wide latitude for economic mobility, who instead exercised *Eigensinn* by leaving their towns and not partaking in this process of integration and stabilisation. Even amongst these interviewees, a substantial number stated that they had, at some point in the post-war period, considered absconding to the West, but claimed that they had been motivated to stay due to emotional ties to families and homesteads.⁶² Instead, it appears that the new system, despite its enormous political restrictions, provided this group of interviewees, who had been young people at the end of the war, with opportunities for a form of normalisation after the chaos of the war in which they were able to pursue their own personal happiness as well as beginning or

⁶² Similarly, Corey Ross has found that it was primarily personal matters such as extended family, possession of a house or land, a good job, or not wanting to uproot one's children which kept people in the GDR. Ross, *Socialism*, p. 153.

continuing with interrupted career paths. By providing the majority of the interviewees with this limited room for manoeuvre and a degree of support in the economic sphere, it seems that the authorities somewhat moderated the impact of the political transition from Nazism to socialism in grassroots Brandenburg. In turn, the increased economic participation of local Brandenburgers subsequently appears to have contributed to the gradual stabilisation of the regime from the early 1950s onwards.

7.4 The salience of the National Socialist past beyond the post-war transition period

This final section will explore whether the National Socialist past held any relevance for the interviewees beyond the transition period of the late 1940s and early 1950s and in what way the memories of the interviewees in this regard may have been influenced by subsequent attempts to politically instrumentalise the past in the official discourse of the GDR in later decades.

The oral history evidence suggests that half of the interviewees did not perceive the Third Reich to be a salient personal reference point in the post-war years and in the decades which followed. Wolfgang Heinrich maintained that everyone was now agreed about the past and that ‘no one ever spoke about the Third Reich anymore’.⁶³ Carmen Jung felt that because her generation had a more ‘light-hearted and rosy view of the world’ they were able to adapt more quickly to the new system than her parents’ and grandparents’ generations.⁶⁴ Similarly, Berol Kaiser-Reka felt that he had no reason to think or speak about the past, and instead only thought about the future, while Erika Schulz stated that she just focused on her life and her job.⁶⁵

In contrast, the remainder felt that their experiences and memories of the Third Reich did continue to play a salient role, both during the post-war political transition as well as in the GDR. Some, such as Arnold Schulze, felt that ‘one likes to remember things that used to be better and is maybe annoyed by things that are now worse’.⁶⁶ These memories also appear to have been discussed in social or

⁶³ Heinrich, 01.09.09.

⁶⁴ Jung, 09.09.09.

⁶⁵ Kaiser-Reka, 16.06.09. Schulz, 28.08.09.

⁶⁶ Schulze, 02.09.09.

workplace contexts. For instance, Gunther Dietrich recalled that he would talk about the Third Reich with his colleagues, with many of them fondly reminiscing about the technical advances of the Third Reich, especially when compared with the stark reality of post-war East Germany: ‘We thought about the fact that the Nazis had built up an unparalleled economic power between 1933 and 1939 [...] one must say that, regardless of what came of it’.⁶⁷ Dr Siegfried Reinke stated that he and his colleagues would share adventure stories from the Hitler Youth amongst each other in the workplace.⁶⁸ Christine Küster stated that they would often talk about the Third Reich amongst their circle of friends, especially in the early years, sometimes singing military songs from this period, although she was keen to stress that ‘they were not Nazi songs’.⁶⁹ Wilhelm Fiedler recalled:

The memory is of course alive [...] negative in the sense of the whole rearmament, the ideological manipulation [...] then of course the horrific war period [...] but positive in the sense that once again rebuilding was carried out, people once again had jobs and food, that there was once again calm and order [...] that the trains ran properly again.⁷⁰

These ‘arenas of articulation’ appear to have played an important part in solidifying memories of the Third Reich for many of the interviewees.⁷¹

Such sentiments, in which positive and negative perceptions of Nazism exist side by side, were also reflected in the recent flurry of debate which followed the Eva Herman debacle on German public television in October 2007 in which she was perceived to be claiming that the Nazis’ pro-family policies had had certain advantages. Similarly, whilst these assertions by some of the oral history interviewees also correspond to Alexander von Plato’s findings that in most accounts ‘individual positive memories may exist with a broader recognition of the horrific shadow side of National Socialist rule’, what is perhaps more remarkable is that these enduring positive associations outlasted forty years of socialist antifascist rhetoric in the GDR, suggesting some of the limits of the SED’s desired transformative project amongst some elements of this Hitler Youth generation.⁷²

⁶⁷ Dietrich, 11.06.09.

⁶⁸ Reinke, 23.06.09. Similarly, von Plato has found that particularly the ‘positive experiences’ of the youth organisations remained continued to remain salient in family or pub circles. Von Plato, *Eine zweite Entnazifizierung*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁷⁰ Fiedler, 25.06.09.

⁷¹ Ashplant et al, *Politics*, p. 17.

⁷² Von Plato, *Hitler Youth*, p. 212. See also Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 158, and Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, ‘Introduction:

In claiming that these kinds of exchanges involving families, friends and work colleagues could take place throughout later decades, the oral history evidence somewhat challenges McDougall's claim that 'private thoughts and memories of the Third Reich – whether positive or negative, defiant or remorseful – remained powerful. They were simply given no public outlet in the GDR'.⁷³ Whilst these loci may not be defined as 'public' in the sense of an open debate on the issue within the official discourse, as recent studies by Paul Betts have illustrated, given the fact that the private sphere in the GDR became increasingly porous, such claims to have positively reminisced about the National Socialist past amongst friends and even in the workplace suggest a certain limited flouting of the officially prescribed norms of how the Third Reich should and could be represented in the GDR.⁷⁴ It appears that even to the present day, the persistence of positive recollections of the Third Reich amongst some interviewees continue to run somewhat counter to the acceptable norms of remembering the past.

One possible explanation for this may be that given the young ages of the majority of the interviewees during the Third Reich and their corresponding lack of accountability for the crimes of that regime, they may feel somewhat more leeway to reminisce positively about what they perceive to be positive childhood, teenage and young adult experiences in their interviews. Moreover, those interviewees who claimed to have flouted the officially prescribed norms in the GDR by 'publicly' speaking amongst friends and colleagues about topics which were forbidden may have also done so in order to present themselves as somewhat challenging the norms of the second German dictatorship with which they could have been potentially complicit. Whilst this may be the case, contemporary reports in the local archival material also indicate that elements of the population continued to make positive public references to the Third Reich throughout the post-war years. For instance, throughout the late 1940s the Fürstenwalde town council received a number of reports that elements of the population in the post-war period were reported to have

Noises of the Past', in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. by Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1-21, (p. 14). For a further expansion of a rejection of the 'repression thesis' of the Nazi past in West Germany see Alon Confino, 'Travelling as a Culture of Remembrance: Traces of National Socialism in West Germany', 1945-1960, *History and Memory* 12 (2000), pp. 92-121.

⁷³ McDougall, *Duty*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ Betts, *Walls*, pp. 238, 191.

publicly reminisced that ‘everything was better under Hitler’.⁷⁵ Similarly, the Brandenburg authorities also reported on the public singing of ‘fascist’ and military songs across the region, particularly in pubs.⁷⁶

In contrast, some of the interviewees, such as Christine Küster, claimed that the Third Reich was used primarily not as a positive, but as a negative comparative reference point to the new political developments in the GDR: ‘we used to say “just like with Hitler”’.⁷⁷ Similarly, Alfred Wegewitz recalled how sometimes he and his friends would cynically recall certain events from National Socialism in later years:

If a few people [...] who knew each other from back then happened to meet on that day then it was always said ‘Gosh, are you thinking about it too, today is the *Führer’s* birthday’ [...] cynical yes [...] and on 1 May there were parades here [...] and it was said that back then the *Kreisleiter* used to stand there and now the comrade so and so is standing there [...] such cynical comparisons.⁷⁸

In this manner this particular group of interviewees claimed that the new GDR state was negatively equated by them with the Third Reich, thereby somewhat distancing the interviewees from complicity in both dictatorial systems. Yet this use of the Third Reich as a negative point of comparison was also utilised in reference to more recent political events as a number of the interviewees, particularly those who stated that they had suffered longer-term traumas from the bombing campaigns, claimed that their painful memories were freshly triggered by the images of the Afghanistan war on television.

