

# **Social perspectives on nationalism, normalization and East German-Polish relations, 1965–1985**

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I, Simon Daniel Coll, 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.

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# Abstract

This thesis explores popular attitudes within the German Democratic Republic (GDR) towards Poland and the Poles from 1965 to 1985, and the ways in which they were shaped by official propaganda campaigns in the GDR. The German-Polish relationship had been profoundly damaged by the events of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, and the subsequent establishment of communism served to ossify the animosity between the two peoples, while adding a variety of new grievances. The thesis focuses on the effect of two discursive projects (a nation-building discourse and a discourse of German-Polish reconciliation) used by the Socialist Unity Party (SED) as part of its attempt to dominate public discourse in the GDR and mould the mindset of its citizens in order to legitimize its rule. It explores the ways in which these competing discourses were continually (re)constructed, reinforced and given emotive power through a variety of discursive practices, and situates them within broader frameworks of communist memory and nationalism politics. It draws on recent work in nationalism theory (notably Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism') and memory studies (including Bell's 'mythscape') to model these discursive processes. Overall, the thesis argues that East German attitudes towards the Poles in this period, particularly as they evolved on a popular level, were largely a product of this ceaseless discursive contestation, or at least heavily influenced by it, and were marked by resentment and unresolved traumas. While this antipathy could no longer be expressed openly, the political structures and the value system of the socialist bloc offered an alternative framework in which it could be indulged, with the result that both German ethnonationalism and anti-Polonism were sustained under communism.

# Impact statement

This research has the potential to advance understanding in three distinct areas of scholarship. Its conclusions should be relevant to the closely related fields of memory and nationalism studies, particularly research on nationalism under communism. This encompasses both popular nationalist sentiment in communist states, and the ways in which popular nationalism was instrumentalized by ruling communist parties as a force for legitimization and mobilization. In its examination of both of these phenomena in the East German context, and of the interplay between competing nationalist discourses in the GDR, this thesis aims to make a meaningful contribution to the study of communist memory politics.

It is of course hoped that this project will be of particular benefit to the study of GDR-Polish relations. While the German-Polish relationship more generally is a fertile area of research, East German-Polish relations remains an underdeveloped field—particularly in comparison with the sizeable body of work on relations between either state and West Germany. Much of the existing research on this topic discusses it only as part of a broader analysis of German-Polish relations, or of German or Central European post-war history. The forces shaping the GDR-Polish relationship were quite distinct, however, as was the way in which the relationship evolved over the communist period; both merit more explicit treatment. Last, the majority of previous studies have been confined to GDR-Polish relations on an official level between the two states and their respective communist parties. There is therefore value in a study focusing primarily on popular attitudes and interactions between East Germans and Poles, and the manner in which these related to official policy.

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# 1. Introduction

This thesis explores popular attitudes within the German Democratic Republic (GDR) towards Poland and the Poles from 1965 to 1985, and the ways in which they were shaped by official propaganda campaigns in the East German state. It focuses in particular on the effect of two discursive projects, so termed because of their use by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) as part of its attempt to dominate public discourse and mould the mindset of its citizens to align them more closely with the communist ideal. The first of these propagated a discourse of normalization, aiming to dispel the historical burdens that had accumulated between Germans and Poles by 1945, and foster reconciliation. The other was a nation-building project, designed to inculcate a sense of GDR national belonging in the population.

The two discursive projects in the GDR were inherently contradictory, both in intention and in their effects on East German attitudes towards the Poles. The GDR nation-building project was pursued as part of a broader legitimizing strategy to which the SED was compelled to resort due to a serious legitimacy deficit. The normalization project, meanwhile, was prompted by a bloc-wide campaign of socialist friendship and solidarity that all Soviet satellite states were obliged to pursue. Both projects were driven at least in part by the Soviet centre, but certainly not as part of any single, coherent plan, and their impacts on the GDR populace were discordant. More specifically, certain aspects of the nation-building project undermined the success of the reconciliation efforts, rendering the populace less receptive to the discourse of normalization. As a result, reconciliation, insofar as it was ever the goal of the SED leadership, was not achieved by the end of the communist era; indeed, Poland's relationship with the GDR was by the 1980s notably cooler than its relationship with the Federal Republic (FRG) in the West. Instead, the twenty-year period encompassed by this study was marked by simmering resentment and hostility on both sides, which, though only intermittently articulated, tainted East German perceptions of and interactions with Poles throughout.

These processes were further complicated by their taking place in the fragmented landscape of communist memory politics, in which numerous 'memory communities' vied for ownership of the national past and their role in it. A top-down study of official discourses is therefore insufficient; also of direct relevance is the 'process of the unofficial knowledge



construction circulating in “private”, or even across, spaces’ within East German society.<sup>1</sup> East German attitudes towards and treatment of Poles, in short, cannot be understood without adequately investigating the intersection of memory and national identity at which they developed. This investigation, moreover, must encompass all levels of society—elite and popular, individual and collective—as well as the myriad connections between them. By extension, the conclusions this study reaches concerning East German conceptions of Poland have the potential to advance historians’ understanding in these related fields as well, enhancing their knowledge of what Andrzej Brenz describes as the ‘complex of direct or indirect, physical or mental, permanent or temporary, conscious or unconscious links [...] that exist between cultures’, as shaped and constrained by ‘objective conditions’.<sup>2</sup>

To approach this topic, the project addresses several research questions. First, it examines which sources of tension or resentment between East Germans and Poles were the most resonant, and therefore the most influential on popular attitudes in the GDR towards Poland and the Poles. Second, it seeks to determine which official discursive project was prioritized by the SED, and how those priorities changed over the twenty-year period. Third, it analyses the popular response to each discursive project in the GDR. Fourth, it investigates the mutual impact of each project; specifically, whether the normalizing project was indeed undermined by the nation-building efforts. Last, it assesses the impact of each project on interactions between the Poles and East Germans in the GDR.

## **Theoretical approach**

This study draws on, and seeks to integrate, three distinct strands of scholarship. While it is hoped that its main contribution will be to the field of GDR-Polish relations, its conclusions also have significant implications for both memory studies and nationalism theory, particularly the study of nationalism under communism. Together, these areas offer a means of conceptualizing the social context (more precisely, the complex network of state–society relationships) in which East German attitudes towards the Poles developed, and in which they

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<sup>1</sup> Ewa Sidorenko, ‘Which Way to Poland? Re-Emerging from Romantic Unity’, in *Reinventing Poland: Economic and Political Transformation and Evolving National Identity*, ed. by Martin Myant and Terry Cox (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 109–27 (p. 116).

<sup>2</sup> Andrzej Brenz, ‘Zur Problematik kultureller Veränderungen im ländlichen Milieu der polnisch-deutschen Grenzregion’, in *Die offene Grenze. Forschungsbericht polnisch-deutsche Grenzregion (1991-1993)*, ed. by Stanisław Lisiecki, trans. by Ulrich Heiße (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1996), pp. 117–27 (p. 125). All translations into English throughout this thesis are my own unless otherwise stated.

were influenced by both discursive propaganda projects.

Even a cursory survey of the literature relating to East German-Polish relations reveals this to be an underdeveloped area of research, particularly in comparison with work on relations between either state and the Federal Republic (FRG). Burkhard Olschowsky, for instance, has identified what could be termed a hierarchy of (un)interest in the topic on the part of German and Polish scholars. The Poles, he asserts, are generally more active in the field of German-Polish relations than their German counterparts, a fact he attributes partly to their post-Cold War desire for a 'Rückkehr nach Europa [return to Europe]'. The majority of Polish scholars, however, are interested chiefly in Polish-West German interactions; while 229 monographs were published on the FRG between 1989 and 1996, only eight were published on the GDR. The smallest group of all, he adds, is that of German academics researching GDR-Polish relations.<sup>3</sup> Christoph Klessmann offers several explanations for this oversight, suggesting, for instance, that four decades of the FRG's Hallstein Doctrine and its associated *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* (or claim to sole representation of the German nation) may have contributed to associating that state more firmly in popular and academic consciousness with the idea of Polish-German relations in general. He also points out that it was in negotiations between Poland and the Federal Republic, beginning in earnest with Willi Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, that the 'real political problems' seemed to lie, at least from the contemporary Polish perspective, and that this too may have stimulated greater Polish interest in the FRG than in its eastern counterpart.<sup>4</sup> As might be supposed from this, Anglophone scholars scarcely feature in this landscape.<sup>5</sup>

Those works that do concentrate on GDR-Polish relations in particular, moreover, are predominantly lone chapters in edited volumes on other, broader subjects, and thereby subordinate the topic to the study of German-Polish relations or pan-German, even pan-

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<sup>3</sup> Burkhard Olschowsky, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt. Das Verhältnis zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen 1980-1989* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2005), pp. 11–15.

<sup>4</sup> Christoph Klessmann, 'Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR Polen (1949 bis 1989)', in *Die lange Nachkriegszeit. Deutschland und Polen von 1945 bis 1991*, ed. by Andreas Reich and Robert Maier (Braunschweig: Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, 1995), pp. 85–93 (p. 85); Basil Kerski, 'Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen. Versuch einer Bilanz', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 9–25 (p. 13).

<sup>5</sup> Virtually the only exceptions to this are Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations 1945-1962* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); Jonathan R. Zatlín, 'Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989', *Central European History*, 40 (2007), 683–720.

European post-war history.<sup>6</sup> While these and other wider analytical viewpoints are important, and will be discussed below, the peculiarities of the East German-Polish relationship merit more explicit and extensive treatment. A further deficiency of the field, and one more pertinent to this project, is the preponderance of work concentrating exclusively on the official, political relations between the two states, and between the SED and the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR). There is, therefore, scope for a study focusing on popular relations and interactions between East Germans and Poles. In addition, there are two main theoretical points that need to be made about the way in which these relations should be viewed.

### ***Relations from a bi- and multilateral perspective***

Official relations between the two states have been examined on a variety of levels by scholars, though a general tendency over the last decade is discernible towards more complex and multilateral comparative frameworks. Those studies adopting a bilateral perspective devote particular attention to the personal relationship between the East German and Polish leaders. The personalities and prejudices of Władisław Gomułka and Walter Ulbricht especially are cited as crucial formative influences on relations throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The deeply entrenched mistrust of these old communists, rooted in pre-war personal experiences and accorded disproportionate importance by the dominant role each played in his own government, hindered rapprochement and heightened existing tensions over border security and relations with the Federal Republic.<sup>7</sup> This antagonism is contrasted with the far

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<sup>6</sup> The standout exceptions to this are *Grenze der Hoffnung. Geschichte und Perspektiven der Grenzregion an der Oder*, ed. by Helga Schultz and Alan Nothnagle (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1996); Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast and Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße. Frankfurt (Oder) - Słubice, Guben - Gubin und Görlitz - Zgorzelec 1945-1995* (Berlin: Arno Spitz, 2000); Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc; Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003); Olschowsky, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt*; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków w prasie i literaturze Niemieckiej Republiki Demokratycznej w okresie powstania Solidarności i stanu wojennego* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007); Daniel Logemann, *Das polnische Fenster: Deutsch-polnische Kontakte im staatssozialistischen Alltag Leipzigs, 1972-1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012); Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Polish-German Relations: The Miracle of Reconciliation* (Opladen, Berlin and Toronto: Barbara Budrich, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Franciszek Ryszka, 'Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR Polen', in *Die lange Nachkriegszeit. Deutschland und Polen von 1945 bis 1991*, ed. by Andreas Reich and Robert Maier (Braunschweig: Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, 1995), pp. 95–103 (p. 98); Kerski, 'Versuch einer Bilanz', pp. 16–17; Mieczysław Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ewa Krauß

more cordial and pragmatic working relationship of their successors, Edward Gierek and Erich Honecker, which manifested in rapid diplomatic advances culminating in the 1972 border opening. Honecker's wariness of Gierek's successors, in turn, is highlighted as a contributing factor in the deterioration of relations in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Another principal focus of bilateral studies is the economic and cultural cooperation between both states. This flourished during the open-border period, which saw the number of partnerships between towns, districts (that is, GDR *Bezirke* and Polish *voivodeships*) and cultural organizations proliferate significantly. Even prior to the 1970s, however, economic links in particular had been growing steadily, and for much of its forty-year history the GDR was Poland's second most important trading partner, behind the USSR. As several authors have pointed out, on the other hand, this was an unequal partnership: the PZPR valued economic cooperation far more highly than did the SED; and both sides favoured closer links with the more robust economy of the Federal Republic rather than with each other.<sup>9</sup>

However, as various scholars, most recently Katarzyna Stokłosa, have made clear, a bilateral perspective is inadequate for any comprehensive assessment of the influences and policy shifts informing GDR-Polish relations.<sup>10</sup> Two broader comparative frameworks that must also be taken into account are both states' attitudes towards the Federal Republic, in

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(Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 59–79 (pp. 61, 69–71); Mieczysław Tomala, “‘Erzählen Sie keinen Unsinn, Genosse Ulbricht!’ Die VR Polen und die DDR in den 60er Jahren: Offizielle Harmonie und internes Mißtrauen’, *WeltTrends*, 13 (1995), 111–31. A good summary of the effect of pre-war communist experiences on post-war attitudes and policies can be found in Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 1–11; Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Klaus Ziemer, ‘Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen in den 80er Jahren’, in *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert – der Fall DDR*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996), pp. 653–64 (pp. 653–54, 661–62); Olschowsky, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur R. Rachwald, ‘Poland and Germany: From Foes to Friends?’, in *The Germans and Their Neighbors*, ed. by Dirk Verheyen and Christian Sjøe (Boulder, CO and others: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 231–49 (pp. 246–47); Klessmann, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen’, pp. 87–88. On cultural links, see Józef Fischer, ‘Die kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen Polen und der DDR in den Jahren 1949-1990’, in *Die lange Nachkriegszeit. Deutschland und Polen von 1945 bis 1991*, ed. by Andreas Reich and Robert Maier (Braunschweig: Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, 1995), pp. 105–18; Willi Przybylski, ‘Kulturelle und gesellschaftliche Kontakte zwischen Frankfurt und dem polnischen Umland im Rahmen des “Kulturbundes” 1970-1990’, in *Grenze der Hoffnung. Geschichte und Perspektiven der Grenzregion an der Oder*, ed. by Helga Schultz and Alan Nothnagle (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1996), pp. 60–63; Wolfgang Templin, ‘Thesen zu den kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen’, in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 269–73.

<sup>10</sup> Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Polen und die deutsche Ostpolitik 1945-1990* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), p. 11.

what might be described as a triangular relationship, and their positions as fellow members of the Eastern bloc.

Relations with West Germany were of central, yet ambivalent significance during the entire twenty-year period. For the most part, and increasingly from the early 1970s onwards, the FRG was a point of division between the GDR and Poland, most notably regarding its political and economic relations with both states. Both the SED and the PZPR were constantly worried at the prospect of the other socialist state's establishing closer relations with the FRG unilaterally, at their expense.<sup>11</sup> This insecurity led the SED to develop what became known informally as the 'Ulbricht doctrine', whereby the party insisted on West German recognition of the GDR as a *sine qua non* of other Eastern bloc states' diplomatic relations with the FRG.<sup>12</sup> On occasion, however, the SED and PZPR found common ground in their stance towards the Federal Republic. The clearest example of this concerned the Oder–Neisse border: whereas the GDR offered at least nominal recognition of the border and its inviolability with the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty, the FRG made no such assurances for the first two post-war decades. While this remained the case, the GDR was in a position to claim both moral authority and the role of indispensable buffer between Poland and an ostensibly fascist and revanchist West Germany.<sup>13</sup> This dynamic was endangered by the Federal Republic's *Ostpolitik* of the late 1960s and the Polish-West German reconciliation to which it gave rise; following this, association with the GDR grew increasingly irrelevant to the Poles.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rachwald, 'Poland and Germany', pp. 233–37; Ziemer, 'Die Beziehungen', pp. 659–61; Kerski, 'Versuch einer Bilanz', pp. 17–18; Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen', pp. 68–71. This is essentially the premise of Stokłosa, *Polen und die deutsche Ostpolitik*.

<sup>12</sup> Klessmann, 'Die politischen Beziehungen', p. 89; Douglas Selvage, 'Poland, the GDR and the "Ulbricht Doctrine"', in *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East Central Europe*, ed. by Mieczysław B. Biskupski (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), pp. 227–41.

<sup>13</sup> Erhard Crome and Jochen Franzke, 'Die DDR und Polen. Betrachtungen über das Verhältnis der Ostdeutschen zu den Polen', in *Die verschwundene Diplomatie. Beiträge zur Außenpolitik der DDR: Festschrift für Claus Montag*, ed. by Erhard Crome, Jochen Franzke, and Raimund Krämer (Berlin: Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003), pp. 110–23 (p. 110); Burkhard Olschowsky, 'Die staatlichen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 41–58 (p. 41).

<sup>14</sup> Rachwald, 'Poland and Germany', p. 235. As Opilowska points out, it was in part the SED's awareness of this growing irrelevance, and of the need to 'stay in the game' where relations with Poland were concerned, that motivated the party to pursue negotiations for the border opening in the early 1970s. See Elżbieta Opilowska, "'The Miracle on the Oder': The Opening of the Polish-German Border in the 1970s and Its Impact on Polish-German Relations in the Borderland', *East Central Europe*, 41.2–3 (2014), 204–22 (p. 207) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/18763308-04103003>>.

Scholars situating GDR-Polish relations within an Eastern bloc context have typically followed the model of a dominant Soviet centre dictating the freedom its satellites were able to exercise in domestic and foreign policy, to an extent that varied with the vicissitudes of Soviet strategic interests throughout the Cold War. Sheldon Anderson, for instance, explains that while ‘the Kremlin ultimately decided the fate of the satellite parties’, the latter did enjoy limited room for manoeuvre, and ‘promoted their respective national interests whenever possible’; in short, whenever this did not impinge on Soviet security or propaganda concerns.<sup>15</sup> This arrangement also shaped the value system within the bloc, with each satellite state’s relationship with or developmental proximity to the USSR serving as the foremost marker of prestige. The coveted position of second place behind the Soviet Union was therefore the object of ‘bitter competition’ between the bloc states, and some historians have interpreted many of the twists and turns of GDR-Polish relations in light of this rivalry.<sup>16</sup> A recurrent theme in this connection is the superciliousness exhibited by the SED towards other ruling parties in the bloc, and towards the PZPR in particular. This was expressed primarily as an assumption of ideological superiority: the SED presented itself as an exemplar of Marxist-Leninist conformity, and frequently denounced the alleged doctrinal laxity of its Polish counterpart’s implementation of socialism.<sup>17</sup> Related to this was the considerable economic self-confidence both the SED and the East German populace displayed in many of their interactions with Poles; as several commentators have remarked, this at times bordered on arrogance, and exacerbated anti-Polish sentiment during the late 1970s and 1980s especially.<sup>18</sup> The general picture that emerges, therefore, is one of constant tension between

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc*, pp. 4–5. More on the internal relations of the Eastern bloc can be found in Csaba Békés, ‘East Central Europe, 1953-1956’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1: Origins*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 334–52; Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, ‘Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962-1975’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 134–57; Vladislav M. Zubok, ‘Soviet Foreign Policy from Détente to Gorbachev, 1975-1985’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3: Endings*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 89–111.

<sup>16</sup> Ryszka, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen’, pp. 96–97; Ziemer, ‘Die Beziehungen’, pp. 653–54.

<sup>17</sup> As a result, the Poles came to refer to the GDR as a ‘stronghold of Stalinism’: Tomala, ‘Erzählen Sie keinen Unsinn, Genosse Ulbricht!’, p. 112. See also Ziemer, ‘Die Beziehungen’, pp. 655–56; Crome and Franzke, ‘Die DDR und Polen’, pp. 114–16.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 144; Andreas Staab, *National Identity in Eastern Germany: Inner Unification Or Continued Separation?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Patrice G. Poutrus, Jan C. Behrends, and Dennis Kuck, ‘Historische Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in den neuen Bundesländern’, *Aus Politik und*

bloc and state interests, though the former remained paramount.<sup>19</sup> Anderson's metaphor of the 'filial' East German-Polish relationship is an apt encapsulation of this. Both states, he suggests, were 'like siblings born into the Soviet family: No matter how much they quarreled, they could not leave it'.<sup>20</sup> This reading is also reflected in Ludwig Mehlhorn's now famous conception of the 'zwangsverordnete Freundschaft', or 'mandated friendship', into which both states were locked against their will.<sup>21</sup> Stokłosa's description of GDR-Polish diplomatic exchanges as mere 'Freundschaftstheater' ('sham friendship') expresses a similar idea, referring more specifically to the static and ritualized nature of much of this activity for the final two decades in particular.<sup>22</sup> Much scholarly debate has centred on the appropriateness or otherwise of these characterizations, with some authors, such as Helga Schultz, criticizing them as unhelpful simplifications.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, however, the model of the 'mandated friendship' has been endorsed even by recent research, and this project also draws on its insights.

Each of these levels of analysis is indispensable to a thorough understanding of popular attitudes towards Poland and the Poles in the GDR. In concert, they provide a more complete picture of the broader political and ideological environment in which these attitudes were generated and sustained. Equally importantly, awareness of these wider contexts also ensures that other factors influencing the mindset of the East German populace that cannot be ascribed to either propaganda project are not neglected.

### ***Relations at the intersection of nationalism and memory***

There are a number of advantages for a project of this sort in examining and evaluating the

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*Zeitgeschichte*, 39 (2000), 15–21. The SED demonstrated similar condescension in its interactions with other fellow socialist populations: Zatlin, 'Scarcity and Resentment', pp. 704–7; Mike Dennis, 'Asian and African Workers in the Niches of Society', in *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, ed. by Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 87–123.

<sup>19</sup> Kerski, 'Versuch einer Bilanz', pp. 14–15.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc*, p. 2. A similar comparison is made in Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998), pp. 90–91.

<sup>21</sup> Ludwig Mehlhorn, 'Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 35–40.

<sup>22</sup> Katarzyna Stokłosa, 'VR Polen und die DDR: Die Bedeutung der Grenze für das "Freundschaftstheater"', in *Partner oder Kontrahenten? Deutsch-polnische Nachbarschaft im Jahrhundert der Diktaturen*, ed. by Mike Schmeitzner and Katarzyna Stokłosa, trans. by Torsten Lorenz (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 193–203 (p. 193).

<sup>23</sup> Helga Schultz, 'Geschichtsbilder in der deutsch-polnischen Grenzregion', *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*, 27 (2009), 319–26 (p. 319).

fields of nationalism and memory studies in an integrative manner. Both fields are by nature interdisciplinary: Patrick Hutton, for instance, describes memory as ‘the quintessential interdisciplinary interest’,<sup>24</sup> while Paul Lawrence, in his survey of nationalism theory, emphasizes the progress that has been made through cross-disciplinary collaboration.<sup>25</sup> Both are, moreover, united by the debt they owe to the postmodern or ‘narrative’ turn in scholarship of the 1980s, as well as to the more recent ‘memory boom’ that followed the demise of European communism in the early 1990s.<sup>26</sup> The advances made by both these revolutions form much of the conceptual background to this study. Combined, then, nationalism and memory studies constitute a solid basis for the modelling of state–society relations in the GDR, and therefore of the landscape in which the discursive projects functioned.

As has been pointed out by a number of its most eminent theoreticians, nationalism studies has become an increasingly diverse field over the last two decades.<sup>27</sup> Despite this variety, on the other hand, the bulk of research remains concerned above all with investigating the origins of nations, national identities and nationalist ideology or sentiment. This is of limited help to a project of this sort, largely because it sheds little light on the development of national identities or ideologies after their consolidation. The sociologist Michael Billig offers a sound critique of this shortcoming, pointing out that an exclusive focus on the construction of national identities and states ‘ignores how these things are maintained once they have been achieved [...] it is as if nationalism suddenly disappears’. Billig underscores the importance of this omission by drawing a distinction between ‘hot’ nationalism, the overt variety commonly fixated on by scholars, and his own conception of ‘banal nationalism’ (on which more below), defining this almost as an interstitial form of

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), p. xiii.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Lawrence, *Nationalism: History and Theory* (Harlow and others: Pearson, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> On the impact of the ‘narrative turn’, see Lawrence, *Nationalism*, pp. 198–206. On the ‘memory boom’, see Mary Fulbrook, ‘History-Writing and “Collective Memory”’, in *Writing the History of Memory*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 65–88; Silke Arnold-de Simine and Susannah Radstone, ‘The GDR and the Memory Debate’, in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. by Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 19–34; Christian Karner and Bram Mertens, ‘Introduction: Memories and Analogies of World War II’, in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. by Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2013), pp. 1–21.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 221–28; John Breuilly, ‘Historians and the Nation’, in *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Peter Burke (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2002), pp. 55–87 (p. 85).



nationalism sustaining the associated identity between periods of salience or explicit political articulation.<sup>28</sup>

Of more interest and utility to this project, therefore, are those aspects of nationalism theory that problematize the maintenance of nations: the means by which national identities are sustained and reinforced; the channels through which nationalist ideologies are disseminated; and, in particular, the respective roles of elites and the broader populace in such processes. The insights offered by what might be referred to as discursive constructionism are especially promising in this respect. Born of the postmodernist shift in the early 1980s, and more specifically of a perceived need to develop a ‘more rounded theory of nationalism’, discursive constructionism attempts to incorporate an analysis of the cultural sphere into earlier modernist work on the structural, political and economic bases of nationalism, in order to account more plausibly for the emotional resonance of national identities in particular societies.<sup>29</sup> Among the most important advances this school has made in the field is its conceptualization of national identity as a process, as opposed to a static construct. This process of national *identification* is understood as highly fluid, more akin to a form of affiliation than an assigned and immutable attribute.<sup>30</sup> Such a dynamic interpretation stems from the body of social psychology theory on which discursive constructionism tentatively draws, wherein nationalism is viewed as a specific form of self-categorization in a social context.<sup>31</sup> This is neatly encapsulated in Benedict Anderson’s noteworthy contribution,

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1995), pp. 43–44.

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence, *Nationalism*, pp. 172–80.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Maxwell, ‘Nationalism as Classification: Suggestions for Reformulating Nationalism Research’, *Nationalities Papers*, 46.4 (2018), 539–55 (pp. 541–42) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2018.1448376>>. Maxwell advocates replacing the term ‘identification’ with ‘classification’ in most contexts, arguing that the latter is less ambiguous and provides more information about ‘who is doing the classifying’; nonetheless, both terms succeed in conveying the fluidity of the process.

<sup>31</sup> John C. Turner and P. J. Oakes, ‘Self-Categorization Theory and Social Influence’, in *Psychology of Group Influence*, ed. by P. B. Paulus, 2nd edn (Hove and London: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1989), pp. 233–75; Craig Calhoun, ‘Social Theory and the Politics of Identity’, in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 9–36; Rupert Brown, ‘Social Identity Theory: Past Achievements, Current Problems and Future Challenges’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30 (2000), 745–78. Theorists such as Billig, John Breuilly and Liah Greenfeld have questioned the validity of applying psychological frames of reference to nationalism, arguing that grouping the latter with other forms of individual identification risks undervaluing or ‘flattening’ its unique social and cultural qualities: Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 60–69; Liah Greenfeld, ‘The Political Significance of Culture’, in *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, by Liah Greenfeld (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), pp. 135–44 (p. 144). While such reservations are useful in reiterating the central importance of a discursive analysis, however, they are misplaced in their blanket rejection of the individual perspective. National identification is undoubtedly also a personal, cognitive process, and an appreciation of the interactions between its personal and collective levels of operation is vital to any understanding of its affective power.

which defines a nation, in the by now almost standardized formulation, as an ‘imagined community’, that is, a level of social identification given substance and significance in the minds of its members. As Anderson explains, all nations must be ‘imagined’ in this way, as ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’.<sup>32</sup> This additional layer of abstraction distinguishes nations from other, more localized communities, as well as highlighting the central importance of both the psychological and the social (in other words, the individual and the collective) levels of their existence.

As Billig points out, however, although these collective constructions are consciously asserted only intermittently, they could not persist without constant reaffirmation, or reimagining, through everyday discursive practices.<sup>33</sup> For present purposes, ‘discourse’ can be defined both broadly, as in Roxanne Lynn Doty’s conception of a ‘structured, relational totality’,<sup>34</sup> and more strictly, as linguistic or other semiotic interactions that craft this totality in the collective imagination of social actors. Individual and collective identities, in other words, are realized and perpetuated ‘through reifying, figurative discourses continually launched by politicians, intellectuals and media people’, as well as by ordinary citizens. These discourses are disseminated throughout the political, social and cultural life of a state: in political speeches, mass communication, the arts, popular culture, education, sport and, most obviously, militarization. The nationalistic content of these discourses may be overt, at times of political crisis, or implicit, existing only in the form of shared assumptions about national belonging. In either case, it is changeable, evolving over time as a result of its reiteration in changing political and social circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

The study of this process in a particular social environment calls for meticulous, contextualized and interdisciplinary analysis of its discursive practices and relations. Billig’s

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<sup>32</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London and New York: Verso, 2006), pp. 6–7.

<sup>33</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>34</sup> Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Richard C. M. Mole, ‘Discursive Identities/Identity Discourses and Political Power’, in *Discursive Constructions of Identity in European Politics*, ed. by Richard C. M. Mole (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–21 (pp. 1–2); Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, ‘The Discursive Construction of National Identities’, *Discourse & Society*, 10.2 (1999), 149–73 (pp. 153–54); Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 11, 93–98.

notion of ‘banal nationalism’ is particularly promising as a means of addressing this analytical need. In his seminal study of the same name, Billig explains the concept as a ‘stretching’ of the term ‘nationalism’ to encompass the ‘collection of ideological habits [...] which reproduce existing nations as nations’ in everyday life. Established nation states, he elaborates, practice the ‘continual “flagging”, or reminding, of nationhood’, through frequent, inconspicuous references to an assumed national collectivity in political and media discourses as well as cultural output. Indeed, this flagging is normally so unremarkable, yet omnipresent, that it is ‘not consciously registered’ by the populace most of the time; nonetheless, it serves to inculcate a sense of belonging that can be mobilized when desired by those deemed to represent the national interest. This conceptualization of nationalism as a process dependent on ubiquitous, yet ‘overlooked’ reinforcement builds on that of Anderson and other constructionists, by outlining more precisely and plausibly the means by which national communities are imagined, and by pointing up the ways in which their constructed nature is occluded over time, becoming ‘contemporary common sense’.<sup>36</sup> It is for this reason that theorists such as Brubaker have defined nationalism as ‘fundamentally not a thing *in* the world, but a perspective *on* the world’.<sup>37</sup> This last point is reiterated in the work of Billig, Brubaker and others by their incorporation of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’. In viewing national identification as a variety of ‘habitus’, that is, as a ‘complex’ of shared values and behavioural patterns, both authors are able to draw on Bourdieu’s understanding of how such social fabrics are ‘internalized’ by a populace, becoming ‘second nature’ and therefore able to function as a motivational and normative influence on future social action.<sup>38</sup> This in turn is vital to explaining the emotive power of nationalist ideology and sentiment. Together, then, these explanatory devices link the two definitions of ‘discourse’ set out above, grounding a community’s linguistic and semiotic interactions within an influential, yet invisible ‘relational totality’. They therefore offer at least a preliminary structure for charting the quotidian operation and maintenance of a particular national identity.

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<sup>36</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, pp. 6–10.

<sup>37</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, ‘Ethnicity as Cognition’, *Theory and Society*, 33.1 (2004), 31–64 (p. 32; emphasis in original).

<sup>38</sup> Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, p. 42; Rogers Brubaker, ‘Ethnicity without Groups’, *European Journal of Sociology*, 43.2 (2002), 163–89 (p. 166); de Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak, ‘Discursive Construction’, p. 153. See also Suzanne Scollon, ‘Political and Somatic Alignment: Habitus, Ideology and Social Practice’, in *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity*, ed. by Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 167–98.

An underlying assumption throughout the foregoing is that both memory and national identification must also be situated within a broader framework of power relations. This, as Özkirimli explains, stems from the Foucauldian understanding of discourse not as a mere ‘disembodied collection of statements’, but as interactions embedded in social contexts and political institutions; it is from these that discourses derive their significance and formative power. The task of researchers is therefore to ‘trace the dynamics of power-making’ through the institutions and relationships within a particular society, thereby ‘uncovering the conditions which allowed a certain discourse to emerge’.<sup>39</sup> Foucault defines these conditions in the widest possible sense, stressing that ‘power relations are rooted in the whole network of the social’.<sup>40</sup> Any examination of nationalistic or memory discourses must therefore take into account both the official and unofficial, the elite and the popular, levels on which they are propagated and internalized. It is for this reason, among others, that some scholars have proposed supplanting Billig’s term ‘banal nationalism’ with ‘everyday nationalism’, arguing—with good reason—that the latter better conceptualizes the interaction and contestation between multiple state and non-state actors in the processes of nation-maintenance, as well as the fluidity and sheer confusion of those processes.<sup>41</sup> In the memory studies literature, this idea is conveyed variously as the interplay of hegemonic and subaltern discourses, ‘memory politics’<sup>42</sup> and the competition between different ‘memory communities’.<sup>43</sup> These are different, yet very closely related ways to describe the same phenomenon; all conceive of memory relations within a society as a constant struggle between a variety of alternative narratives concerning a community’s identity or its past, each of which enjoys some measure of social, and possibly institutional, support, and thereby

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 117–50; Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 207–08.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, in *Power*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley et al, *Essential Works of Foucault: 1954-1984*, 3 (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 326–48 (p. 345).

<sup>41</sup> For example, Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, ‘Hot, Banal and Everyday Nationalism: Bilingual Road Signs in Wales’, *Political Geography*, 28.3 (2009), 164–73 (pp. 165–67) <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.03.002>>.

<sup>42</sup> Tomasz Leszkowicz, ‘Ostatnia ofensywa na froncie historycznym? Polityka pamięci historycznej Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej w latach 1981–1986’, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 46.2 (2014), 103–20.

<sup>43</sup> Arnold-de Simine and Radstone, ‘The GDR and the Memory Debate’, p. 19; Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), 179–97 (p. 189).

serves the political interests (broadly defined) of its supporters.<sup>44</sup> This struggle, conducted through all the channels of discursive dissemination outlined above, seeks to establish one narrative, one particular interpretation of an event or a people, as socially and politically dominant, received as ‘common sense’ by the majority of the populace. This, in turn, places its supporters in a position to exclude all alternatives from public discourse. Since this dominance can never endure, however, the result is a permanently and ‘essentially contested’ memory landscape.<sup>45</sup> The most relevant encapsulation of this is provided by Douglas Bell’s concept of ‘mythscape’, explained as a ‘discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of people’s memories and the formation of nationalist myths is debated, contested and subverted incessantly’.<sup>46</sup> As Christian Karner and Bram Mertens assert, this serves as a useful framework for integrating nationalism and memory theory, allowing researchers to apply the insights offered by both to the study of the struggles for discursive hegemony in particular polities.<sup>47</sup>

The naturalization of particular nationalist and memory discourses as ‘common sense’ should therefore be understood as both an inherent societal development and an elite political objective. Much of the value of the present project lies in its attempt to incorporate both, or indeed all, social actors in its investigation of East German nationalism and memory cultures, and to identify points of convergence and divergence in their goals and perceptions. Discursive constructionism as an explanatory model conceptualizes these as psychological, social and political processes; an appreciation of this triad is vital to any comprehensive understanding of the interplay of nationalisms and memories within and between both post-war communist states.

Indeed, this model is no less applicable to communist states, whose ruling parties strove, through their virtual monopolization of public discourse, to remould their citizenries to conform to the ideals of the ‘new socialist personality’.<sup>48</sup> As is by now well established in

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<sup>44</sup> Anna Wylegała, ‘Child Migrants and Deportees from Poland and Ukraine after the Second World War: Experience and Memory’, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 22.2 (2015), 292–309 (p. 295) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2015.1008411>>.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity After the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 238.