The National Socialist past did not just remain personally salient for some of the interviewees; it was also later repeatedly instrumentalised in the official sphere of GDR political doctrine as ‘the communists kept memory alive and put it in the service of current policy’.⁷⁹ These official attempts at instrumentalising contemporary developments with reference to the Third Reich and Nazism appear to have both influenced and acted as a counterpoint to the current memories of the interviewees in this regard. In some cases the individual memories appear to have somewhat converged with the official GDR state narrative on certain issues, while in

⁷⁵ See, for instance, KALOS F/RdS/688, no pag.

⁷⁶ See, for example, the case in February 1950 in Gohlitz, twenty kilometres from Brandenburg/Havel where the singing group was said to have included a detective constable from the *Volkspolizei*, as well as the chairman of the local CDU faction, the former mayor of the town of Gohlitz as well as some local farmers and businessmen. BLHA, Rep. 203/78, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁷ Küster, 01.09.09.

⁷⁸ Wegewitz, 07.09.09.

⁷⁹ Herf, *Divided*, p. 164.

other instances the memories amongst the interviewees seem to have diverged from the dominant political discourse of the SED.

One area where this partial dissonance between official discourse and private perception was visible was in the case of the uprising on 17 June 1953, which had been officially declared by the SED to be the doing of ‘fascist provocateurs’.⁸⁰ Yet in the oral history interviews, where a quarter of those interviewed claimed to have personally known someone involved, the majority of the perceptions and memories stand in contrast to this official state narrative. Instead, a large proportion felt that those involved were merely dissatisfied workers or ordinary people ‘just like you and me’, and that ‘everyone knew that it wasn’t the fascists’.⁸¹ Whilst these assertions appear to reaffirm the current popular debates on this issue which circulate today, these interviewees were arguably also exposed to unofficial counter-memories of this tenor already before 1989. Myriam Renaudot has found that throughout the GDR years the 17 June remained a topic of conversation, both within families as well as in the pub. Nonetheless, she also contends that traces of the SED’s ideological utilisation of 1953 can still be observed in unified Germany to this day.⁸² Corresponding with this, a small number of interviewees provided evidence that the official state discourse had indeed crossed over and had been absorbed into individual perceptions and memories. Paul Gärtner believed that it was ‘fascists’ who were involved in the uprising, claiming to have seen people with swastika flags and recalling it as a ‘deliberate provocation’; while Wolfgang Heinrich felt certain that the uprising was supported by ‘secret financial sources’.⁸³

Following from this, the GDR state subsequently attempted to continue to instrumentalise the National Socialist past, particularly during the highly strained Cold War context in the 1950s and 1960s. The framework adopted for rhetorically dealing with the Third Reich in official discourse, both domestically and internationally, was that of antifascism. As Josie McLellan highlights: ‘The relationship between history and official antifascism worked in two directions: on

⁸⁰ On the 17 June 1953 and its impact in the GDR see, for instance, Bernd Eisenfeld, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk and Ehrhart Neubert, *Die Verdrängte Revolution: Der Platz des 17. Juni 1953 in der deutschen Geschichte* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2004). Burghard Ciesla, ed., *Der 17. Juni 1953 in Brandenburg. Eine Dokumentenedition* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2003) provides a collection of archival source material from Brandenburg.

⁸¹ Dietrich, 11.06.09. Küster, 01.09.09.

⁸² Myriam Renaudot, ‘Der Siebzehnte Juni’, in *Erinnerungsorte*, pp. 335, 339.

⁸³ Gärtner, 27.06.09. Heinrich, 01.09.09.

the one hand, antifascism was a means of interpreting the past. On the other, the past was used to bolster and legitimate the antifascist state'.⁸⁴ These propagandistic attempts to present East Germany as an antifascist success story were frequently presented in radio programmes, while the infamous 'Brown Books', which 'externalised the Nazi past' by accusing West Germany of being 'a paradise for Nazi and war criminals', and attempting to shame hundreds of politicians and high ranking officials with incriminating Nazi pasts were an important contemporary strategy for the SED state.⁸⁵ These were further complemented with orchestrated trials against prominent former National Socialists living in the Federal Republic.⁸⁶

Whilst only six of those interviewed felt that the Third Reich remained topical in official state discourse throughout the GDR it appears that the interviewees continue, consciously or unconsciously, to reproduce elements of this Cold War propaganda, even in the present day. This was particularly the case with reference to the supposedly less thorough denazification process which had taken place in West Germany after the war. For instance, Dr Edith Dorn was of the opinion that 'certainly more vigorous action was taken here than in other parts of the Federal Republic [...] they admit that today [...] that they continued to work as judges, I don't think that's good', while special camp survivor Reinhold Rösner felt that in East Germany the former Nazis were 'left to rot' in the NKVD camps while in the

⁸⁴ Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945-1989* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), p. 75.

⁸⁵ Nationalrat der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland Dokumentationszentrum der staatlichen Archivverwaltung der DDR, *Braunbuch: Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik. Staat, Wirtschaft, Armee, Verwaltung, Justiz und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Staatsverlag, 1965), p. 7. See also Detlev Siegfried, 'Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1969', in Schildt, *Dynamische Zeiten*, p. 109. On radio programmes see: Christoph Classen, 'Zum öffentlichen Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in der DDR. Das Beispiel des Radios', in *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften*, ed. by Axel Schildt et al. (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 2000), 166-196 (p. 171).

⁸⁶ For an overview of some of the GDR campaigns such as 'Gestern Hitlers Blutrichter – Heute Bonner Justizelite' in the late 1950s, see, for instance, Annette Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949-1969. Oder: Eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), pp. 76-82. She also provides a brief discussion on the Oberländer affair, pp. 141-151. For further detail on the GDR trial against Oberländer see Philipp-Christian Wachs, 'Die Inszenierung eines Schauprozesses – das Verfahren gegen Theodor Oberländer vor dem Obersten Gericht der DDR', in *Vorträge zur deutsch-deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, by Wolfgang Buschfort, Philipp-Christian Wachs and Falco Werkentin (Berlin: Schriftenreihe des Berliner Landesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2001). Ironically this was despite the fact that the GDR never acknowledged its liability for compensation to Holocaust victims living in Israel or elsewhere, and instead, for a number of reasons, followed a pro-Arab foreign policy. For a detailed examination of the GDR's foreign policy in relation to Israel and the Middle East see Meining, *Judenpolitik*.

Federal Republic ‘a large part of the country was built up with active National Socialists’.⁸⁷ Likewise, Dr Siegfried Reinke felt that:

I would have wished that denazification in the former Federal Republic or West Germany had been somewhat more thorough; it is intolerable that Nazi judges who shortly before the end of the war gave the order to shoot sailors, that they are in leading positions.⁸⁸

The repeated mention of Bonn’s alleged ‘blood judges’ by the interviewees appear to reflect much of what was propagated by GDR itself, particularly until the late 1960s. Moreover, it seems likely that Dr Reinke’s reference to the judges who gave the order to shoot sailors is perhaps an allusion to the ‘Filbinger Affair’ which concerned the uncovering of the severe penalties passed down by the military judge Hans Filbinger at the end of the war. These first garnered media attention in 1972 in West Germany and finally came to the fore in August 1978 when Filbinger was forced to resign his long-running position as the CDU Minister President of Baden Württemberg.⁸⁹ This public resignation was utilised in East German propaganda, and recently hit the headlines again on Filbinger’s death in 2007, therefore perhaps freshly influencing the current memories and opinions of some of the interviewees. Yet it also appears possible that this influence may also have an additional source. In fact, in January 1971, the year before the Filbinger affair became public, a five-part East German television film entitled ‘*Rottenknechte*’ premiered in the GDR, which focused on the death penalties of mutinous sailors in 1945 as well as the subsequent successful careers of the former Nazis in the West-German navy and NATO. As the Filbinger affair escalated throughout the 1970s, East German television showed re-runs of ‘*Rottenknechte*’ up until July 1978, a month before Filbinger finally resigned.

As Lynn Abrams has argued ‘memory – both individual and collective – exists in a symbiotic relationship with the public memorialisation of the past’, and it is reasonable therefore to assume that some of these oral history memories and opinions on the Third Reich are perhaps directly or indirectly attributable to aspects of such Cold War discourses as well as more recent differing political discourses and cultural influences.⁹⁰ Yet just as current discussions on the past are multifaceted, so too do the interviewees present ‘multiple voices’, which are not seldom

⁸⁷ Dorn, 24.06.09. Rösner, 10.09.09.

⁸⁸ Reinke, 23.06.09.

⁸⁹ See Wolfram Wette, ed., *Filbinger – eine deutsche Karriere* (Springer: Klampen, 2006).

⁹⁰ Abrams, *Oral History*, p. 79.

‘contradictory and opposed to each other’.⁹¹ Whilst the majority of the interviewees claim to have generally embraced the fall of the Wall in 1989 and adapted relatively well to the third major political transition of their lives, there were some, such as Paul Gärtner, who felt fundamentally disillusioned with the society in which he now finds himself:

If one still shows images of Adolf Hitler today on public television then for me it is a provocation [...] I see all of the war literature of the fascist army in the supermarket and I ask myself what kind of societal development that is.⁹²

Paul Gärtner is not alone in these sentiments as a recent representative study from 2008 has shown that roughly every ninth East German supposedly longs for a return of the GDR.⁹³ Whilst such sentiments hint at some of the ambivalences and complexities surrounding the most recent ideological changeover in Brandenburg, the political transition post-1989 is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, such disillusioned utterances as those by Paul Gärtner, in which he vehemently reproduces the antifascist terminology of the ‘fascist army’, perhaps illustrate Biess’s observation that ‘participation in antifascist activity was not just motivated by opportunism or material needs, but also by a genuine search for new meaning after the collapse of National Socialism’.⁹⁴ In this manner, the antifascist doctrine appears to have provided an important framework for some individuals with which to make sense of the political system which they had experienced in their youth.

On the other hand, there is a general consensus in the historical literature that there were severe shortcomings in the ability of the antifascist doctrine to adequately deal with the impact and legacy of the National Socialist past. As Wierling has argued, by defining ‘fascism’ as ‘the politics of the most aggressive segments of the capitalist class’ and ‘neglecting National Socialism as a broad political movement’, the broader masses of the population in East Germany were able to ‘feel morally exonerated’.⁹⁵ The impact of this can be seen in relation to the widespread perception amongst the interviewees that it was the ‘big Nazis’ who supposedly ended up in the

⁹¹ Confino and Fritzsche, *Noises*, p. 12.

⁹² Gärtner, 27.06.09.

⁹³ Reinhard Liebscher, *Sozialreport 2008: Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage in den neuen Bundesländern. Das Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungszentrum Berlin-Brandenburg e.V.* (Berlin: Volkssolidarität Bundesverband e.V., 2008).

⁹⁴ Biess, *Homecomings*, p. 144.

⁹⁵ Dorothee Wierling, ‘Is there an East German Identity? Aspects of a Social History of the Soviet Zone/German Democratic Republic’, in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte, XIX* (Gerlingen: Institut für Deutsche Geschichte-Universität Tel Aviv, 1990), 193-207 (p. 198).

West while the ‘small Nazis’ in the East should be allowed to re-integrate into their communities in Brandenburg. This relatively wide latitude for reintegration provided by the antifascist ideological framework enabled a significant number of individuals to re-establish themselves within the new political system as they were absolved from moral guilt, and, similar to the NDPD and the DSF, were re-classified as victims of the ‘fascist’ machine.

The flipside to antifascism was that whilst it may have been an effective tool for integrating large elements of society as well as being a useful form of self-representation throughout the ideological wrangling of the Cold War, both the oral history and archival evidence suggest that it created a certain gulf between political discourse and personal perceptions and memories. As a consequence, it appears that no fundamental engagement with one’s own potential complicity could take place in the official public sphere in the GDR and instead created the appearance that there had been ‘no normal daily life in the Third Reich’.⁹⁶ This simplified dualistic interpretation of the Nazi past, argues von Plato, ‘did not necessarily match the experiences of those people who had lived ‘perfectly normal’ lives in the Third Reich’.⁹⁷ In this manner, it appears as though the oral history interviewees were able to, in the words of Kansteiner, ‘integrate diverse images’, as the memories of positive experiences and perceptions on the Third Reich could continue to co-exist parallel to acknowledging the regime’s destructive characteristics.⁹⁸

7.5 Conclusion

The oral history evidence suggests that the attempts made by the East German administration to rehabilitate and reintegrate young individuals into the new political structures after 1945 proved to be a complex undertaking. For Germans who had been too young to carry functions in the Third Reich, the oral history evidence suggests that the process of political transition was characterised by apathy, ambivalence as well as acceptance. It appears that for some interviewees, personal memories of the Third Reich remained salient until the present day. For those with positive recollections, these were often apparently used as a way to find fault with

⁹⁶ Herbert and Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, pp. 32-34.

⁹⁷ Von Plato, *Eine zweite Entnazifizierung*, pp. 8, 10-11.

⁹⁸ Kansteiner, *Memory*, p. 321.

aspects of GDR development, while others seem to have clung to positive childhood experiences and what were portrayed as innocent National Socialist activities as youths. Conversely, the Third Reich also appears to have been utilised as a cynical reference point as well as a basis for genuine reflection about some of the horrors of the past.

For those who were permitted and willing to avail themselves of its opportunities, the new political system appeared to provide some of the interviewees with a certain room for manoeuvre, despite the extremely restricted political circumstances, and enabled them to re-build their lives within the new system. Whilst these self-representations may in part reflect post-1989 narratives, the archival evidence from both the NDPD and DSF in the previous chapters seems to suggest similar trends. It therefore appears that particularly the economic opportunities for advancement proved to be an important mediating factor in tying people to their communities and directly or indirectly helping to build the new East German state. By establishing this post-war framework for political transition and integration it appears that the desires of both the authorities and large sectors of the grassroots populace for a swift normalisation somewhat overlapped, thereby eventually contributing to the partial stabilisation of the emerging East German socialist state.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

This thesis has examined grassroots responses and their relative implications within the context of both punitive and rehabilitative measures in post-war Brandenburg during the transitions from Nazism to socialism. Two main research questions were explored.

First, in what ways did people at the grassroots attempt to challenge the imposition of punitive measures, and did their responses have any effect on the manner in which these policies were implemented at a grassroots level? The punitive measures aimed to change the political, economic and social system and diverged from the immediate needs and desires of grassroots Brandenburgers who were attempting to survive amidst the utter chaos and very real existential challenges with which they were faced in the wake of the collapse of the Third Reich. The archival and oral history evidence suggests that despite the severe practical and political constraints, when faced with an immediate existential threat grassroots Brandenburgers attempted to challenge the imposition of these measures in three main ways: written complaints, informal networks of communication and unofficial counter-memories.