<sup>46</sup> Duncan S. A. Bell, ‘Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 54.1 (2003), 63–81 (p. 66) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0007131032000045905>>.

<sup>47</sup> Karner and Mertens, ‘Memories and Analogies of World War II’, pp. 7–9.

<sup>48</sup> Angela Brock, ‘Producing the “Socialist Personality”? Socialisation, Education, and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behaviour’, in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 220–52. See also

the literature, communism and nationalism were intertwined long before 1945, and throughout the post-war period, communist parties in the Soviet satellite states pursued a strategy of mobilizing nationalist sentiment to validate their rule, striving to establish themselves in the popular mind with the representation and defence of the nation. This was attempted through a range of propaganda campaigns, promises and rhetorical contortions—the ‘instrumental use of theory’.<sup>49</sup> This approach had its roots in classical Marxism,<sup>50</sup> and had begun with the various ‘national lines’ imposed by the Comintern during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> Aside from capitalizing on nationalist sentiment to outmanoeuvre their political rivals during the initial ‘bogus’ coalition phase of their takeovers,<sup>52</sup> local communists were instructed by Moscow to improve their standing with the population by casting themselves as ‘heirs to national traditions and guardians of the national interests’.<sup>53</sup> To this end, they appropriated national heroes and cultural figures in a ‘scissors-and-paste job’ of selective national reconstruction,<sup>54</sup> and supported policies seen as advancing the interests of their nation state, even if this put them at odds with communists elsewhere in the bloc. Some of the most thoroughgoing indigenization was carried out in Poland, where correspondingly greater prominence was given to national themes and symbols even during High Stalinism.<sup>55</sup>

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Martin Sabrow, ‘Dictatorship as Discourse: Cultural Perspectives on SED Legitimacy’, in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 195–211; Zofia Wóycicka, *Arrested Mourning: Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland, 1944-1950*, trans. by Jasper Tilbury, Warsaw Studies in Contemporary History, 2 (Frankfurt am Main and others: Peter Lang, 2013); Tom Dickens, ‘The Political Slogan in Communist Czechoslovakia (1948–89)’, *Central Europe*, 15.1–2 (2017), 58–87 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790963.2017.1412719>>.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> On this, see Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradiction?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Mevius, *Agents of Moscow*, pp. 23–24; Martin Mevius, ‘Reappraising Communism and Nationalism’, *Nationalities Papers*, 37.4 (2009), 377–400 (pp. 383–84) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990902985637>>; Jan C. Behrends, ‘The Stalinist Volonté Générale: Legitimizing Communist Statehood (1935–1952)’, *East Central Europe*, 40.1–2 (2013), 37–73.

<sup>52</sup> George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe: 1945-1992* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Mevius, ‘Reappraising Communism and Nationalism’, p. 388.

<sup>54</sup> George Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe* (London: Hurst, 2000), p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> Jan C. Behrends, ‘Nation and Empire. Dilemmas of Legitimacy during Stalinism in Poland (1941-1956)’, *Nationalities Papers*, 37.4 (2009), 443–66 (pp. 453–54) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990902985686>>. For more on this, see Krzysztof Tyszka, *Nacjonalizm w komunizmie: ideologia narodowa w Związku Radzieckim*

In what became the GDR, meanwhile, German division and the stigmatization of National Socialist ideology rendered a straightforward exploitation of German nationalism problematic for the SED; nonetheless, the party pursued a nation-building project of sorts throughout the twenty-year period that is the focus of study here.<sup>56</sup> This strategy was more than simply the placing of ‘old wine in new bottles’, as the SED did not simply repackage existing national narratives wholesale, but added their own ingredients and inflections to them. The process therefore more closely resembled the continuation of a national tapestry that had already begun. As Orla-Bukowska explains, any new political system, however ‘radical’, ‘cannot completely sever but must tie into the threads, colors, and patterns of the tapestry delineating the national persona’.<sup>57</sup> This echoes an idea well established in nationalism theory, particularly its ethnosymbolist branch, which holds that any nationalist construction, whether elite-driven or otherwise, must build on ‘relevant pre-existing social and cultural networks’ to be received as authentic by the populace.<sup>58</sup> This applies to all the identity constructions promoted by different memory communities; all derive from, and must remain connected to, the same pool of fundamental nationalist values, symbols and self-conceptions, though each may develop from them in a different direction. In short, the SED were forced to take into account the existent shape of collective memory in their territory; indeed, they were themselves products of it. As will be explored throughout the thesis, in at least some cases, nation-building policies were pursued because SED members—in both the leadership and the rank and file—were themselves nationalists, and acted on their own chauvinistic sentiment. ‘After all’, as José Faraldo has remarked, ‘how could communists avoid the nationalist education and the national mental models many of them had received?’

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*i Polsce Ludowej* (Warsaw: Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2004); T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2006); Michael Fleming, *Communism and Nationalism in Poland, 1944-1950* (London: Routledge, 2010); Marcin Zaremba, *Im nationalen Gewande. Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944-1980*, trans. by Andreas R. Hofmann (Osnabrück: fibre, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> The most comprehensive work on official GDR nationalism remains Joanna McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation in the Former GDR* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, ‘New Threads on an Old Loom: National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland’, in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. by Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 177–209 (p. 178).

<sup>58</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 129–31. Whitmeyer refers to this phenomenon as ‘latent nationalism’: Joseph M. Whitmeyer, ‘Elites and Popular Nationalism’, *British Journal of Sociology*, 53.3 (2002), 321–41 (p. 337).

The national was not a mere ideology but a mental context'.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the SED were unable to replace their national 'tapestry' entirely, but could only add to it, and were therefore compelled to select 'strands and beads which could be sewn into the construct painstakingly fashioned over the course of centuries'.<sup>60</sup> This became a source of considerable difficulty for the party leadership, as they proved incapable of making their additions to the national tapestry without pulling on a variety of adjacent threads that they had not intended to touch, jeopardizing both the utility and the integrity of their nation-building project.

## **Historical context**

This, then, was the backdrop against which popular conceptions of Poland and its people took shape, and both propaganda projects were pursued, over the life of the SED-state. While the entire forty-year period is of course important for an understanding of the evolution of East German attitudes towards the Poles, this thesis concentrates on the two decades between 1965 and 1985. This period is long enough to allow generational changes in East Germans' views to be discerned and charted. This time frame has also been chosen, however, because it represents a period of relative stability in the domestic politics and international situation of the GDR. The major upheavals of the immediate post-war period, the reconstruction years and the 1953 uprising lie outside it, as does the destabilization and eventual dissolution of the state in the late 1980s. This period can be characterized as the time in which the SED consolidated its rule and attempted to 'normalize' its ideology, and is therefore the most appropriate time frame to examine in order to discern that ideology at work among the populace.

*Normalization* has been conceived of by scholars such as Mary Fulbrook as a theoretical 'ideal type', an abstract device that can be applied to a variety of historical contexts to map and compare processes by which stability emerges and is sustained in particular societies. These processes are generally divided into three analytically distinct but interrelated aspects: stabilization (whereby norms and expectations are established); routinization (in which those norms gradually become part of everyday life that must be negotiated); and internalization (in which subsequent generations grow up with those norms

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<sup>59</sup> José M. Faraldo, 'Introducing Polish Identities', in *Europe, Nationalism, Communism: Essays on Poland* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 7–11 (p. 9).

<sup>60</sup> Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads on an Old Loom', pp. 178–79.



as aspects of social reality to which they must decide how to relate).<sup>61</sup> In the East German context, historians such as Fulbrook and Ina Merkel have applied the concept of normalization to explore how these processes functioned within the GDR, and to investigate the various meanings East Germans may have given to the idea of living a ‘normal life’ in a dictatorship. It has been suggested that the term is inappropriate to apply to the GDR in this way, by those who argue that it should be used in a more specific, limited sense (to refer only to economic reforms in particular socialist states in a tightly focused period, for instance), or by those who object to the use of a word used by the Soviets and many local communists themselves to describe their efforts to reassert control following upheavals in the bloc.<sup>62</sup> ‘Normalization’ has also been criticized by some, including Jan Palmowski, on the grounds that it ‘obstructs, rather than creates, a more sophisticated understanding of how different spheres of power related to everyday life’. The concept, Palmowski asserts, relies on an understanding of ‘normality’ that effaces the plurality of reasons East Germans may have had for participating in party and state structures and organizations, and otherwise contributing to the relative stability of the 1960s and 1970s, and the majority of the 1980s. Moreover, he argues, use of the term risks suggesting that conditions in the GDR were perceived as ‘normal’ by citizens at the time; this is not certain by any means, and is not why the GDR remained stable until 1989.<sup>63</sup> Such criticisms, however, seem to turn on a limited and overly normative understanding of ‘normalization’. Fulbrook’s definition of the concept is more flexible, with wider historical applicability. Rather than as a description of the GDR, she argues, or a normative assertion that its state and societal apparatus in this period should be (or were) considered ‘normal’, the term can be understood as a heuristic device for eliciting meaningful questions about the stability that characterized these middle decades.

It seems clear that the stability of these years had a tangible impact on GDR society, and is a meaningful basis for the periodization of this study. More specifically, the 1965–1985 window roughly corresponds to the period of normalization in the SED-state. The years following the erection of the Berlin Wall were ‘marked by a new normality’ in the GDR, as

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<sup>61</sup> Mary Fulbrook, ‘The Concept of “Normalisation” and the GDR in Comparative Perspective’, in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 1–30.

<sup>62</sup> Fulbrook, ‘The Concept of “Normalisation”’, pp. 2–11.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 311–13.

the SED felt the need to demonstrate to its citizenry the superiority of the socialist system, but also now felt at greater liberty to do so.<sup>64</sup> Having forestalled the threat of demographic haemorrhage in the GDR, the party was no longer gripped by the ‘siege hysteria’ that it had felt prior to the construction of the Wall.<sup>65</sup> 1965 also saw Erich Honecker begin to gain greater power within the SED leadership, reversing some of Ulbricht’s more experimental economic and cultural reforms, and while he would not become general secretary of the party until 1971, the mid 1960s marked the start of his construction of a more conservative political culture with a greater emphasis on material improvements in the present rather than striving for a utopian future.

Naturally, the Wall also created a new normality for the East German populace, in the form of a now ‘insurmountable’ border with the West that an entire subsequent age cohort grew up with.<sup>66</sup> None of this is to argue for the total isolation of the GDR in this period, of course, but the Wall, and the domestic and international consequences of its construction, did usher in a new phase of life in the GDR to some extent. These new conditions came to be folded into the everyday life of ordinary East Germans—to become ‘common sense’, or, in Merkel’s formulation, “‘unquestioned naturalness” (*Selbstverständlichkeit*)<sup>67</sup>—in a process of stabilization and routinization. This was in part the result of a largely implicit agreement between state and populace that at least the economic and social life of the GDR would have to change, with the option of carving out a limited private sphere and a greater emphasis on consumer satisfaction in the economy. In addition to (short-lived) economic reform, this led to minor steps towards decentralization and an increased focus on local, everyday life improvements.<sup>68</sup> This, in turn, encouraged increased popular accommodation to the continued existence of the SED-state for the foreseeable future. While East Germans responded in

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<sup>64</sup> Christian Rau, ‘Socialism from Below: Kommunalpolitik in the East German Dictatorship between Discourse and Practice’, *German History*, 36.1 (2018), 60–77 (p. 61) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghx120>>.

<sup>65</sup> I. R. Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia in the German Democratic Republic’, *German Life and Letters*, 37.1 (1983), 57–70 (p. 61) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.1983.tb00594.x>>.

<sup>66</sup> Ina Merkel, ‘The GDR—A Normal Country in the Centre of Europe’, in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook, trans. by Esther von Richthofen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 194–203 (esp. p. 198). There were of course exceptions to the insurmountability of the Wall. As Merkel points out, however, these transgressions—of ‘objects, people, ideas, metaphors, plots, and so on’—acquired a ‘very special meaning’ by their very status as exceptions.

<sup>67</sup> Merkel, ‘A Normal Country’, p. 200.

<sup>68</sup> Rau, ‘Socialism from Below’, p. 76.

myriad ways, many of these involved learning to operate according to the ‘written and unwritten rules of the game’, and finding ways to lead satisfying lives in the spaces available.<sup>69</sup> An inevitable concomitant of this was that the rules did become more routine for people, in a process of ‘mostly unconscious internalization of at least some of the repeatedly propagated and experienced norms’.<sup>70</sup> This process, however, was not one of passive absorption, or even acceptance, but of continual negotiation and contestation. The 1960s and 1970s were also a period of greater international stability, with the policy of *détente* leading to the emergence of a far less confrontational relationship between the Eastern bloc and the West (as the flashpoints of Cold War violence shifted to South East Asia during the Vietnam War era), and therefore to increasing diplomatic acceptance by the West of the GDR’s existence. The most important manifestation of this, and certainly the most visible, was the achievement of at least *de facto* acceptance by the Federal Republic in the form of Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*.<sup>71</sup> All this, as Merylyn Thomas argues, was ‘instrumental in enabling the GDR leaders [...] to pursue their goal of creating a strong and permanent socialist German state’.<sup>72</sup>

The normality that developed in this context was of course ‘contradictory’, characterized to a large extent by new conflicts and grievances arising from the SED-state’s ambivalent stance towards decentralization and local autonomy, and the party’s failure (or unwillingness) to address local grievances and thus fulfil the promises of this supposed new approach.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the relative international quietude achieved by *détente* was marred by growing East–West tensions from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, and bloc relations remained frosty thereafter.<sup>74</sup> Crucially, however, none of this came to fruition—in the form of the disintegration of the Eastern bloc and the implosion of the East German state—until the very end of the 1980s, with terminal destabilization setting in only with the accession of

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<sup>69</sup> Fulbrook, ‘The Concept of “Normalisation”’, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Working in East Germany: Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961–79* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 11–12.

<sup>71</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, ‘*Détente* in Europe, 1962–1975’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 198–218 (pp. 209–12).

<sup>72</sup> Merylyn Thomas, ‘“Aggression in Felt Slippers”: Normalisation and the Ideological Struggle in the Context of *Détente* and *Ostpolitik*’, in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961–1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 33–51 (esp. pp. 34, 41–43).

<sup>73</sup> Rau, ‘Socialism from Below’.

<sup>74</sup> Olav Njølstad, ‘The Collapse of Superpower *Détente*, 1975–1980’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3: Endings*, ed. by Leffler and Westad, pp. 135–55.

Gorbachev in the USSR in 1985 and the consequent transformation of Soviet attitudes to the communist bloc. This took the form of the abandonment of the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’, which had served as a guarantee of the USSR’s commitment to propping up the GDR since the 1960s. With Gorbachev’s accession to power came increasing frustration with and questioning of Honecker’s ageing leadership.<sup>75</sup> The two decades from 1965 to 1985 therefore constitute a period of stability of the GDR’s borders, its international standing and, arguably, its political leadership.

There is a broad consensus in the literature on the appropriate periodization of the GDR-Polish relationship.<sup>76</sup> As concerns the period prior to 1965, two phases are customarily identified by historians. The first of these encompasses the immediate post-war years, from 1945 to 1950. Relations in this stage were overshadowed by the aftermath of the Second World War, which accentuated the dichotomy between the desire, or at least the duty, of the SED and the PZPR to begin tentative rapprochement between their states, and both populaces’ inability to make the emotional adjustments required.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, policy disputes and a clash of nationalistic legitimacy strategies ensured that even the communists were unable to maintain a united or consistent stance towards one another.<sup>78</sup> This era, in short, laid the groundwork for the combination of historically infused tension and unsettled collaboration that was to characterize the following decades.

The following stage, spanning most of the 1950s, was bookended by two events exemplifying this contradictory relationship. The signing of the treaty of Görlitz/Zgorzelec in 1950, with which the SED officially recognized the new GDR-Polish border, was accompanied in the GDR by what Behrends refers to as a ‘propaganda offensive’, a multifaceted campaign to disseminate the socialist perspective on the new border and its legitimacy, as well as to promote a positive image of Poles more generally.<sup>79</sup> This media campaign was supplemented by a range of cultural endeavours designed to normalize the idea

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<sup>75</sup> Helga Haftendorn, ‘The Unification of Germany, 1985-1991’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 3: Endings*, ed. by Leffler and Westad, pp. 333–55 (esp. pp. 335–57); Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2002), pp. 131–34.

<sup>76</sup> Much of the material in this section has been reworked from Simon Coll, ‘The SED’s Positive Polenbild as a Flawed Instrument of East German-Polish Reconciliation, 1972-1980’ (unpublished master’s thesis, University College London, 2014), pp. 3–7.

<sup>77</sup> Klessmann, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen’, pp. 86–87.

<sup>78</sup> Olschowsky, ‘Die staatlichen Beziehungen’, p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Jan C. Behrends, *Die erfundene Freundschaft. Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und in der DDR (1944-1957)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), p. 266.

of friendship between the two peoples.<sup>80</sup> Such efforts were at best partially successful, as evidenced by the revisionist sentiment, as well as more general anti-Polish abuse, expressed by a vocal minority of the striking workers' groups during the uprising of June 1953.<sup>81</sup> The 1956 uprising in Poland, meanwhile, was received extremely negatively by the SED, whose defensive response endangered the minimal reconciliation thus far attained.<sup>82</sup> The SED rapidly became alarmed at the vigour and extent of the post-Stalinist reforms taking place within Polish society, and was justifiably concerned that they might resonate with the GDR populace.<sup>83</sup> The SED leadership therefore attempted to forestall popular sympathy for Poland by executing what amounted to a smear campaign in the East German press, using the party's monopolization of the media to skew reporting on events related to the reforms, redact the speeches of PZPR leaders and present extracts divorced from their original context, and limit access to the alternative narratives in the Polish press. In so doing, the party attempted to craft an alternative, unsympathetic image of Poland: one of a state whose hasty reforms had left it vulnerable to the depredations of capitalism, and whose nationalist variant of communist ideology had proven itself alien and unreliable.<sup>84</sup> Popular East German reactions to the uprising were varied, with some citizens expressing admiration for the Polish workers' and intellectuals' defiance of the Soviets, but many also expressed the hope that the Soviet response would involve a border revision in the GDR's favour.<sup>85</sup> Reports from the Polish ambassador in East Berlin and various GDR political leaders identified widespread discontent

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<sup>80</sup> Fischer, 'Die kulturellen Beziehungen', pp. 106–7; Przybylski, 'Kulturelle und gesellschaftliche Kontakte', pp. 60–61; Elżbieta Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze. Geteilte Städte an der deutsch-polnischen Grenze', *Eurostudia – Revue Transatlantique de Recherche sur l'Europe*, 7.1–2 (2011), 153–66 (p. 162).

<sup>81</sup> Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen', p. 63; Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 162; Schultz, 'Geschichtsbilder', p. 322; Heidi Roth and Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in Sachsen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 245–89.

<sup>82</sup> Ryszka, 'Die politischen Beziehungen', p. 97; Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen', pp. 61–67.

<sup>83</sup> For a general overview of the 1956 uprising and reforms, see R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and After*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 283–87; Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Volume II: 1725 to the Present*, revised edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 438–40; Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 76–104; Békés, 'East Central Europe'; Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), pp. 484–86.

<sup>84</sup> Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, 'Reaktionen der DDR auf die Oktober-Ereignisse in Polen im Jahre 1956', in *Die DDR – Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 669–96 (pp. 679–90); Beate Ihme-Tuchel, "'Manche haben vom Polyzentrismus geträumt'. Die Reaktion der SED auf die polnische Krise von 1956', in *Die DDR – Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 569–85 (p. 580).

<sup>85</sup> Olschowsky, 'Die staatlichen Beziehungen', p. 43.

with the Oder–Neisse border settlement, and a growing willingness, during the political instability in Poland, to express it.<sup>86</sup> The nebulous intellectual opposition in the GDR also incorporated revisionism into their reformist platform, with such figures as Wolfgang Harich advocating the return of several border territories to the GDR.<sup>87</sup>

The seven years leading from 1965 to the opening of the GDR-Polish border in 1972 are divided more variably by historians, but their accounts are concurrent in their general model of an era of renewed efforts on both sides to reduce mutual distrust and antipathy, which were hampered by disagreements over economic cooperation and, for the first time, the controversial spectre of the Federal Republic, with which both desired closer relations.<sup>88</sup> Overall, however, a steady proliferation of institutional links in the economic and cultural spheres led to the development of an amicable, if delicate, *modus vivendi*, culminating in the negotiations in September 1971 at which the visa-free travel policy was agreed.<sup>89</sup>

The period of the open border, from January 1972 to October 1980, stands out as the most significant phase in relations between the two populations, particularly as concerns those questions of reconciliation and mutual perceptions that are of most interest to this project. The initial years of this phase were marked by positive developments fuelled by both peoples' exuberant response to the new opportunities the open border presented to them. East Germans, particularly those of the younger generations, took pleasure in sampling the more diverse and liberalized Polish culture, while the older generations were, for the most part, gladdened by the opportunity to revisit their former homes as *Heimwehtouristen* ('nostalgia tourists').<sup>90</sup> For their part, Poles capitalized enthusiastically on their newfound access to East German markets and consumer goods. Both populations therefore engaged in at least limited rapprochement, and numerous cross-border friendships, economic partnerships, cultural collaborations and even marriages resulted.<sup>91</sup> Less tangibly, the increased personal contact

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<sup>86</sup> Ruchniewicz, 'Reaktionen der DDR auf die Oktober-Ereignisse in Polen', pp. 675–76.

<sup>87</sup> Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 162.

<sup>88</sup> Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen', pp. 66–73; Olschowsky, 'Die staatlichen Beziehungen', pp. 43–48.

<sup>89</sup> Klessmann, 'Die politischen Beziehungen', p. 89; Czesław Osękowski, 'Der Pass- und Visafreie Personenverkehr zwischen der DDR und Polen in den siebziger Jahren. Politische, wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Auswirkungen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ulrich Heiße (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 123–33 (p. 124).

<sup>90</sup> Jajeśniak-Quast and Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße*, pp. 83–84; Stokłosa, 'Freundschaftstheater', pp. 196–97; Opiłowska, 'The Miracle on the Oder', p. 214.

<sup>91</sup> Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', pp. 163–64; Mehlhorn, 'Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft?', p. 38.

that all this entailed, and which both peoples were enjoying for the first time in over twenty years, succeeded in beginning the overdue process of correcting negative impressions and counteracting prejudice.<sup>92</sup> In so far as this was the SED's aim, however, it quickly proved beyond either the ability or the will of the party to achieve. What Dariusz Wojtaszyn terms the 'initial euphoria' that greeted the border opening proved short-lived, and the remainder of the 1970s saw mounting tension between East Germans and Poles. This tension was principally due to the detrimental impact of large numbers of Polish *Einkaufstouristen* ('shopping tourists') on an already deficient economic system, an impact that became increasingly evident to the East German populace and led to increasingly vocal and xenophobic opposition to the open border. This, along with the complications caused by Polish administrative reforms in the border region in 1975 and the SED leadership's own ambivalence on the matter, contributed to the SED's waning commitment to the open border during the second half of the 1970s.<sup>93</sup> When the border was re-sealed in October 1980, as one of several responses to the Solidarity crisis developing in Poland, both state and popular relations were sourer than before.

As a result of this suspension of relations, the remainder of the 1980s feature as a rather barren period in the literature, consisting of little more than minimal and superficial diplomatic activity punctuated by occasional flashes of conflict.<sup>94</sup> The most notable of these effectively marks a sharp end to the period of normalization explored in this study, representing as it does an escalation of GDR-Polish antagonism. This was the dispute that broke out in the latter half of the decade over the Pomeranian Bight territorial waters, claimed without warning or negotiation by the GDR in 1985 and, for a brief period, defended militarily in what amounted to a minor war between the two nominally allied states; certainly,

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<sup>92</sup> Osękowski, 'Der Pass- und Visafreie Personenverkehr', pp. 124–28; Jajeśniak-Quast and Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße*, pp. 77–87.

<sup>93</sup> Jajeśniak-Quast and Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße*, pp. 88–93; Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków*, p. 52; Zatlin, 'Scarcity and Resentment', pp. 683–85, 690–95; Stokłosa, 'Freundschaftstheater', pp. 198–202; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, 'Offizielle Kontakte zwischen der DDR und Polen in der Grenzregion', in *Zwischenräume. Grenznahe Beziehungen in Europa seit den 1970er Jahren*, ed. by Anita Pretenthaler-Ziegerhofer, Michael Kißener, and Jan Kusber (Innsbruck, Vienna and Bozen: Studienverlag, 2011), pp. 175–83 (p. 179).

<sup>94</sup> Ryszka, 'Die politischen Beziehungen', pp. 102–3; Fischer, 'Die kulturellen Beziehungen', pp. 113–16; Ziemer, 'Die Beziehungen'; Georg W. Strobel, 'Die Beziehungen DDR-Polen in den achtziger Jahren', in *Die DDR – Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 587–604; Kerski, 'Versuch einer Bilanz', pp. 20–23. The most thoroughgoing survey of this decade is Olschowsky, *Einvernehmen und Konflikt*.

Arthur Rachwald has judged this an example of East German revanchism.<sup>95</sup> Relations were also marred from the early 1980s onwards by the mounting economic difficulties in both states, and the protectionist economic and, more damagingly, propaganda strategies each side employed to relieve the pressure. As Jonathan Zatlin has explored in some depth, in response to the consumer goods crisis of the 1980s, the SED chose to capitalize on growing popular resentment of foreigners by engaging in a programme of economic scapegoating, seeking to ‘blame foreigners for [its] own failures’. For a variety of reasons, most notably their perceived ‘excessive’ purchasing habits, migrant workers, in particular Poles, increasingly became the targets of popular racism, and through ‘cynical manipulation’ of these sentiments, the SED attempted to ‘displace popular anger’ that would otherwise have been directed at the state and its leadership.<sup>96</sup> This victimization persisted as the most substantial form of interaction between the two populations until 1989.

There is some degree of variation between these accounts; the tendency of some scholars to combine the final two communist decades is particularly unhelpful, considering the political and relational ruptures that occurred in the 1980s.<sup>97</sup> In general, however, the level of conformity points to a relatively uncontested chronology in this field, with which this study also broadly agrees.

## Methodology and sources

In order to address the research questions outlined above, this thesis follows three broad, interconnected lines of investigation. These correspond with the three ‘levels of cognition’ identified by Eduard Mühle in his survey of the ‘mental maps’ governing German conceptions of Eastern Europe throughout the twentieth century: the level of ‘indirect and impersonal encounters’, mediated through newspapers, books, radio and television; that of ‘indirect personal encounters’ via contact with institutions, visitors and immigrants; and that

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<sup>95</sup> Wojtaszyn, ‘Offizielle Kontakte’, pp. 180–83; Rachwald, ‘Poland and Germany’, p. 236; Olschowsky, ‘Die staatlichen Beziehungen’, pp. 56–57.

<sup>96</sup> Zatlin, ‘Scarcity and Resentment’, pp. 697–701. See also Jonathan R. Zatlin, “‘Polnische Wirtschaft’–“deutsche Ordnung”? Zum Umgang mit Polen in der DDR’, in *Ankunft, Alltag, Ausreise: Migration und interkulturelle Begegnung in der DDR-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Christian Th. Müller and Patrice G. Poutrus, trans. by Christoph Kalter (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), pp. 295–315.

<sup>97</sup> For instance, Klessmann, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen’, pp. 85–86; Ryszka, ‘Die politischen Beziehungen’, p. 100.



of ‘direct personal contacts and experiences’.<sup>98</sup> This serves as a useful device for conceiving of the most relevant levels on which factors shaping East German perceptions of and interactions with the Polish population operated. First, therefore, this study charts the shifts in the content, intensity and means of dissemination of the officially propagated nationalist and normalizing discourses in the GDR, and the ways in which these influenced attitudes towards the Poles.

Second, it investigates what East Germans thought about both official discourses, and how they responded to them. This entails an exploration of what the populace already thought and felt about the Poles, as a result of their (or their families’) wartime experiences or of more recent post-war events, as well as an assessment of how convincing they found the official propaganda, and to what extent they internalized its arguments and its rhetoric. There are of course additional problems of interpretation when making use of opinion research from a communist state. The factors shaping and constraining respondents’ answers need to be taken into account, as do the motivations and even the technical competence of the functionaries conducting—and, just as importantly, reporting on—the research. In the GDR, opinion research was treated as a tool for instruction and policy communication as much as a means of gathering data, and the reporting of results—both within the SED hierarchy and to the wider public—was limited by the need to reflect predetermined positions. As Joanna McKay phrases it, the party conducted opinion research not to ensure that policy matched popular sentiment, but ‘in order to identify areas where the Party’s message was not getting across and where propaganda needed to be improved’.<sup>99</sup> In this respect at least, it is easy to agree with Mary Sarotte’s conclusion that the SED ruled ‘without regard for the people’.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, the party devoted considerable effort to monitoring popular opinion throughout

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<sup>98</sup> Eduard Mühle, ‘The European East on the Mental Map of German Ostforschung’, in *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Eduard Mühle (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 107–30 (pp. 108–9).

<sup>99</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, p. 91. See also Karen Henderson, ‘The Search for Ideological Conformity: Sociological Research on Youth in the GDR under Honecker’, *German History*, 10.3 (1992), 318–34 (pp. 319–20) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gh/10.3.318>>; Mark Allinson, ‘Popular Opinion’, 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 University Press, 2002), pp. 96–111; Peter W. Sperlich, *The East German Social Courts: Law and Popular Justice in a Marxist-Leninist Society* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2007), pp. 28–30.

<sup>100</sup> M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969–1973* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 5.

the communist period,<sup>101</sup> and much of this material remains useful if appropriate caution is applied. In particular, since the SED tolerated and even propagated certain forms of anti-Polonism, and was generally concerned with monitoring those forms of which it did not approve, the subject was certainly not taboo. Its opinion research therefore has some valuable insights to offer. For information about popular opinion in the GDR, as well as the thoughts and feelings of individual citizens, a range of opinion and mood reports prepared by local and regional offices of the security services, the SED and the bloc parties and mass organizations are consulted.

Third, the study examines the various interactions between East Germans and Poles that took place in the GDR over the twenty-year period. This includes both official contacts, principally economic, political or cultural exchanges between representatives of state institutions, and unofficial encounters, such as those with tourists, foreign workers or acquaintances from the other state, as well as off-duty interactions between members of official delegations. Particularly in the latter case, the outcomes of these interactions are also assessed, with a view to identifying links between changes in either discursive project and greater hostility or cordiality between the two populations. Sources for this include material relating to the preparation for and outcome of official exchanges, such as minutes from the meetings of local and regional party centres, mass organizations and local societies, police reports; press coverage of these exchanges; and various forms of written testimony.

The overarching aim of these investigations is to cross-reference the shifts in the official discursive projects, popular attitudes, and the outcomes of both official and unofficial interactions, mapping the interrelationship of these three elements over the twenty-year period in order to reach a conclusion concerning the success and relative impact of the propaganda projects in the GDR. This is accomplished principally through the use of both national and regional archival sources relating to the dissemination of both discursive projects and to official data-gathering efforts to gauge popular reaction to them. A large proportion of the sources consulted are opinion and mood reports compiled at state-wide, *Bezirk* (district) and *Kreis* (region) level by the SED and various mass organizations, notably the Free German Trade Union Confederation (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, FDGB). On the national level, the resources of the Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin are consulted. The

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<sup>101</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, p. 91.

Foundation for the Archives of the Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR (*Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen, SAPMO-BArch*) contains incident reports by various East German parties and mass organizations on incidents of xenophobic statements and behaviour by Germans directed at Poles; reports from the Stasi's Central Analysis and Information Group (*Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe, ZAIG*); library reports summarizing survey data from the Central Institute for Youth Research (*Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, ZIJ*); and more general material relating to GDR-Polish relations in the papers of SED leader Walter Ulbricht. Beyond the Federal Archive, the state archives (*Landes- or Staatsarchiv*) of Saxony are consulted, which contain documentary material from the SED, bloc parties, People's Police (*Volkspolizei*) and the FDGB for the former *Bezirk* Dresden and its constituent *Kreise*. The conclusions reached in this study with the aid of this combination of national and regional evidence will, it is hoped, relate to the fate of these discourses of normalization and reconciliation, and the evolution of popular attitudes towards the Poles both across the GDR as a whole and with an eye to regional specificities and variations.

Every locality in the GDR had its own geographical, demographic and (to a certain extent) historical peculiarities that affected the ways in which political and administrative structures were imposed, and each discursive project propagated and received. In this respect, *Bezirk* Dresden had several features that recommend it as a region on which to focus. First, its territory extended to the GDR-Polish border, encompassing several border settlements, notably the town of Görlitz, which was one of the more significant sites in post-war GDR-Polish rapprochement. Görlitz became one of a number of 'split' towns as a result of the border shift, with the pre-war settlement being divided into Görlitz on the GDR side and Zgorzelec on the Polish side.<sup>102</sup> This gave Görlitz and similar towns a distinctive relationship to the Polish state and people: it ensured that the town and its environs experienced a great deal of contact with the Poles and gave it a prominent role in both official and popular GDR-Polish relations. Notably, it was the location of the 1950 signing of the treaty by which the GDR recognized the Oder–Neisse border. It also received a large proportion of Polish tourists and shoppers during the open-border period in the 1970s, and was therefore the site of much

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<sup>102</sup> For an overview of the particular history of the 'split' towns along the Oder–Neisse border, see Jajeśniak-Quast and Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße*.

of the direct interaction between East Germans and Poles that took place at this time. Second, the *Bezirk*'s capital, the city of Dresden, was the site of some of the more widely publicized wartime devastation, and therefore became a centrepiece of official and unofficial narratives of German wartime suffering and the SED's rhetoric of collective exculpation for the East German populace. In addition, much of the Dresden area lay in one of two regions that were unable to receive Western television throughout the life of the GDR, and which therefore became known (informally) as the 'Valley of the Clueless [*Tal der Ahnungslosen*]'. Indeed, the 'valley' was associated so closely with Dresden that a popular joke held that the initials of the West German public broadcaster ARD stood for 'Außer Raum Dresden [apart from the Dresden area]'.<sup>103</sup> While it appears that living without access to Western programming did not drastically affect East Germans' value systems or their attitudes towards the SED, there is evidence to suggest that a 'distinct "culture of media"' developed in the 'valley'.<sup>104</sup> This is of less importance than the *Bezirk*'s other characteristics, but adds an intriguing dimension to a study focusing on the reception across the GDR more generally of SED propaganda and the development of a popular sense of membership of the socialist community.

## Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized thematically, with each chapter structured around a particular socially constitutive aim of one or both of the two discursive projects. The content and channels of dissemination of both projects serve as the 'spine' of each chapter, providing a framework around which popular reactions to the official discourses, and their impact on popular conceptions of the Polish state and populace, are explored.

The second chapter ('Processing the legacies of war') examines the persistent legacies of the Second World War in what would become the GDR; the often contradictory ways in which both propaganda projects engaged with them; and the ways in which these shaped the outlook of the SED and the East German populace alike over the subsequent decades. The enormity of the rift in the East German-Polish relationship caused by the Nazi terrorization of Poland proved very difficult to overcome—a difficulty compounded by the SED's and the populace's resort to a strategy of exculpation as the cornerstone of their efforts at national

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<sup>103</sup> Hans-Jörg Stiehler, *Leben ohne Westfernsehen. Studien zur Medienwirkung und Mediennutzung in der Region Dresden in der 80er Jahren* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2001), p. 14, n. 14.

<sup>104</sup> K. Peter Etkorn and Hans-Jörg Stiehler, 'The "Valley of the Clueless" – Results from an Historical Experiment', *Communications*, 23.3 (1998), 271–98 <<https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.1998.23.3.271>>.

(re)construction. To this immense burden was added the national outrage, and in some cases the personal traumas,<sup>105</sup> caused by the establishment of the Oder–Neisse border and the transfer of German territories to Poland. This grievance fed into the nascent narrative of German victimhood, and overshadowed popular attitudes towards the Poles for decades.

The following chapters move through the twenty-year period that is the focus of the thesis, tracing the impact of the wartime and immediate post-war developments on East German conceptions of and relations with Poles in these years. The legacies of the war interacted with both propaganda projects, and with the new sources of East German-Polish tension that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, in highly complex ways. These interactions touched on interstate relations within the bloc, and between East and West Germany, as well as on state–society relations within the GDR and popular-level interactions between individual East Germans and Poles, who encountered each other in a variety of contexts. For all this complexity, however, and in spite of the tentative moves towards reconciliation that were made in the 1970s in particular, the overall tenor of these encounters remained negative. This generally manifested as continued antagonism that the SED was unable—and in many cases unwilling—to combat.

Chapter 3 (‘Asserting the socialist brotherhood’) focuses on the SED’s reconciliation project in the first instance. The chapter investigates the ways in which the party tried to conform to the requirements of the post-war political context in which both states found themselves by recasting the East German-Polish relationship as part of the wider ‘family’ of socialist states, and the concomitant depictions of Poland as a valued political, economic and cultural partner. This includes an examination of the doctrine of ‘socialist patriotism’ as an attempt at creating a connective, bloc-wide source of popular identification; the closely related broader inculcation of socialist values among the populace; and the use of fraternal or familial imagery in representations of Poland. Mehlhorn’s notion of the ‘zwangsverordnete Freundschaft’ is also interrogated throughout. In the event, the new narrative failed to take hold with the East German populace—or, for that matter, with many SED members

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<sup>105</sup> Some scholars, including Christina Morina, have criticized the use of the term ‘trauma’ in contexts of social or collective memory, arguing that its primary meaning of a ‘clinical concept’ experienced by individuals renders it problematic when applied on a larger scale: Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 9. While this is a reasonable reservation, for the purposes of this project the judicious metaphorical use of such terms does not seem overly disingenuous.

themselves. Popular impressions of the Poles remained largely negative, a problem exacerbated by the various new disagreements and rivalries that arose between the GDR and Poland. As much of this tension could not be expressed openly or honestly within the framework of shared membership of the Eastern bloc, it was instead channelled through the bloc structures and couched in acceptable socialist language.

As the 1970s wore on, however, even these socialist trappings were gradually shed, as the SED began to rehabilitate more elements of the pre- or non-communist German past and incorporate them into its nation-building project. This resurrection of previously downplayed national histories was in part the East German manifestation of a broader surge of nostalgia and national reinvention taking place in both East and West in this period, and in part a response to the mounting concerns about its own legitimacy the party was experiencing. Chapter 4 ('Resurrecting national histories') charts this process, particularly as it related to the historical, ideological and architectural legacy of Prussia, and examines the Polish response. These developments are also considered in the context of worsening GDR-Polish relations in general, for a variety of reasons, from the mid 1970s onwards. The SED's endorsement, even glorification, of a growing number of elements from the German past associated with anti-Polish values and hostility towards the Poles prompted serious concern across the border, where it evoked still-recent traumas and raised questions about the extent to which the SED was even trying to improve popular attitudes.

Chapter 5 ('Redefining the economic relationship') shifts the focus to the economic sphere, the main area in which indirect and (to a lesser extent) direct personal encounters between East Germans and Poles took place in this period. The chapter investigates the ways in which the SED attempted to present Poland as a plausible economic partner of the GDR. This entailed working against some two centuries of accumulated prejudice and a history of German denigration of the Poles, best represented by the notion of the *polnische Wirtschaft*. This narrative foundered, however, when tested against the everyday experiences of East Germans, and the banal nationalistic associations that were formed, as they interacted with Poles in the economic sphere. The 1960s, and especially the open-border period in the 1970s, saw the proliferation of economic links between the two states. These created a host of new opportunities for East Germans to encounter Poles. They also brought their own new sources of friction, however, which exacerbated existing resentments. The fate of the economic narrative was therefore similar to that of the narrative of socialist brotherhood. Unable to

convince the populace, it failed as a means of either undergirding the SED's efforts to cultivate a sense of attachment to the wider socialist community or contributing to East German-Polish rapprochement. Again, therefore, anti-Polish sentiment continued to be expressed, but with communist inflections.

These interrelated developments continued into the 1980s. By the middle of the decade, with the border once again more tightly controlled and official relations entering a new ice age, the party's rhetoric relating to the socialist brotherhood was growing increasingly hollow. East Germans once again had fewer opportunities for direct personal encounters with Poles, and as a result, indirect impersonal encounters—especially the critical media coverage of Polish economic tourists and the revitalized older strands of German ethnonationalism—assumed greater prominence. Their combined effect, in conjunction with the unresolved legacies of the war, ensured that popular conceptions of the Poles remained negative until the end of the communist era.

The concluding chapter revisits the questions posed in this introduction in light of these developments, establishing what the interaction between the two discursive projects, and their contradictory impact on East German conceptions of the Poles, reveal about the nature of normalization in the GDR, the limits of the SED's control and discursive dominance, and the success of the party's efforts to secure its own legitimacy.

## 2. Processing the legacies of war

The Second World War, and the scarcely imaginable suffering of Poland and its people at the hands of Nazi Germany, laid the foundation for all post-war interactions between Germans and Poles. Crome and Franzke, for instance, refer to the war as the starting point for GDR-Polish relations,<sup>1</sup> while Müller argues that it locked the two peoples into a ‘special relationship’ akin to that between Germans and Jews.<sup>2</sup>

As Catherine Plum has pointed out, the GDR’s status as one of Nazi Germany’s successor states lent a uniquely complex and emotive character to its various narratives related to the Second World War, as well as to both official and popular discourses of perpetration and victimhood.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will examine the resonance of the war in the GDR, and the often contradictory ways in which it shaped the outlook and behaviour of communists and populace alike towards the Poles over the twenty-year period. At present, the evidence points to the persistence of traumas and resentments on both sides throughout the communist period, despite official efforts to dispel them. These efforts were fatally compromised by the German communists’ own experiences of national (or indeed personal) injury, their incorporation of many of these resentments into the process of national reconstruction, and their inability to sustain a legitimizing nationalist discourse without drawing on them. This left the SED unable and unwilling to pursue reconciliation with as much vigour as would have been necessary truly to overcome the recent past.

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<sup>1</sup> Erhard Crome and Jochen Franzke, ‘Die DDR und Polen. Betrachtungen über das Verhältnis der Ostdeutschen zu den Polen’, in *Die verschwundene Diplomatie. Beiträge zur Außenpolitik der DDR: Festschrift für Claus Montag*, ed. by Erhard Crome, Jochen Franzke, and Raimund Krämer (Berlin: Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003), pp. 110–23 (p. 111).

<sup>2</sup> Michael G. Müller, ‘Poland and Germany from Interwar Period through to Time of Détente’, in *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Eduard Mühle (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 91–106 (p. 92). See also Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska, ‘Introduction: Between Entitlement and Reconciliation: Germany and Poland’s Postmemory after 1989’, in *Germany, Poland and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past*, ed. by Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1–22 (p. 4). This is similar to Fritz Stern’s notion of a ‘historic triangle’ connecting Germans, Poles and Jews in a relationship that helped to shape ‘social interaction and political decision making’ in the post-war period: cited in Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Plum, *Antifascism after Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949–1989* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 257–58.



## Answering to the occupation

By 1945, many cities throughout Poland were ‘little more than mounds of shattered stone’.<sup>4</sup> This is echoed in Walter Ulbricht’s personal observations of the extent of the devastation in Poland, made at a press conference following his official visit in 1948:

[...] there is literally nothing more to see of any buildings [in Warsaw]. There is nothing that can be recognized. A very large area of the city, the Ghetto, has literally been razed to the ground. There are no longer even any remnants of the walls there. Everything there has been completely destroyed. The [German] troops surrounded this vast area; attacked it with artillery, with other weaponry, with flamethrowers and so on, and destroyed it house by house; buried the population under the rubble, since they had blocked the district off; they also destroyed some buildings along with their inhabitants; and there is literally not a stone left standing, and not a single street that can be recognized [...] There is only rubble.<sup>5</sup>

Ulbricht’s reference to German (rather than Nazi) troops is worthy of note, suggesting as it does the SED leadership’s willingness to make a more inclusive statement of responsibility. Similarly, SED functionary Karl Wloch, general secretary of the short-lived Hellmut-von-Gerlach Society, recorded his impressions of war-torn Poland in a memoir written in the early 1970s: ‘I was the only German standing among thousands of Polish people at the dedication of the Ghetto monument in Warsaw. At the time, Warsaw was still completely destroyed, and a terrible desert of rubble lay all around’.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, these observations were recorded at least partly to emphasize communist achievements in improving German-Polish relations and, to a lesser extent, the reconstruction of Poland. On the other hand, the contemporary remarks, particularly those made by Ulbricht, should also be seen as part of the propaganda offensive intended to demonstrate to the populace the extent of Nazi crimes. Whether this can be considered part of the (admittedly half-hearted) programme of denazification in the Soviet Occupation Zone (Sowjetische Besatzungszone, SBZ), or a separate strand of propaganda aimed more specifically at reconciliation with Poland, is uncertain.

As might be assumed, their experiences during the war left the Poles with an abiding

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Pressekonzferenz der Hellmut-v.-Gerlach-Gesellschaft am 22.10.1948’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1245, pp. 91–134.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Wloch, ‘Entwurf eines Diskussionsbeitrages’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1103, pp. 87–90.

antipathy towards the German state and its people.<sup>7</sup> As Sieglinde Leuschner phrased this problem in his report, the Poles ‘have experienced the most painful disillusionment with the German people. They have had bitter experiences, and no one can expect Germans to be welcomed with open arms in Poland today. There is hardly a family in Poland that has not had at least one member murdered by the fascists [...] That cannot be forgotten so quickly by the Polish people’.<sup>8</sup> Karl Wloch recalls coming into direct contact with Polish anti-German sentiment. ‘At that time’, he mentions, ‘German couldn’t even be spoken on the streets of Warsaw. The legacy that Hitlerite fascism had left was traumatic and horrifying’. At the time, Wloch was convinced that ‘many decades would have to pass before even somewhat manageable relations would be possible between the German and Polish peoples’.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the remembrance of Fritz Apelt, compiled in 1967, mentions the party’s awareness of the level of anti-German sentiment among the Polish populace in the immediate post-war period. ‘We were aware’, Apelt says, ‘that the terrible crimes committed in Poland by Hitlerite fascism during the Second World War had left unresolvable hatred towards German fascism. The fact that this hatred was at the time directed by the Polish populace against *everything German* [emphasis mine], was perfectly understandable’. The SED functionary added that when his delegation was received by a representative of the Union of Polish Journalists in the city, they were given to understand that they would do better ‘not to speak a single word of German in public’.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid 1950s, members of official delegations on both sides were advancing the cautious view that such feelings were being overcome, as a result of communist efforts at normalization. At a meeting of the German-Polish historians’ commission in November 1956, for instance, a member of the Polish delegation mentioned a colleague’s belief that ‘there is no longer any anti-German sentiment in the Polish population’.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, a 1963 letter to Ulbricht from Karl Mewis, GDR ambassador to Poland, mentions the latter’s belief that an ever greater proportion of the Polish population was coming to accept the GDR as a separate

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Tomasz Szarota, ‘Niemcy w oczach Polaków podczas II wojny światowej’, *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 10.2 (1978), 143–75; Tomasz Chinciński and Tomasz Rabant, ‘Die deutsche Besatzung im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Polen’, *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, 18.1 (2014), 31–43.

<sup>8</sup> Sieglinde Leuschner, ‘Report’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1247, pp. 1–22.

<sup>9</sup> Wloch, ‘Entwurf eines Diskussionsbeitrages’.

<sup>10</sup> Fritz Apelt, ‘Erinnerung’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/0013/1.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Wimmer, ‘Notizen zur zweiten Tagung der deutsch-polnischen Historikerkommission vom 14.-17. November 1956 in Berlin, 22 November 1956’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1247, pp. 239–45.

German state, free of its historical burden and a valued ally of Poland.<sup>12</sup> It is uncertain from the letter on what Mewis' assumption was based, but it seems clear that, at least in the SED's own estimation, GDR-Polish relations were improving. However, there is more evidence to suggest that, if these assertions were not the result of outright deception or wishful thinking, the improvement was slight. Anti-German sentiment persisted throughout the following decades, though it had only limited opportunity for expression. A clear example was noted in a report on the experiences of the East German circus *Zirkus Busch* during its tour of Poland in 1956. While in Wrocław, members of the circus were subjected to 'numerous anti-German sentiments'. Although the report admits that these were 'too vague [...] to do anything about', it does mention that waiting staff at the Hotel Polonia were 'reluctant to serve German guests', to the extent that the group was forced to decamp to the Hotel Warszawa instead.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, a group of German tourists visiting Turów in 1959 were repeatedly called "German swine" (in Polish) by Polish children. The report on the incident surmises that 'this does not come only from the children, but is a matter of upbringing by their parents'.<sup>14</sup> In a speech marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Western Press Agency in 1960, Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki referred to the problem of 'continued nationalistic attitudes towards the GDR' within the Polish populace, and argued that more needed to be done to raise the East German state's profile in official media.<sup>15</sup> The SED also reported on a series of clashes between Polish citizens and another GDR tourist delegation in Zakopane in 1964, including a conversation in which 'several citizens of our republic were called murderers by a Polish guest. Despite our insistence, the hotel management did nothing to prevent such incidents'.<sup>16</sup>

As late as the 1980s, these problems persisted. A report on GDR-Polish educational cooperation from 1984, for instance, noted that among Polish German-studies students and

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Mewis, 'Letter to Ulbricht, 9 October 1963' (Berlin), p. 149, SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1251, pp. 149–51.

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Heymann, 'Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VRP, 7 December 1956' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1247, pp. 298–301.

<sup>14</sup> Günter Kornisch, 'Bericht über die Situation im Montagebereich Turow/VR Polen, 23 September 1959' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1250, pp. 61–62.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ewald Moldt, 'Letter to Johannes König, 21 March 1961' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1250, pp. 163–69 (pp. 168–69).

<sup>16</sup> Gerd Viertel and Gerhard Noack, 'Information über einige Vorkommnisse bei einer Reise in die VR Polen – Zakopane' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1252, pp. 16–17.

academics, ‘anti-GDR sentiment [...] has not yet been overcome’.<sup>17</sup> As might be expected, this residual antipathy manifested especially plainly at time of heightened tension between the two peoples. An earlier assessment of the political mood of German studies scholars in Poland, this one produced during the Solidarity crisis in 1980, reported a number of statements ascribing the SED’s unilateral closure of the border to a lingering Nazi-era disdain for Poles. Various slogans expressed the belief that ‘the fascist past has not been overcome in the GDR’, a view that was echoed by a naturalized Polish academic and member of Solidarity in a lecture on academics forced to emigrate to the Federal Republic and Switzerland in 1968.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, this researcher was originally from the GDR—a fact that may have lent credence to his conclusion, or at least worried the SED more than similar statements made by many other Poles.

Such accusations must have appeared all the more plausible in light of the numerous occasions on which the East German populace demonstrated that the virulent anti-Polish stereotypes invoked by the Nazis were alive and well.<sup>19</sup> Many of these had drawn on long-established strains of anti-Slavism in German society and culture, and therefore remained in circulation throughout the post-war period. A significant number of recorded examples date from the open-border period, partly due to the new social and commercial pressures created by the increase in cross-border contact, and partly as this was the first time since the end of the war that both peoples had the opportunity to trade insults. In some cases, these stereotypes and prejudices acquired new guises and variations that reflected the current state of German-Polish relations, though equally often they were used in an unchanged form by even young generations.

SED analysis and propaganda on this theme rarely tackled this anti-Polonism explicitly. The communists did, however, make occasional reference to the Germans’ moral obligation

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<sup>17</sup> Ministerrat der DDR, Ministerium für Hoch- und Fachschulwesen, Abteilung Ausland I, ‘Stand und Probleme der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und der VRP auf dem Gebiet des Hochschulwesens, 9 July 1984’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7844.

<sup>18</sup> Hans-Joachim Böhme, ‘Report to Hannes Hörnig, 16 December 1980’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7842.

<sup>19</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War: How the Nazis Led Germany from Conquest to Disaster* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 101–5; Gerhard Hirschfeld, ‘Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe’, in *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Eduard Mühle (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 67–90; Jonathan R. Zatlin, ‘Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989’, *Central European History*, 40 (2007), 683–720 (p. 688); Dariusz Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków w prasie i literaturze Niemieckiej Republiki Demokratycznej w okresie powstania Solidarności i stanu wojennego* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007), p. 40.

to atone for Nazi crimes in order to repair their relations with Poland. This was articulated as early as 1948 by Leuschner, who argued that, given the magnitude of the crimes committed against the Polish people and the level of hatred that the latter now felt for all things German, ‘it is on us to make the first concrete steps towards understanding. We must demonstrate that we are willing to right this wrong committed against Poland not only with words, but with actions’.<sup>20</sup> Leuschner was making this argument in order to explain the poor state of economic cooperation between the SBZ and Poland in the late 1940s. The Germans, he insisted, could hardly expect greater quantities of resources from Poland at a time when Poland also needed them, and particularly when it was not yet certain of its newfound (ostensible) friendship with Germany.

The German communists evidently considered themselves the likeliest agents of this national rehabilitation. Hubert Meller, former press advisor to the Polish Military Mission in Berlin in the late 1940s, referred to the normalization of relations as ‘a matter that only communists could resolve’.<sup>21</sup> In a memoir composed shortly before his death some twenty years later, East German historian Felix-Heinrich Gentzen made a similar case. In his view,

[...] a new relationship with Poland could only become reality, and endure, once those forces that had in their own class interests poisoned this relationship in the past, who for almost two hundred years had oppressed and forcibly Germanized sections of the Polish populace, and in the last war had tried to physically liquidate the entire Polish people, the monopoly lords [*Monopolherren*] and Junkers, the fascist war criminals, had been removed from power via an antifascist-democratic revolution and brought to their just punishment. The establishment of a new relationship between the democratic Germany and a democratic Poland was therefore an intrinsic element of the people’s democratic revolution, especially in the cultural and ideological arenas, and can only be correctly understood in this context.

Gentzen asserted, moreover, that this relationship was reciprocal, and that a renewed and improved relationship with Poland supported ‘the process of antifascist-democratic revolution in the east of Germany’—not least because of the supervisory role played by the Soviet Union in that process.<sup>22</sup> In short, the repair of the German-Polish relationship was envisaged by the SED as an important adjunct to the establishment of East German socialism

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<sup>20</sup> Leuschner, ‘Report’.

<sup>21</sup> Hubert Meller, ‘Erinnerung’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/2205.

<sup>22</sup> Felix-Heinrich Gentzen, ‘Erinnerung’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1911.

from a very early stage, and inevitably made its mark on what became the GDR's official national identity.

However, the distinction between antifascists and ordinary, unenlightened Germans was not one that most Poles were willing or able to make. There is even evidence to suggest that anti-communist, or at least anti-Soviet, sentiment among the Polish populace may have exacerbated tensions between Poles and Germans. Karl Lawonn, whose remembrance describes the situation in Stettin/Szczecin in the immediate post-war period, mentions the 'numerous clashes' the communist activists had with Poles, 'who did their utmost to imprison us, and above all to imprison the communists; who did not allow them into meetings at the garrison headquarters [*Kommandantur*]; and who simply pulled them off the street to put them on work details. There was a great danger, therefore, that with the transfer of Stettin to Polish administration a general hunt for communists and social democrats would begin'.<sup>23</sup> In the event, of course, no such cull took place. Nonetheless, other accounts have made candid reference to the difficulty for the Poles in disentangling the complicity of German communists from the broader populace that had perpetrated, or tacitly supported, their victimization. In Meller's words, 'it could not be expected that there would be understanding [on the Polish side] for antifascists in Germany as well, that people would start to differentiate'. That sort of discrimination, he continued, was also something that only communists or similarly 'progressive people' would be able to manage.<sup>24</sup> This faith was belied, however, by the fact that the German communists themselves struggled with this separation; where matters such as the Oder-Neisse border were concerned, their (initial) reactions were every bit as nationalistic as those of their compatriots. Nonetheless, Meller's assertion of a distinction between communists and populace is noteworthy. Though Meller compiled his memoir in the late 1980s, and may therefore have been keen to include Polish reconciliation in his account of the SED's achievements, if it was an accurate reflection of SED views at the time, it may have been an early example of the party's paternalistic and morally supercilious attitude towards the German people, particularly concerning their complicity in National Socialist crimes.

The Polish reluctance to give communists the benefit of the doubt extended to the East

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<sup>23</sup> Karl Lawonn, 'Erinnerung' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1070.

<sup>24</sup> Meller, 'Erinnerung'.

German state more broadly. Despite SED efforts to assert the political and moral distinctiveness of the GDR through its antifascist propaganda (on which more below), the Poles viewed the atrocities of the occupation as a pan-German burden, which required acknowledgement and repentance from both post-war German states. The GDR's moves towards reconciliation were important, but insufficient. The SED was painfully aware that the Polish attitude did not fully differentiate between the two German states, and a great deal of its diplomatic activity within the Warsaw Pact, as well as many of the tensions that arose on this level between the GDR and Poland throughout the 1960s, was motivated by the existential and geopolitical anxiety provoked by this awareness. This reached its peak in the late 1960s during the *Ostpolitik* negotiations between Poland and the Federal Republic, which the SED monitored with acute unease. The party's concerns are evident in a report on a meeting between Polish Foreign Ministry representative Winiewicz and Georg Duckwitz, Secretary of State of the West German Foreign Ministry, in 1970. The report contains a lengthy summary of the two ministers' discussion of Polish views on West German recognition of the Oder–Neisse border, with Winiewicz explaining that Poland considered this a prerequisite for closer relations or economic cooperation between the two states. When making this point, Winiewicz stressed that 'Poland [...] attaches great importance to the normalization of relations with *the entire German people* [emphasis mine]'; in other words, in spite of the GDR's recognition of the border twenty years earlier, the PZPR considered the job only half done while the Federal Republic refused to follow suit. Indeed, the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty, and the 'close and friendly relations' that Poland and the GDR had cultivated over the intervening decades, were described by Winiewicz as 'a concrete step' towards the larger goal of 'mutual regulation of relations and Poland's collaboration with the entire German people'.<sup>25</sup> A report on a conversation between the GDR and Polish Foreign Ministers in 1970 notes with concern that the Poles seemed to view West German recognition of the border as 'the fundamental European security issue [...] All other issues take a back seat'. The report interpreted Polish insistence on West German involvement as a sign of the Poles' lack of faith in the GDR: 'In the Polish view, the Oder–Neisse border must always be seen in relation to the existence of both German states and the possibility of their unification.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Information über die Gespräche des stellv. Außenministers der VRP, Genossen Winiewicz, mit dem westdeutschen Staatssekretär Duckwitz am 5. Februar 1970 in Warschau' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1255, pp. 8–18.

This has made their lack of trust in the strength of socialism in the GDR and its further development obvious'.<sup>26</sup> There were of course many other reasons for the Polish eagerness to normalize relations with West Germany, not least its economic appeal, and each of them was received by the SED as a blow to the GDR's international standing and legitimacy. The East German citizenry was less concerned with such problems of national demarcation on the whole, however.

## Strategies of exculpation

In spite of communist efforts, however, the wartime atrocities committed against Poland went largely unprocessed, even unmentioned, by a majority of East Germans. Their reluctance to confront their country's treatment of Poles, along with all the other groups terrorized under Nazism, was noted from the very beginning of the post-war period. By 1950, contemporary observers such as Hannah Arendt were expressing their disgust at the 'pervasive self-pity' of the Germans, who 'continually invoked the image of *armes Deutschland* as the miserable and sacrificial victim – *Opfer* in its double sense – of history'.<sup>27</sup> Arendt's condemnations aside, this process of selective forgetting was initially crucial to the integrity and usability of the post-war national identity that the Germans were attempting gradually to construct. As Atina Grossmann has explained, such 'narratives of victimization' served both to 'block confrontation with recent Nazi crimes' and to 'manage the chaos of the immediate postwar years and eventually to authorize reconstruction of German nationhood and national identity'.<sup>28</sup> The discourses of German victimhood shielded ordinary East Germans, at least

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<sup>26</sup> 'Bericht über die Hauptprobleme der Gespräche zwischen Genossen Winzer und dem polnischen Außenminister Jedrychowski vom 27. – 29. April 1970 in Warschau, 30 April 1970' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1255, pp. 53–60.

<sup>27</sup> Atina Grossmann, 'Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945–1949', in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Washington, D.C. and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 93–127 (pp. 93–95). Arendt's original criticisms were made in Hannah Arendt, 'The Aftermath of Nazi Rule', *Commentary*, 10 (1950), 342–53. While Arendt's remarks were prompted by her travels around West Germany, they could equally well have been applied to Germans in the East at the time. As Aleida Assmann has observed, 'the memory of German suffering could well serve as a narrative that embraces both East and West German experience', and the recent renewed focus in united Germany on German wartime suffering represents 'a shared experience of victimhood [that] emphasises an underlying link between the two postwar states which transcends all political boundaries and differences'. See Aleida Assmann, 'On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory', *German Life and Letters*, 59.2 (2006), 187–200 (p. 192, n. 10) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00344.x>>.

<sup>28</sup> Grossmann also notes that this manner of forgetting is a constitutive feature of almost any national identity,



partially, from the need to confront the consequences of the war for those targeted by the Nazis.

The populace's desire for an exculpatory narrative of this sort is more understandable when set against the immense material and demographic devastation wrought by the war, and the traumatic sense of transition and interregnum to which it led in the immediate post-war period. The situation in post-war Germany was described by SED functionary Artur Hofmann, when relating his experiences in Görlitz in 1945, as 'total defeat'.<sup>29</sup> By the close of hostilities, Germany had suffered around five million military deaths, most occurring on the Eastern Front. At home, Germans were forced to cope with 600,000 civilian deaths, with 900,000 more civilians wounded, and a torrent of some eight million refugees and expellees (on which more below) from all over Eastern Europe and eastern regions of the Reich.<sup>30</sup> Berlin had been reduced to a 'metropolitan desert', littered with the remains of wrecked tanks and other vehicles, around three-quarters of its pre-war housing stock and countless landmark buildings. Most of the city's social and administrative infrastructure had been destroyed. Its streets and waterways were clogged with debris, vegetation, corpses and even unexploded mortars and bombs, to the extent that 'mass death' was a prominent element of the post-war landscape.<sup>31</sup> In the city of Dresden, some 25,000 people had been killed in the Allied bombing of February 1945,<sup>32</sup> around 65 percent of housing had been left uninhabitable,<sup>33</sup> and numerous buildings, including the opera house and the iconic *Frauenkirche*, had been demolished. This physical destruction was accompanied by a psychological wound, a

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citing Renan's observation that 'the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things': Grossmann, 'Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood', pp. 93–95.  
<sup>29</sup> 'Tätigkeitsbericht der Genossen Artur Hofmann und Herbert Oehler' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/2088, pp. 116–28.

<sup>30</sup> Figure cited in Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Botting, *In the Ruins of the Reich: Germany, 1945–1949* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 98–99; David Clay Large, *Berlin: A Modern History* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), p. 371; Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War: The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 16–17; Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London: Pocket Books, 2010), pp. 394–97.

<sup>32</sup> *Abschlussbericht der Historikerkommission zu den Luftangriffen auf Dresden zwischen dem 13. und 15. Februar 1945* (Dresden: Stadtarchiv der Landeshauptstadt Dresden, 2010). The historians' commission's report suggests 25,000 as an upper limit for the number of people killed. See also Tami Davis Biddle, 'Dresden 1945: Reality, History, and Memory', *Journal of Military History*, 72.2 (2008), 413–49 (pp. 423–44) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2008.0074>>; Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing: Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR, 1945–53: From Antifascism to Stalinism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 11.

widespread belief that Germans had ‘suffered enough’,<sup>34</sup> as well as a sense of defeat arising from Germany’s loss of the war, dismemberment and occupation by an assortment of foreign powers, most painfully (at least for the territory that became the GDR) the Soviet Union. Elena Rzhetskaya, a Red Army interpreter, recalls an encounter with a German woman on a bridge over the river Spree in 1945: ‘I called her over. She stared at me with absent, transparent eyes, politely nodded her head, then, exactly realising who I was, in a wild, guttural voice, screamed: “All is lost!”’<sup>35</sup> As Grossmann makes clear, these ‘direct experiences of war and defeat’ made ‘the more powerful impressions’ on the German populace; they were ‘the stuff of which memories were made’, and easily trumped the more abstract, not to mention more distressing, questions of ‘memory, commemoration, guilt, and complicity’.<sup>36</sup>

It should be mentioned that ordinary Poles were driven by a similar need to forget their own complicity in certain wartime and immediate post-war crimes and injustices. In Norman Naimark’s words, ‘For most Poles, like the Germans, the immediate postwar period was dedicated to forgetting their own culpability for the horrors of the immediate past [...] The utter brutality of the wartime period, the petty collaboration, Polish complicity in the occupation, and the indifference among the majority to the murder of the Jews—the many instances when survival trumped morality—were wartime phantoms that were pushed into a deep psychological freezer’.<sup>37</sup> This could hardly become an area of understanding between the two peoples, however, since their respective narratives of victimhood were fundamentally incompatible.

This climate of defeat and despair gave rise to a broader sense of personal and national dislocation among the German population. Historians have variously characterized this time as one of blurred boundaries, “sluggish and murky transitions”, and as an “end”, which

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander von Plato, ‘The Consensus against the Victors: 1945 and 1990’, *Oral History Review*, 21.2 (1993), 73–79 (p. 74).

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Manfred Malzahn, *Germany 1945–1949: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 48–49.

<sup>36</sup> Grossmann, ‘Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood’, pp. 94–95, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Norman Naimark, ‘Historical Memory and the Debate about the Vertreibung Museum’, in *Austria’s International Position after the End of the Cold War*, ed. by Günter Bischof and Ferdinand Karlhofer, *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, 22 (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2013), pp. 227–41 (p. 229). See also R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 355–56.

was not as yet a clearly defined new beginning'.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, Mary Fulbrook stresses the need to understand the importance of the 'radical historical rupture' that 1945 represented for ordinary Germans, and the extent to which it threw individual and group identities into flux.<sup>39</sup> Interviewees from what René Lehmann defines as the 'first generation' of East Germans, and what several scholars, including Fulbrook and Dorothee Wierling, have referred to as the '1929ers' (that is, those born between 1927 and 1934, who were therefore socialized as young people under Nazism) experienced the collapse of the Third Reich as a 'caesura and a turning point in their own biographies'.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, Wierling has commented on the 'striking' extent to which 'the anxieties, humiliations and disorientations of 1945 still dominate the memories and feelings of the Hitler Youth generation and are often expressed as a set of barely hidden resentment and *Ressentiment* [...] They were terrified by often traumatic experiences at the end of the war, deprived of the hermetic Nazi world view and left without guidance and credible authorities after the breakdown of the regime. Many of them experienced a major personal crisis in the immediate aftermath of World War II, which has left its marks until today'.<sup>41</sup> This was the basis for the concept of 'zero hour' (*Stunde Null*), embedded into post-war national mythology on both sides of the Elbe, whereby the end of the war was experienced, and subsequently remembered, as the catalyst for such immense national and personal change that the Germans who survived it could not be considered the same people as before.<sup>42</sup> The subsequent dissolution of the German Reich as a political entity reinforced this interpretation.

It is of course possible to overstate this point, and various scholars have pointed out the propensity for the 'zero hour' construction to obscure more than it reveals. Fulbrook, for instance, cautions that, despite how suggestive the idea seemed at the time, 'history did not

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<sup>38</sup> Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 200; Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 259.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Fulbrook, 'East Germans in a Post-Nazi State: Communities of Experience, Connection, and Identification', in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 33–55 (pp. 33–36).

<sup>40</sup> René Lehmann, 'Generation and Transition: East German Memory Cultures', in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. by David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, trans. by David Clarke (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 102–15 (p. 104).

<sup>41</sup> Dorothee Wierling, 'How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?', in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 210–25.

<sup>42</sup> Bessel, *Germany 1945*, p. 390.

simply come to an end, or simply start afresh, at the “zero hour” of 1945. People’s lives are messier and more continuous than the narratives of history books’.<sup>43</sup> This was not simply a case of wishful thinking on the part of the populace, however, nor of a top-down imposition by the SED of a reductive exculpatory narrative. The reality was more ambiguous, and the idea of a ‘zero hour’ evidently resonated with a large proportion of Germans in the immediate post-war period. As Richard Bessel mentions, that Germans chose to use the term is itself significant; to dismiss it, particularly from the dogmatically moralistic standpoint of ensuring that they do not ‘evade their moral responsibility’, is ahistorical.<sup>44</sup> Even Friedhelm Fischer, who is otherwise very sceptical of the utility of the concept, concedes that the political and material situation in 1945 rendered the idea of a zero hour ‘almost physically palpable’ as well as morally appealing.<sup>45</sup>

For Poles, the disruption had begun earlier, with the Soviet and Nazi invasions in 1939, following which their state had been partitioned and had effectively ceased to exist. As a result, Polish feelings of discontinuity and dislocation were even more pronounced than those experienced by the German populace. Both peoples, however, found themselves in a similar state of ‘physical, political, and moral chaos’ by the start of the post-war period, having suffered not only the loss of their national polities, but also the disintegration of most other frameworks with which to organize ‘the complex set of emotions, pathologies, and desires that accompanied the loss’.<sup>46</sup>

Faced with such disarray, most ordinary East Germans were concerned above all with re-establishing a normal life as quickly and painlessly as possible, a goal that of necessity also entailed the ‘reconstitution and reinvention of the national discourse’.<sup>47</sup> Questions of national and personal complicity in wartime atrocities also needed to be reckoned with and incorporated into the new narratives, albeit to drastically varying degrees. This process of reinvention was inexorable, and the SED could not have held it back had it wanted to. As Elizabeth Wenger notes, ‘the ultimate situation [facing the party] was paradoxical: the

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<sup>43</sup> Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Bessel, *Germany 1945*, p. 396.

<sup>45</sup> Friedhelm Fischer, ‘German Reconstruction as an International Activity’, in *Rebuilding Europe’s Bombed Cities*, ed. by Jeffrey M. Diefendorf (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 131–44 (p. 131).

<sup>46</sup> Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), pp. 1–2.

<sup>47</sup> Stefania Bernini, ‘Mothers and Children in Post-War Europe: Martyrdom and National Reconstruction in Italy and Poland’, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 22.2 (2015), 242–58 (p. 242) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2015.1008420>>.

unifying antifascist narrative implicated the majority of the German people, but it was a condition of blame that the new government leaders could not make explicit while they tried to unify and lead the GDR'.<sup>48</sup> In the event, the SED sought to harness the reinvention for its own political ends, shaping the national discourse in a way that, if successful, would boost its popular legitimacy and aid the consolidation of its power. The initial post-war period can therefore be characterized as one of both spontaneous identity reconstruction and the deliberate, contested intervention by the SED in that process.