In relation to the initial phase of retaliatory violence and the policies of dismantling and displacement the findings indicate that the attempts of grassroots Brandenburgers to negotiate the impact of these measures on their lives were mainly unsuccessful and reinforced feelings of passivity, anger and victimhood. Likewise, whilst grassroots Brandenburgers attempted to moderate the immediate existential threat posed by NKVD activities in a number of ways, these grassroots responses were not in themselves effective in altering the manner in which these punitive Soviet policies were carried out. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that both the NKVD arrests and the cumulative protests and unofficial public commemoration of their dead appear to have placed the SED leadership under a certain amount of pressure and, combined with larger domestic and foreign policy considerations, appear to have acted as a contributing factor in altering some of their policies. However, clear limits to grassroots challenges also existed, as can be seen in the manner in which the authorities responded to the public manifestation of counter-memories in Ketschendorf in the early 1950s. Similar patterns of grassroots

complaint in the form of written petitions were evident in response to the various denazification measures. The findings revealed that in some instances the persistence of grassroots *Eigensinn*, and the dynamics it created at a local and regional level, could somewhat affect the manner in which various denazification measures were implemented.

In sum, the punitive measures which attempted to remove the remnants of the National Socialist regime often posed an existential threat to grassroots Brandenburgers and elicited various degrees of grassroots *Eigensinn* despite the practical and political constraints. Often these responses were not necessarily intentionally political, but instead attempted merely to ameliorate the impact of a particular punitive measure on individual lives. However, the present study acknowledges that this restricted room for manoeuvre was not just a product of individual acts of *Eigensinn* but a combination of a plethora of other factors which also served to dilute and curb Soviet and SED aspirations for hegemony. It appeared that the aftermath of the war acted as both a limiting and enabling factor for the ability of grassroots actors to exert *Eigensinn* in the face of punitive measures. On the one hand, the very real existential challenges they were faced with in the immediate post-war years meant that the grassroots population was extremely constrained in their room for manoeuvre. On the other hand, local Brandenburgers could also take advantage of the infrastructural problems and shortages in qualified labour in an attempt to negotiate and shape their own lives. Furthermore, the extent to which the grassroots challenges in relation to the specific punitive measures appeared to have an effect on the manner in which these policies were implemented varied. In many cases these grassroots challenges had little or no effect; however, in certain instances these grassroots responses occasionally did have some local impact. However, the relative importance of grassroots challenges should not be overstated and must be seen as just one among many different factors which somewhat affected the manner in which top-down rule in post-war Brandenburg was realised, particularly in the wider context of foreign policy considerations and the beginning of the Cold War.

The second research question examined the extent to which grassroots Brandenburgers participated in political organisations which were designed to integrate East Germans during the rehabilitative stage, and the possible impact these responses may have had on the post-war transition. These rehabilitative measures

were designed to facilitate political reorientation and integration amongst grassroots Brandenburgers and were strongly linked to the solidification of SED hegemony from the late 1940s onwards. Both the NDPD and the DSF had been expressly established to challenge previous National Socialist sentiments and aid in facilitating the political transition from 'fascism' to socialism. The second part of this study explored grassroots responses to these political overtures in Brandenburg as well as investigating some of the factors which may have both impeded and facilitated the process of post-war transition for the young age cohort of oral history interviewees. By rhetorically shifting the parameters of Nazi victims and perpetrators, it appears as though a large number of Brandenburgers were provided with the opportunity, if they so wished, to avail themselves of the chance for political, economic and social advancement.

Both the archival and oral history evidence suggests that a significant proportion of people became members of these political organisations. While some appear to have joined these organisations with a clear strategy for economic advancement, others seem to have joined due to acquiescence; there were also those who refused membership. In fact, notwithstanding the fact that an organisation such as the DSF had 5.5 million members by the late 1970s, roughly half of the GDR population also did not join the friendship society. Moreover, the evidence suggests that whilst these organisations provided a redemptive framework, in many ways both the DSF and NDPD remained rather superficial institutions which avoided a fundamental confrontation both with certain tenets of National Socialist ideology as well as the actual reality of Brandenburgers' experiences throughout the early years of the Soviet occupation. It therefore appears that they alienated a considerable proportion of the grassroots population who felt that they could not reconcile the official rhetoric with some of their own post-war experiences.

The findings of the present study indicate that attempts by these political organisations at re-writing the official political doctrine and altering the previous political framework did not go unchallenged at a grassroots level in Brandenburg. Particularly the persistence of anti-Soviet sentiments and distress about the solidification of the Oder-Neisse border continued to present themselves as grassroots obstacles throughout the post-war years. Whilst the impact of these objections should not be overstated, in some instances the policy makers were indeed forced to somewhat adapt their rhetorical approaches in order to accommodate the

popular mood at a grassroots level. Nonetheless, although these organisations may have provided some latitude for economic integration, the evidence suggests that in general the political room for manoeuvre was firmly controlled and these opportunities for integration were to occur with the caveat of outward political conformity.

Notwithstanding these difficulties in politically converting the masses within the new ideological framework, it was arguably the economic stability and gradual post-war normalisation of daily life which played the most important role in facilitating the transition in Brandenburg after 1945, suggesting that simplified binary concepts of resistance and compliance do not adequately reflect the complexities involved in the transitions from the National Socialist to the socialist system after 1945. Whilst these claims of strategically accommodating oneself within the new political constraints in order to avail oneself of economic opportunities need to be interpreted with caution, as they may have been in part a product of post-1989 narratives and self-representations amongst the oral history interviewees, the archival evidence also indicates that political memberships were not necessarily matched by active participation at this time.

These opportunities for economic mobility occurred against the wider backdrop of the redemptive antifascist ideological framework, which, combined with shifting notions of perpetrators and victims in the aftermath of the war, served to push potential complicity with the Third Reich regime into the background. Therefore, it was with the introduction of these rehabilitative measures that the interests of the new dictatorial regime and grassroots Brandenburgers most closely converged in the late 1940s and thereby acted as an important contributor in facilitating the post-war transition.

This study has provided a multifaceted examination of a wide variety of grassroots responses to both punitive and rehabilitative measures in post-war Brandenburg and their possible implications. However, it must be noted that both the archival and oral history sources may have been affected in different ways as regards evidence of *Eigensinn*. First, it is conceivable that incidents demonstrating *Eigensinn* may have been overstated or understated amongst the oral history interviewees in order, consciously or unconsciously, to present their former selves in a more favourable light in the current political context twenty years after the collapse of the GDR. Specifically, in relation to the punitive measures this may have manifested

itself as somewhat exaggerating the extent to which they may have challenged the imposition of the new dictatorship. However, the possibility cannot be excluded that acts of *Eigensinn* may have also been understated amongst the oral history interviewees in order to emphasise a sense of victimhood in the face of punitive measures. Furthermore, in relation to the rehabilitative measures it is conceivable that the interviewees may have been inclined to minimise their sense of agency in order to downplay their potential complicity in the GDR dictatorship. The inverse of this may have also been the case with respect to those interviewees who claimed to have flouted the officially prescribed norms in the GDR and thereby may have somewhat overstated the extent to which they challenged the norms of the second German dictatorship.

Second, in relation to the archival sources, the incidences of negative contemporary reporting in the archival material must be also treated with an element of caution, as they may have understated the many inroads which the authorities had made in Brandenburg, in particular by the early 1950s. The attempts by some citizens to exert their *Eigensinn* through *Eingaben* were not necessarily representative of the wider population and it must be assumed that there were many Brandenburgers who did not challenge the punitive post-war measures in this manner. Therefore, it is likely that a great many individuals participated in the new political system without ever overtly challenging the new political, economic and social status quo. However, it is also conceivable that at times acts of *Eigensinn* amongst grassroots Brandenburgers may have been underreported in order to create the impression that the new authorities were more in control at the local level than may have actually been the case. However, it is important to note that the present study attempted to overcome some of the inherent biases associated with both sources by combining contemporaneous and retrospective sources of evidence. Therefore, the extent to which their findings converged provided strong support for their validity.