The centrepiece of the SED's intervention was the doctrine of antifascism. This doctrine and its importance to the party's national narrative, legitimization strategy and even worldview have received considerable scholarly attention, and will not be recapitulated here. For present purposes, it will suffice to say that antifascism was also at the heart of the SED's attempts to deal with questions of both national and individual German guilt, and with the aftermath of the war more broadly. In constructing its antifascist narrative, the party developed an interpretation of the present and the recent past that emphasized the ideas of national rehabilitation, national rebirth, national demarcation and, most relevantly to this discussion, national victimhood. These strands of the antifascist narrative were closely interrelated, and together proposed a framework by which most ordinary East Germans could reconstitute their national, and in some cases personal and social, identities in a more bearable form. German war guilt was folded into this narrative in a selective way that offered the bulk of the population the chance for exoneration, by accepting SED rule and participating (however half-heartedly) in the socialist reconstruction of the country.

Most East Germans never embraced this doctrine in its totality, and there were substantial differences between the ways in which the various strands of the antifascist narrative were balanced in official and subaltern discourses. On the whole, however, these differences did not pose a significant threat to the SED's legitimization efforts. This was partly due to the party's attempts to suppress the various alternative narratives gaining traction in the early post-war years. Some scholars have suggested that it was aided in this by what C. Bradley Scharf terms an 'inward migration' on the part of the broader German populace following the traumas of defeat and Soviet occupation, whereby the majority,

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Wenger, 'Speak, Memory? War Narratives and Censorship in the GDR', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 96.4 (2018), 642–71 (pp. 643–44) <<https://doi.org/10.5699/slaveasteurorev2.96.4.0642>>.

including surviving non-communist political elites, withdrew after an ‘initial flurry of low-level activity’ to immediate family and social circles, and refused to participate in any wider activity. This ‘literal or figurative exile’ paved the way for the communists to step forward and ‘guide the period of reconstruction’ themselves, and can therefore be said to have eased, if not guaranteed, their monopolization of power.<sup>49</sup> This situation has been characterized by Jarausch and Geyer as the initial emergence of an ‘impressive intermezzo of discordant voices’, which were rapidly stifled and subordinated to the SED’s own preferred narrative.<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately, of course, the party was not able to achieve such clear-cut discursive dominance. The party operated within certain constraints that prevented it from recasting the national narrative entirely to its liking—the most significant of which, for the purposes of this study, stemmed from the existing content of that narrative. The resultant conflicts between various memory communities precipitated what Orla-Bukowska terms a ‘bifurcation of discourse’, that is, a widening disparity between the official and private discursive spheres, especially regarding the war and the German occupation of Poland. However, both spheres needed to come to terms with, and find an acceptable meaning for, the same wartime and post-war events, and their interrelationship helped to shape post-war national memory.<sup>51</sup> Orla-Bukowska’s metaphor is of course limited in its binary opposition of ‘official’ and ‘private’ discourses, and needs modifying to account for the multiple overlapping and competing memory communities that were participating in this process of national and self-redefinition. The discourse, in other words, was more fragmented than bifurcated.

In the main, however, the divide between official and popular interpretations of the antifascist doctrine, and its implications for matters of national and personal complicity, was easier to bridge than in many other areas of communist policy. Albeit for very different reasons, state and populace were tacitly allied in their desire to prioritize national suffering in their narratives. Though this alliance was forged in the immediate post-war years, it proved sufficiently appealing to endure through several generations. The idea of the new East

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<sup>49</sup> C. Bradley Scharf, ‘Necessity and Vision in East German Identity’, in *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, ed. by Kathy Harms, Lutz Reuter, and Volker Dürr (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 94–104.

<sup>50</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 5–10.

<sup>51</sup> Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, ‘New Threads on an Old Loom: National Memory and Social Identity in Postwar and Post-Communist Poland’, in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. by Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 177–209 (pp. 177–78).

German state's representing a political and moral *tabula rasa* formed the basis of its official identity. This interpretation represented an overlap of the national victimhood, national rebirth and, to a certain extent, the national demarcation strands of the party's nation-building propaganda. It was augmented by the SED's selective incorporation of private narratives stemming from personal or communicated memories, those that lent credence and legitimacy to the official version.<sup>52</sup> As Karl Wilds has argued, this is typical of the relationship between 'cultural' (that is, socially or politically dominant) and 'communicative' memories; the former is 'the dominant partner in this relationship that selects and filters communicative memories in accordance with the normative historical and political precepts that it enforces'.<sup>53</sup> In this and several other respects, official antifascism therefore represented a rare confluence of communist and (some) popular narratives, at least as far as the broad strokes were concerned.

In its qualified endorsement of their need for national and biographical rehabilitation, the SED implicitly proposed what Niven has termed a 'psychological deal of exchange' with the East German populace: 'in return for the promulgation of a view of their past which cast them as victims of the Western Allies, they were asked to re-imagine the Soviets as liberators',<sup>54</sup> as well as throw themselves into the socialist reconstruction of Germany. This was virtually the same rhetoric of communist liberation and rejuvenation used elsewhere in the Eastern bloc, especially in Poland, but with added persuasive force based on the unique moral, social and psychological quandary in which the East Germans found themselves. It was this added moral element, which Hans-Hermann Hertle and Stefan Wolle have referred to as an offer of 'collective exculpation', that underpinned the redemptive and rebirth strands of the SED's national narrative.<sup>55</sup> Other researchers, including Wenger, have pointed out that

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<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, Christiane Wienand, 'Remembered Change and Changes of Remembrance: East German Narratives of Anti-Fascist Conversion', in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 99–118 (pp. 103–6); Plum, *Antifascism after Hitler*, pp. 177–83.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Wilds, 'Cultural Memories of German Suffering during the Second World War: An Inability Not to Mourn?', in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. by Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 2013), pp. 81–99 (p. 93).

<sup>54</sup> Bill Niven, 'The GDR and Memory of the Bombing of Dresden', in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 109–29 (pp. 114–15).

<sup>55</sup> Hans-Hermann Hertle and Stefan Wolle, *Damals in der DDR: Der Alltag im Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*, 2nd edn (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann, 2006), p. 15.

this offer of exculpation via cooperation ‘did not necessarily present itself as a moral question’; in many cases, its appeal was simply the possibility it presented of returning to a normal life as quickly as possible.<sup>56</sup>

The focus on German suffering fed into the SED’s antifascist narrative, lending it enough emotional resonance to allow it to remain the linchpin of the party’s legitimization efforts until at least the early 1970s. In particular, it found energetic support among the ‘1929ers’, who were on the cusp of adulthood in the immediate post-war years, and who became the ‘backbone’ of the East German party and institutional apparatus. As Fulbrook has explained, this cohort experienced the violence of the end of the war more profoundly and personally than most others, their lives ‘more deeply disrupted, physically and geographically as well as emotionally’. Many ‘1929ers’ felt an acute sense of betrayal by the Nazi state that they had previously supported, but which they held responsible for unleashing this violence on them and their homes. As a consequence, their search for an alternative ideology was more urgent, and their commitment to the SED’s antifascist doctrine more fervent, than those of other, even proximate, generational groups.<sup>57</sup> Participation in the antifascist youth movement, as well as in the reconstruction efforts more generally, offered them the chance to ‘[atone] for their guilt and that of their parents’.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, this cohort has also been referred to as the ‘reconstruction generation’ as a result.<sup>59</sup>

Many memory communities within the GDR benefited from this alliance to some extent, with the notable exception of the Jewish minority.<sup>60</sup> As a result, state and populace

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<sup>56</sup> Wenger, ‘Speak, Memory?’, p. 655.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Fulbrook, ‘Living Through the GDR: History, Life Stories and Generations in East Germany’, in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Caroline Pearce and Nick Hodgkin (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 201–20 (pp. 206–7).

<sup>58</sup> Dorothee Wierling, ‘Three Generations of East German Women: Four Decades of the GDR and After’, *Oral History Review*, 21.2 (1993), 19–29 (p. 22).

<sup>59</sup> Dorothee Wierling, ‘The Hitler Youth Generation in the GDR: Insecurities, Ambitions and Dilemmas’, in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 307–24 (p. 307).

<sup>60</sup> On this, see Robin Ostow, ‘Being Jewish in the Other Germany: An Interview with Thomas Eckert’, *New German Critique*, 38 (1986), 73–87; Robin Ostow, ‘From the Cold War through the Wende: History, Belonging, and the Self in East German Jewry’, *Oral History Review*, 21.2 (1993), 59–72; Jeffrey Herf, ‘German Communism, the Discourse of “Antifascist Resistance,” and the Jewish Catastrophe’, in *Resistance against the Third Reich: 1933-1990*, ed. by Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 257–94; Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999); Cora Granata, ‘The Cold War Politics of Cultural Minorities: Jews and Sorbs in the German Democratic Republic, 1976-1989’, *German History*, 27.1 (2009), 60–83; Mike Dennis, ‘Between Torah and Sickle: Jews in East Germany, 1945-1990’, in *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, ed. by Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte (New York and Oxford: Berghahn



found itself bound together more tightly on these matters than any other. In this respect, the SED's message of national victimhood and national redemption served a similar function to official ethnonationalism in Poland, which also formed the basis for an alliance between communists and populace that lasted for at least two decades.<sup>61</sup> From the early 1970s onwards, the antifascist doctrine began to lose much of its adhesive power, as younger post-war generations had become a larger proportion of the populace; the SED then began seeking alternative sources of legitimacy.<sup>62</sup>

## Emphasizing German suffering

The most significant point of disagreement between official and popular understandings of the war was the extent to which the national victimhood strand should be emphasized. German suffering was defined in a far narrower sense in the SED's interpretation, and was refracted through the lens of communist ideology and Cold War geopolitical divisions.

Through a network of 'well-orchestrated' commemorative programmes, and rhetoric placing disproportionate emphasis on German losses at the expense of the Western Allies, notions of German suffering 'played a central role in state memory' in the GDR.<sup>63</sup> The most prominent object of this commemoration was the bombing of Dresden in 1945, and the city 'served as [a] symbol of East German victimhood' throughout the existence of the GDR.<sup>64</sup> The general shape of this activity, and of the SED's victimhood discourse more broadly, has been neatly summarized by Bill Niven as 'self-pity on the one hand, and indignation towards the Western Allies on the other'.<sup>65</sup> The narrative, which relied heavily on 'historiographical sophistry', started from the premise that the Nazis—the "Hitler gang" or "Hitler clique"—were entirely to blame for both waging and losing the war, and therefore for almost all the

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Books, 2011), pp. 28–60.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Fleming, *Communism and Nationalism in Poland, 1944-1950* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 126–42; T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2006), p. 188.

<sup>62</sup> This will be expanded on in Chapter 5 ('Resurrecting national histories').

<sup>63</sup> Niven, 'The Bombing of Dresden' p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas C. Fox, 'East Germany and the Bombing War', in *Bombs Away! Representing the Air War over Europe and Japan*, ed. by Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 113–30 <[https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401201919\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401201919_008)>. For more on the commemoration of the bombing of Dresden in particular, see Claudia Jerzak, 'Memory Politics: The Bombing of Hamburg and Dresden', in *Catastrophe and Catharsis: Perspectives on Disaster and Redemption in German Culture and Beyond*, ed. by Katharina Gerstenberger and Tanja Nusser (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2015), pp. 53–72 (esp. pp. 60–61).

<sup>65</sup> Niven, 'The Bombing of Dresden', p. 110.

German suffering that ensued. The remainder had been inflicted by the capitalist powers, who in the final stages of the war had waged a vicious and unjustified bombing campaign in a bid to put Germany, and its Soviet liberators, at a disadvantage in the Cold War to come. In this way, the SED's interpretation 'elided' the differences between the Germans and their wartime victims, implying that "'imperialist forces" were as much to blame for the bombing of Dresden as they were for Auschwitz'.<sup>66</sup> In this way, Cold War politics 'facilitated the escape from acknowledging the criminal nature of the war'.<sup>67</sup> In an expression of both its paternalism and its sense of vindication, the SED argued that the populace should certainly have known better than to follow the Nazis. On the other hand, it also insisted that the Nazis had rapidly deprived them of their rights, deceived them, victimized them and, in the words of Wilhelm Pieck, had 'driven [them] to death on the battlegrounds and on the home front'.<sup>68</sup> As this comment implied, German soldiers were also recast as blameless victims of fascist deception and coercion, able to achieve rehabilitation for the crimes they had committed when serving the Nazis through antifascist conversion, or by assisting with reconstruction efforts (as forced labourers in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps, for instance).<sup>69</sup> This salvation was also open to Wehrmacht troops on the Eastern Front; those who had been involved in the occupation and devastation of Poland.<sup>70</sup>

Beyond these points of agreement, of course, the GDR memory landscape remained fractious; there remained areas of considerable difference between various East German memory communities on the relative complicity, innocence and suffering of certain groups as a result of the war. The SED appears to have made some effort to encourage acknowledgement of Polish wartime victimhood, at least to the extent that normalized

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<sup>66</sup> Robert G. Moeller, 'The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimisation in East and West Germany', in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 26–42 (pp. 28–30); Niven, 'The Bombing of Dresden', pp. 113–14.

<sup>67</sup> Anna Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation: Germans and Their Nazi Past (1945–2010)*, trans. by Marta Skowronska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 148.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Moeller, 'The Politics of the Past in the 1950s', p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> This is discussed in detail in Wienand, 'Remembered Change and Changes of Remembrance', pp. 99–102; Frank Biess, "'Pioneers of a New Germany": Returning POWs from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945–1950', *Central European History*, 32.2 (1999), 143–80.

<sup>70</sup> For more on the myth of the '*saubere Wehrmacht*', see Omer Bartov, 'German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications', *History and Memory*, 9.1/2 (1997), 162–88; *The Discursive Construction of History: Remembering the Wehrmacht's War of Annihilation*, ed. by Hannes Heer and others, trans. by Steven Fligelstone (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

relations would be possible. This was discernible, for instance, in attempts by the leadership to raise awareness of the damage done to Polish cities during the war. Sieglinde Leuschner's report on a visit by an SED delegation to Poland in 1948 sought to put this devastation into perspective for the German populace: 'We ought to have the chance to show all [Germans] Warsaw; the warmongers and provocateurs would lose all heart. Berlin has been hit hard, but compared to Warsaw, Berlin is still in good condition [...] It has to be said that in spite of the destruction caused by the American aircraft, living conditions in Berlin are significantly more bearable than in the horrifyingly devastated Warsaw'.<sup>71</sup> The comparison between Berlin and Warsaw here is especially interesting, given that the overall SED strategy depended on its tapping into popular discourses of German victimhood and relativizing the suffering inflicted by the Germans on other peoples—especially, though not exclusively, the Poles. This may have been part of an effort by Leuschner to advocate the combatting, or at least the curtailment, of the victimhood discourse. It is equally likely, however, that it was an attempt by the SED to have its cake and eat it in this respect: that is, to condemn the outrages committed against Poland during the war, while nonetheless highlighting the damage done to Berlin by the Western Allies. This seems particularly probable as this report was originally intended for publication as a public informational document.

Similar acknowledgements of Polish suffering were made in propaganda justifying the Oder–Neisse border and the German expulsions. In the main, these efforts were ineffectual, not least because the SED found it difficult to commit to them fully. While the wartime atrocities committed in Poland could be blamed on the Nazis, and therefore integrated fairly smoothly with the larger victimhood narrative, the border shift and the expulsions hit far closer to home for many ordinary Germans. As will be explored below, this element of the narrative was widely rejected.

Obviously, certain post-war events were off-limits for inclusion in the official victimhood discourse, above all those casting the Soviet Union and other communist states in an unfavourable light. The most painful of these were the expulsions of the German population from the territory annexed by Poland (on which more below) and the truly shocking behaviour of the occupying Red Army in Germany, which included widespread looting and the rape of German women. The precise number of German women raped is

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<sup>71</sup> Leuschner, 'Report'.

unknown, but estimates have ranged up to 1.5 million.<sup>72</sup> The fact that Hofmann was permitted to include in his account of the post-war situation candid references to the ‘daily incidents of plundering and rape’ by the Red Army is surprising, given the blanket interdiction on such topics imposed by the SED. While it is unclear when his recollection was written, criticism of the Soviet Union remained a sensitive subject throughout the GDR’s lifetime. His equivocation in attributing the rapes to ‘criminal elements’ within the Red Army may have been a way around this, but the line remains hard to explain.<sup>73</sup> More generally, there was considerable tension between official and private accounts of the war, and between the personal and behavioural archetypes articulated in the SED’s antifascist narrative, and the majority of East Germans’ own understandings of their actions during the war.<sup>74</sup>

In the main, such experiences were discussed and passed on only in private narratives, in a web of alternative victimhood discourses that extended beyond the official version, but for the most part did not undermine it. This ‘victim’s memory’, in Stefan Berger’s formulation, was the basis of wartime biographies that were passed to subsequent generations in private and family circles. As Berger explains, this narrative reshaping was compounded by the limited knowledge later generations possessed of their relatives’ actions or experiences during the war. Having few facts to work with, they therefore ‘tended to fill gaps imaginatively’, and were generally unwilling to countenance the idea of close family members as perpetrators of wartime atrocities. As a consequence, over several generations the historical facts were ‘brought into line’ with private communicated memories.<sup>75</sup> For many ordinary East Germans, ‘the really quite brief but vivid experiences of victimization narrated over and over so dominated all memory as to seemingly block out all knowledge of what

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<sup>72</sup> Moeller, ‘The Politics of the Past in the 1950s’. For more on the looting, rapes and other acts of violence committed by Soviet soldiers in Germany, see Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 69–140; Pritchard, pp. 25, 35, 90–95; Filip Slaveski, ‘Violence and Xenophobia as Means of Social Control in Times of Collapse: The Soviet Occupation of Post-War Germany, 1945–1947’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 54.3 (2008), 389–402 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2008.00505.x>>. Interestingly, Richard J. Evans has noted that, despite their antipathy towards the Germans as a result of the occupation, Polish troops occasionally protected German women from Red Army soldiers during the expulsions. See Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory* (London: Abacus, 2015), pp. 406–07.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Tätigkeitsbericht der Genossen Artur Hofmann und Herbert Oehler’.

<sup>74</sup> Fulbrook, ‘East Germans in a Post-Nazi State’, pp. 39–40.

<sup>75</sup> Stefan Berger, ‘On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths: Why the Debate about German Victims of the Second World War Is Not a Historians’ Controversy’, in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 210–24 (pp. 222–23).

happened before'. As a result, narratives of German victimhood were 'rapidly constructed' and 'tenaciously remembered'.<sup>76</sup> Throughout the subsequent decades, therefore, most ordinary East Germans remained invested in downplaying the harm that they or their relatives had caused to the many victims of Nazism. As Elizabeth Heineman has phrased it: 'reminders of "Germans"' sufferings rarely force[d] the listener to understand those sufferings in relation to other traumas caused, facilitated, or at least tolerated by the very people who, by losing the war, eventually experienced pain of their own'.<sup>77</sup>

## Dealing with the new border

The interplay between these official and popular narratives became more complex, and far more fraught, when it came to the changes made to the German-Polish border. These had a profound and damaging impact on relations between the two peoples, not only because of German bitterness at the loss of some 101,200 km<sup>2</sup> of territory to Poland, but also as a result of the distress and disruption caused by the Polish resettlement of around 3.2 million ethnic Germans from that territory, the majority of whom were women and children.<sup>78</sup> Poland retained a minority of 100,000 or so ethnic Germans, a fact that itself became a source of political tension, particularly with the Federal Republic, in later decades.<sup>79</sup> By the end of the

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<sup>76</sup> Grossmann, 'Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood', pp. 94–95, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity', *American Historical Review*, 101.2 (1996), 354–95 (p. 360).

<sup>78</sup> Machteld Venken and Maren Röger, 'Growing up in the Shadow of the Second World War: European Perspectives', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire*, 22.2 (2015), 199–220 (p. 201) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2015.1008410>>. For more on the German expulsions, see Hugo Service, *Germans to Poles: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing after the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 92–125; Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene. Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 12; Konrad Zielinski, 'To Pacify, Populate and Polish: Territorial Transformations and the Displacement of Ethnic Minorities in Communist Poland, 1944-49', in *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50*, ed. by Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 188–209; Ewa Ochman, 'Population Displacement and Regional Reconstruction in Postwar Poland: The Case of Upper Silesia', in *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50*, ed. by Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 210–28; Ulrich Merten, *Forgotten Voices: The Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Transaction, 2012); Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*; Beata Halicka, *Polens Wilder Westen. Erzwungene Migration und die kulturelle Aneignung des Odraums 1945-1948* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013); John J. Kulczycki, *Belonging to the Nation: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Polish-German Borderlands, 1939-1951* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> Keith Sword, 'From Ethnic Cleansing to Ethnic Resurgence: The German Minority in Poland, 1945-95', in *The German Lands and Eastern Europe: Essays on Their Social, Cultural and Political Relations*, ed. by Roger Bartlett and Karen Schönwälder (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 238–59.

process, around 4.3 million German refugees remained in the SBZ, a figure that amounted to almost a quarter of the zone's total population. While this figure included expellees from other parts of Europe, including Czechoslovakia and various minority communities in Central and South-Eastern Europe, a significant majority had come from what was now Poland.<sup>80</sup> Their experiences of deportation, coupled with the broader and more abstract popular outrage over the border shift, left an indelible mark on East German memory cultures and 'shaped [...] the image of Poland' for millions of East Germans in the post-war period.<sup>81</sup>

While primarily a product of border changes, however, these expulsions, particularly that of the Germans, had more than logistical significance. The German expulsion was also perpetrated as part of a programme of national homogenization, pursued by the P(Z)PR<sup>82</sup> in an effort to boost their nationalist credentials in the eyes of the wider populace, and craft a new Polish identity that acknowledged the communists as the architects of the reconquest of an indigenously Polish region.<sup>83</sup> This policy, which was so detrimental to any normalization of GDR-Polish relations in the short term, became an integral part of the Polish communists' plan for national reinvention. In eastern Germany, meanwhile, the new border became a cornerstone of the SED's nation-building project and its reconciliation discourse. In the event, however, it proved severely disruptive to both. The enormity of the changes and traumas wrought by the border shift were too great to be controlled, and it rapidly became the most prominent strand of unofficial victimhood discourses as well.

### ***The border as national injury***

The official interpretation propagated by both the SED and the P(Z)PR characterized the new

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<sup>80</sup> Figure of 4,312,289 as of 19 April 1949, based on official SBZ estimates, quoted in Manfred Wille, 'Compelling the Assimilation of Expellees in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in the GDR', in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. by Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, trans. by Sean Ward, Harvard Cold War Studies (Lanham, MD and others: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 263–83 (p. 266). A similar figure is referenced in Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>81</sup> Niels Gatzke, 'Das Polenbild in Deutschland – Entstehung und Gegenwart', in *Probleme mit Polen? Polenbezogene Ressentiments in Vorpommern*, ed. by Regionale Arbeitsstelle für Bildung, Integration und Demokratie (RAA) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e. V. (Waren (Müritz), 2012), pp. 12–19 (p. 15) <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-338529>>.

<sup>82</sup> In the immediate post-war period, the Polish communists were represented by the Polish Workers' Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR), which in 1948 absorbed the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS) to form the PZPR. For simplicity's sake, this chapter will use the acronym P(Z)PR where appropriate, to refer to the party in its pre- and post-merger incarnations.

<sup>83</sup> Curp, *A Clean Sweep?*; Fleming, *Communism and Nationalism in Poland*; Machteld Venken, 'Nationalization Campaigns and Teachers' Practices in Belgian-German and Polish-German Border Regions (1945–1956)', *Nationalities Papers*, 42.2 (2014), 223–41 (pp. 233–34) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.817386>>.

Oder–Neisse border as a crucial first step towards peace and reconciliation between the two states, after the outrages committed during the Second World War. This was articulated clearly, for instance, in an editorial by Ulbricht appearing in *Neues Deutschland* in November 1948. In the article, the first secretary set out the SED’s justification for the border shift and resultant population transfers, at the same time cautioning readers against expressions of traditional, and morally bankrupt, German nationalism.<sup>84</sup> Similar reasoning was presented in an SED document from 1950 summarizing arguments for party agitators. The document refers to the Oder–Neisse line repeatedly as a ‘peace border’, established in order ‘to make a new German attack [on Poland] impossible and to give the Polish people a secure western border’. It places German territorial losses in the context of the Reich’s pursuit of—and defeat in—an imperialist ‘war of conquest’ in Poland, and defends the German expulsions as both a justified punitive measure against a populace that had ‘to a great degree [...] joined Hitler’s war of conquest’, and a fair means of ensuring that the peace would never again be disturbed by a German kin-state acting in the name of German national minorities abroad.<sup>85</sup> This is a neat, if simplistic, encapsulation of the narrative that both communist parties disseminated regarding the new border and its foundational role in cordial relations between the two states. In the immediate post-war years, the SED made some effort to convince the resettled Germans themselves of this narrative. In a political discussion with a group of recent arrivals at Küchensee resettler camp near Storkow, Brandenburg, in August 1947, for instance, a local *Kreis* functionary expressed sympathy with the recent suffering of his audience, at the same time stressing that ‘we are not the ones to blame for the hard fate that has befallen you; it is solely the fault of the insane policies [*Wahnsinnspolitik*] of the Hitler regime of the past twelve years. In a similar vein, representatives of the Brandenburg *Land* Department for Resettlers and Repatriates were told at a meeting in September 1947 that ‘the causes of the resettlement from East Prussia lie in the consequences of National Socialist rule’. Parallels were drawn between the present expulsions and the Nazi relocation of German populations in the Baltic and south-eastern Europe in a bid to bolster this interpretation.<sup>86</sup> In

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Ulbricht, ‘Die Grundlagen der deutsch-polnischen Freundschaft’, *Neues Deutschland*, 21 November 1948, p. 3; Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Why Is the Oder-Neiße Line a Peace Border? Material from “Frage und Antwort”, Nr 6 (1950)’, trans. by Randall Bytwerk, *German Propaganda Archive, Calvin College*, 1998 <<https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/oder.htm>> [accessed 30 July 2020].

<sup>86</sup> ‘Auszug aus der Rede des Herrn Kreisrat Kulis Beeskow im Umsiedler Lager Küchensee vom 11.8.1947’

their propaganda setting this out, the SED and the P(Z)PR also strove to make clear to the GDR populace the necessity of at least nominal acceptance of this interpretation as a prerequisite to political conformity. The P(Z)PR propaganda on this issue within Poland incorporated an additional argument attempting to justify the border shift historically.<sup>87</sup> As Philippe Garabiol has mentioned, however, the historical argument never gained much traction, or indeed much official support, on the East German side, and disappeared from SED propaganda from around 1954 onwards; the new border's moral and political justifications were deemed more persuasive to the East German populace.<sup>88</sup>

This official interpretation met with relatively meagre success, however, and despite the SED's insistence to the contrary, the border change and expulsions engendered a great deal of anger, resentment and, in many cases, revanchism among East Germans. The deportations were interpreted in anti-Polonistic terms, with one victim denouncing it as a 'campaign of plunder [*Plünderungsaktion*] by the Poles', and others describing the Polish behaviour using vicious animalistic imagery.<sup>89</sup> While such feelings could not in general be publicly expressed, they occasionally surfaced at times of political instability. During the workers' uprising of 1953, crowds in Stalinstadt (later Eisenhüttenstadt) were heard demanding that the government 'chuck the Polacks [*Pollacken*] out of Germany'.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in 1956 many East Germans expressed the hope that the Soviet response to the Polish uprising would involve a border revision in the GDR's favour.<sup>91</sup> Reports from the Polish ambassador in East Berlin and

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(Potsdam), BLHA, Rep. 256 Umsiedlerlager KÜchensee.

<sup>87</sup> In this interpretation, the Polish annexation of former eastern German territories was in fact a reclamation of lands traditionally belonging to the Polish nation, which had previously been seized by the Germans during the partitions, or in some cases earlier. The post-war border settlement was therefore an appropriate, if not long overdue, attempt to redress the balance. This idea was articulated most prominently in the names given to these territories in P(Z)PR propaganda: the 'Recovered Territories' (*Ziemia Odzyskana*), which was given clear endorsement in the name of the ministry responsible for the region; and, less commonly, the 'Piast lands', a reference to the Polish state that existed from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, and whose name was invoked to suggest that the post-war border changes were serving to realign Poland with its medieval forebear. See Tomasz Kamusella, 'The Twentieth Anniversary of the German Polish Border Treaty of 1990: International Treaties and the Imagining of Poland's Post-1945 Western Border', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 25.3–4 (2010), 120–43 (p. 124).

<sup>88</sup> Philippe Garabiol, 'Les contradictions internes à l'est: le cas des relations entre le RDA et la Pologne (1949-1953)', in *L'Europe de l'Est et de l'Ouest dans la Guerre froide 1948-1953*, ed. by Saki Dockrill and others (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002), pp. 73–81 (p. 80).

<sup>89</sup> Elżbieta Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze. Geteilte Städte an der deutsch-polnischen Grenze', *Eurostudia – Revue Transatlantique de Recherche sur l'Europe*, 7.1–2 (2011), 153–66 (p. 157); Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków*, p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Helga Schultz, 'Geschichtsbilder in der deutsch-polnischen Grenzregion', *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*, 27 (2009), 319–26 (p. 322).

<sup>91</sup> Burkhard Olschowsky, 'Die staatlichen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete*



various GDR political leaders identified widespread discontent with the Oder–Neisse border settlement, and a growing willingness, during the political instability in Poland, to express it.<sup>92</sup> The nebulous intellectual opposition in the GDR also incorporated revisionism into their reformist platform, with such figures as Wolfgang Harich advocating the return of several border territories to the GDR.<sup>93</sup> Even between such flashpoints, however, border revisionism remained a persistent influence on popular conceptions of and attitudes towards Poles. Mood and opinion reports by factories and political bodies revealed continued popular belief in the injustice of the settlement, along with disparaging comments about the Poles' inability to develop the land they had annexed effectively.<sup>94</sup> The initial propaganda campaign surrounding the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty aside, the SED made little effort to challenge these views, and this, along with the taboo on public discussion of border issues (on which more below), left anti-Polish sentiment free to fester throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Interestingly, there seem to be more examples of popular border revisionism dating from the early to mid 1960s than from any other period. Mass organization security and incident reports contain a range of examples of comments such as those made by a nurse at a children's hospital in Querfurt in 1961: 'Everyone who's lost their *Heimat* in the east wants to go back, so we shouldn't recognize the Oder–Neisse border'.<sup>95</sup> A more aggressive complaint was made in 1960 by a factory worker in Ludwigslust, who commented to the local Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend, FDJ) secretary that 'if Walter Ulbricht and Grotewohl come here, they'll be sentenced to fifteen years for treason, for trading away the eastern territories'.<sup>96</sup> A 1965 report on the activities of a right-wing gang based in Neuersdorf, moreover, mentioned the group's use of slogans such as 'We will reconquer the German eastern territories' among its various violent and revanchist proclamations. Among other measures, the report proposed that the gang members be made to meet with an antifascist

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*Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 41–58 (p. 43).

<sup>92</sup> Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, 'Reaktionen der DDR auf die Oktober-Ereignisse in Polen im Jahre 1956', in *Die DDR – Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 669–96 (pp. 675–76).

<sup>93</sup> Opilowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 162.

<sup>94</sup> Jan C. Behrends, *Die erfundene Freundschaft. Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und in der DDR (1944-1957)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), pp. 266–69; Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków*, p. 48.

<sup>95</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Halle, 'Zur Tätigkeit des Klassengegners, 18 December 1961' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/16.

<sup>96</sup> FDGB Bundesvorstand, Abteilung Information/Statistik, 'AK – Information Nr. 41, 12 July 1960' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/23021, pp. 105–12.

veteran, 'so that [they] can understand the dark past reflected in these words'.<sup>97</sup>

A more comprehensive, if potentially less reliable, indication of the extent of popular revanchism can be found in the results of a survey conducted by the SED's *Institut für Meinungsforschung* in 1965. The questionnaire was designed to gauge popular opinion on a variety of topics relating to the 'German question' and national politics in the GDR. One question asked, 'Do you consider the present borders of Germany to be final, or do you believe that the borders of 1937 should be reinstated?' As might be expected from a survey of this sort, the majority of respondents declared their support for the post-war borders. There was, however, a marked difference between the answers of those in the 41–50 age group (that is, those who had been between 25 and 35 years old in 1950) and the remainder. While the other age groups expressed between 69 and 72 percent support for the new borders, in the 41–50 group this was reduced to 63.1 percent. The proportion of this age group that refused to supply an answer was also higher than that of any other group.<sup>98</sup> The fact that the responses of those aged 50 and above were in line with those of the younger cohorts is particularly interesting, and suggests that the relative hostility of the 41-to-50-year-olds towards the Oder–Neisse border stemmed from something other than their having experienced the border change as adults. What that factor may be, however, is difficult to determine from this survey in isolation. Potentially illuminating, however, is the fact that certain other studies have also identified this group as demographically distinct. In her analysis of the political mobilization of different age cohorts in the GDR, for instance, Mary Fulbrook determines that this group—more specifically, the cohort born between 1915 and 1919, or the upper half of the 41–50 age bracket in 1965—was one of the most under-represented among those who played a 'significant role' in the GDR throughout its history. This group's relative lack of participation is all the more striking given that those born just five years earlier or later were represented more prominently. While the group is not one of the 'sore-thumb' cohorts that are the focus of Fulbrook's study, she does point out that it was part of a larger cohort, born during or around the First World War, which suffered demographic losses that left it less able to achieve prominence in the post-war era. More relevantly, she comments that this group was one of several to experience the Third Reich as

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<sup>97</sup> FDJ Zentralrat Organisation-Kader, 'Besonderes Vorkommnis, 1 October 1965' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/24449.

<sup>98</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5198.

adolescents or young adults, and was therefore among those most profoundly influenced by Nazi ideology and propaganda. It is possible that this influence made it less receptive to SED ideology in turn. These demographic and historical points are persuasive, and offer a partial explanation for this group's apparent reluctance to engage with East German politics or, to a certain extent, with society and culture in the GDR. The results of this survey suggest that this reservation also extended to the group's willingness to identify with the SED's definition of the German nation, or at least their willingness officially to express an opinion on the matter. It seems unlikely that this is the entire story, however, particularly as the fine demographic granularity of Fulbrook's study makes it clear that other age cohorts who were the generational contemporaries of this group went through similar experiences and socialization, yet showed markedly greater political and social engagement.<sup>99</sup> As mentioned above, moreover, those cohorts that had come of age under Nazism in many cases enjoyed the smoothest transition to the new political orthodoxy in the East. For their part, the writer(s) of the IMF report offered no analysis beyond describing the results as a 'worrying signal [*ernstes Signal*]'. The responses show a similar disparity between the attitudes of manual workers and farmers on the one hand, and salaried employees, pensioners, students and intellectuals on the other, with the former group expressing significantly more support for a restoration of the 1937 borders than the latter. The starkest difference is to be found between the answers given by manual workers (59.2 percent support for the 1950 borders, 32.6 percent for those of 1937) and the responses of intellectuals (84.6 percent for the 1950 borders, 12.3 percent for those of 1937).<sup>100</sup>

It was presumably this fusion of anti-Polish sentiment and belligerent border revisionism that Polish journalist Adam Krzemiński was describing when he referred to an 'Oder–Neisse complex' dominating unofficial memory cultures in the GDR.<sup>101</sup> By the time of

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<sup>99</sup> Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*, pp. 250–53. While Fulbrook's study was confined to those individuals sufficiently prominent to warrant an entry in the post-*Wende* biography *Wer war wer in der DDR* (Who was who in the GDR), her other work has suggested that these generational patterns were replicated in the broader East German populace. See Mary Fulbrook, "'Normalisation" in the GDR in Retrospect: East German Perspectives on Their Own Lives', in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 278–320 (pp. 288–90).