It must also be noted that the findings of the present study were based predominantly on two local case studies and therefore may be limited in their generalisability to other parts of Brandenburg and the GDR. Given that the oral history interviewees were aged between twelve and twenty-four in 1945, the present findings cannot be generalised to any other age cohort. In addition to these possible generational differences, the present study does not make any claims as regards the

interviewees' representativeness of all young people who experienced these transitions from Nazism to socialism in Brandenburg between 1945 and 1952. Therefore, the present findings may be limited in their generalisability in terms of socioeconomic status, gender, political affiliation, or urban and rural differences, amongst many others. Finally, given that this study focused predominantly on stationary Brandenburgers, these findings do not necessarily correspond with the experiences of the roughly 876,200 citizens who attempted to exert their *Eigensinn* by leaving the Soviet zone for a variety of reasons in the years after the Third Reich collapsed.¹

Despite these methodological limitations, this study contributes to the existing historical scholarship on grassroots East Germany in the post-war period in a number of ways. First, this study has contributed to knowledge about the manner in which each specific policy under examination was responded to at a grassroots level in Brandenburg and the wider implications these responses had on the post-war transition. It therefore provides a base for similar examinations in the other regions of East Germany, especially studies of comparable towns which were also home to NKVD institutions in the post-war period.

Second, rather than just focusing on one single policy, the present study presented a comprehensive and multifaceted examination of the grassroots responses to both punitive and rehabilitative post-war policies in Brandenburg. This afforded the opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which grassroots responses and their relative implications varied as a function of specific punitive and rehabilitative contexts. However, further studies will be required to examine the extent to which these findings can be generalised across Brandenburg and East Germany in the post-war period.

Third, whilst this study does not wish to downplay the extremely repressive political system established in East Germany, it moves beyond totalitarian approaches which have tended to neglect the potential influence which dynamics at a grassroots level could have on the implementation of policies in the post-war period. By providing evidence that grassroots actors could on occasion somewhat affect the manner in which policies were implemented in grassroots Brandenburg as well as strategically accommodating themselves within the system in order to receive

¹ Patrick Major, *Going west*, p. 191.

material and social benefits, this thesis contributed to a more differentiated perspective on post-war East Germany than some recent studies which have tended to simply emphasise violent oppression of the masses.² Furthermore, the findings of the present study challenge assertions by some historians that grassroots actions which went against the regime were always politically motivated.³ Instead, this thesis has demonstrated that in the wake of the aftermath of the Third Reich those local Brandenburgers who challenged policies were mainly motivated by existential, social and economic concerns.

In sum, the present study provided evidence that the latitude for grassroots responses and their relative implications varied as a function of specific punitive and rehabilitative contexts. Furthermore, the ways in which grassroots responses manifested themselves was determined by the extent to which the needs of the grassroots populace and the emerging dictatorship converged and diverged. Therefore, although macro events and considerations ultimately dictated the direction of political developments after 1945, the multifarious grassroots attempts to shape and negotiate their own lives did occasionally have some local impact and thereby could act as a contributing factor in *both* impeding and facilitating the political transition from Nazism to socialism in post-war Brandenburg.

² See, for instance, Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (London: Penguin, 2012).

³ See, for example: Bruce, *Resistance*, p. 12.

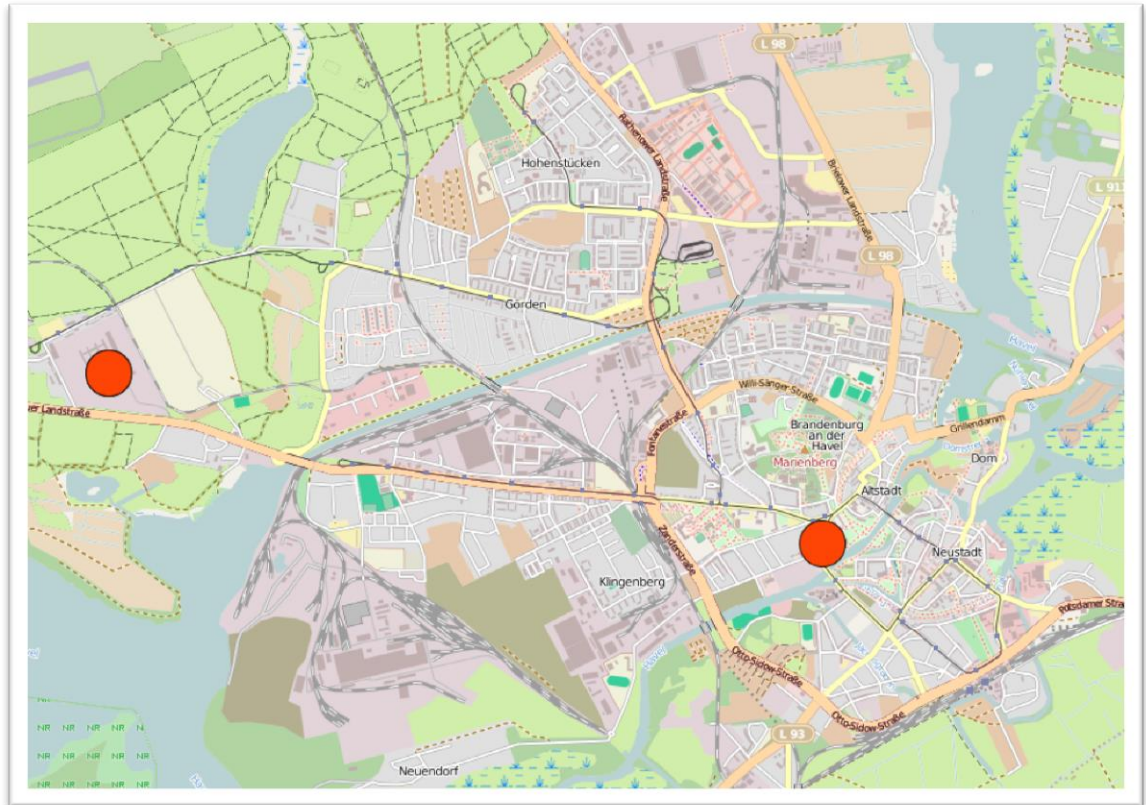
Appendices

Fig. 1: Map of Brandenburg illustrating the locations of Brandenburg/Havel and Fürstenwalde/Spree



Source: Derivative by Julie Deering-Kraft, based on 'Hanhil File Brandenburg location map G.svg,' licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.

Fig. 2: Map of Brandenburg/Havel illustrating the locations of the NKVD operations



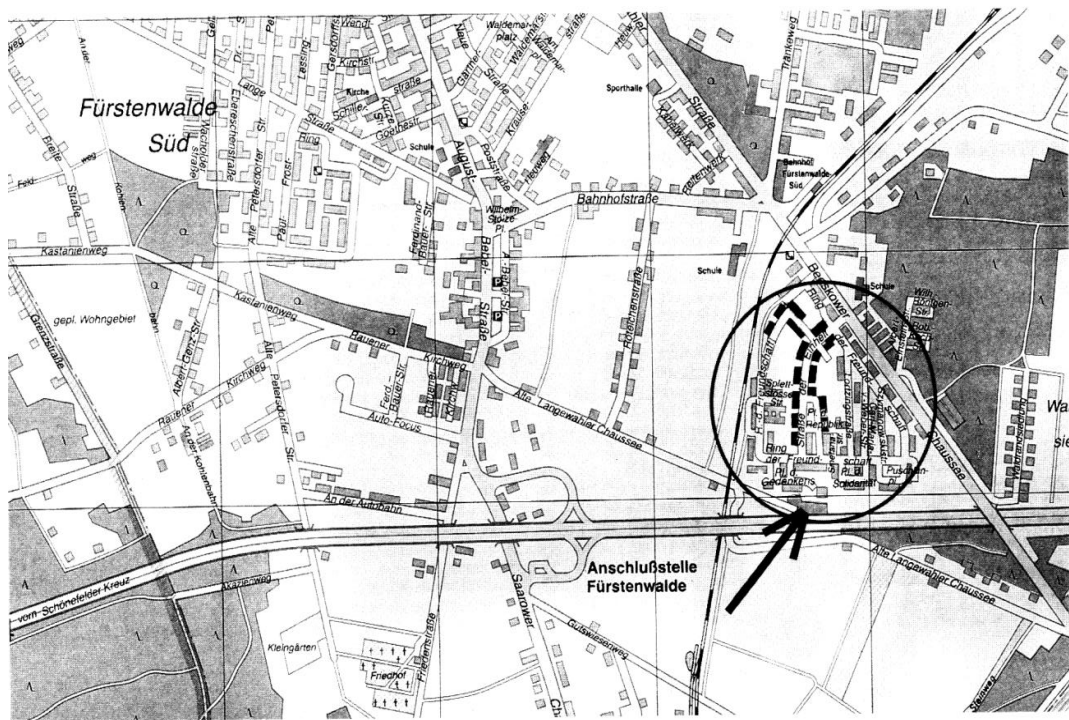
Source: Derivative by Julie Deering-Kraft, based on openstreetmap & contributors, licensed CC BY-SA. The NKVD operative prison in the Neuendorfer Straße in the town centre is marked on the right hand side and the *Zuchthaus* Brandenburg on the town's outskirts is marked on the left hand side.

Fig. 3: View of the NKVD Operative Prison in the Neuendorfer Straße, Brandenburg/Havel



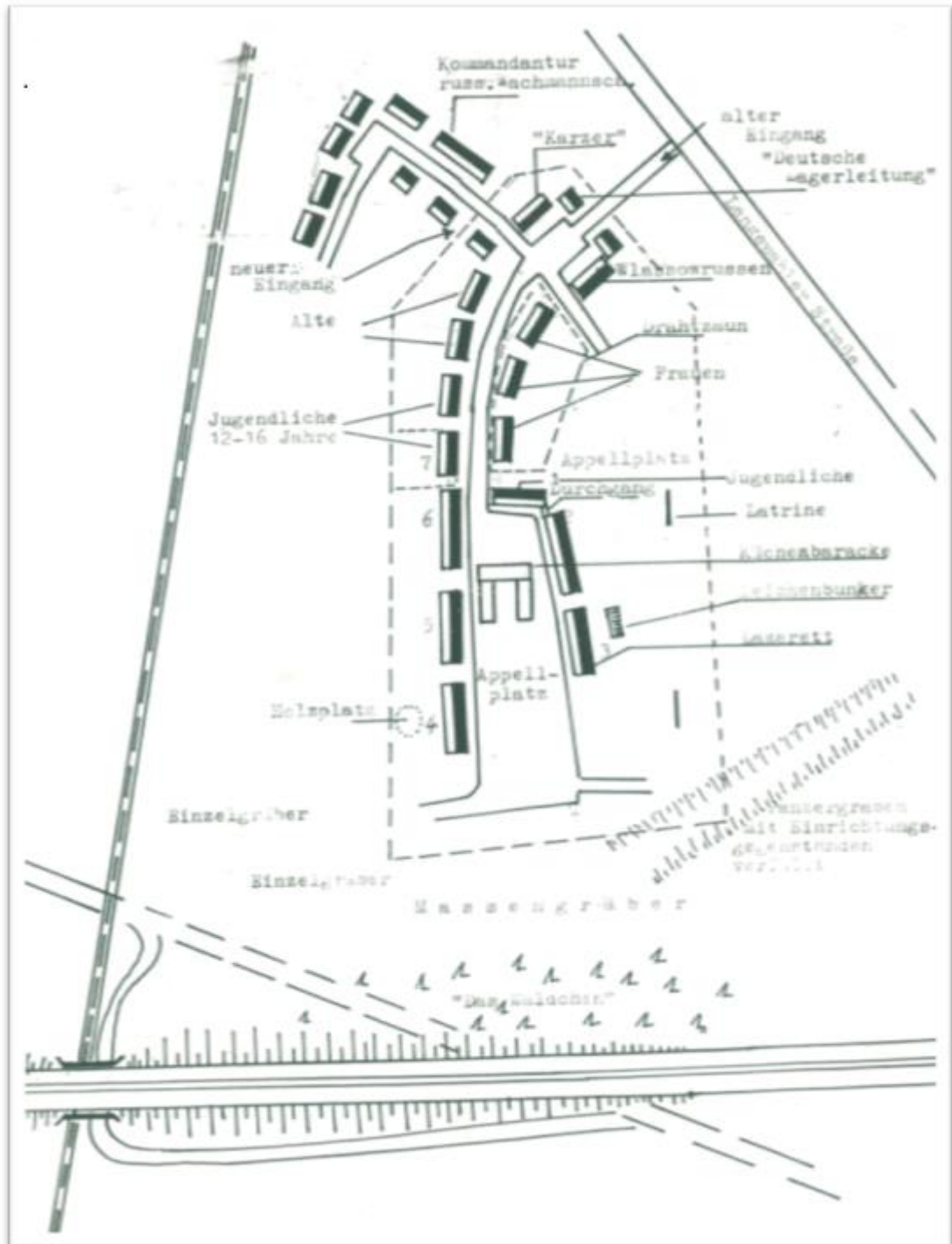
Source: Courtesy of Wolfgang Fried in Brandenburg/Havel, from his the private collection, circa 1945/46. Note the bricked up windows in the left side of the photograph.

Fig. 4: Map of Fürstenwalde-South indicating the location of NKVD special camp no. 5 Ketschendorf



Source: Renate Lipinsky and Jan Lipinsky, *Die Straße, die in den Tod führte: Zur Geschichte des Speziallagers Nr. 5 Ketschendorf/Fürstenwalde* (Leverkusen: Kremer-Verlag, 1999), p. 318. Note the camp's vicinity to the main Berlin-Frankfurt/Oder motorway.

Fig. 5: Map of NKVD special camp no. 5 Ketschendorf



Source: KALOS F/Stadt-Museum/757 'Das "Speziallager Nr. 5 des NKWD" in Ketschendorf - Zwischenbericht für den "Runden Tisch" 26.04.1990'. Note the location of the mass graves and the *Autobahn* running along the south perimeter of the camp grounds.

Table 1: Biographical information of the interviewees (N=20)

Names of Interviewees	Year of birth	Place of Residence during the Post-war Transition Period	Political memberships pre-1945	Political memberships post-1945	Occupation post-1945
Beck, Ulla*	1931	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungmädel</i>	DSF, FDGB	Accountant
Dietrich, Gunther	1927 (†2012)	Brandenburg/ Havel	<i>Jungvolk, Hitler Youth</i>	DSF, FDGB	Civil engineer
Dorn, Edith, Dr*	1930 (†2010)	Brandenburg/ Havel	<i>Jungmädel</i>	DSF, FDGB, FDJ	Third level lecturer
Fiedler, Wilhelm*	1921	Brandenburg/ Havel	—	FDGB	Teacher
Fried, Wolfgang	1927	Brandenburg/ Havel	<i>Jungvolk, Hitler Youth</i>	FDJ, <i>Kulturbund</i>	Chemist
Gärtner, Paul	1931	Brandenburg/ Havel	<i>Jungvolk, Hitler Youth</i>	DSF, FDJ, GST, SED	Manual labourer
Gericke, Hans	1924	Brandenburg/ Havel	<i>Jungvolk, Hitler Youth, NS-Studentenbund</i>	FDGB	Civil engineer
Heinrich, Wolfgang	1933	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungvolk</i>	DSF, FDGB, FDJ, GST, <i>Kulturbund</i> SED	Engineer
Hirsch, Gertrud *	1928	Fürstenwalde	BDM	FDJ, FBGB, <i>Sportgemeinschaft</i>	Office clerk