<sup>100</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/5198.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Dariusz Wojtaszyn, 'Polen zwischen Deutschland und Russland — Fluch der Geschichte?', in *Polska między Niemcami a Rosją — Polen zwischen Deutschland und Russland. Materialien internationaler Colloquien, Gödelitz, 27. bis 29. März*, ed. by Karol Czejarek and Tomasz G. Pszczołkowski (Pułtusk: Akademia Humanistyczna im. Aleksandra Gieysztora, 2011), pp. 25–34 (p. 31).

the border opening in 1972, these feelings were largely unchanged; indeed, they had ossified. A report from the director of the Polish Information and Cultural Centre in Leipzig from 1973, for instance, bemoaned the persistence of anti-Polonism in the GDR, particularly in southern regions.<sup>102</sup>

Even the SED was not immune to this sentiment. The rank and file of the party, particularly new cadres recruited from 1945 onwards, were in many cases no less nationalistic than the populace at large, a situation that caused considerable problems of behavioural and ideological discipline.<sup>103</sup> The border change, and particularly its ratification in 1950, was the subject of much barely suppressed protest. Such sentiments persisted among SED cadres until at least the 1960s. Indeed, there is every indication that the party leadership itself shared these revanchist feelings, at least in the first few years, and that it too was vehemently opposed to any recognition of the border's permanence, changing tack only when disciplined by the Soviet centre.<sup>104</sup> In a memoir written in 1977, Rudolph Bühring discusses the persistence of 'many unresolved issues' concerning the Oder–Neisse border among German communists in the immediate post-war period, even after the final frontier had already been agreed officially. Bühring asserts that these stemmed from 'the prejudice even of comrades in our party against Polish people'.<sup>105</sup> The 1980s remembrance of Hubert Meller suggests that the SED's 'reservations' about the border were motivated in part by nationalistic concerns, particularly its hopes, not yet conclusively frustrated, of achieving a united socialist Germany. Acknowledgement of the border, the leadership feared, would leave it 'at a

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<sup>102</sup> Reported in Daniel Logemann, *Das polnische Fenster: Deutsch-polnische Kontakte im staatssozialistischen Alltag Leipzigs, 1972-1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), p. 37.

<sup>103</sup> Jan Kiepe, 'Nationalism as a Heavy Mortgage: SED Cadres Actions between Demand and Reality', *Nationalities Papers*, 37.4 (2009), 467–83 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990902985694>>.

<sup>104</sup> Andreas Malycha, 'Die SED und die Oder-Neiße-Grenze bis zum Görlitzer Vertrag 1950', in *Grenze der Hoffnung. Geschichte und Perspektiven der Grenzregion an der Oder*, ed. by Helga Schultz and Alan Nothnagle (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1996), pp. 81–111; Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations 1945-1962* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), pp. 32–40; Czesław Osękowski, 'Der Pass- und Visafreie Personenverkehr zwischen der DDR und Polen in den siebziger Jahren. Politische, wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Auswirkungen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ulrich Heiße (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 123–33 (p. 124); Mieczysław Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ewa Krauß (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 59–79 (p. 60); Schultz, 'Geschichtsbilder', p. 322.

<sup>105</sup> Rudolph Bühring, 'Erinnerung' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1845/1.

disadvantage' electorally, and cause considerable damage to its popular legitimacy.<sup>106</sup> This remained a source of tension between the East German and Polish leaderships across the entire communist period.<sup>107</sup>

The reluctance with which all echelons of the SED recognized the border fuelled not only alienation on both sides, but also continued Polish fears of German revanchism from the GDR as well as from the Federal Republic. At a meeting with a Polish cultural delegation from Szczecin in Stralsund in 1958, for example, a representative of the Liberal Democratic Party (Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands, LDPD) *Bezirksleitung* Rostock was asked: 'How many [former inhabitants of German Stettin] live in Stralsund, and how many live in *Bezirk* Rostock? Do they not bear any hatred towards a Polish company from Szczecin? Will their sons, who will one day serve in the army, not turn their weapons around and try to reconquer the former German territories?' This anxiety resurfaced in other questions during the session, including: 'What do the people of Stralsund think about the accommodation shortage? Do they not think that there would be enough apartments if the Stettin Germans weren't here?'<sup>108</sup> There is no record of the LDPD representative's replies to these questions; the fact that an official delegation felt the need to ask them, however, suggests that Polish anxieties were both real and relatively influential. Such fears were not eased by a variety of diplomatic incidents over the subsequent two decades implying that the SED leadership still had designs on Polish territory. These ranged from what may have been misunderstandings, such as incidents of raucous behaviour and revanchist comments by soldiers in the National People's Army (NVA) during joint exercises,<sup>109</sup> to obvious provocations, such as the scandal caused by the decision taken by the Director of the GDR Culture and Information Centre in Warsaw to take a walk through the town of Włocławek wearing a long leather coat and accompanied by a German shepherd.<sup>110</sup> That the latter event

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<sup>106</sup> Meller, 'Erinnerung'.

<sup>107</sup> Basil Kerski, 'Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen. Versuch einer Bilanz', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 9–25 (p. 16).

<sup>108</sup> SED Bezirksleitung Rostock Secretariat, 'Letter to Ulbricht, 27 July 1958' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1250, pp. 14–20.

<sup>109</sup> Polish Army report reproduced in *Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991*, ed. by Wojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (Budapest: Central University Press, 2005).. The report argues that the revanchist comments in question were the result of inadequate or biased political training.

<sup>110</sup> Reinhardt Gutsche, 'Nur ein Erfüllungsgehilfe? Die SED-Führung und die militärische Option zur Niederschlagung der Opposition in Polen in den Jahren 1980/81', in *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates: Beiträge und Analysen*, ed. by Klaus Schroeder (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), pp. 166–79 (p.

occurred in the early 1970s demonstrates the extent to which these problems continued to overshadow even official GDR-Polish relations decades after the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty.

### *The expulsions as personal trauma*

For those personally involved in the resettlements, the matter was less one of clear-cut revanchism. Far more salient were their more immediate, personal losses: of their houses or farms; of most of their property; of their homelands; and in many cases of their extended families. Their understanding of the deportations was also dominated by their traumatic experiences of the often brutal and violent way in which they were carried out.

As a result, there developed a slight dissonance between the understanding of these two groups of what the border change meant, and of the precise nature of the injury that had been inflicted. This was not as wide as the gulf between East German and Polish interpretations of the change more generally, but it is important that all these levels of discord, all these overlapping spaces within which the SED's narrative regarding the Oder–Neisse border was contested, and partially internalized, be taken into account. There were of course differing opinions among the expellees themselves. When interviewed by René Lehmann, for instance, one former refugee from the eastern territories refused to refer to herself as an 'expellee', preferring instead to use the official GDR designation 'resettler [*Umsiedler*]'.<sup>111</sup> This is an interesting reminder that German victimhood was emphasized only with qualifications in official narratives—though the fact that only one interviewee out of eighteen individual and seven family discussions drew this distinction suggests that the majority did not identify with the SED's favoured terminology. For the most part, indeed, the expellees' experiences and outlook were different enough for them to constitute a distinct memory community, separate from their respective national groups, whose interpretation of the border shift was at variance with the official version. It was in the interest of both communist parties to eliminate, or at least to suppress, this threat to the integrity of the new national collectivities that they were trying to construct. In each state, the border, the resettlers and their memories and experiences of deportation all needed to be woven into the new national narrative, and all needed to be reconciled with the varied, counterproductive and often contradictory popular responses to these developments outlined above. The methods used by the SED were generally crude and

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<sup>111</sup> Lehmann, 'Generation and Transition', p. 108.

coercive, their aim being to achieve at least nominal integration as quickly as possible.

One of the crudest such methods was the sealing of the Oder–Neisse border once the population transfers had been completed. The border itself was surrounded by an exclusion zone, protected by fencing, barbed wire, a network of watchtowers, and a strip of earth on each side ploughed so that any intruders would be unable to cover their tracks. The area was also ‘combed by mounted patrols every few hundred meters or half a kilometer’. For good measure, photographing of buildings and monuments in the area was prohibited, as was walking along the Oder or Neisse rivers until 1946. One resident of Zgorzelec recalls walking down to the border with her friends in the mid 1960s to watch an Easter Sunday procession in neighbouring Görlitz and striking up a conversation with a group of East Germans on the other side, whereupon she and her friends were arrested by a Polish border patrol, and were detained as ‘spies’ for several hours. Another remembers numerous occasions during her childhood on which her play along the Neisse river was interrupted by Polish and East German soldiers, both of whom ‘terrified’ her.<sup>112</sup> By the early 1960s, East Germans were criticizing this situation. In 1962, for instance, a group of workers in Bautzen were reported for expressing ‘a negative attitude towards the border between the GDR and People’s Poland, and towards the allegedly overly stringent border controls. The average West German can get to Czechoslovakia and Poland more quickly than we can. They asked if that was supposed to be friendship’.<sup>113</sup>

In a related effort, the SED began almost immediately to impose a taboo on any public discussion of these matters, to say nothing of any demands for border revision.<sup>114</sup> An SED document dated February 1945, for instance, insisted that there be ‘no further discussion of the “resettler problem” [...] The word “resettler” ought to vanish from public discourse. All

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<sup>112</sup> Elżbieta Opiłowska, “‘The Miracle on the Oder’: The Opening of the Polish–German Border in the 1970s and Its Impact on Polish–German Relations in the Borderland”, *East Central Europe*, 41.2–3 (2014), 204–22 (p. 205) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/18763308-04103003>>; Katarzyna Stokłosa, ‘The Border in the Narratives of the Inhabitants of the German-Polish Border Region’, in *European Border Regions in Comparison: Overcoming Nationalistic Aspects or Re-Nationalization?*, ed. by Katarzyna Stokłosa and Gerhard Besier (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 257–74 (pp. 259–61). These security measures were not dissimilar to those established along the inner-German border; see, for instance: Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>113</sup> FDJ Zentralrat Abteilung Organisation-Instrukteure, ‘Informationen über Feindtätigkeit und besondere Vorkommnisse aus Informationen der Bezirksleitungen, 18 June 1962’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/3721.

<sup>114</sup> Tomala, ‘Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen’, p. 61; Kerski, ‘Versuch einer Bilanz’, p. 15.

comrades ought only to discuss and act on matters from a social viewpoint'.<sup>115</sup> This extended even to the omission of any mention of the population transfers from GDR history textbooks as late as 1989. The taboo was imposed for various reasons, the most significant relating to the official antifascist narrative. The contents of this narrative made little allowance for the expellees' perspective or ordeals. In essence, the SED sought to 'determine and monopolize' popular memory cultures in the GDR,<sup>116</sup> and to use this dominance to expedite the assimilation of the expellees. They were expected to integrate into their new residences as 'ahistorical beings, officially forbidden to keep memories of their homeland alive or preserve their cultural and intellectual heritages'.<sup>117</sup>

There exists some debate in the literature on whether this situation helped or hindered the normalization of East German-Polish relations. A few scholars, notably former GDR historian Helga Schultz, have raised the possibility that the taboo and the isolation of both populations may in fact have expedited the easing of tensions. Citing sociological research conducted in post-*Wende* Germany, Schultz suggests that issues related to the expulsions are less contentious in the border region than in other areas of Germany. She contrasts this favourably with the approach taken in the FRG, in which the activities and political prominence of expellees' organizations ensured that the populace received frequent reminders of the indignities inflicted on the German nation.<sup>118</sup> This argument is rendered problematic by Schultz's admitted close identification with the Marxist-Leninist historiography promoted by the SED, despite the distinguished career she enjoyed in united Germany. More to the point, there is little other evidence to support her conclusions, and far more suggesting that the policy simply allowed resentment to fester and unflattering stereotypes to proliferate on both sides of the border. The problem was not simply one of a lack of empathy. Katarzyna Stokłosa has pointed out that many East German expellees were aware that they had a great deal in common with the Poles resettled in their homes in the eastern territories, most of whom had also been relocated from eastern Poland as part of an 'involuntary process'. In the event, however, 'the overwhelming feeling of grievance militated against any potential for

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<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Wille, 'Compelling the Assimilation of Expellees', p. 277.

<sup>116</sup> Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 159. See also Rainer Schulze, 'Instrumentalisation – Marginalisation – Re-Evaluation: Flight and Expulsion after the Second World War in Post-War German Collective Memory', in *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945*, ed. by Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 173–87 (pp. 175–79).

<sup>117</sup> Wille, 'Compelling the Assimilation of Expellees', p. 272.

<sup>118</sup> Schultz, 'Geschichtsbilder', p. 326.



reconciliation constituted by this understanding and permitted the development of the mutual atmosphere of hatred prevalent either side of the border'.<sup>119</sup> Though small numbers of East Germans and Poles enjoyed limited visits to or contact with the other state, for the majority it was not until the start of the open-border period in the early 1970s that these tensions could even begin to be resolved.

Many expellees took decades to adapt to their new homes and nation states, assuming that they adapted at all. One of the main inhibiting factors was the uncertainty surrounding the permanence of the Oder–Neisse border in the immediate post-war years. A large proportion of resettlers, both German and Polish, initially operated under the assumption that the border shifts would be reversed, and that they would soon be permitted to return home. This belief, in turn, left the resettlers disinclined to develop the border region economically, move further into Germany's hinterland, or in some cases even to unpack.<sup>120</sup> The SED recognized the danger of this mindset, to the resettlers' emotional well-being as well as to their efforts at national integration, at an early stage, with economics functionary Bruno Leuschner speaking out in 1948 against the 'illusions of sitting on suitcases [*Auf-den-Koffer-Sitzen*] and waiting to return to the old neighbourhood' to which it could give rise.<sup>121</sup> Felix-Heinrich Gentzen also found it necessary to stress in his memoir the danger that such 'illusions', fostered by 'enemies of a new democratic Germany', had posed.<sup>122</sup> The party attempted to address this problem with the resettlers directly, and included in its induction and political education programmes exhortations for them to set aside potentially disruptive hopes of return. In a political discussion with a group of recent arrivals at a resettler camp near Storkow, Brandenburg, in June 1947, for instance, the local SED *Kreis* chairman outlined the party's official line on the border question, and 'warned the resettlers not to cling to hopes of returning in the near future. He called on them to build themselves a new home

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<sup>119</sup> Stokłosa, 'The Border in the Narratives of the Inhabitants of the German-Polish Border Region', p. 258.

<sup>120</sup> Dariusz Galasiński and Ulrike H. Meinhof, 'Looking across the River: German-Polish Border Communities and the Construction of the Other', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 1.1 (2002), 23–58 <<https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.1.1.05gal>>; Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 156; Opiłowska, 'The Miracle on the Oder'. The concentration of expellees in the border region may also have been in part a consequence of the disorganization and material privations of post-war Germany: both Eastern and Western occupying powers were short of areas able to house and feed large quantities of refugees, and rural areas, including those on the Oder-Neisse border, were often in the best position to do so. On this, see Wille, 'Compelling the Assimilation of Expellees', p. 270.

<sup>121</sup> 'Pressekonferenz der Hellmut-v.-Gerlach-Gesellschaft am 22.10.1948', p. 123.

<sup>122</sup> Gentzen, 'Erinnerung'.

here, and vigorously to oppose all rumour-mongers and reactionaries'.<sup>123</sup> These words made little impression, however. While the Görlitz/Zgorzelec treaty provided some stability to the situation, the problem persisted in some form for generations.<sup>124</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the climate in these early years, many of the Poles resettled in the 'recovered territories' were paralysed by a similar sense of uncertainty and impermanence. An East German teacher visiting Warsaw on a study trip in 1956, for example, related an encounter with a Polish man who spoke 'quite openly' about the Polish attitude towards the border question. 'The German lands are no use to us,' the man argued, 'because the Poles who've moved there only work with the next day or two in mind. They don't believe they'll be able to stay there forever'.<sup>125</sup> Any potential for reconciliation that may have been offered by this commonality was lost, however, by the inability of both resettler groups to communicate for much of the communist era.

The expellees' difficulties were compounded by a powerful sense of *Heimweh*, or homesickness, sustained by their having 'to look out across the river, full of nostalgia, at their lost home'.<sup>126</sup> The persistence of this longing is evidenced by the enthusiasm with which GDR citizens indulged in what was termed *Heimwehtourismus*, the revisiting of former homes in Poland, as soon as the opened border offered them the chance in the 1970s.<sup>127</sup> The destabilizing potential of this practice had been discussed by Polish border authorities even before the border opening, and as expected, the encounters between the East Germans and the new Polish owners of their properties were often bitter affairs. Many East Germans were offended at what they perceived as the dilapidated state of their houses and cemeteries, while a few made openly revanchist threats that they would soon regain control of the area. Though this certainly did not happen in all cases, for most former refugees the *Heimwehtourismus* trips were the first opportunity to engage with their loss in thirty years, and were bittersweet occasions at best. The trips also demonstrated the extent to which anti-Polish sentiment had been incubated, even strengthened, among resettlers and in GDR society more broadly, as old

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<sup>123</sup> 'Kulturelle und politische Betreuung der Umsiedler aufgeschlüsselt nach Transporten Jan 1947–Jan 1949' (Potsdam), BLHA, Rep. 256 Umsiedlerlager KÜchensee, Nr. 166.

<sup>124</sup> Stokłosa, 'The Border in the Narratives of the Inhabitants of the German-Polish Border Region', p. 259.

<sup>125</sup> 'Bericht von einer Lehrerdelegation. Abschrift' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1247, pp. 211–13.

<sup>126</sup> Opiłowska, 'Stadt-Fluss-Grenze', p. 157.

<sup>127</sup> Katarzyna Stokłosa, 'VR Polen und die DDR: Die Bedeutung der Grenze für das "Freundschaftstheater"', in *Partner oder Kontrahenten? Deutsch-polnische Nachbarschaft im Jahrhundert der Diktaturen*, ed. by Mike Schmeitzner and Katarzyna Stokłosa, trans. by Torsten Lorenz (Berlin: LIT, 2008), pp. 193–203 (pp. 196–97).

prejudices were aired and new ones formed.<sup>128</sup> These developments cast further doubt on Schultz's surmise that the SED's policy of suppressing confrontation with the past was beneficial to the reconciliation process.

As far as the official national narratives were concerned, however, the integration of the resettlers proceeded swiftly and easily. This official line is evident in the remembrances of Felix-Heinrich Gentzen, in which he claimed that the SED had managed to assimilate the new arrivals from the east by the 1950s, due in no small part to widespread party and popular effort to promote a 'feeling of solidarity' among the entire population, and to encourage the resettlers to feel 'not like outcasts [*Ausgestoßene*], but like equal citizens in the country'.<sup>129</sup> There is some evidence that many did indeed begin rapidly and energetically to commit to their new state. In her interviews with former expellees, Wierling makes clear that many felt a 'strong desire' to return to their former homeland at the time, but that this did not inhibit them from getting involved in the post-war rebuilding efforts in the GDR. After their 'personal, social, regional and ideological bonds' had been forcibly disintegrated by the German defeat, the border change and the expulsions, they became willing, even 'quite eager', to take advantage of the opportunities for integration and advancement offered by the communist authorities. Not everyone reacted in this way, however; some of Wierling's other interviewees acknowledge feeling 'a certain depressed passivity and lack of energy' when facing the everyday challenges of reconstruction, and their accounts of the immediate post-war period are marked by a certain 'narrative flatness', or even silence.<sup>130</sup> Regardless of how they responded to these pressures, however, it seems likely that the expellees experienced longing and resentment in the long term, beneath the surface of what could be expressed publicly. Nonetheless, by the beginning of the 1950s both communist parties had declared the integration efforts a success, and stopped compiling separate statistics on the expellees.<sup>131</sup> They were simply folded into the populations of the (East) German and Polish nation states,

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<sup>128</sup> Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast and Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Geteilte Städte an Oder und Neiße. Frankfurt (Oder) - Słubice, Guben - Gubin und Görlitz - Zgorzelec 1945-1995* (Berlin: Arno Spitz, 2000), pp. 83–84; Osękowski, 'Der Pass- und Visafreie Personenverkehr', p. 126; Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>129</sup> Gentzen, 'Erinnerung'.

<sup>130</sup> Wierling, 'The Hitler Youth Generation in the GDR', pp. 311–13.

<sup>131</sup> Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 26. Michael G. Müller points out that the refugee problem in the GDR was swept under the rug primarily 'by political order from above', in the interest of maintaining the appearance of solidarity throughout the socialist bloc: Müller, 'Poland and Germany', p. 100. Nonetheless, its diminution certainly served the SED's national narrative well.

while the SED ‘congratulated [itself] on the striking success of [its] integrational capabilities’.<sup>132</sup> The Oder–Neisse border, meanwhile, was hailed as one of several immutable borders defining these new states, as well as the principal guarantor of peace between them.

## Conclusions

While the concept of 1945 as a ‘zero hour’ should indeed be applied with caution, it is clear that the Second World War, and the upheavals that occurred in its aftermath, represented a major turning point in German-Polish relations. The war established the material, emotional and geopolitical conditions in which relations would unfold throughout the following decades. (More obviously and relevantly for this study, it was only the German defeat in the war and the communist assumption of power in both Poland and eastern Germany that made it possible for an *East* German-Polish relationship to develop at all.)

For ordinary Germans, the nascent years of the GDR were felt as an extended ‘postwar phase’, in which ‘the material and psychological effects of war dominate[d] everyday life’ and served as inescapable reminders of the recent past.<sup>133</sup> It was in this confused and volatile environment that the SED began constructing its reconciliatory and nation-building discursive projects. Of these, the reconciliation discourse was more immediately obvious, but the two were in fact intertwined even from this early stage. The SED placed the emphasis initially on the atrocities of Nazism and the devastation wrought in Poland, and this became the basis of its narrative of redemption and national reconstruction through commitment to socialism. The other crucial element of this narrative, however, was an emphasis on German suffering. Rehabilitation through socialism was presented primarily as a means of working through this, with reconciliation with Poland a distant second in the list of priorities.

The Oder–Neisse border presented an immense challenge to both discourses; this was perhaps unsurprising, given its origin as a Soviet (and, to a lesser degree, Polish) imposition rather than any kind of bilateral reconciliation initiative. The new border was presented by the SED as a political and moral necessity and, more fervently, as the foundation of a new East German-Polish friendship and a guarantor of peace—and, therefore, as a demonstration of how only socialism could bring about that peace. However, it and the expulsions that

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<sup>132</sup> Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, p. 354. It should be pointed out that, as Douglas makes clear in his discussion, the Federal Republic had its own blind spots and problems concerning the integration of resettlers.

<sup>133</sup> Wierling, ‘Three Generations of East German Women’, p. 24.

accompanied it were received by ordinary (East) Germans as a national outrage, and in many cases as a personal trauma as well. Although the SED was quick to declare popular acceptance of the new border and suppress all open discussion of the matter, popular resentment and desire to revise the border remained strong throughout the communist era, finding overt expression again at various moments of unrest and discontent in the 1950s and beyond. The SED's efforts to prevent this in subsequent decades were greatly hampered by its limited control of the populace; its inability to allow dissent or discussion on a subject so fundamental to the GDR's existence and identity; and, crucially, its use of other elements of the German victimhood narrative, which sustained this sense of national injury to some extent. Renewed demands for border revision were therefore made at times of acute strain in GDR-Polish relations, and notably on several occasions when the SED encouraged heightened anti-Polonism for its own ends. The party certainly did not intend for border revisionism to become part of that anti-Polish rhetoric, and the fact that it did illustrates the limits of its control of the national narrative, and the rather fraught and unresolved nature of the 'bargain' made with the East German populace as part of the construction of socialism in the immediate post-war period. In addition, the SED was unwilling to commit to a full-throated defence of the border, as many members were themselves influenced by nationalist concerns. The SED did not attempt to secure a deeper or more widespread acceptance of the border, in short, because it was both unable and disinclined to do so. The border was therefore incorporated (imperfectly) into the reconciliation discourse, but its acceptance was undermined by elements of the nation-building discourse, as well as other shortcomings in the nature of SED rule.

This chapter has set out the premises from which the GDR-Polish relationship developed. Dealing with the immensely significant legacies of war, which never fully waned, it has outlined the ways in which these would resonate through official and private discourses in subsequent decades. These legacies would continue to shape popular attitudes to and interactions with Poles throughout the period from the mid 1960s through to the mid 1980s, even with growing distance from the immediate wartime and post-war period. The following chapter explores these resonances further, and investigates the ways in which these legacies, in conjunction with new communist-era grievances, frustrated SED efforts to present the GDR and Poland as 'brother' states within the wider socialist community.

### 3. Asserting the socialist brotherhood

This chapter focuses on the SED's attempts from the mid 1960s onwards to recast the East German-Polish relationship as a part of the wider 'family' of socialist states, a process shaped above all by what Laura Silverberg has termed the 'intertwining forces of Soviet-imposed socialism and German nationalism'.<sup>1</sup> The resulting ideology of 'socialist patriotism' was folded into the party's nation-building project in a bid to create a connective, bloc-wide source of popular identification that would remain compatible with deeper-rooted nationalist loyalties. In addition to its nation-building function, the SED hoped that this narrative of the socialist brotherhood would transform popular understandings of Poland and its people, contributing to reconciliation efforts by depicting Poland as a valued political, economic and cultural partner. In the event, however, the loftier aspects of this narrative failed to take hold, with only those elements that more closely aligned with the prejudices and the exceptionalism of German ethnonationalism resonating with the East German populace. As a result, little progress was made in working through the legacies of the Second World War, and these continued to shape the manner in which East Germans related to their Polish neighbours throughout the 1960s and 1970s, interacting with new sources of tension introduced by political developments in the Eastern bloc in complex and often deleterious ways.

#### A 'forced friendship'?

To contextualize these developments, it is worth briefly examining the power structure that had been established in the Eastern bloc by the mid 1960s and its impact on the bilateral GDR-Polish relationship. The dominant role of the Soviet centre was crucial in this respect. Christoph Klessmann has stressed the fundamental significance of the GDR's dependence on the USSR. As a result of its status as a product of Cold War division and a Soviet-backed communist bid for power, he argues, the GDR 'had less room for political maneuvering than other East European states that were based upon prior nations'.<sup>2</sup> Mary Sarotte has argued that while it may be stretching the point to refer to the GDR as a 'puppet state' of the Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Silverberg, 'East German Music and the Problem of National Identity', *Nationalities Papers*, 37.4 (2009), 501–22 (p. 502) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990902985710>>.

<sup>2</sup> Christoph Klessmann, 'Rethinking the Second German Dictatorship', in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 363–71 (p. 365).

Union, ‘it is accurate to say that, when Moscow and East Berlin’s interests diverged [...] Moscow prevailed. The East German tail did *not* wag the Soviet dog’. Nonetheless, the GDR was able to function ‘as an actor on the world stage’ despite this lack of complete autonomy. Sarotte also notes that *Ostpolitik* was of particular concern to the Soviets in this connection: ‘the Soviets feared East Germany’s potential *to start wagging* as a result of its contacts with the West’.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars, notably Hope M. Harrison, have long argued that the GDR exerted more influence on Moscow’s German policy than is usually acknowledged. As the Cold War developed, the USSR increasingly invested its reputation in the well-being and reliability of its German ally. Soviet fears that the GDR would ‘abandon’ the Eastern bloc, either involuntarily by collapsing and being absorbed into the Federal Republic, or willingly by pivoting more towards China, therefore gave the East German state more clout than might be expected. The SED became ‘adept at taking advantage of this situation’, and on many occasions succeeded in pushing its policy agenda even when this clashed with Soviet wishes. This was the case especially with policies relating to the FRG in the 1950s, with the SED using their influence to secure Soviet support for the further entrenchment of German division, up to and including the construction of the Berlin Wall, despite the strain this placed on Moscow’s relationship with the US, which it was keen to improve at the time.<sup>4</sup>

The organization of the bloc, and the limited parameters for political autonomy that it provided, promoted a political culture based at least partly on ideological conflict and contest. The increased contact among the bloc states, and between the bloc states and the USSR, that was prompted by the Soviet ‘friendship project’ of the 1950s and 1960s had the unintended effect of stoking the nationalistic fears and prejudices of many communist leaderships.<sup>5</sup> The SED was certainly not above such behaviour, and frequently exhibited a certain ideologically supercilious attitude towards Poland, exploiting Marxist and internationalist rhetoric to gain an advantage in its rivalry for Moscow’s favour. This superciliousness also stemmed from long-standing German anti-Polonism, and therefore served almost as a conduit for the rehabilitation (or simply the continuation) of a plethora of popular anti-Polish stereotypes.

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<sup>3</sup> M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p. 3 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup> Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 1-11.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Applebaum, ‘The Friendship Project: Socialist Internationalism in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s’, *Slavic Review*, 74.3 (2015), 484-507 (p. 486).

Alongside this, however, was a strain of anti-Soviet (or anti-Russian) feeling in both states, though it was far more pronounced in Poland; indeed, it too became little more than fresh clothing for old prejudices, with traditional Polish distrust of the German-Russian relationship manifesting in its characterization of the GDR as the dogmatically Stalinist lapdog of the Soviet Union. The interaction between these various prejudices, tensions and power relations shaped East Germans' and Poles' relationships both with each other—in a 'forced friendship [*zwangsverordnete Freundschaft*]', as Ludwig Mehlhorn terms it<sup>6</sup>—and with the wider socialist camp to which they were obliged to belong.

## **Fostering the brotherhood**

While the 'hard power' mechanisms by which the USSR managed its satellite states are certainly not irrelevant here, the ways in which it exercised 'soft power' are more important to an understanding of the interplay of nationalisms within the Eastern bloc.<sup>7</sup> Chief among these was the attempt by the Soviets and the SED to cultivate a sense of commitment to both the GDR and the brotherhood of socialist states more widely among the populace.

### ***Selling socialist patriotism***

As outlined earlier,<sup>8</sup> the SED's efforts to stimulate popular loyalty to the GDR and the bloc entailed the inscription of certain aspects of communist ideology and symbolism into the dominant national narrative. In effect, the party sought to craft a specifically communist nation state, which would serve as a source of political power, but also, equally importantly, as a home for its own socialist memory culture. As Laura Silverberg explains, while the SED leadership maintained at least ostensible commitment to a united socialist German nation, socialist symbols and rhetoric served a double function in nation-building propaganda: as in most Eastern bloc states, they asserted the GDR's solidarity with the socialist camp, while they also allowed for clear demarcation from the Federal Republic. In short, 'socialism had

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Mehlhorn, 'Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Zur Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 35–40.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' power was first developed by Joseph Nye, and elaborated in Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). For more on the Soviet use of 'soft power' in the Eastern bloc, see, for example, Patryk Babiracki, *Soviet Soft Power in Poland: Culture and the Making of Stalin's New Empire, 1943-1957* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See Introduction, p. 22.



potential as both a diversifying force (with respect to the two Germanys) and a unifying one (with respect to the Eastern bloc).<sup>9</sup>

In practice, however, patriotism and proletarian internationalism were very awkwardly fused together. Of the threads available to the SED as it attempted to rework the national tapestry into a more acceptable pattern, very few related to wider international loyalties. The resulting message, whereby East Germans were expected to endorse both German ethnonationalism and solidarity with the international proletariat, was decidedly mixed, and enjoyed little popular appeal. Behrends and Poutrus have discussed the tension that prevailed in the GDR between the ‘interconnected ideologies of nationalism and internationalism’.<sup>10</sup> The situation was not helped by the fact that internationalism remained an abstract and politicized concept, far harder to identify with than the more straightforward and culturally grounded rhetoric of *völkisch* nationalism; it was, after all, for its accessibility that the SED had chosen to incorporate it into its propaganda.

The idea of loyalty to an ethnically defined German nation was ‘more acceptable’ to a majority of the population than any commitment to internationalism, and therefore more influential.<sup>11</sup> There is some evidence that in the wake of the construction of the Berlin Wall, the SED succeeded in instilling in many citizens a sense of the GDR as their new homeland, as a nation, or at the very least a state, in which they could feel a sense of pride and belonging. A report from the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda (*Bezirk* Dresden) in 1969, for instance, claims that factory workers in the region increasingly ‘accept the GDR as their state’ and have pride in it as such.<sup>12</sup> In the same year, the party organization at the *Ferdinand Kunert* foundry in Schmiedeberg (*Bezirk* Dresden, *Kreis* Dippoldiswalde) also asserted that their workers had come to accept the idea, pointing out that ‘in conversation, concepts such as “our state, our republic, our factory” and so on are being used with increasing frequency’. The organization’s report suggests that the workers’ commitment to the GDR stemmed from the state’s ability to offer them a better life and a more ‘secure existence’ than its imperialist

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<sup>9</sup> Silverberg, ‘East German Music’, p. 503.

<sup>10</sup> Jan C. Behrends and Patrice G. Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR – Explorations and Explanation from a Historical Perspective’, in *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations*, ed. by Tomasz Kamusella, Wojciech Burszta, and Sebastian Wojciechowski, 2 vols (Poznań: Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa, 2005), I, 155–70 (p. 156).

<sup>11</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, pp. 162–63.

<sup>12</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, ‘Analyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Arbeiter der bezirksgeliteten Industrie sowie bei Komplementären und Privatunternehmern’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

forebears, as evidenced by the fact that ‘it is above all older workers who rate the accomplishments of the workers’ and peasants’ state highly’. Younger workers, it argues, accepted the narrative for a different reason:

Young people do not have any basis for comparison with earlier social systems. They accept a great deal without question, as they have grown up under socialist conditions here. The majority view the GDR as their socialist fatherland, which offers them every possibility for development. In taking on youth projects and other plan tasks, they demonstrate that they feel part of our state and that they are aware of the dual role of the working class. This is also demonstrated through expressions such as ‘these are our machines’, ‘these are our materials’, etc.<sup>13</sup>

This concurs with the conclusion of the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz (*Bezirk* Dresden) in 1967 that young people in rural areas of the *Kreis* ‘are becoming ever more aware that the GDR is their fatherland’.<sup>14</sup> A similar report on the attitude of students in *Kreis* Dippoldiswalde claims that a majority acknowledged the GDR as their ‘socialist fatherland’, which was manifest in their ‘readiness to defend our fatherland’ and in the enthusiasm with which many had participated in military schooling.<sup>15</sup> A 1969 report from the same region, meanwhile, asserts that functionaries in the *Rat des Kreises* and town councils of Dippoldiswalde and Altenberg generally had a solid sense of the GDR as their socialist home:

There is also consensus that the GDR is the socialist fatherland of our citizens, and that we have been making constant progress in the twenty-year development of socialism. As a result, we estimate that this understanding has developed significantly among comrades and party workers [...] The conviction is firmly ingrained in all workers that the GDR is their socialist fatherland.

The same report also discusses the ideological development of farmers working on Agricultural Production Cooperatives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*, LPGs), claiming that they ‘always spoke of our German Democratic Republic, our state, our

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<sup>13</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB GISAG Betrieb ‘Ferdinand Kunert’ Schmiedeberg, ‘Denkanalyse – Beschluß Kreisleitungssitzung vom 30. 8. 1969, 1 October 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>14</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Analyse Bewußtseinsentwicklung – Jugend’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/A.4.06.59.

<sup>15</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, ‘Report, 26 September 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

LPG’, and concluding that some sense of national belonging must have been cultivated.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the casualness of this flagging suggests that GDR nationalism, or at the very least an acceptance of GDR statehood, was on the way to becoming ‘banal’ by the late 1960s.