Table 1: Biographical information of the interviewees. (N=20) (continued)

Names of Interviewees	Year of birth	Place of Residence during the Post-war Transition Period	Political memberships pre-1945	Political memberships post-1945	Occupation post-1945
Jung, Carmen *	1928	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungmädels</i>	DSF, FDGB	Office and admin. clerk
Kaiser-Reka, Berol	1930	Brandenburg/Havel	<i>Jungvolk</i>	DSF	Musician
Krause, Fritz *	1929	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungvolk</i> , Hitler Youth	FDGB	Structural engineer
Küster, Christine	1931	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungmädels</i>	DSF, FDGB	Trading director in a construction company (from 1960 onwards)
Michel, Kurt	1931 (†2012)	Brandenburg/Havel	<i>Jungvolk</i>	FDJ (short period)	Electrician
Reinke, Siegfried. Dr	1929	Brandenburg/Havel	<i>Jungvolk</i> , Hitler Youth	DSF, FDJ, SED	Economist
Rösner, Reinhold	1929	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungvolk</i> , Hitler Youth	FDGB	Economist
Schmidt, Karl*	1921 (†2012)	Brandenburg/Havel	<i>Jungvolk</i>	FDGB	Foundry moulder
Schulz, Erika	1927	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungmädels</i> , BDM	FDGB	Innkeeper and Employee in <i>Handelsorganisation</i>
Schulze, Arnold	1931 (†2012)	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungvolk</i>	DAV, DSF, FDGB, FDJ	Biology lecturer at a technical college
Wegewitz, Alfred	1926	Fürstenwalde	<i>Jungvolk</i> , Hitler Youth	DSF, <i>Kulturbund</i>	Lawyer

Interview Schedule

1. Persönliche Daten:

Alter, Familienstand, Ausbildung und Beruf

1a. Wann wurden Sie geboren? _____

1b. Wo wurden Sie geboren? _____

1c. Mit wie vielen Geschwistern sind Sie aufgewachsen? _____

1d. Sind sie verheiratet?

Ja Seit wann sind Sie geheiratet? _____

Nein

Verwitwet Seit wann sind Sie verwitwet? _____

Geschieden Seit wann sind Sie geschieden? _____

1e. Haben Sie Kinder? Wenn ja, wie viele? Wann geboren?

Anzahl der Kinder: _____

Kind 1: M W Geburtsjahr

Kind 2: M W Geburtsjahr

Kind 3: M W Geburtsjahr

1f. Wie viele Personen leben zurzeit in Ihrem Haushalt? _____

Wer? _____

1g. Welchen Schulabschluss haben Sie?

Volksschulabschluss

Mittlere Reife

Abitur

Kein Abschluss (Anzahl der Schuljahre und Schulart)

1h. Wann haben Sie Ihre Schulausbildung abgeschlossen?

Vor 1945 (wann/wo): _____

Nach 1945 (wann/wo): _____

1i. Haben Sie eine weitere Ausbildung nach Ihrem Schulabschluss gemacht?

Vor 1945 (wann/wo): _____

Nach 1945 (wann/wo): _____

Nein

1j. Welchen Beruf haben Sie ausgeübt?

Vor 1945 (wann/wo): _____

Nach 1945 (wann/wo): _____

1k. Wann sind Sie in den Ruhestand getreten? _____

1l. Welchen Beruf übte Ihre Mutter/ Ihr Vater aus?

Mutter: _____

Vater: _____

2. Kindheit und Jugend im Dritten Reich:

Bewertung der Kindheit und Jugendzeit

Einstellung zum Dritten Reich und politisches Engagement

2a. Wenn Sie sich zurückversetzen, wie würden Sie Ihre *Kindheit* beschreiben?

Sehr glücklich

- Überwiegend glücklich
- Überwiegend unglücklich
- Sehr unglücklich

Gründe? _____

2b. Wenn Sie zurückversetzen, wie würden Sie Ihre *Jugendzeit* beschreiben?

- Sehr glücklich
- Überwiegend glücklich
- Überwiegend unglücklich
- Sehr unglücklich

Gründe? _____

2c. Wie haben Sie das Dritte Reich in Erinnerung ?

- Sehr positiv
- Überwiegend positiv
- Überwiegend negativ
- Sehr negativ

Gründe? _____

2d. Erinnern Sie sich noch an das, was Sie selbst *damals* als *Kind und Jugendlicher* vom Nationalsozialismus hielten?

- Sehr gute Idee
- Überwiegend gute Idee
- Überwiegend schlechte Idee
- Sehr schlechte Idee

Gründe? _____

2e. Welche Einstellung hatten Ihre Eltern *damals* in der Hitlerzeit zum Nationalsozialismus ?

- Sehr gute Idee
- Überwiegend gute Idee
- Überwiegend schlechte Idee
- Sehr schlechte Idee

Gründe? _____

2f. Waren Ihre Eltern vor oder während des Dritten Reichs politisch engagiert?

- Ja
Seit wann? _____
Wer (Mutter/ Vater/ beide Eltern) _____
Welche Partei/ polit. Organisation _____
- Nein

2g. Welche Rolle spielte das politische Engagement in Ihrer Familie in dieser Zeit (vor 1945)?

- Äußerst große Rolle
- Große Rolle
- Gewisse Rolle
- Geringe Rolle
- Keine Rolle

Gründe? _____

2h. Haben Sie selbst vor 1945 Jugendorganisationen oder politischen Parteien angehört?

- Ja
Welche? _____
- Nein

3. Der zweite Weltkrieg:

Erinnerungen an den Krieg

4f. Hat sich Ihre *damalige* Einstellung zu den Russen in den darauffolgenden Jahren der Nachkriegszeit (1945-195) in irgendeiner Weise gewandelt?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

4g. Gab es besondere Ereignisse, die Ihre Haltung gegenüber den Russen in den Nachkriegsjahren positiv beeinflusst hat?

4h. Gab es besondere Ereignisse, die Ihre Haltung gegenüber den Russen in den Nachkriegsjahren negativ beeinflusst hat?

4i. Was hielten Sie *damals* von der Gesellschaft für deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft?

Mitgliedschaft: Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

5. Leben in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und frühen DDR:

Politische Übergangsphase und Neuorientierung,
Veränderungen der Lebenssituation (Beruf, Wohnort, Besitzverhältnisse, familiäre Situation)
Politische Einstellung und politisches Engagement
Persönliche Einstellung zur Entnazifizierung, Enteignung und NKWD-Lagern/
Gefängnissen

5a. Wie haben Sie *damals* nach dem Krieg die politische Übergangsphase empfunden?

5b. Wie schwer oder leicht ist Ihnen diese Neuorientierung nach 1945 gefallen?

Sehr einfach
Ziemlich einfach
Ziemlich schwer
Sehr schwer

Gründe? _____

5c. Was haben Sie *damals* vom Sozialismus gehalten?

Sehr gute Idee
Überwiegend gute Idee
Überwiegend schlechte Idee
Sehr schlechte Idee
Keine Meinung

Gründe? _____

5d. Was hielten Sie *damals* vom Antifaschismus?

5e. Wenn Sie an Nachkriegszeit zurückdenken, wie haben Sie *damals* das Leben für sich und Ihre Familie in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der frühen DDR empfunden?

5f. Was ist Ihre schlimmste Erinnerung, wenn Sie an die Nachkriegszeit *zurückdenken*?

5g. Was ist Ihre schönste Erinnerung, wenn Sie an die Nachkriegszeit *zurückdenken*?