The SED met with more mixed results, however, in associating this limited nationalism with the socialist character of the GDR. The fact that the GDR was a socialist country and a part of the Eastern bloc was at best incidental to many of those who endorsed it as a separate German state. There is evidence that a limited number of GDR citizens did accept both parts of the equation. A 1969 report by the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde claims that all ‘older colleagues’ in the region had the ‘firm recognition’ that ‘the GDR [is] our socialist fatherland’.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, a 1969 report by the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde mentions that a majority of workers on the LPG *Vereinte Kraft* in Cunnersdorf seemed to believe that ‘the GDR is the true *Heimat* of all Germans’, and expressed their confidence that socialism would eventually spread to the Federal Republic as well.<sup>18</sup> A 1969 report by the economic department of the SED *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde paints a rather more pessimistic picture, however, in its assessment of the ideological and national awareness of workers at the semi-state enterprise (*Betrieb mit Staatlicher Beteiligung*, BSB) *Johannes Tittel* in Schlottwitz (*Bezirk* Dresden). The document states that the ‘socialist class consciousness’ of the workforce was ‘very poorly developed’. Most workers exhibited a ‘passive attitude’ towards the GDR state, being content to live and work there provided that their pay and living circumstances were enough to satisfy, and believing in turn that they were contributing enough if they worked well; as a result, ‘the vast majority do not recognize the historical mission of the German Democratic Republic’. More worrying was the fact that ‘many view the whole of Germany [*Gesamtdeutschland*] as their fatherland, and the GDR as the current state in which they live’. The report points out that, while there was no desire to return to fascism, especially among older workers, ‘they are also [...] of the opinion that things are nowhere near as bad in West Germany as is presented’. Similarly, there seemed to be very

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<sup>16</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., ‘Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins der Werktätigen im Kreis Dippoldiswalde, 11 November 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>17</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, ‘Analyse des Denkens der Lehrkräfte und Genossen der OS Kipsdorf, 19 September 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>18</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, ‘Einschätzung zu Fragen der Bewußtseinsanalyse in der LPG Typ III “Vereinte Kraft” Cunnersdorf, 25 March 1971’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

little understanding of why the Berlin Wall needed to be erected, and those workers who did show some knowledge were generally more aware of the economic justifications for the Wall than of the political or military. The report concedes that these conclusions were based on very few opinions, since it was not possible to canvas most workers on these topics.<sup>19</sup> Its findings were echoed, however, in a 1974 report by the SED party organization for the regional trading organization (*Handelsorganisation*, HO) in *Kreis* Bischofswerda (*Bezirk* Dresden). which briefly mentions various workers' complaints about the poor provision of goods in the GDR, especially the mismatch between these shortages and the reports of economic success in the media. The report expresses the particular concern that this situation 'hinders the development of patriotic thought and pride in being a citizen of the GDR'.<sup>20</sup> A 1969 report from the party organization at the Planeta printing machine factory in Radebeul in Dresden, outlining the ideological development of members of the 'artistic intelligentsia' at the plant, notes that a majority of those surveyed remained 'not especially well theoretically educated or active in social life'. The authors ascribe this to the insufficient ideological work conducted with this group by SED, state and mass organizations in Radebeul in recent years, which had resulted in a situation 'in which artists are left too much to themselves'. Despite this, however, the report emphasizes that all those interviewed displayed both 'a certain pride' in the GDR and its achievements and faith in the SED and its policies; this simply did not translate into societal-political activity.<sup>21</sup> The idea of the socialist German nation, therefore, took hold among the GDR populace only insofar as it occupied the same space as any other nationalist affiliation. A large proportion of East Germans were willing to take some pride in the GDR as their state, but far fewer felt any interest in it as their socialist state.

In light of this, it is hardly surprising that the populace was still less accepting of the GDR as part of a wider community of socialist states. In its discussion of the attitude of factory workers in the region, a 1968 ideological report by the *Kreisleitung* Freital claims that socialist patriotism was indeed becoming an established mindset:

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<sup>19</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Wirtschaft, 'Denkanalyse, 30 September 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>20</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation HO Kreisbetrieb Bischofswerda, 'Berichterstattung zur Verwirklichung des Beschlusses über Agitation und Propaganda, 15 November 1974' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.98.

<sup>21</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Druckmaschinenwerk Planeta Radebeul, 'Zuarbeit zur Bewußtseinsanalyse, 25 September 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.131.

A new patriotism is developing, shaped by the responsibility of the working class for the fierce advance of socialism as a world system, the collapse of the colonial system and the development of the democratic and anti-imperialist liberation movement, as well as by the growing desire for peace among the people and other factors.

The report also claims that advances in communication technology were reinforcing the ‘relationship of the working class to their fatherland and to internationalism’. News now travelled fast enough that local concerns rapidly became ‘global political events’, which encouraged the working class to feel more connected to their fellow workers across the world. The report cites the Vietnam War and the recent Czechoslovakian crisis as examples of this. On the other hand, when it moves on to the outlook of the ‘scientific-technical intelligentsia’, the report concedes that ‘despite their positive attitude towards proletarian and socialist internationalism, there remain certain tendencies towards national arrogance and nationalism’, an attitude it ascribes in part to the scepticism of most intellectuals towards the GDR media and their insistence on maintaining ‘an objective opinion’ on most matters.<sup>22</sup> In a 1972 report examining the societal effects of the opening of the GDR-Polish border, meanwhile, the *Kreisleitung* Freital points out that the border opening had not yet led to a strengthening of socialist consciousness among workers, but was viewed in wholly personal and unpolitical terms: the open borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia were ‘not yet perceived as a key component of socialist integration. [The workers] do welcome the measures [...] but their inner attitude, which they reveal in conversation, shows that they see advantages only for themselves’.<sup>23</sup> A similar report by the *Kreisleitung* Freital’s education (*Volksbildung*) division mentions that discussions of ‘questions of socialist integration’ with teachers and students showed that ‘the international character of socialism is not understood’, nor was the fact that ‘integration does not concern only the economic policies of socialist countries’.<sup>24</sup>

In short, the populace continued to view the socialist community in purely national—and nationalist—terms, according to the same paradigm that governed any other interstate

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<sup>22</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Analyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Bürger der verschiedenen Klassen und Schichten des Kreises Freital, 20 September 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/B/4.05.74.

<sup>23</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Dienstleistungskombinat’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/C/4.05.101.

<sup>24</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, Abt. Volksbildung, ‘Zuarbeit für Bewußtseinsanalyse, 21 March 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/C/4.05.101.

relations. Indeed, the main form in which socialist internationalism was experienced by the populace was that of Soviet dominance, with the USSR a constant political, economic, cultural and military presence. To a large extent, the socialist brotherhood, at least as an everyday reality, was synonymous with Soviet power. It was perceived as a ruler–client relationship in the traditional mould, quite at odds with the image of a family of equal states promoted in communist rhetoric. József Litkei’s summation of the ironies of the Hungarian communists’ attempts to establish a legitimizing, Marxist national narrative applies equally well to the GDR: he highlights the ‘inner contradiction of a historico-political construct designed to endow with national pathos a regime that not only subordinated national aspirations to Soviet interests, but even celebrated this subordination in conspicuous ways’.<sup>25</sup>

The tension between local nationalism and internationalism manifested, among other ways, in both official and popular attitudes towards foreigners in the GDR. One of the major factors contributing to this was the fact that the presence of almost all foreigners in the GDR was so closely associated with the SED in the minds of the populace. This impression was an inevitable consequence of the circumstances under which foreigners were allowed into the GDR in the first place. With the exception of ordinary Poles (and Czechs) during the open-border period, they were allowed in only at the SED’s invitation, as part of an official delegation or an economic or cultural exchange programme, and were portrayed in the media as guests of the East German state. Throughout their stays, which were strictly curtailed, the communist authorities also did their utmost to isolate them from the East German population. As a result, for ordinary East Germans the presence of foreigners was never normalized, and indeed acquired a rather distasteful political inflection. In essence, they quickly came to be viewed as representatives of the communist state, and were subject to the same unarticulated distrust and aversion with which the populace treated most other aspects of communist rule.<sup>26</sup> One of the main manifestations of the ‘socialist brotherhood’ in the everyday lives of GDR citizens was therefore compromised by the SED’s domestic legitimacy problems. In the Poles’ case, the open-border period did not last long enough to mitigate this impression, and Poles working in or visiting the GDR were largely viewed in the same category as Soviet

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<sup>25</sup> József Litkei, ‘The Molnár Debate of 1950: Hungarian Communist Historical Politics and the Problem of the Soviet Model’, *East Central Europe*, 44.2–3 (2017), 249–83 (p. 276) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/18763308-04402005>>.

<sup>26</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, pp. 160–61.

troops, political immigrants from Greece or Spain, and contract workers from Vietnam, Mozambique and other newly socialist states.

### ***The Federal Republic complication***

The SED's attempts to channel popular nationalism were of course complicated by the populace's continued attraction to and 'will for unity' with the Federal Republic. A small number of East Germans accepted, or claimed to accept, aspects of the SED's characterization of the Federal Republic and the threat it posed. A December 1966 opinion report by the *Kreisleitung* Bautzen (*Bezirk* Dresden) claims that a majority of workers in the *Kreis* held the correct view of the German question:

It is recognized by a significant majority of the working class that reunification of the two German states is impossible at present. They have developed greater understanding of the fact that the solution to the national question requires a change of power relationships in West Germany. The fundamental point, that the threat to the nation lies not in division but in the existence of imperialism and militarism in West Germany, is better understood.

The report stresses that this general 'clarity' concerning the short-term prospects of reunification was shared by 'traders', private business owners, young factory workers, and other similar groups, all of whom agreed that 'reunification can take place only in line with the preservation of peace and the securing of social progress'. It also notes that despite this apparently growing acceptance of the SED's position, many workers remained attached to the idea that 'small steps' can be made towards an accommodation with the FRG in the meantime: 'in order to achieve a rapprochement, everyone will have to come down a peg or two. We will have to speak with the current rulers of West Germany. Both sides would need to work to ease the situation'.<sup>27</sup> A 1966 document produced by the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde reports on the attitude of some 1,600 workers surveyed towards current SED policy on the German question. The report claims that 'the vast majority' of workers supported the idea of closer inter-German dialogue in general, viewing it as an 'absolute necessity for the interests of the German question'. Some, however, suggested that talks would be more difficult following the formation of the Grand Coalition in Bonn, and 'a not

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<sup>27</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bautzen, 'Analyse des Denkens der verschiedensten Bevölkerungsschichten des Kreises Bautzen in Vorbereitung der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz und der Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz 1967, 28 December 1966' (Dresden), HStADD, 13001 SED-KL Bautzen, Nr. IV/A/4.01.77.

insignificant proportion' dismissed the talks as 'useless'. The *Kreisleitung* asserted that the vast majority of those surveyed understood the party's reasoning for refusing to pursue reunification, or rather, for prioritizing 'European security' over reunification, agreeing that 'there can be no reunification with monopolists and revanchists'.<sup>28</sup> When discussing its workers' awareness of the dangers of West German imperialism, a 1969 report by the party organization at the Ruhla watch factory (*Bezirk* Erfurt, *Kreis* Eisenach) quotes one young worker to show that FRG revanchism was looked on with particular disapproval: 'our citizens know of course that West German imperialism is very dangerous. This can be seen in the fact that it wants the land it had in 1930 back'. Revanchism and border revisionism, the report claims, were aspects of FRG policy, and of German nationalism more broadly, that had been repudiated by most workers.<sup>29</sup> A similar report compiled by the SED party organization at a compressor construction plant in Bannewitz (*Bezirk* Dresden, *Kreis* Freital) in 1968 discusses the workers' attitude towards the Federal Republic, with a more extensive statement about the danger represented by the West:

The role played by the West German state, as a leading imperialist state with an aggressive and revanchist character, is generally well recognized. This manifests in [West German] claims to sole representation, demands for border revision, the development of the NPD [Nationaldemokratischer Partei Deutschlands, National Democratic Party of Germany], the creation of the emergency laws and their interference in the affairs of foreign states, especially in the CSSR [Czechoslovak Socialist Republic].<sup>30</sup>

This illustrates the extent to which the myth of the socialist-led reconciliation with Poland, and the GDR's moral superiority for its recognition of the Oder–Neisse border, had been woven into the SED's propaganda on the German question.

The juxtaposition of the virtuous GDR with the warmongering Federal Republic was made explicitly in official media in this period, with a 1970 article in *Neues Deutschland*, for instance, insisting that 'the revanchist agitation [*Revanchehetze*] against the People's Republic of Poland, in particular against the Oder–Neisse border, has increased significantly

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<sup>28</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, 'Analyse des Denkens der Bürger des Kreises Dippoldiswalde, 28 December 1966' (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/A/4.03.047.

<sup>29</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Uhrenkombinat Ruhla, 'Denkanalyse, 15 October 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>30</sup> SED Bezirksparteiorganisation VEB Kompressorenbau Bannewitz, 'Analyse des Denkens, 16 September 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/B/4.05.74.



with the formulation of the West German right-wing cartel in the Bonn state'.<sup>31</sup> An opinion report compiled by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda in 1968 also stresses that a majority of citizens were aware of the 'aggressive und revanchist character' of many FRG policies. A number of female workers stated that 'the Bonn government is playing a traitorous game with young West Germans by pursuing the same policy of revanchism and xenophobia as the German fascists, under the guise of regaining "the *Heimat*"'. This attitude was evident even among former expellees discussing West German calls for border revisionism: 'even among the former resettlers there are clear statements against the emergence of revanchist groups in West Germany'. As with many similar reports, however, the document cautions that the workers' awareness of the full 'danger' posed by West German imperialist aggression was not fully understood; 'indeed, it is underestimated'.<sup>32</sup>

Some comments indicate a more pragmatic acceptance of German division, rather than a fervent commitment to GDR nationhood. A 1973 report by the party organization at a factory in *Kreis* Bischofswerda, for example, reports various comments to the effect that the two post-war Germanies were now too different, or had diverged too far, for the FRG's refusal to recognize the GDR to be justified. As the report argues, 'the reality of how [the two states] have taken shape since the Second World War cannot be denied'.<sup>33</sup>

For the most part, however, opinion and mood reports from the mid 1960s to the late 1970s illustrate the degree to which the populace retained their pan-German national loyalties, and were distressed by the realities of German division. This can be seen, for instance, in a report on a brief strike by a group of LPG tractor drivers in *Bezirk* Potsdam on 17 June 1965. The group stated in the presence of other LPG farmers that they did not need or intend to work that day, as 17 June was the 'Day of German Unity'.<sup>34</sup> There is no further discussion of this in the report, and it can be assumed that this was only a facetious

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<sup>31</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, 1 July 1970, p. 7. Quoted in Birgit Wolf, *Sprache in der DDR. Ein Wörterbuch* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2000), p. 160.

<sup>32</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Agit./Prop., 'Teilanalyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Arbeiterklasse einschließlich der Arbeiterjugend, Frauen und der wissenschaftlichen Intelligenz aus der Produktion sowie Forschung und Entwicklung der Industrie aus den entscheidensten [sic] Betrieben des Kreises, 14 May 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>33</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Kombinat Fortschritt, Bischofswerda, 'Berichterstattung an das Sekretariat der SED-Kreisleitung Bischofswerda über die Stimmung und Meinung der Werktätigen zu folgenden Fragen, 9 April 1973' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.96.

<sup>34</sup> Siegfried Pohl, 'Vorkommnis in der LPG Typ III Goerne, Krs. Rathenow, 22 June 1965' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/4/123, pp. 132–34.

justification for the group's refusal to work. Nonetheless, their decision to use an appeal to pan-German unity in that excuse indicates the power such sentiment held over the populace. In its discussion of the attitude of the more highly educated workforce at the Bannewitz compressor construction plant, meanwhile, the party organization at the factory mentions that proletarian internationalism was becoming better established, but 'the ideology of nationalism still has roots. Many people have not yet completed their inner confrontation with these problems'.<sup>35</sup> A report on political-ideological education compiled by the FDGB's Organization Division in 1973, for instance, notes with concern that members remained worryingly 'unclear' about the Federal Republic's status as a foreign state. 'That the FRG is an imperialist state', the report stated, 'is stipulated without question. That the FRG is a foreign capitalist state [*kapitalistisches Ausland*], however, is not generally accepted'. Such attitudes apparently prevailed in at least 80 percent of new state-owned enterprises in *Bezirk Erfurt* alone.<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, a 1974 report by the party organization at a slipper factory in Hartha (*Bezirk Leipzig, Kreis Döbeln*) mentions that many workers still required 'clarification' on the GDR's relationship with West Germany. In particular, they still needed convincing 'that the FRG is a foreign state as far as we are concerned, and should be treated as such'.<sup>37</sup> A 1978 report by the party organization at a factory in *Kreis Bischofswerda* echoes many of these concerns, noting that 'a number of workers are not yet clear on the fact that two German nations have developed that in essence have nothing more than a language in common, and that the FRG should therefore be viewed by us as a foreign state'.<sup>38</sup>

Many East Germans remained hopeful for reunification between the two states in the near future and, most worryingly of all for the SED, did not care whether this was under socialist or capitalist auspices. When discussing the awareness of the socialist-imperialist

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<sup>35</sup> SED Bezirksparteiorganisation VEB Kompressorenbau Bannewitz.

<sup>36</sup> 'Information über die Gespräche des stellv. Außenministers der VRP, Genossen Winiewicz, mit dem westdeutschen Staatssekretär Duckwitz am 5. Februar 1970 in Warschau' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1255, pp. 8–18.

<sup>37</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Vereinigte Hausschuhwerke Hartha, Grossharthau, 'Einschätzung über den Stand der Verwirklichung des Beschlusses des Politbüros des ZK vom 07.11.72 auf dem Gebiet der mündlichen Agitation sowie die Anleitung und Qualifizierung und Wirksamkeit der Agitatoren, 13 November 1974' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.98.

<sup>38</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation HO Kreisbetrieb Bischofswerda, 'Bericht über die Ergebnisse der politischen Massenarbeit zur weiteren Entwicklung des sozialistischen Patriotismus und des proletarischen Internationalismus sowie die Vertiefung des sozialistischen Geschichtsbewußtseins aller Bürger in Vorbereitung des 30. Jahrestages der DDR, 2 October 1978' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/D/4.02.110.

class struggle among young agricultural workers, a 1968 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda mentions that ‘many young people in agricultural areas lack a firm friend/foe schema’.<sup>39</sup> Naturally, the Federal Republic did its best to encourage this sense of pan-German unity. A 1967 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz stresses that both school-age and working-age young people underestimated the danger posed by West German imperialism.<sup>40</sup> A 1970 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda claims that the Federal Republic was attempting to weaken GDR socialism by undermining ‘the formation of a GDR consciousness’. The report claims that Bonn was employing a variety of slogans in its propaganda to appeal to pan-German nationalism, including: ‘we’re all Germans!’, ‘Germans must be able to visit each other!’, and ‘there is too much that is international and too little that is German in communism’. Even seemingly complimentary slogans, such ‘East Germany is also enjoying an economic miracle’, are interpreted as insidious attempts to draw parallels between the two states, and to remind the GDR populace of their close association. In the *Kreisleitung*’s estimation, this illustrated ‘that social democracy has entered into a marriage with nationalism in order to confuse the citizens of the German Democratic Republic and hinder the development of the socialist consciousness’.<sup>41</sup> The irony of this accusation, given the extent to which the SED also strove to mine German nationalism, is especially noteworthy.

This pan-Germanism understandably led many East Germans to resent the continued division of Germany, and the SED’s insistence that the two states were diverging into separate German nations. A 1967 opinion report focusing on manual workers in *Kreis* Görlitz cites one worker’s comment that ‘it pains us that the two German states live apart from one another, and that our government is so resolved [on the matter]’. The document stresses, however, that there were also many ‘positive opinions expressed, which acknowledge the successes of the GDR above all’.<sup>42</sup> A report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda from 1969 points out that widespread confusion remained among state and private sector industrial workers concerning ‘the question of why we must enforce an ever stronger demarcation

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<sup>39</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Gesamtanalyse zum Bewußtseinsstand der Bürger der verschiedenen Klassen und Schichten, 19 September 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>40</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Analyse Bewußtseinsentwicklung – Jugend’.

<sup>41</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Rede anläßlich der Feierstunde “25 Jahre demokratischer Block” am 13.7.70, 13 July 1970’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.133.

<sup>42</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Handwerker und Beschäftigte in PGHs, Privatbetrieben und Komplementäre’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/A.4.06.59.

[*Abgrenzung*] between our republic and the FRG'. 'Especially where there are family links', the report continues, 'questions are asked such as, "why should I cut myself off entirely from my relatives in the FRG?"'<sup>43</sup> This sentiment is echoed in numerous other reports. In its discussion of workers' attitudes towards the Federal Republic, the Brandt government and *Ostpolitik* more generally, a 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda concludes that many workers in the region, in both state and private firms, failed to understand 'that imperialism is incapable of addressing the questions of our time in the interests of the people'. Many workers expressed disagreement with or confusion about the policy of *Abgrenzung*. The report stresses that these problems had been addressed through political work, but that some workers still claimed not to understand, asking questions such as 'why are we not allowed to travel to West Germany?' The *Kreisleitung* surmises that 'these people view *Abgrenzung* as wrong' principally because they 'are thinking only of their personal connections to family and friends in the FRG'. It therefore concludes that the SED had not yet established 'complete clarity' on these issues among the workforce.<sup>44</sup>

The opening of the GDR-Polish border in 1972, which was intended to reinforce a sense of fellowship between the two states, merely invited unfavourable comparisons with intra-German relations, with many East Germans expressing their frustration that access to the Federal Republic continued to be denied while travel to Poland—a far less desirable locale—had been eased. A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda claims that mass political work among workers was proving increasingly successful at increasing class consciousness and a correct attitude towards the FRG as an agent of Western imperialism. The authors caution, however, that some 'illusions' remained, especially where the intentions of the Brandt government and *Ostpolitik* were concerned. These misunderstandings included direct comparison of inter-German travel arrangements with those in place between the GDR and other socialist states: 'why can everyone not be allowed to travel in the FRG, as they can in Poland and the CSSR, for example?'<sup>45</sup> A 1973 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda

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<sup>43</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Analyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Arbeiter der bezirksgeleiteten Industrie sowie bei Komplementären und Privatunternehmern'.

<sup>44</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Einschätzung zum Denken der Werktätigen in den Betrieben der Industrie zu politisch-ideologischen Grundfragen und zur Wirtschaftspolitik nach dem VIII. Parteitag' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.96.

<sup>45</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Agit./Prop., 'Berichterstattung über die Durchführung des Planes der politischen Massenarbeit August 1972 vor dem Sekretariat der Kreisleitung am 5. September 1972, 5 September 1972' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.97.

mentions various views expressed by the populace that indicate that more political work was needed in certain areas, including relations with the Federal Republic. The document records a number of questions asked by citizens, including ‘why do we not organize travel arrangements with the FRG in the same way as with the CSSR and Poland?’ These ‘illusions’, it notes, persist ‘despite what is in our view persuasive argumentation’ from the SED.<sup>46</sup> A report from the same year by the party organization at a factory in *Kreis Bischofswerda* suggests that the necessity of the *Abgrenzung* policy ‘is not yet understood by all workers’. The report notes that most accepted the abstract need for the GDR to distance itself from the imperialist West and contribute to European peace; ‘when workers who want to visit the FRG are personally affected, however, opposition is expressed’. In contexts other than that of workers’ travel to and relatives in the Federal Republic, moreover, the issue was barely discussed.<sup>47</sup> A 1973 opinion report by the *Kreisleitung Bischofswerda*, meanwhile, mentions that there remained considerable ‘uncertainty’ among many manual workers concerning the concepts of class struggle and ‘peaceful coexistence’, and how these were to be applied to inter-German relations. ‘We talk of peaceful coexistence on the one hand, and *Abgrenzung* on the other’, uncertain workers were heard to ask, ‘What are we supposed to make of that?’ More broadly, the document echoes those mentioned above in its characterization of the workers’ general attitude towards the FRG: they were willing to pay lip service to *Abgrenzung* in abstract terms, but ‘particularly where travel between the two German states is concerned, there is widespread desire for “generosity”’. A number of workers drew further comparisons with the open borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia, pointing out that ‘we’re linked more closely with the FRG, since our relatives live there, than we are with Poland, the CSSR or other socialist states. Why then do we not have the same travel arrangements?’ In short, the report concludes, there was ‘no clarity whatever’ on the national question.<sup>48</sup> ‘I don’t understand why we in the GDR have abandoned the idea of German unity’, citizens in *Kreis Freital* were reported saying in 1974.<sup>49</sup> A 1977 report by the

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<sup>46</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Report, 17 January 1973’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.97.

<sup>47</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Kombinat Fortschritt, Bischofswerda.

<sup>48</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Bewußtseinsanalyse über das Denken und Handeln der Handwerker und Gewerbetreibenden verbunden mit einer Einschätzung der Leitungstätigkeit des Kreissekretariats und der Wirksamkeit der Arbeitsgruppe Handwerker und Gewerbetreibende, 8 September 1973’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.96.

<sup>49</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Ideologische Probleme’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr.

SED party organization at a stoneworks in Demitz-Thumitz (*Kreis* Bischofswerda) mentions that ‘as before, there is uncertainty regarding the FRG–GDR relationship. This uncertainty is mainly exacerbated by contacts and family relationships’.<sup>50</sup>

The upshot of this was that pan-German identification remained strong throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. As Andreas Staab has noted, German division loomed much larger in the national consciousness of GDR citizens than in that of West Germans, as indicated in a number of Infratest surveys conducted throughout the 1980s; in a 1984 survey, for instance, 89 percent of East German respondents desired reunification. Moreover, these survey results suggest that unlike their Western compatriots, East Germans were likelier to hold concurrent identities as both GDR citizens and members of the broader German nation. An analysis of various surveys of young people conducted between 1976 and 1977, for example, notes with concern that only 44 percent of those surveyed answered ‘definitely yes’ or ‘strongly agree’ to questions about their ‘connection to the GDR’ and ‘demarcation [*Abgrenzung*] from the FRG’.<sup>51</sup> In a 1989 survey, meanwhile, around 76 percent of GDR respondents identified as strongly German, while the same percentage considered themselves strongly East German.<sup>52</sup> As far as the SED leadership was concerned, this was a step in the right direction, but was nowhere near the sense of separate East German nationhood that the party was attempting to foster by the mid 1960s. The failure of the SED leadership to establish a truly resonant concept of separate GDR nationhood, or to weaken the population’s sense of kinship with the Federal Republic, undermined the idea of the socialist brotherhood considerably.

### ***Rewriting history: the narrative of GDR-Soviet friendship***

An equally crucial, and closely related, part of the effort to establish the socialist brotherhood was Moscow’s promulgation of a narrative of ‘Soviet friendship’ with the GDR. This narrative, along with its counterparts in other bloc states, was conceived as part of the wider ‘friendship project’ of Soviet internationalism. The pursuit of this project had been prompted partly by the various incidents of political unrest that rocked the GDR, Bulgaria,

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<sup>50</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Lausitzer Granit Demitz-Thumitz, ‘Erste Erfahrungen und Probleme in Auswertung des Beschlusses über die weiteren Aufgaben der politischen Massenarbeit der Partei, 7 July 1977’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/D/4.02.110.

<sup>51</sup> Abteilung Volksbildung im ZK der SED, ‘Problemmaterial. Betrifft: Zu Entwicklungstendenzen im Bewusstsein und in der Haltung der Jugend’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.05/65.

<sup>52</sup> Andreas Staab, *National Identity in Eastern Germany: Inner Unification or Continued Separation?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 17.

Czechoslovakia and Poland shortly after Stalin's death, which had convinced Moscow that a more collaborative approach was needed towards its Eastern European empire. The early post-Stalin years therefore saw the USSR reconfigure its relationship with its satellite states, to a limited extent. In the political and military spheres, this led to a greater degree of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, particularly through the frameworks of Comecon and the newly established Warsaw Pact, in an attempt to recharacterize the bloc as an alliance of equal states. This was largely for the sake of appearances, and certainly did not affect the subordinate status of the satellite states. These efforts were accompanied by a comprehensive proliferation of economic and cultural ties. Contact with the Soviet centre became an increasingly visible and tangible part of everyday reality for citizens throughout the bloc, manifesting in mass tourism, cultural events and the exchange of media and consumer goods. The various Soviet Friendship Societies, pen-pal schemes and magazines established around this time all contributed to these efforts to foster a more closely integrated socialist community. The reciprocity of intra-bloc relations became a point of pride for the Soviet Union, which held them up as evidence of its moral superiority to the exploitative and imperialist West.<sup>53</sup>

In the GDR, the narrative of German-Soviet friendship became 'a central element of the legitimization of SED rule'. Particularly in the first two decades of communist rule, the SED had been viewed by a large proportion of the populace as a foreign, and specifically a Russian, imposition, and had frequently been referred to as the 'Russian party'. Naturally, Soviet involvement in the suppression of the 1953 uprising had only reinforced this impression.<sup>54</sup> The SED feared that public expression of anti-Soviet sentiment would undermine its own legitimacy, and in addition to banning any such expressions, sought to raise the USSR's profile and incorporate the idea of Soviet dominance into popular understandings of the nation. The initial years of Erich Honecker's tenure as SED general secretary were marked by particularly ardent professions of loyalty to and friendship with the USSR. In an interview shortly after assuming power in 1971, Honecker reaffirmed the importance of the GDR's friendship with the Soviet Union, stressing that 'this friendship is

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<sup>53</sup> Csaba Békés, 'Cold War, Détente, and the Soviet Bloc: The Evolution of Intra-Bloc Foreign Policy Coordination, 1953–1975', in *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945–1989*, ed. by Mark Kramer and Vít Smetana (Lanham and others: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 247–76 (pp. 249–52); Applebaum, 'The Friendship Project'.

<sup>54</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, 'Xenophobia in the Former GDR', p. 160.

not only a vital resource for us, but also key to our survival'.<sup>55</sup> Along similar lines, Egon Krenz, then First Secretary of the FDJ, described the USSR in 1974 as 'the heart of the family of socialist nations'.<sup>56</sup> The changes to the GDR constitution promulgated in 1974 included a revision to Article 6 (2) concerning GDR-Soviet relations. While the 1968 version had made the comparatively sober statement that the GDR would foster 'all-round cooperation and friendship' with the USSR, the 1974 draft declared that the two states were 'forever and irrevocably allied' in a 'close and brotherly alliance'.<sup>57</sup> In October 1975, the GDR and the USSR signed a new Friendship Treaty, which pledged cooperation in a host of areas and strengthened the GDR's dependence on its Soviet benefactor.<sup>58</sup> The agreement was hailed by the SED as a means of promoting greater integration of the Eastern bloc in general, and indeed was extended in 1977 to include other communist states.<sup>59</sup>

One of the aims of the German-Soviet Friendship Society (Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft, DSF) from its foundation in 1949 had been to 'bring the image shown in the media of a German people unanimously in favour of friendship with the Soviet Union and [the reality of] popular opinion in the GDR ever closer together'.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, SED functionaries relied on membership of the DSF as one of the principal metrics of popular support for the Soviet Union and the friendship narrative. Opinion and mood reports from these decades are replete with references to growing DSF membership in particular localities, workplaces and party cells, or expressions of concern that membership was not growing quickly enough, and frequently draw conclusions about the level of popular engagement with the friendship narrative from these figures alone.<sup>61</sup> As might be expected,

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in 'Aus Erich Honeckers Interview: Beziehungen zur KPdSU, 25. August 1971', in *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), pp. 322–23.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in 'Aus der Rede des 1. Sekretärs der FDJ, Egon Krenz, 10. Oktober 1974', in *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), p. 348.

<sup>57</sup> 'Aus den Veränderungen der Verfassung, 7. Oktober 1974', in *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), pp. 345–47 (p. 345).

<sup>58</sup> Extracts in 'Aus dem Vertrag über Freundschaft, Zusammenarbeit und gegenseitigen Beistand zwischen der DDR und der UdSSR, 7. Oktober 1975', in *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), pp. 350–52.

<sup>59</sup> *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), p. 320.

<sup>60</sup> Jan C. Behrends, 'Besuch aus der Zukunft. Sowjetische Stachanowarbeiter in der DDR', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 50.2 (2002), 195–204 (pp. 196–203).

<sup>61</sup> Examples include: 'Report, 10 October 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr.



this reasoning was problematic, as various functionaries obliquely pointed out. A 1969 report on workers at the Paul Berger factory in Glashütte (*Bezirk* Dresden) noted that the factory had no DSF branch, but argued that ‘the relationship to the Soviet Union cannot be gauged using membership of the DSF; this would lead to an erroneous assessment’. The report insists that most workers hold relatively clear and correct views on the importance of the GDR-Soviet relationship and the ‘true character’ of the USSR.<sup>62</sup> Other reports from the same period show that this point was on occasion made by ordinary East Germans, who maintained that joining the society was not necessary to demonstrate solidarity with the USSR.<sup>63</sup> A similar analysis by the SED *Wohnparteiorganisation* in Paulsdorf (*Bezirk* Dresden, *Kreis* Dippoldiswalde) from 1969 makes the same point, adding that DSF events are often attended only by SED members in any case, and that ‘many members only pay their dues’.<sup>64</sup> Another document from the same year, from the SED *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde (*Bezirk* Dresden), is more emphatic on this point, stating that ‘in a few cases, friendship with the Soviet Union is still too much a matter of membership of the organization’.<sup>65</sup> In other cases, reports were surprisingly frank in admitting that many workers were obliged to join the DSF by their brigades, and that membership was therefore not a ‘heartfelt matter’ for everyone.<sup>66</sup> While these remarks are hardly revelatory, they are an interesting indication that the SED was aware of these expressions of apathy, and took them into account in at least some of its analyses of popular opinion. Despite its crudity, however, DSF membership remained one of the only tools available to the SED, which used it to assess the success of the narrative throughout this period.

At the core of the friendship narrative was the way in which the dominant historical

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IV/B/4.03.65; SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Bandtex Pulsnitz, ‘Informationsbericht zum Stand der Verwirklichung des Politbürobeschlusses vom 7.11.1972, 15 November 1974’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.98.

<sup>62</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, ‘Bericht über Durchführung des Beschlusses der SED-Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde Nr. 10/69 -- Denkanalyse -- betrifft BSB Paul Berger, Glashütte, 30 September 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>63</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Bewußtseinsanalyse über das Denken und Handeln der Handwerker und Gewerbetreibenden verbunden mit einer Einschätzung der Leitungstätigkeit des Kreissekretariats und der Wirksamkeit der Arbeitsgruppe Handwerker und Gewerbetreibende, 8 September 1973’.

<sup>64</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, ‘Analyse des Denkens im Bereich der WPO Paulsdorf, 30 September 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>65</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., ‘Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins’.

<sup>66</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation Zumpe & Kienmt KG Präzisionsmechanik Glashütte, ‘Denkanalyse zum Auszug aus dem Beschluss der SED-Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde Nr. 10/69, 1 October 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

narrative in the GDR was reshaped to suggest a deep-rooted association with both the Russian state and communist ideology. It is important to note that the Sovietization of official historical narratives in the various satellite states was not a systematic or uniform process. There was considerable variation between states in the content of such narratives, and especially in the level of freedom enjoyed by each ruling communist party to introduce specific nationalist elements. This was influenced by differences between the academic and cultural traditions and institutions in each state, its strategic importance to Moscow, and personal disagreements and rivalries within the communist leaderships. One of the key differentiating factors, however, was the extent to which each state's dominant national history was entangled with that of the USSR. Those states whose historical narratives involved more interaction with Russia or the USSR, particularly as recently as the Second World War, had limited freedom to interpret those narratives along national lines, while those whose histories were less important to the Soviets 'had significantly more room to make use of the Romantic national visions of their past'. Both the GDR and Poland fell squarely into the former camp, and were therefore obliged to consult more frequently with Soviet historians when developing their historical master-narratives. In contrast, states such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria were able to construct their narratives with less direction from the centre.<sup>67</sup>

Scharf's description of this process as a 'blatant effort to graft Soviet history onto the German past' is apt. The overall course of German history was recast from a teleological Marxist perspective: 'the history of the German people was portrayed in a manner which emphasized the condition of the underclass in each age [...] it was a means to redefine history, to amplify the significance of revolutionary change, and to impose on early events a current conception of class struggle'. The history of Germany was also situated within the larger (especially Soviet) socialist movement:

In practice, this meant that critical turning points in German history were subordinated to events in other nations, such as the Paris Commune and, especially, the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent unfolding of Soviet socialism. Consequently, East German schoolchildren were taught little of the political tragedy of the Weimar Republic but a great deal about Stalin's struggle against the Rightists and the Trotskyists. It was as if Russian history had

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<sup>67</sup> Litkei, 'The Molnár Debate', pp. 270, 275–78.

become German history!<sup>68</sup>

Of greater emotional resonance among the East German populace was the way in which the history of the Second World War was revised. Wolff-Powęska has noted that the battle of Stalingrad was reinterpreted as the starting point for the (East) German-Soviet friendship. The German defeat at Stalingrad, in this interpretation, was a ‘triumph of the just war’, which paved the way for reconciliation between the Soviets and ordinary Germans and their concerted efforts to overthrow Nazism, and thereafter to work towards a brighter (that is, socialist) future for Germany.<sup>69</sup>

The revisionism was never taken to with much enthusiasm by the populace, however. As Behrends phrases it, there was ‘only a marginal overlap’ between the rosy picture of German-Soviet relations presented in the media and the mindset and experiences of the majority of GDR citizens, these being characterized by ‘a mix of old stereotypes and more recent bad experiences with the “Russians”’.<sup>70</sup> In the case of the former, Behrends and Poutrus have argued that the East German populace were never able to subscribe wholeheartedly to the narrative of Soviet superiority and leadership, at least partly due to traditional notions of Slavic ‘backwardness’ present in German ethnonationalism. This prejudice had been given a new lease of life during the Nazi period, through both the use of anti-Slavic language and stereotypes in Nazi propaganda and the enlistment of Soviet prisoners as slave labourers in Germany during the war. As a consequence, it was even more difficult than it would otherwise have been for many ordinary East Germans to countenance the idea of the USSR (in essence, Russia) as a role model for the redevelopment of Germany in the post-war period. Popular reactions to the narrative were therefore ‘highly ambivalent’.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the SED’s attempts to perform the friendship narrative, and to lend it credence through the staging of public events, often proved ‘a double-edged sword’. While such events were necessary as normative demonstrations of German-Soviet friendship, they had the potential to run out of the SED’s control, offering a (limited) platform for dissenting

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<sup>68</sup> C. Bradley Scharf, ‘Necessity and Vision in East German Identity’, in *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, ed. by Kathy Harms, Lutz Reuter, and Volker Dürr (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 94–104.

<sup>69</sup> Anna Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation: Germans and Their Nazi Past (1945–2010)*, trans. by Marta Skowronska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 158.

<sup>70</sup> Behrends, ‘Besuch aus der Zukunft’, pp. 198–203.

<sup>71</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, pp. 157–59.

voices. Behrends has therefore argued that the official narrative was plausible only to those ‘believers who did not want to look behind the facades’ staged by the authorities.<sup>72</sup>

Naturally, recent experiences of wartime enmity with the USSR made the friendship narrative still harder to accept. A 1969 opinion report from the SED party organization at the *Uhrenkombinat* in Ruhla (*Bezirk* Erfurt) makes clear that while acceptance of the friendship narrative was widely understood as a necessity by the workers, it was a genuine, heartfelt commitment to only a few, as ‘the past, personal experiences and prejudice (in film, etc.) still have an effect’. The report emphasizes that a large number of those who had noticed the reluctance of workers to become more engaged blamed ‘1945’ for the lingering hostility towards the Soviets.<sup>73</sup> A report from the same year produced by the SED organization in Malter (*Bezirk* Dresden, *Kreis* Dippoldiswalde) states that a small number of citizens refused to join the DSF for ‘personal reasons’. These included such sentiments as, ‘I’ve personally suffered because of Soviet people: my husband was killed, and I myself was deported’, or ‘my husband became ill in Russia and died. I can’t feel any friendship for those people. What the children decide isn’t my concern’. The report mentions that attempts to convince these dissenters of the friendship narrative usually failed.<sup>74</sup> Many East Germans were also aware that, even after the end of hostilities, the Soviets had taken a long time to become more supportive and nurturing in their treatment of the GDR, maintaining a more punitive approach until the mid to late 1950s. This was longer than it took the Western Allies to shift their attitude towards what became the Federal Republic.<sup>75</sup> As late as 1975, a host of comments were recorded calling into question the dominant interpretation of the USSR’s role in the reconstruction efforts of the immediate post-war years. ‘Didn’t the Soviet Union force us into socialism?’ wondered one of the more forthright critics; another asked, ‘did the Russians really come as liberators?’ Other comments expressed scepticism of the claims of Soviet sacrifices made in this period, pointing out that the burden of reconstruction had fallen on the Germans themselves and asking, ‘aren’t we overstating the assistance given by the

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<sup>72</sup> Behrends, ‘Besuch aus der Zukunft’, p. 203.

<sup>73</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Uhrenkombinat Ruhla, ‘Denkanalyse, 15 October 1969’.

<sup>74</sup> SED Wohnparteiorganisation der SED Malter, ‘Denkanalyse – Beschluß der SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde Nr. 10/69, 8 October 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>75</sup> Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*, p. 1.

Soviet Union?’<sup>76</sup>

Those East Germans outraged by the post-war territorial losses in the east, and in particular those with personal memories of the expulsions of the 1940s, also found it difficult to demonstrate commitment to the Soviet alliance. A 1969 report from the SED *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde, for example, asserts that while a majority of land and forestry workers in the *Kreis* professed support for the friendship narrative, in a few cases, ‘primarily [those involving] older people who were resettlers, the meaning of friendship with the Soviet Union is not appreciated’.<sup>77</sup> In the same year, the *Kreisleitung* of Dresden-Land mentions that the *Kreis* authorities had for years been forced to contend with the ‘reservations’ of a large number of workers in their propaganda work. These reservations apparently stemmed from ‘personal experiences directly following the liberation from Hitler-fascism, or those relating to resettlement’. This report stresses, however, that these misgivings had largely been overcome by the late 1960s, and comments on the expulsions were heard much less often.<sup>78</sup> A related complication was the popular memory of the mass rapes committed by Soviet troops in the immediate post-war period.<sup>79</sup> While these incidents were banned from public discussion, the ‘blank spots’ they left in official and private discourses undermined the Soviet friendship narrative significantly.<sup>80</sup>

There were of course occasional exceptions to this, in which Germans remembered Soviet assistance in the aftermath of the war more clearly than their mutual enmity during hostilities. In a discussion of attitudes towards the USSR among workers at the Planeta printing machine factory in Radebeul, a 1969 report by the factory’s party organization highlights that ‘particularly among older workers, the Soviet Union’s selfless assistance in all areas with the construction of a new democratic and socialist Germany is held in high esteem’.<sup>81</sup> It is unclear whether this shows that different groups, or those in different

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<sup>76</sup> Wolfgang Rudolph, ‘Information über Meinungen, Fragen und Argumente unter der Jugend zur historischen Bedeutung des 30. Jahrestages der Befreiung, zur Sowjetunion als Hauptkraft bei der Zerschlagung des Hitlerfascismus und zur deutsch-sowjetischen Freundschaft, 25 June 1975’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/23781.

<sup>77</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., ‘Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins’.

<sup>78</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Agit.-Prop., ‘Sekretariatsvorlage zum Bewußtseinsstand der Arbeiterklasse und Intelligenz in strukturbestimmenden Betrieben – Kreis Dresden-Land, 4 December 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.131.

<sup>79</sup> On this, see Chapter 2 (‘Processing the Legacies of War’), note 72.

<sup>80</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, p. 159.

<sup>81</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Druckmaschinenwerk Planeta Radebeul, ‘Bewußtseinsanalyse über das

localities, had different experiences of the war and its fallout, or that they responded to their experiences differently. A comparable 1969 report from the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde (*Bezirk* Dresden) mentions, amid an otherwise optimistic overview of DSF membership among factory workers in the area, that a small number of workers remained who had ‘a negative opinion of the DSF as a result of events in 1945’. The report went on, however, to note that many of these workers had changed their minds after interacting with Soviet troops stationed nearby from autumn 1968 onwards, which was leading to ‘close contact and burgeoning friendly relations’, and even ‘familial gatherings [...] with Soviet families’.<sup>82</sup> However, incidents of this sort were rare, and expressions of support for the GDR-Soviet friendship narrative among older Germans in particular were few and far between. For the majority, the Soviets remained former enemies. As a consequence of these combined preoccupations, the narrative of German-Soviet friendship was regarded by a sizeable proportion of the populace as ‘a fiction’.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the objections of many East Germans to these changes to the historical narrative led them to reject ‘even the more positive contributions of revisionist history’.<sup>84</sup>

#### ***Unable to enthuse: popular response to the friendship narrative***

To a certain extent, popular receptiveness to the narrative was divided along generational lines. Younger cohorts, particularly those who had been educated under the auspices of the SED, were likelier to take the notion of German-Soviet friendship at face value than their elders. This was especially evident among the ‘1949ers’, who were approaching adulthood in the late 1970s. A 1977 report from the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, for instance, notes with approval that young people in the locality were constantly developing a greater appreciation for the USSR. As a result of the preparations for the festivities to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the report claims, ‘friendship with the Soviet Union has deepened’. Young people increasingly recognized that ‘the firm alliance with the Soviet Union has contributed to recognition of the GDR and the strengthening of our sovereignty’, and that ‘the future of our people lies in the close, unwavering friendship with the Soviet

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Denken und Handeln der Werktätigen im VEB Druckmaschinenwerk PLANETA, Radebeul, 30 October 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.131.

<sup>82</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., ‘Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins’.

<sup>83</sup> Behrends, ‘Besuch aus der Zukunft’, pp. 198–203.

<sup>84</sup> Scharf, ‘Necessity and Vision in East German Identity’.

Union and the community of socialist states'.<sup>85</sup> An SED analysis of a range of opinion surveys conducted among young people in 1976 and 1977, meanwhile, concludes that a majority had a 'positive attitude' towards the USSR and the Soviet Communist Party, in large part because of the Soviets' liberation of Germany from fascism. The document cautions, however, that the young people interviewed were less convinced of the present-day 'exemplary guiding role [*Vorbildrolle und -wirkung*]' of the Soviet Union, and that more political work needed to be done on this front.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, the extent to which younger GDR citizens imbibed the rhetoric of socialist brotherhood occasionally proved a mixed blessing, convincing them to value close relations with all Eastern bloc states equally, rather than hold the Soviet Union in special regard. This is noted in a 1969 report from the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde, which explains that, while students in the area generally accept the idea that friendship with the USSR is a 'vital necessity' for the GDR, a number have expressed a desire 'to cultivate friendship with *all* peoples, not giving sufficient recognition to the principle of our friendship with the Soviet Union'.<sup>87</sup> A similar report from the *Kreisleitung* Freital in 1973 records various comments made by students at a school in Freital concerning the GDR-Soviet relationship, including the pointed question, 'why do we only have a DSF, and not friendship with Hungary, Romania and Poland as well?' This indicates, incidentally, that the Society for German-Polish Friendship had either closed down by this point, or had been given very little support in spreading its message.<sup>88</sup>

Some Germans also expressed their fatigue with the wealth of propaganda promoting the friendship narrative. A few, including residents of the town of Tharandt and certain workers at the furniture manufacturing facility in Oelsa (both in the vicinity of Freital), admitted that they frequently turned their radios off during such propaganda broadcasts.<sup>89</sup> A decade later, in 1977, the party's *Kreisleitung* in Bischofswerda were still worried that certain aspects of the USSR's role remained unclear to many, and that its 'historic achievement' and 'sacrifices for the liberation of humanity from the scourge of fascism and imperialist

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<sup>85</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Einschätzung zum Stand der Bewußtseinsentwicklung unter der Jugend des Kreises, 21 October 1977' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/D/4.02.110.

<sup>86</sup> Abteilung Volksbildung im ZK der SED.

<sup>87</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, 'Report, 26 September 1969' (emphasis in original).

<sup>88</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, Abt. Agit./Prop., 'Argumente, Meinungen und Fragen – aus den Abrechnungen der Referenten, 9 February 1973' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/C/4.05.87.

<sup>89</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Bewußtseinsanalyse, 22 April 1968'.

oppression' continued to be underestimated.<sup>90</sup> Comparable reports from the late 1960s identify similar problems with the attitudes of doctors<sup>91</sup> and farmers, the latter making various disparaging comments about the inequality of the GDR-Soviet relationship.<sup>92</sup>

Occasionally, critical remarks were made about specific Soviet actions or policies, notably the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Factory workers in *Kreis* Bischofswerda, for example, were heard to refer to the invasion as an act of 'interference [*Einmischung*]', and to decry the way in which the USSR 'dictates [...] the policy of the other socialist states'.<sup>93</sup> Condemnations of the invasion were also recorded in Bischofswerda, Neukirch and Putzkau (the latter two in *Bezirk* Dresden, *Kreis* Bautzen), including: 'the Russians gobble everything up; what do they want there?' and 'hopefully the Russians will soon have had their fill – they butt in everywhere'. A citizen in a Putzkau bakery was also overheard saying, 'when I see a Russian from now on, I'm going to give him a wide berth'.<sup>94</sup> One factory worker in Pulsnitz (*Kreis* Bischofswerda) was more specific and pointed in his criticism:

We've all been part of this before. I was active in the HJ [Hitler Youth], and I admit that freely. I was 15 years old when the collapse of 1945 happened. That was the first time I was disillusioned. Then, at school, we were taught that Stalin was the man, and years later all his plaques and monuments were taken down. That was the second time I was disillusioned. Then Khrushchev, the man I myself thought very highly of because he worked so energetically to maintain peace; he vanished without a trace as well. So how do I know the men at the top today are the right ones? These experiences have simply made us all more and more critical. My grandmother used to say, 'if it's in the newspaper, it's true'. Today we say, and I say this completely frankly, 'first look at what lies behind the words, and what we can read between

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<sup>90</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Agit./Prop., 'Ergebnisse bei der Umsetzung des Politbüro-Beschlusses vom 18. Mai 1977, 19 September 1977' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/D/4.02.110.

<sup>91</sup> Rat des Kreises Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen, 'Analyse des Bewußtseinsstandes der med. Intelligenz des Kreises Dippoldiswalde, 6 August 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 11858 SED-KL Dippoldiswalde, Nr. IV/B/4.03.65.

<sup>92</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Gesamtanalyse zum Bewußtseinsstand der Bürger der verschiedenen Klassen und Schichten, 19 September 1968'.

<sup>93</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Bewußtseinsanalyse über das Denken und Handeln der Handwerker und Gewerbetreibenden verbunden mit einer Einschätzung der Leitungstätigkeit des Kreissekretariats und der Wirksamkeit der Arbeitsgruppe Handwerker und Gewerbetreibende, 8 September 1973'.

<sup>94</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Parteinformation, 'Schwankende Haltung – zur Freundschaft der Sowjetunion und der soz. Länder, 16 September 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.



the lines'. Things began with an invasion in 1939 too.<sup>95</sup>

The directness of this denunciation of the Soviets, and, for that matter, of communist media culture and historical revisionism throughout the bloc, is striking—as is the worker's comparison of the Czechoslovakian invasion with that of Poland in 1939.

Popular responses to the friendship narrative were of course not unremittingly negative; rather, the majority of East Germans, particularly those of older generations, approached the narrative from a default position of scepticism, which SED and Soviet propaganda was able to assuage only in certain areas. Many opinion and mood reports from the mid 1960s onwards indicate that the idea of friendship with the Soviet Union had at least become a commonplace for many East Germans. A 1967 report from the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, for instance, asserts that 'friendship with the Soviet Union has become a matter close to the heart of the overwhelming majority of our young people. They increasingly recognize that friendship with the Soviet Union is an important contribution to the preservation of peace in Germany and in the world', and that these young people have come to view the USSR as 'a good friend'.<sup>96</sup> A similar opinion report from *Kreis* Bischofswerda (*Bezirk* Dresden), dating from 1968, concludes that the workers surveyed were generally very positive about the GDR-Soviet relationship. The USSR, it claims, was widely perceived as a 'guarantor of peace', having 'made the greatest sacrifices in order to aid socialist and independent states around the world in their struggle against imperialism'. The report notes that older workers in particular were aware of the ways in which the GDR-Soviet relationship had deepened politically, economically, culturally and militarily since 1945, and were pleased that 'friendship with the Soviet Union is established as an integral part of our constitution'. Younger workers, meanwhile, simply saw friendship with the Soviets as 'natural' and self-evident. Soviet technological advances, in particular the success of the space programme, had also made a powerful impression on workers. This level of support for the Soviet alliance was evident in the high levels of participation in the work of the DSF, as well as in programmes such as the 'Dresden Greets Leningrad' card exchange, which involved fifty workers from the I. G. Schurig factory alone. The report also mentions, with a note of relief, that the popular 'disdain' for Soviet goods that had been prevalent a few years earlier seemed to be on the

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<sup>95</sup> Industrie- und Handelskammer des Bezirkes Dresden, 'Wertung des Bewußtseinsstandes, 17 September 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>96</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, 'Analyse Bewußtseinsentwicklung – Jugend'.

wane.<sup>97</sup> More broadly, a report from the same year from the SED party organization in the high-voltage fittings plant in Radebeul claims that, as a result of regular contact with a Soviet unit stationed at the nearby oil depot in Radebeul, as well as with a number of Czechoslovakian and Polish facilities, ‘proletarian internationalism has developed very well in our factory’. The report also makes brief mention of the fact that nineteen of the plant’s 366 workers were ‘resettlers and repatriates’, though whether this contributed to the workforce’s more accepting attitude towards the socialist brotherhood is left unclear.<sup>98</sup>

Far more common than those East Germans responding so proactively to the friendship narrative, however, were those who were willing to accept the ideas of Soviet internationalism and GDR-Soviet amity, but were uninterested in contributing to them. In some cases, this was interpreted as a symptom of a more widespread apathy. A 1968 report from the *Fortschritt* Neukirch VII factory in *Bezirk* Dresden mentions that a worrying proportion of the workforce, and even a number of party members, displayed ‘a certain passivity and indifference’ regarding political matters, rarely expressing opinions or contributing to discussions, and doing their best to avoid taking part in workers’ meetings.<sup>99</sup> A 1969 report on the attitude of workers at the Johannes Tittel factory in Schlottwitz states that, while workers were broadly convinced of the achievements of the USSR and the justifications for its leading role, there was little active engagement with this idea, not least because there was no branch of the DSF at the factory.<sup>100</sup> In the same vein, a report from the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda spanning 1968 and 1969 expresses concern that ‘very little’ discussion of GDR-Soviet friendship took place among factory workers in the *Kreis*. Related topics, such as proletarian internationalism, ‘the role of the socialist world system’ or the balance of power between the socialist and imperialist camps, were similarly neglected. The report suggests that this was due largely to the professed apolitical attitude of many workers, who claimed that ‘they have no time, and apart from that they wouldn’t understand anything

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<sup>97</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Agit./Prop., ‘Teilanalyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Arbeiterklasse einschließlich der Arbeiterjugend, Frauen und der wissenschaftlichen Intelligenz aus der Produktion sowie Forschung und Entwicklung der Industrie aus den entscheidensten [sic] Betrieben des Kreises, 14 May 1968’.

<sup>98</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Hochspannungs-Armaturenwerk Radebeul, ‘Analyse des Bewußtseinsstandes, 2 May 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.132.

<sup>99</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation Fortschritt Neukirch VII, ‘Analyse des ideologischen Zustandes im BPO-Bereich Fortschritt Neukirch Betrieb VII, 17 September 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>100</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Wirtschaft, ‘Denkanalyse, 30 September 1969’.

to do with politics'. Perhaps searching for a silver lining, the report stresses that there was no evidence of any negative disposition towards the Soviet Union either; the workers' apathy evidently worked both ways.<sup>101</sup> A similar analysis from the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda dating from 1973 identifies many of the same concerns. The report claims that the majority of workers exhibited a very positive attitude towards the USSR, acknowledging its economic power, its leading role in the construction of socialism and the maintenance of peace, as well as its central position in the 'anti-imperialist struggle'. However, this mindset was clearly 'not yet all-encompassing', as the document notes with disapproval: workers still visited other socialist states more often than the USSR, and membership of the DSF remained lower than it ought to be, with many workers not sufficiently committed to join. Of equal concern was the fact that workers had also proved slow to bring Soviet production methods and experiences onto the factory floor.<sup>102</sup> Beyond the industrial sphere, a 1969 report from the *Kreisleitung* Dippoldiswalde criticizes teachers from the towns of Dippoldiswalde and Altenberg for their commitment to the friendship narrative for ideologically incorrect reasons. For these teachers, 'friendship with the Soviet Union is motivated by the economic and military strength of the Soviet state and its vast territorial expansion, but the commonality of the political struggle and the question of the end goal, the victory of communism, is far less appreciated. The attitude towards the Soviet Union here is insufficiently class-oriented'.<sup>103</sup>

## Conflicts over ideological conformity

In sum, the concept of the socialist brotherhood failed to capture the imagination of either party or populace within the GDR. It also made little headway in the other satellite states, despite Soviet hopes that it would serve as a binding ideology across the bloc. Rather than being replaced, therefore, individual nationalist loyalties and rivalries persisted; all that changed in the new socialist context was the form in which they could be expressed. The main effect of the socialist brotherhood propaganda was to compel both the SED and the East German populace to couch their prejudices of and resentments against the Poles in terms

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<sup>101</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Analyse des Betriebes E. H. Petzold, Bischofswerda' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>102</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Bewußtseinsanalyse über das Denken und Handeln der Handwerker und Gewerbetreibenden verbunden mit einer Einschätzung der Leitungstätigkeit des Kreissekretariats und der Wirksamkeit der Arbeitsgruppe Handwerker und Gewerbetreibende, 8 September 1973'.

<sup>103</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., 'Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins'.

appropriate to the amicable and equitable union of socialist states of which they were purportedly a part. Accusations of weak socialist convictions became a very popular method. In a bloc dominated by the Soviet centre, whose approval was earned largely through demonstrations of ideological conformity, challenging the extent to which another state was conforming, or questioning its population's commitment to socialism, could be damaging—while also earning the accuser the favour of Moscow. Calling into question the socialist credentials of the Poles therefore became an acceptable way for East Germans to indulge their anti-Polish sentiment. A certain ideological superciliousness coloured many GDR interactions with Poles throughout, and indeed beyond, the twenty-year period. This sense of superiority was also evident in a great deal of party documentation discussing Poland, or relating incidents involving Poles.

This attitude is clear, for instance, in a report on a conflict sparked by SED functionaries' criticisms of 'revisionist tendencies' they observed in members of the Polish delegation to the *Ostseewoche* international festival in Rostock in 1958:

We consider it the duty of our party to inform the Polish comrades of the signs of revisionism that could be observed among the Polish guests who spent their *Ostseewoche* here. We confronted these revisionist tendencies and asked the Polish comrades to discuss it. It was our intention to talk with the Polish comrades about the way in which revisionism can still be overcome successfully, and how the construction of socialism on the basis of Marxism-Leninism can be realized. The Polish comrades did not respond to our concerns in a Marxist manner. They felt hurt and stressed that they had a pronounced national sentiment. When we discussed this with the [...] delegation [...] the Polish comrades were simply not prepared to engage in an exchange of views with us, because they felt offended [...] We [...] explained our Marxist position, which brought us closer in a sense, but no comprehensive understanding was reached.

In a subsequent conversation about these ideological disagreements, the Polish delegation leaders were said to react 'with wounded vanity'.<sup>104</sup> A report by Kurt Hager on the ideological situation in Poland in 1963 encapsulated this dynamic very neatly. The Poles, Hager reported,

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<sup>104</sup> SED Bezirksleitung Rostock Sekretariat, 'Letter to Ulbricht, 27 July 1958' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1250, pp. 14–20.

reacted to any hint of a schoolmasterly attitude [*Schulmeisterei*] very touchily [...] We found that most Poles had a pronounced sense of national pride. Even people not favourably inclined towards the People's State [meaning Poland] speak with deference of its achievements and successes. Even justified critical remarks are met defensively.

[...]

It must be kept in mind that the principles of a fully understood socialist internationalism must first overcome the inclinations towards superciliousness and a know-it-all attitude in the expressions and everyday actions of some German comrades encountered by Polish friends and comrades.<sup>105</sup>

A 1968 report by the SED party organization at a concrete plant in Dresden briefly mentions the doubts expressed by some workers concerning the integrity of the socialist bloc. Despite numerous 'courses and seminars' on the topic, it explains, 'we still encounter opinions to the effect that the events in the People's Republic of Poland and in the CSSR are aimed at the renunciation of the Soviet Union'. Numerous comments along these lines depicted Poland as less oriented towards and loyal to the Soviet Union, while implicitly placing the GDR in the role of reproachful elder statesman.<sup>106</sup> A similar report from the party organization at the Radebeul 2 facility briefly mentions that 'as a result of the events in the People's Republic of Poland and in the CSSR, as well as the attitude of Romania, there have recently been serious doubts about whether the unity [of the socialist camp] really exists'.<sup>107</sup> A 1970 report by the *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land includes a brief example of ideological superciliousness from an employee at a factory in Radebeul, who ascribed the current unrest in Poland to the fact that 'political-ideological work [had been] neglected in the PZPR'.<sup>108</sup> A similar report from the *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land in 1971 mentions various critical reactions from various GDR citizens to the strikes in Poland. These included a number of questions hinting at the ineffectualness and ideological deficiency of the PZPR, such as 'why was the situation not

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<sup>105</sup> Kurt Hager, 'Einige Beobachtungen zur ideologischen Situation in der VR Polen' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1251, pp. 70–73.

<sup>106</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Betonwerke Dresden, 'Analyse des Bewußtseinsstandes, 8 May 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.132.

<sup>107</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation VEB Energiebau Radebeul 2, 'Analyse über den Bewußtseinsstand der Werktätigen unseres Betriebes (Lt. Beschluß des Sekretariats der Kreisleitung), 8 May 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.132.

<sup>108</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, 'Informationsbericht über Meinungen und Stimmungen zur 7. ZK-Tagung der PVAP vom 20. 12. 70 und zu den Ausschreitungen antisozialistischer Elemente in der VR Polen, 22 December 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.119.

assessed correctly by the Polish comrades before it came to the need for such measures?’ and ‘why were measures for the improvement of political-ideological work not introduced sooner?’ One SED member employed at a pharmaceutical plant in the *Kreis* was heard asking, ‘how is socialist democracy developed in the factories? What role do the party factory organizations play? How was this dissatisfaction not noticed in time?’<sup>109</sup>

The SED also kept a close eye on other incidents of unrest in Poland, including the upsurge in antisemitism in the late 1960s. In a 1968 report on the political and ideological situation in the country, Karl Mewis mentions that antisemitism had definitely increased in certain quarters (including within the PZPR) in the wake of ‘events in the Near East’ (notably the Six-Day War). Mewis contrasts this deplorable tendency, however, with the ‘healthy drive against Zionism’ in both party and state—a reflection of the doctrinal contortions required in that political climate. The report also notes that in some cases, as a result of ‘cliquish associations’ within the PZPR, anti-Zionism can drift into ‘manifestations of antisemitism’, a comment that almost amounts to an acknowledgement that the two were synonymous. Mewis adopts a general tone of disapproval at the political divisions emerging within the PZPR, blaming ‘revisionist and reactionary elements’ for the ‘lack of any general conception of the comprehensive development of socialism’ that had characterized the PZPR’s recent domestic and foreign policy. He goes on to warn of the risk of ‘nationalist tendencies’ re-emerging as a result of the lack of unity between the Polish party and the populace on the question of the construction of socialism.<sup>110</sup>

The narrative of Polish ideological inferiority also dominated East German discussions of cultural interactions between the two states. A 1965 report on a visit by a GDR delegation to the 9th *Warsaw Autumn* music festival includes a paragraph lamenting the fact that none of the press conferences at the festival devoted much time to questions of the content or social value of the music. The report mentions pointedly that this speaks to ‘a certain unwillingness on the part of Polish colleagues to take a position on aesthetic-ideological questions’, and advises that the deepening cooperation of Polish and GDR composers’ organizations be used to develop this conversation (in other words, to improve the political education of the

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<sup>109</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, ‘Einschätzung über aufgetretene Meinungen und Argumente zur Lage in der VR Polen nach den Vorkommnissen in Dezember 1970, 22 February 1971’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.119.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Mewis, ‘Information über personelle Fragen in der polnischen Partei- und Staatsführung, 2 January 1968’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1254, pp. 1–2.

Poles).<sup>111</sup> A 1968 report on a visit by a Polish cultural delegation by a functionary from the Dresden *Bezirk* Office for Cultural Work contains a brief example of GDR ideological superciliousness. When discussing the delegation's response to questions about the content and techniques of artistic expression in Poland, the report notes that in comparison with the GDR attitude, 'a great deal is conspicuous by its absence in the Polish contribution, particularly material engaging with social and socialist life'. When asked which 'creation methods' the Poles could learn from, the delegation leader 'scandalized' his GDR hosts with the observation that the Poles did not care for GDR methods at all. The speaker suggested that the East German approach was characterized by a 'lack of [...] any evolved sense of responsibility among our artistic creators [*Volkskunstschaffende*] towards socialist society'. The Polish behaviour during the discussion made it clear that, while GDR artists had 'generally clear ideas' concerning the socio-political significance of their work ('thanks to the ongoing cultural policy of party and government'), for the Poles this 'process of ideological confrontation in the cultural arena' had only just begun. The report concludes that it must be assumed that the Polish comments and criticisms were 'honestly intended to help [...] and not made with any arrogant or provocative intentions', itself a rather condescending assessment.<sup>112</sup>

Along the same lines, a report from the *Rat des Bezirkes* Dresden on a cultural delegation to Wrocław in April 1968 makes several unfavourable comparisons between several Polish opera performances and their GDR counterparts. The scenery used is described as 'mostly outdated', 'conventionally arranged, without clear or firm leadership', and failing to display 'any clear conception'. Both the costumes and the music were subjected to similar criticism. While not an example of explicit ideological superciliousness, this nonetheless demonstrates the extent to which GDR officials were willing to characterize Poland as underdeveloped.<sup>113</sup>

A 1968 report relates the impressions gained by an official working for the Dresden city

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<sup>111</sup> Horst Domagalla, 'Bericht' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1252, pp. 205–08.

<sup>112</sup> Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Dresden, 'Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Delegation des W.d.K. Wrocław anlässlich der Eröffnung der "Ausstellung des bildnerischen Laienschaffens aus der Wojewodschaft Wrocław" im KKH Dippoldiswalde 2. – 5.12.1968, 11 December 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, BT/RdB Dresden, Nr. 8831.

<sup>113</sup> Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, 'Bericht über meinen Aufenthalt in Wrocław, Volksrepublik Polen, in der Zeit vom 29. März bis 2. April 1968, 11 April 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 11430 BT/RdB Dresden, Nr. 8832.

and *Bezirk* libraries from spending time with his Polish hosts on the differences between GDR and Polish cultural policy. The official notes that the power of the Catholic Church remains ‘as great as ever’ in Poland, ‘concentrat[ing] their efforts on children above all’. The report points out the relative ‘indifference’ of the Poles towards ‘liberalistic, modernist, individualistic and, to a certain extent, mystical artistic outlooks’ in cinema (‘it is dominated by undemanding Western thrillers’) and the theatre. The author also mentions his disapproval of the Poles’ politically outmoded attitude to German literature, which was still viewed and treated ‘as a single entity’ after two decades. The Poles, he continues, drew no distinction between the literary output of the FRG and the GDR; indeed, they evinced a surprising tolerance for older German ‘bourgeois kitsch literature’, especially in those regions that still boasted a large German-speaking population. He suggests that the library, in conjunction with the Dresden *Rat des Bezirkes*, should develop an ‘aid programme’ to raise awareness of socialist German literature and encourage young Poles to make that their first experience of the German language. Perhaps in the interest of balance, the report also contains more positive appraisals of the organization and working methods of Polish libraries, and congratulates the Poles on no longer repeating many of the ‘glaring political errors’ observed several years earlier.<sup>114</sup> A report from the same year by a Dresden *Bezirk* official on an amateur film festival in Poland expresses similar sentiments when discussing the artistic quality of amateur Polish films. The document repeatedly notes that, while the technical quality of the films on display was ‘considerably high’, the majority tended to emphasize individual subjects and ‘human relationships’ over ‘societal relationships’ or ‘the connections between the social, the political and the individual’. Similarly, the ‘work and professional sphere [...] appears very rarely as a cinematic theme’. Many films were marked by a tone of ‘detachment or resignation’.<sup>115</sup>

This critical tone is also adopted in a 1978 report on a discussion relating to a planned art exhibition to be held in Poland the following year, which was to include several pieces taken from an exhibition in Dresden. The tone of the entire discussion was rather confrontational, with the Polish representative arguing that ‘the conception for the exhibition,

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<sup>114</sup> Stadt- und Bezirksbibliothek Dresden, Abt. für Bezirksarbeit, ‘Bericht über den Verlauf und die Ergebnisse des Besuches unserer Delegation in der Wojewodschaft Wroclaw vom 23. bis 25. April 1968, 2 May 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, BT/RdB Dresden, Nr. 8831.

<sup>115</sup> Klaus Richter, ‘Bericht über das gesamtpolnische 8mm-Amateurfilmfestival in Polanica vom 13. -- 15.9.1968, 17 September 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, BT/RdB Dresden, Nr. 8831.



as well as the contents of the catalogue [...] do not correspond in any way to circumstances in Poland and the needs of the Polish populace'. The Poles were especially critical of the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, which had been written by a GDR collaborator in the project; they complained that the text contained 'decidedly too much talk of ideological problems, and too little of artistic questions', in another indication of the disparity between GDR and Polish attitudes to ideology. The GDR delegation replied that East Germans did not share the Polish view of 'a keen distinction between ideological and artistic problems'. The Poles concluded the meeting with the insistence that 'this exhibition may be suitable for the Soviet Union, but not for Poland'.<sup>116</sup>

The outbreak of the Solidarity crisis in 1980 offered a new area in which the SED could express its disapproval of Polish policy and cast aspersions on the commitment and competence of the Poles. A 1980 report on the attitude of a group of GDR students studying in Poland mentions that 'many students are evidently and genuinely disappointed by developments in the People's Republic of Poland and the political apathy of many sectors of the Polish population'. The students also showed 'a certain scepticism' concerning whether the PZPR had 'the strength and the ability' to solve the crisis.<sup>117</sup> Another East German student studying in Warsaw in the same year expressed his poor opinion of the development of socialist consciousness in the country. In Poland, the student argued, 'social education is very poor compared to ours', a deficiency to which he attributed the success of Solidarity and its 'dogmatic' slogans about freedom and national independence. The student characterized the Poles as unable to appreciate the 'social effects of their actions', and maintained that they were 'not in a position to comprehend this specific situation'.<sup>118</sup> A report from the same year from the FDGB *Kreisvorstand* Bautzen (*Bezirk* Dresden) includes numerous statements from workers' collectives at factories throughout the *Kreis* expressing their satisfaction that the Solidarity crisis was being discussed by socialist leaders. One such comment complained that it was 'inconceivable that the party leadership has just looked on for so long, without

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<sup>116</sup> Liga für Völkerfreundschaft, Kultur- und Informationszentrum Warszawa, 'Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit Frau Aleksandra Prokop, Mitarbeiterin des Cbwa, am 6. 11. 78, 8 November 1978' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 13/2802.