5h. Hat Ihr Vater vor und nach 1945 den gleichen Beruf ausgeübt?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

5i. Haben Sie vor und nach 1945 den gleichen Beruf ausgeübt?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

Wie waren die Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten nach 1945 Ihrer Meinung nach?

5j. Haben Sie vor und nach 1945 im gleichen Haus/ in der gleichen Wohnung gelebt?

Ja

Nein

Gründe? _____

5k. Welche Rolle spielte politisches Engagement für Sie in der Nachkriegszeit?

Äußerst große Rolle

Große Rolle

Gewisse Rolle

Geringe Rolle

Keine Rolle

Gründe? _____

5l. Haben Sie sich nach 1945 irgendeiner Partei, Jugendorganisation oder Massenorganisation angeschlossen?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

5m. Welche Einstellung hatten Sie zu den verschiedenen Parteien und Massenorganisationen in der Nachkriegszeit?

5n. Was hielten Sie *damals* von der NDPD?

Sehr viel

Ziemlich viel

Ziemlich wenig

Sehr wenig

Gar nichts

Gründe? _____

5o. Welchen Ruf hatte die NDPD?

5p. Wer ist Ihrer Meinung nach in die NDPD eingetreten?

5q. Wie wurden Ihrer Meinung nach die ehemaligen Nazis in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone behandelt?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe?

5r. Kamen Sie oder Familienmitglieder oder nahestehende Freunde von Ihnen vor eine Entnazifizierungskommission?

Ja/ Nein:

Wenn ja, wie haben sie das *damals* empfunden?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe?

5s. Kamen Nachbarn oder Kollegen von Ihnen vor eine Entnazifizierungskommission ?

Ja/ Nein:

Wenn ja, wie haben sie das *damals* empfunden?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe?

5t. Haben Sie Leute gekannt, die als Zuschauer zu diesen Entnazifizierungskommissionen gegangen sind?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe?

5u. Welche Rolle haben diese Entnazifizierungskommissionen *damals* in der Öffentlichkeit gespielt?

- Sehr große Rolle
- Ziemlich große Rolle
- Ziemlich geringe Rolle
- Sehr geringe Rolle
- Gar keine Rolle

Gründe?

5v. Hatten Sie persönliches Interesse daran?

- Sehr großes Interesse
- Ziemlich großes Interesse
- Ziemlich geringes Interesse
- Sehr wenig Interesse
- Überhaupt kein Interesse

Gründe?

5w. Können Sie sich noch an die Gerichtsprozesse gegen ehemalige Nationalsozialisten erinnern?
Welche Rolle haben diese Gerichtsprozesse Ihrer Meinung nach in der Öffentlichkeit gespielt?

- Sehr große Rolle
- Ziemlich große Rolle
- Ziemlich geringe Rolle
- Sehr geringe Rolle
- Gar keine Rolle

Gründe? _____

5x. Hatten Sie persönliches Interesse daran?

- Sehr großes Interesse
- Ziemlich großes Interesse
- Ziemlich geringes Interesse
- Sehr wenig Interesse
- Überhaupt kein Interesse

Gründe? _____

5y. Wurde bei Ihnen oder Ihrer Familie oder bei nahestehenden Freunden Eigentum beschlagnahmt oder enteignet?

Ja/ Nein

Wenn ja, wie haben sie das *damals* empfunden?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe? _____

5z. Wurde bei Ihren Nachbarn oder Kollegen Eigentum beschlagnahmt oder enteignet?

Ja/ Nein

Wenn ja, wie haben sie das *damals* empfunden?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe? _____

5zi. Haben Sie *damals* in der Nachkriegszeit von den NKWD Lagern oder Gefängnissen in der Nachkriegszeit in der Ostzone etwas gewusst?

Ja/ Nein

5zii. Hat man *damals* untereinander darüber gesprochen?

5ziii. Haben Sie jemanden gekannt der nach dem Krieg in solch einem Gefängnis oder Lager inhaftiert war?

Ja/ Nein

Wenn ja, wie haben sie das *damals* empfunden?

- Sehr gerecht
- Ziemlich gerecht
- Ziemlich ungerecht
- Sehr ungerecht

Gründe? _____

6. Erinnerungen an das Dritte Reich und Gedenken an die Kriegsoffer:

6a. Haben Sie in den Nachkriegsjahren noch manchmal an die Zeit im Dritten Reich zurückgedacht?

Ja/ Nein

Falls ja: An was haben Sie besonders gedacht?

6b. Hatten Sie *damals* je das Bedürfnis verspürt mit jemandem über die Zeit im Dritten Reich zu sprechen?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe _____

6c. Haben Sie *damals* mit jemandem über die Zeit im Dritten Reich gesprochen?

Ja/ Nein

Falls ja, mit wem?

6d. Haben Sie irgendwelche Andenken an das Dritte Reich behalten:

6e. Gab es in dieser Zeit in irgendeiner Form einen öffentlichen Dialog über die Zeit im dritten Reich?

6f. Wie ging man in der Nachkriegszeit mit dem Thema „deutsche Kriegsgefallene“ um?

6g. Konnte man offen über dieses Thema reden?

6h. Gab es in Ihrer Gegend während der Nachkriegszeit offizielle Gräber von deutschen Kriegsgefallenen aus dem 2. Weltkrieg?

Ja/ Nein

Welche Bedeutung hatte das für Sie?

- Äußerst große Bedeutung
- Große Bedeutung
- Gewisse Bedeutung
- Geringe Bedeutung
- Keine Bedeutung

Gründe? _____

6i. Falls zutreffend, existiert eine Grabstätte oder Gedenktafel für Ihre gefallenen Angehörigen aus dem 2. Weltkrieg?

Ja/ Nein (Wenn ja, seit wann?) _____

Welche Bedeutung hat das für Sie?

Äußerst große Bedeutung

Große Bedeutung

Gewisse Bedeutung

Geringe Bedeutung

Keine Bedeutung

Gründe? _____

6j. Wurden in Ihrer Gegend sowjetische Kriegsdenkmäler und/oder sowjetische Soldatenfriedhöfe errichtet?

Ja/ Nein (Wenn ja, seit wann?) _____

Welche Bedeutung hatte das für Sie?

Äußerst große Bedeutung

Große Bedeutung

Gewisse Bedeutung

Geringe Bedeutung

Keine Bedeutung

Gründe? _____

7. Zusätzliche Fragen:

7a. Kannten Sie jemanden der in der Zeit von 1945 bis 1952 in den Westen gegangen ist?

Ja/ Nein

Haben Sie selbst *in dieser Zeit* mit diesem Gedanken gespielt?

Ja/ Nein

Gründe? _____

7b. Welche Gründe waren für Sie ausschlaggebend nicht in den Westen zu gehen?

7c. Welche Erinnerungen haben Sie an den 17. Juni 1953?

7d. Haben Sie, Ihre Freunde oder Verwandten bei diesem Aufstand eine Rolle gespielt?

Ja/ Nein

7e Wer hat sich Ihrer Meinung nach daran beteiligt?

7f. Was hielten Sie *damals* von diesem Aufstand?

Sehr gute Idee

Überwiegend gute Idee

Überwiegend schlechte Idee

Sehr schlechte Idee

Gründe? _____

7g. Blieb Ihrer Meinung nach der Nationalsozialismus privat oder öffentlich nach 1952 ein relevantes Thema in der DDR?

Ja/ Nein

7h. Rückblickend, welche politischen Ereignisse hatten den größten *negativen* Einfluss auf Ihr Leben?

7i. Rückblickend, welche politischen Ereignisse hatten den größten *positiven* Einfluss auf Ihr Leben?

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<i>KALOS F/RdK:</i>	<i>Rat des Kreises Fürstenwalde</i>
<i>KALOS F/RdS:</i>	<i>Rat der Stadt Fürstenwalde</i>
<i>KALOS F/Stadtverwaltung:</i>	<i>Stadtverwaltung Fürstenwalde</i>
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