<sup>117</sup> 'Information über eine Zusammenkunft mit den Studierenden der DDR in der VR Polen am 27./28. 9. 1980 in Berlin, 10 October 1980' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7945.

<sup>118</sup> Jörg Vetter, 'Report, 20 September 1980' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7842.

introducing any concrete countermeasures'.<sup>119</sup> A 1981 report by the FDGB *Kreisvorstand* Bautzen includes an overview of opinions expressed by workers in the *Kreis* concerning the Solidarity crisis. Several comments lay the blame for the unrest at the feet of the Polish leadership, and display a certain degree of exasperation at the instability now paralysing the country. 'The Poles have to take care of themselves', went one comment, 'they have to work out how to get out of the situation they've landed themselves in'. Another asked 'why didn't the PZPR realize this earlier? Why did they allow this development that's doing such harm to the Polish people, and which is still making the situation worse?'<sup>120</sup> An SED functionary from the Leipzig business school visiting the Poznań Academy of Sciences in 1981 recorded numerous criticisms of the outlook and discipline of the Polish academics and functionaries. In his estimation, the Poles made the mistake of viewing Solidarity as a 'purely political problem', overlooking 'the global political effects' of the crisis. A number of Poles dismissively ascribed the unrest as the result of the previous government's economic policies, which had now been changed; 'they do not see the consequences of the threat posed by the development and increasingly brazen behaviour of counterrevolutionary forces'. For their part, the Polish communist leadership seemed 'preoccupied with itself for the most part, and that also seems enough to satisfy the members'. The functionary was also critical of the poor discipline in evidence on the part of those Poles who attended the same seminars as he did: many members were missing; others came and went throughout the meeting; and many of the remainder listened distractedly and without interest, some even falling asleep.<sup>121</sup>

The Poles were certainly not oblivious to the tone in which these events were being discussed in the GDR. A 1981 report on a contingent of Polish journalists attending a language course at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig briefly discusses the journalists' views on the Solidarity crisis, as well as the current state of German-Polish relations more broadly. One journalist mentioned that before she had set off to attend this course, her colleagues had made a number of critical remarks, arguing that as a result of her

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<sup>119</sup> FDGB Kreisvorstand Bautzen, Abt. Agit./Prop., 'Erste Meinungen zum Treffen der führenden Repräsentanten der Teilnehmerstaaten des Warschauer Vertrages, 6 December 1980' (Dresden), HStADD, 12467 FDGB-KV Bautzen, Nr. 96.

<sup>120</sup> FDGB Kreisvorstand Bautzen, 'Zusammenfassende Darstellung der Probleme der politischen Massenarbeit im Monat Februar 1981, 2 March 1981' (Dresden), HStADD, 12467 FDGB-KV Bautzen, Nr. 96.

<sup>121</sup> SED Grundorganisation, Handelshochschule Leipzig, 'Bericht über eine Dienstreise an die Akademie für Wirtschaftswissenschaften Poznan vom 4.10. – 9.10.81, 15 October 1981' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7382.

indoctrination in the GDR, she would start depicting Poland in a bad light, ‘writing and appearing on the radio against the Poles’. The journalist noted that this had earned her ‘the enmity of her colleagues’ back in Poland.<sup>122</sup>

In response to the food shortages afflicting Poland as a consequence of the Solidarity crisis in September 1981, and for which the GDR had sent relief supplies, workers in *Kreis* Freital asked ‘do people in the People’s Republic of Poland receive so little political education that they expect to be fed by the government without doing any work?’<sup>123</sup> A December 1981 report from the *Kreisleitung* Freital recounts the reaction of workers in the region to the GDR’s sending of relief supplies and donations to Poland. The report mentions that despite the predominantly positive response, occasional dissenting views were expressed, and that a number of workers argued ‘that things would not have come to this point if the Polish comrades and workers had done their jobs properly, and that they themselves are to blame for their situation’.<sup>124</sup> A similar report contains various additional dissenting comments, including multiple expressions to the effect that the Solidarity crisis was ‘the Poles’ own fault!’ Several citizens expressed scepticism that the relief package donation campaign organized by the SED would achieve anything, and still more either refused to donate, citing their religious affiliations, or claimed—falsely, in the author’s view—that they had already done so.<sup>125</sup> A similar report on the donation drive in schools in the *Kreis* mentions that the results of the drive at several institutions, such as the Ernst Schneller *Oberschule* in Mohorn, were very disappointing, with only 90 of 224 pupils donating a package. A variety of excuses were given, including the claim that some students were ill, some absent for other reasons, that some siblings shared a donation, or simply that ‘the shops are shut today’.<sup>126</sup> For all the SED’s expressions of disappointment at this refusal to participate, the East German people had in fact taken their cue from the party leadership in this respect. By characterizing

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<sup>122</sup> Gerhard Gerth, ‘2. Information. Betr.: Arbeit mit der polnischen Journalistengruppe, 5 December 1981’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7938.

<sup>123</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Information über Stimmung und Meinungen der Werktätigen zu aktuellen innen- und außenpolitischen Fragen und Erfahrungen in der politischen Massenarbeit, 9 September 1981’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

<sup>124</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Information über Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Lage in der VR Polen, 19 December 1981’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

<sup>125</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Information über Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Lage in der VR Polen, 20 December 1981’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

<sup>126</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, ‘Volksbildung – Genosse Weigert, 21 December 1981’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

the Solidarity crisis as yet another failure of ideological orthodoxy on the part of the PZPR and the Polish people, the SED had provided the populace with an additional reason to disdain the Poles and blame them for their own difficulties—and an additional reason to resent being asked to help. The populace had simply embraced the SED’s rhetoric more than had been intended, to the point where their reaction interfered with the party’s attempt to perform the socialist brotherhood.

There were two areas in particular on which the SED and the East German populace (albeit for different reasons) concentrated their criticisms of the Poles: Polish expressions of anti-Soviet sentiment and Polish relations with the Federal Republic. These were areas in which the strained dynamics of the East German-Polish relationship—of distrust, rivalry and self-interest refracted through the structures and the rhetoric of the Eastern bloc—became especially clear.

### ***Polish anti-Sovietism***

One of the principal angles from which both party and populace attacked the ideological integrity of the Poles was in their disproportionate focus on manifestations of anti-Sovietism in Poland. Given the GDR’s own ambivalence towards the socialist brotherhood in general, this may seem a tad shameless; it was not a case of outright hypocrisy, however. For the most part, exhibitions of anti-Sovietism were a rarity in the GDR, where outright anti-Soviet sentiment, ethnicized or otherwise, never became widespread. As a consequence of the peculiar complexity and emotive character of GDR narratives concerning the war, and of related questions of guilt and perpetration, compared to those of other Eastern bloc states, as Catherine Plum has noted, attitudes towards the Soviet Union were more fractious and ‘polarized’ than elsewhere. GDR citizens travelling abroad, for instance, were often shocked by the level of anti-Soviet sentiment on display in Poland and Czechoslovakia.<sup>127</sup>

It is certainly true that a limited number of East Germans were openly critical of the USSR and its assertion of friendship with the East German state. Opinion reports such as that produced by the SED *Kreisleitung* Freital (*Bezirk* Dresden) in 1968 describe persistent ‘matters that are not yet understood correctly or with sufficient clarity’ concerning the GDR-Soviet relationship. This lack of political education manifested, for instance, in expressions of

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<sup>127</sup> Catherine Plum, *Antifascism after Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949–1989* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 257–58.

discontent around the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, with a number of citizens calling into question the USSR's role as the dominant force and role model in the bloc: 'as things stand now, we don't have anything more to learn from the Soviet Union. We've managed in 18 years what the Soviet Union only achieved in 50 years. We're continuing to make progress, so the Soviet Union should now be learning from us in the first instance'.<sup>128</sup> Similarly disparaging comments about the Soviet economy by farmers in Kaufbach were reported by the *Kreisleitung* Freital in 1974. These included the view that 'we did not need the Soviet Union, and were ourselves capable of managing without its help', and that economic cooperation with the Soviets was hindering progress in the GDR, 'because we must offer too much in return'. Several farmers even expressed the fear that the GDR would become 'a colony of the Soviet Union' if this inequitable relationship continued. Workers at the nearby electrical plant focused their criticisms on the Soviet economy itself, asking 'how there was anything to be learnt or adopted from a country like the Soviet Union, where they are worse off than we are'.<sup>129</sup> Other outspoken Germans juxtaposed the perceived economic frailty of the Soviet Union with its pretensions to a leading role in the bloc, demanding, 'why does the Soviet Union, the heartland of socialism, have such low living standards?'<sup>130</sup> Farmers working in Agricultural Production Cooperatives (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften*, LPGs) in *Kreis* Dippoldiswalde were also criticized for comparing the 'scientific-technical achievements' of the Soviet Union unfavourably with those of the capitalist world.<sup>131</sup> Similar comparisons were also made in the broader populace, with people asking such questions as 'Why do we bind ourselves so closely to the Soviet Union? In the capitalist world, there are also plenty of good things that we could make use of'.<sup>132</sup>

In some instances, criticisms of the Soviet centre acquired a more overtly ethnicized character. This was the case, for example, with comments made by a teacher in Cossebaude, a suburb of Dresden, in 1967, including the slightly disdainful remark that, 'socialism may have been good enough for the troops in Russia in 1917, but was never suited to

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<sup>128</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Bewußtseinsanalyse, 22 April 1968' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/B/4.05.74.

<sup>129</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Ideologische Probleme'.

<sup>130</sup> Rudolph, 'Information über Meinungen, Fragen und Argumente'.

<sup>131</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dippoldiswalde, Abt. Agit.-Prop., 'Einschätzung der Entwicklung des sozialistischen Bewußtseins'.

<sup>132</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Report, 17 January 1973'.

Germany!’<sup>133</sup> Various SED reports make reference to acts of graffiti and vandalism driven by anti-Soviet, or expressly anti-Russian, sentiment from the late 1960s onwards. In a report from March 1968, for instance, the *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land mentions the destruction of a Soviet flag perpetrated by two teenagers from Radebeul. The pair, both of whom expressed a ‘negative attitude towards the socialist states’ in general, managed to burn off the emblem and the bottom edge of the flag.<sup>134</sup> In 1972, meanwhile, a copy of a book published to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the USSR was discovered defaced with the words ‘50 years of the USSR – how much longer?’.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, among various ‘fascist’ slogans found on a construction site in Schwerin in 1973 was the line: ‘out with the Russians! Long live Greater Germany!’<sup>136</sup> The most prominent of these, however, was the thirty-metre-long slogan found daubed in oil paint on the surface of the road from Dahme to Jüterborg (*Bezirk* Cottbus) in 1975: ‘Russians out of the GDR – citizens fight back against Moscow’. That this road was used daily by Soviet units stationed in the area added to the provocation of the words.<sup>137</sup>

Still more rarely, though more seriously, this anti-Sovietism led to verbal abuse or even violent outbursts committed against Soviet citizens in the GDR. Several exchanges between GDR and Soviet factories were disrupted by such incidents. Visits by Soviet delegations to both the VEB *Spurenmetalle* Freiburg facility near Dresden and a factory in *Bezirk* Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1968, for instance, were marred by displays of ‘tendencies towards arrogance [*Überheblichkeit*] and contempt’ by SED cadres at the plants.<sup>138</sup> In the same year, a German foreman working at the heavy engineering plant *Karl Liebknecht* in the USSR was reported for his hostile behaviour towards his Soviet colleagues, which included insults and threats to chase them off the site. The report on the foreman’s actions concludes that he was to be

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<sup>133</sup> FDGB Bundesvorstand, Abteilung Information/Statistik, ‘AK – Information zur provokatorischen Haltung des Lehrers Gräfe – OS Cossebaude/Dresden-Stadt und der Lehrerin Bittermann – OS Ebersbach/Kreis Döbeln sowie über eine Unterschriftensammlung im VEB Wälzlagerwerk Luckenwalde, 15 February 1967’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/4826, pp. 245–49.

<sup>134</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, ‘Report, 2 April 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.85.

<sup>135</sup> Rudi Focke, ‘Information über besondere Vorkommnisse, 21 December 1972’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/8931.

<sup>136</sup> Rudi Focke, ‘Information über besondere Vorkommnisse, 3 January 1973’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/8931.

<sup>137</sup> GDSF Bezirksvorstand Cottbus, ‘Information über besondere Vorkommnisse, 25 July 1975’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 32/1073.

<sup>138</sup> Rudi Focke, ‘Sonder-Information über Vorkommnisse aus dem wissenschaftlichen Industriebetrieb VEB Spurenmetalle Freiberg, 26 November 1968’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/7774; Fritz Brock, ‘Letter to Günter Mittag, 29 November 1968’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/89, pp. 198–201.

recalled to the GDR immediately.<sup>139</sup> The 1970s saw a number of more virulent acts of anti-Russian aggression, such as the assault on a group of Soviet soldiers by German youths in *Bezirk Suhl* in 1972,<sup>140</sup> or the attack on a Soviet commander and his deputy in Fürstenberg (Bezirk Potsdam) by ‘thugs [*Rowdys*]’ in 1975, the victim in the latter case being forced to use his weapon to defend himself.<sup>141</sup> A larger-scale incident in the town of Rathenow (*Bezirk Potsdam*) in 1978 involved a group of around thirty German youths, who indulged in threatening behaviour and violence towards various Soviet citizens, including families, while returning home in a drunken state. Among other acts, the group broke several windows and shouted abuse at the Soviets, including such threats as ‘you Russian swine, get to your houses!’<sup>142</sup>

In the main, however, the objections to the narrative of Soviet friendship related to the Soviet Union’s interactions with the GDR, rather than the Russians’ treatment of the Germans. Indeed, the relative mildness of East German anti-Sovietism was one of several reasons for the GDR’s reputation among the satellite states as an especially zealous Soviet client state, an accusation of which the Poles made considerable use. This view of the GDR was evident in comments made during clashes between Polish citizens and a GDR tourist group in Zakopane in 1964:

During our trip, we tour guides, as well as several of our tourists, were provoked by various Polish citizens. The conflicts mostly began with someone saying to us that we in the GDR live in a state with just as much oppression as in Poland before the ‘1956 revolution’.

We frequently heard arguments such as, ‘there are still Stalinists in the leaderships of the socialist states, and one of the biggest is W. Ulbricht’.

The Polish train conductor tried several times to influence our tourists with the following argument: ‘the West German Chancellor Erhard is the right man for Germany. How long are you willing to make do with your Ulbricht?’ He was so insolent that Comrade Noack struck him in the face. The conductor immediately left our carriage and did not come back.

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<sup>139</sup> Gerhard Tautenhahn, ‘Antisowjetisches Verhalten, 11 November 1968’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/89, pp. 189–90.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Auswertung von Informationen der BPKK, die in der Zeit vom 1.1.1972-31.3.1972 bei der ZPKK eingegangen sind, 24 April 1972’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/939, pp. 21–35.

<sup>141</sup> GDSF Bezirksvorstand Potsdam, ‘Letter to Kurt Thieme, 13 June 1975’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 32/1073.

<sup>142</sup> GDSF Bezirksvorstand Potsdam, ‘Letter to Kurt Thieme, 23 October 1978’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 32/1073.

Upon reporting this incident to the Polish border authorities, we were told, ‘we don’t understand German’ – despite the fact that we had also spoken in German when answering questions at passport control.<sup>143</sup>

The GDR’s close association with Stalinism also made its citizens unpopular in other socialist states. This can be seen, for example, in a brief report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on the treatment of GDR citizens visiting Czechoslovakia in 1968. The group had arranged to visit Czechoslovakia for a holiday, but had cut their stay short and returned home based on their reception. They had been physically threatened by several Czechoslovakian citizens, who had thrown stones at them and called them fascists, and had been refused service in shops and petrol stations, being told to ‘go and get it from the Russians’. A Dresden family visiting Czechoslovakia had also been subjected to similar treatment. The document also mentions a group of Czechoslovakian citizens seen marching through several areas holding swastika flags with ‘Walter Ulbricht’ written on the front, insulting any GDR citizens they encountered as ‘occupiers’.<sup>144</sup> A similar report from the same period by the Stasi *Kreisdienststelle* Görlitz records a number of additional incidents, including a Berlin couple who were repeatedly threatened and told to leave Czechoslovakia ‘or something would happen to them’, and various other GDR citizens who confessed to being unwilling to go out on the streets alone for fear of being ‘physically attacked’.<sup>145</sup> The ill-feeling engendered by the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia aside, such incidents illustrate the degree to which East Germans were thought of as arch-Stalinists and Soviet stooges (as well as former Nazis) by their socialist neighbours.

In Poland, on the other hand, anti-Sovietism was markedly more pronounced. Much of Polish anti-Sovietism stemmed from a long-standing antipathy towards Russia, which had been exacerbated by more recent history and which was far more intense and widespread than among the East Germans. The Polish variant of anti-Soviet sentiment was also more nakedly ethnicized, not least because of the Polish communists’ greater reliance on a more nationalistic, indigenized form of communism. For many Poles, particularly by the mid

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<sup>143</sup> Gerd Viertel and Gerhard Noack, ‘Information über einige Vorkommnisse bei einer Reise in die VR Polen – Zakopane’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1252, pp. 16–17.

<sup>144</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Lage am Grenzübergang Straße und Bahn Görlitz, 23 August 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/B.4.06.132.

<sup>145</sup> MfS Kreisdienststelle Görlitz, ‘Information, 24 August 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/B.4.06.132.



1960s, hatred of the Soviets carried more weight than anti-German resentment. This was certainly the case for those Poles from the eastern regions of Poland, who had experienced Soviet as well as German brutality during the war—and many of whom, incidentally, had in the post-war upheavals been relocated by the Polish communists to the newly acquired western territories.

The upshot of this was that East Germans seeking to criticize Poles for anti-Soviet statements or behaviour had a fair amount of ammunition. Opinion and mood reports reveal a large number of occasions on which Polish criticism of the USSR or expressions of anti-Russianism were piously noted. A 1976 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on workers' responses to price increases in Poland, for instance, mentions that several female Polish workers employed at the *Wilhelm Pieck* capacitor factory declared 'that "the Russians are to blame" for this price increase'.<sup>146</sup> In his memoirs written in 1977, Rudolph Bühring briefly mentions several examples of anti-Soviet sentiment among Polish communists. Bühring recalls a PZPR colleague saying of the railway network in Szczecin 'that they think very little of new Soviet [production] methods; conditions are completely different in their country'. He also describes a number of personal conversations with Poles, who confided 'you know, we don't like the Russians very much, and we don't copy everything they do'. He interprets this as a sign that 'close cooperation' between the SED and the PZPR is necessary, presumably so that the SED could provide the Poles with additional political guidance. On that note, however, Bühring mentions that most colleagues were keen to confine their cooperation to 'closer acquaintance' and the 'cultivation of contacts', rather than 'political-ideological questions'.<sup>147</sup>

Following the onset of the Solidarity crisis, incidents of anti-Sovietism in Poland became a more common occurrence, and its language more provocative. The SED also started paying much closer attention to such incidents, meticulously keeping track of this potential threat to the quietude of its own populace. A 1980 account of the political situation among Polish students and academics in German studies includes criticism of the 'latent anti-Sovietism' evident in these groups, which the report believed stemmed from typically Polish

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<sup>146</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, 'Kurzinformation zu typischen Diskussionen im Zusammenhang mit der angekündigten Preiserhöhung in der VR Polen, 26 June 1976' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

<sup>147</sup> Rudolph Bühring, 'Erinnerung' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1845/1.

‘nebulous notions of freedom, democracy and pluralism’. The report also includes examples of anti-GDR sentiment among these groups, such as the comment that ‘in comparison to Germans from the FRG, those from the GDR are more politically dangerous, because they are linked too closely to the Soviet Union’.<sup>148</sup> The rector of Humboldt University, when meeting Polish academics in Warsaw in 1980, discussed with his Polish colleagues the causes of the Solidarity crisis. The Poles offered a range of reasons for the PZPR’s loss of authority among the Polish populace, including ‘an anti-Sovietism deeply rooted in Poland’. They went on to argue that the Soviets themselves were to blame for this, thanks to ‘the fourth partition of Poland by Hitler and Stalin, territorial changes after the Second World War, and so on’. At the rector’s protests, the Polish academics stressed that Poland also had much to thank the USSR for, and that the communist leadership was at fault for failing to convince the populace of this.<sup>149</sup> In a 1980 report on the political situation in Poland, the attitude of many Poles is summarized, somewhat sardonically, as: ‘we poor Poles – you close the border, and in the east stands the Soviet Union full of tanks’. This juxtaposition suggests that at least some Poles viewed the GDR and the Soviets as joint agents of external oppression, and resented being flanked by them.<sup>150</sup> In a similar vein, an East German student studying in Warsaw in 1980 reported that ‘an anti-Russian attitude is becoming very apparent in statements such as “Russia has never been a good neighbour”, fears of Russian intervention [and] “in Russia the people are not free”’. This anti-Russian attitude eventually leads to anti-Sovietism’.<sup>151</sup> A 1981 report on the political situation, meanwhile, associated this anti-Sovietism explicitly with the Solidarity crisis: ‘The anti-communist and nationalistic interpretation of the past Russian (or Soviet)-Polish relationship plays an increasingly major role in the activities of the counterrevolution’. The report also notes that GDR students in Poland often attempt to counter with pro-Soviet arguments, but ‘their specialist historical knowledge is simply insufficient’.<sup>152</sup> A number of clashes took place in the cultural arena, with SED figures scrupulously expressing disapproval of Polish cultural policies and products that hinted at

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<sup>148</sup> Hans-Joachim Böhme, ‘Report to Hannes Hörnig, 16 December 1980’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7842.

<sup>149</sup> Helmut Klein, ‘Bericht, 30 November 1980’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7842.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Information über die Wahlversammlung der GO Studenten Lodz, VR Polen, am 13.11.1980, 17 November 1980’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7842.

<sup>151</sup> Vetter, ‘Report, 20 September 1980’.

<sup>152</sup> Ministerrat der DDR, Ministerium für Hoch- und Fachschulwesen, ‘Report to Hannes Hörnig, 16 June 1981’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7843.

national independence or rejection of the Soviet centre. At an architectural conference that took place in Warsaw and Katowice in 1981, GDR delegates were appalled to see plans to demolish Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science—which, as Brian Campbell points out, was 'ostensibly a gift from the Soviet Union to the Polish people'—and to replace it with a park.<sup>153</sup> Even after the unrest was suppressed following the establishment of martial law in 1981, and the SED's interactions with Poland waned, occasional incidents were noted. A 1984 report, for instance, notes several incidents of anti-Soviet behaviour by a tourist group visiting the GDR from Łódź. The group shouted 'subversive' and anti-Soviet abuse at their tour guide.<sup>154</sup>

### ***Polish relations with the Federal Republic***

Aware of the economic and, to a lesser extent, the political allure of the FRG to Poland, the SED had always been concerned by any sign of reconciliation or closer association between its two neighbours. In the wake of the limited East–West rapprochement prompted by the FRG's *Ostpolitik* strategy from the late 1960s,<sup>155</sup> however, these worries became more acute. Attitudes towards the question of German division became part of the power struggle taking place within the SED Central Committee at this time, serving as 'an indicator of [...] loyalty (or lack of it) to the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc'.<sup>156</sup> The same was also true of relations between the bloc states. The SED's concerns that Poland would opt for the Federal Republic once the Oder–Neisse border had been recognized and its other national interests had been satisfied manifested as a sense of ideological superiority.

In a speech delivered at a conference in Wrocław, the deputy chairman of the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden attempted to relate the West German stance on the Oder–Neisse border with more general European peace and security concerns. The official referenced the FRG's refusal to recognize either the border or the GDR itself alongside the threat to

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<sup>153</sup> Brian William Campbell, 'Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR, 1945-1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Rochester, 2005), p. 309.

<sup>154</sup> Jürgen Heinrich, 'Information über besondere Vorkommnisse im III. Quartal 1984, 11 October 1984' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/16874.

<sup>155</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'Détente in Europe, 1962–1975', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 198–218 (pp. 209–12). For an overview of the SED leadership's perspective and priorities in particular relating to *Ostpolitik*, see Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*.

<sup>156</sup> Joanna McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation in the Former GDR* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), p. 71.

European peace represented by NATO missiles based on West German territory. He went on to insist that ‘it is high time that the FRG contributed to European peace and security’ and ‘recognized the existing borders in Europe, including the borders of the GDR and the Oder–Neisse peace border; renounced control over nuclear, biological and chemical weapons; and was prepared to take part in talks on disarmament and the renunciation of the use of force in Europe’. The official concluded his argument by stating that ‘West Germany has a decision to make: peace and collective security or the maintenance of revanchist policies and the continuation of the armament craze in the interest of US global strategy and its own monopoly on armaments’. He characterized both these policies as part of the same ‘German imperialism’ that ‘unleashed two world wars with its policy of expansion’. He also attempted to establish an equivalence between the recognition of the GDR and the protection of Poland’s borders. He chastised the Brandt government for its failure to pursue ‘the recognition of the Oder–Neisse border called for by West German voters’, contrasting this with the GDR’s own proactivity in signing the Görlitz/Zgorzelec agreement twenty years earlier. He also quoted Gomułka’s maxim that ‘for the People’s Republic of Poland, the security and inviolability of the GDR is synonymous with the security and inviolability of Poland’, and expressed his confidence that the entire socialist bloc would unite in defending the sovereignty of any of its members, including either the GDR or Poland.<sup>157</sup> The speech can be viewed as a reflection of the SED’s anxiety that the Poles would prioritize relations with the FRG over concessions that would contribute to the security of the GDR, and an attempt to appeal to the spirit of the socialist brotherhood to persuade Poland to remain on side.

A 1967 opinion report produced by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz mentions that, among agricultural workers and LPG farmers in the region, ‘the agreements with the People’s Republic of Poland and the CSSR are an expression of deepening friendship and the struggle against the plans of West German imperialists’.<sup>158</sup> This statement is fairly formulaic, and unlikely to be truly indicative of any popular opinion, but it is an interesting indication of the connection drawn by the party between the GDR-Polish friendship, the policy of *Abgrenzung* and the struggle against West German imperialism. An FDGB report from 1970 on

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<sup>157</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, ‘Draft of speech for Wrocław conference’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>158</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Ideologie, ‘Ergänzung zur Analyse des Denkens und des Bewußtseinsstandes der Menschen im Kreis, 27 September 1967’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/A.4.06.59.

discussions held with a Polish union delegation mentions that, when discussing the meetings currently taking place between Brandt and GDR Prime Minister Willi Stoph in Erfurt and Kassel, the Polish delegation expressed some reservations about West German conduct. The report is keen to note that the Poles were willing to draw parallels between Brandt's behaviour in Kassel and Georg Duckwitz's actions in Warsaw, and 'exposed the stalling tactics and [the FRG's] refusal to recognize the Oder–Neisse peace border'. The Polish delegation also made it clear that they were interested in the FDGB's stance on the Stoph–Brandt meetings, as well as the GDR's trade relations with the FRG more generally, and stressed to the East Germans that 'they are firmly on our side'.<sup>159</sup> This may be evidence that the GDR and Poland were to some extent united, at least formally, against the Federal Republic even during the *Ostpolitik* negotiations—or may simply be another example of each side's paying lip service to bloc unity, while scrabbling to gauge the extent to which the other was willing to abandon them for the sake of closer relations with the West.

For the most part, however, the SED and the populace were openly suspicious of Poland's relations with the Federal Republic. The party in particular voiced its suspicions as frequently as possible, mobilizing the rhetoric of the socialist brotherhood in an effort to bring the pressure of the bloc to bear on the Poles. A report on a consultative meeting between SED functionaries and Polish Foreign Ministry official in 1969 expresses the party's unease regarding Poland's priorities in its relations with both German states:

The statements by the Polish comrades on the question of the European security conference made it clear that the Polish attitude is very strongly influenced by nationalist perspectives. This can be seen especially in the manner in which the Polish side is trying its utmost to pursue only those claims that serve Polish national interests (recognition of its borders, even disregarding the risk that, while the Oder–Neisse border has been recognized, no similar recognition of the border between the GDR and West Germany is forthcoming).

This stance also stems from their tendency to underestimate the global activities of imperialism, and to overrate their own options in the process of détente in Europe. In pursuing their political concept, the Polish side also attempted to play the GDR off against the USSR

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<sup>159</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, Gewerkschaft Land, Nahrungsgüter und Forst, 'Einschätzung einer Arbeitsberatung mit einer Delegation des Bezirksvorstandes der polnischen Landesarbeitergewerkschaft Wroclaw am 22. und 23.5.1970 in Görlitz, 26 May 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

by ostentatiously emphasizing the role of the GDR and Poland in European affairs.<sup>160</sup>

A 1969 report by the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden provides an account of a visit by a GDR students' delegation to Wrocław voivodeship, during which Polish attitudes towards both German states were discussed. The report notes that both delegations were in agreement 'that the Oder–Neisse border, which has been denoted a peace border by our two governments, must be jointly defended along the Elbe and the Werra', and praised the 'clear standpoint' of the Polish delegation on this issue. It mentions with disapproval, however, that some Polish workers showed a tendency to conflate the FRG and the GDR in conversation, instead referring simply to 'Germany'. The author cites the example of a Polish interpreter who mentioned that her relatives all lived in Bremen, and that they were doing very well under the West German government. The interpreter openly described herself as unpolitical—indeed, the report notes that 'there was no sign of political work, such as appearances by leading comrades or worker veterans [*Arbeiterveterane*, retirees]' throughout the delegation's visit.<sup>161</sup> The emphasis placed in the report on this apathy and lack of ideological conformity points to the SED's concerns about Polish reliability and loyalty to their fellow bloc states.

A 1968 opinion report by the *Kreisleitung* Freital makes brief mention of the uncertainty expressed by some workers over Poland's relationship with the West, leading them to ask such questions as 'what are the reasons behind the US loans to Poland?' and 'why are there Western newspapers in Poland?'<sup>162</sup>

A 1970 report by the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden notes with disapproval the extent to which Polish functionaries expressed optimism about the *Ostpolitik* negotiations. The report mentions that FDGB functionaries had become aware of 'certain illusions' held by their Polish counterparts concerning the likely positive outcome of the negotiations. It recounts a discussion held with a Polish official, who expressed his confidence that the FRG would soon consent to recognize both the Oder–Neisse border and the GDR; the FDGB figures evidently viewed this as naive at best, and 'repeatedly told him not to harbour any

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<sup>160</sup> 'Zusammenfassender Bericht über die Konsultation mit dem stellv. Außenminister der VR Polen, Gen. Wolniak, am 23.10.69, 24 October 1969' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1254, pp. 256–63.

<sup>161</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, Gewerkschaft Land, Nahrungsgüter und Forst, 'Bericht über eine Studiendelegation des Bezirksvorstandes der Gewerkschaft Land, Nahrungsgüter und Forst vom 1. bis 5.9.1969 in der Wojwodschaft [sic] Wrocław/VR Polen, 8 September 1969' (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>162</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Informationsbericht für den Monat Juli 1968 der URANIA-Gesellschaft in Freital' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/B/4.05.74.

great illusions or hopes under any circumstances'. The author mentions his disappointment, however, that this seemed to be the majority opinion among the Polish functionaries present.<sup>163</sup> This points to the considerable nervousness on the part of the GDR communists at the eagerness of the Poles to believe in and associate more closely with the Federal Republic. Along similar lines, a 1970 report by the GDR embassy's student department in Warsaw on the concerns expressed by GDR students in Gdańsk, Warsaw and Wrocław notes that some students expressed doubts about the quality of the GDR's relationships with other socialist parties and states. These students related their concerns to the *Ostpolitik* negotiations in particular, suggesting that if Brandt made all treaties between the FRG and the socialist states part of a single 'package', the GDR would be pressured (even 'blackmailed') to sign, even if the 'package' did not include any commitment on the part of the Federal Republic to recognize the East German state. They also made it clear that they did not trust the GDR's socialist allies not to sacrifice the GDR for their own interests. On the talks between the Federal Republic and Poland, the students argued that it was to the GDR's disadvantage that official recognition had been set aside in favour of broader talk of 'European security' and 'European borders'. The report does not endorse these concerns, and even notes that further ideological work would need to be done with the students on 'the problems of the socialist community of states'.<sup>164</sup> Nonetheless, the SED leadership certainly shared these fears.

A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz included in its list of concerns following the opening of the GDR-Polish border the belief expressed by some GDR citizens that Poland's ideological laxity posed a risk to their children: 'Will imperialism gain more ideological influence over our young people? In Poland, for example, they show American films with German subtitles'.<sup>165</sup> A 1982 report from a group of GDR students studying in Poland makes brief mention of various politically unacceptable views expressed by their fellow students at the Wrocław Polytechnic, including a critical comment on the German question: 'we don't understand why the FRG and the GDR don't unite. It's clear that the FRG provides economic

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<sup>163</sup> Charlotte Schimmer, 'Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation des FDGB-Bezirksvorstandes Dresden anlässlich der Feierlichkeiten zum 25. Jahrestag des Sieges über den Faschismus in Wrocław, VR Polen, vom 7.5.–11.5.70, 20 May 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>164</sup> GDR Embassy, Studentenabteilung Warsaw, 'Monatsbericht, 28 December 1970' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.04/463.

<sup>165</sup> 'Bericht von einer Lehrerdelegation. Abschrift'.

support for the GDR; otherwise, it wouldn't be doing so well'.<sup>166</sup>

These multifaceted tensions are encapsulated in a report on a rather complex power struggle that occurred at a Polish construction site in Bełchatów, near Łódź, in late 1976. The site was a cooperative project between Poland, the GDR and the FRG, with the two German states building additional facilities and providing personnel. Around November 1976, the FRG contingent, most of whom represented the Krupps construction company, attempted to court their GDR counterparts, attempting both official and unofficial contact. The report notes that the GDR delegation was either unable or unwilling to devise suitable excuses to resist these overtures, and that four workers did indeed attend a meeting with the Krupps team, after the chief engineer and the SED group organizer failed to prevent them. The account concludes with the information that the four workers had subsequently been recalled home, and that the chief engineer was to be replaced with a more 'politically and professionally experienced comrade'.<sup>167</sup> While Poland played only a peripheral role in these events, the story illustrates the dynamic of this triangular relationship rather well, with Poland serving as a battleground on which the two German states played out their conflict.

Both these areas of interaction—East German criticisms of Polish anti-Sovietism and the fraught triangular relationship between Poland, the GDR and the Federal Republic—were sites at which all the processes outlined above played out. In both cases, the GDR related to Poland not as a socialist brother, but as a nation state fearing being disadvantaged by a rival state, and using the tools of the socialist bloc to undermine its rival. The East German populace were happy to follow suit due to their pre-existing resentment and dislike of the Poles, and used the newly established socialist value system to express this antipathy.

## Conclusions

The Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc was the background against which post-war East German-Polish relations took shape. By the mid 1960s, a new political paradigm had begun to emerge in the bloc, one that emphasized cooperation and the promotion of a sense of fellowship among the satellite states. As the 1960s and 1970s wore on, however, this more

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<sup>166</sup> Ministerrat der DDR, Ministerium für Hoch- und Fachschulwesen, Sektor Auslandsstudium, 'Kurze Situationsschilderungen unserer in der VR Polen studierenden Aspiranten (Ende Mai 1982), 15 June 1982' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7843.

<sup>167</sup> Gerhard Tautenhahn, 'Memo to Günter Mittag, 23 December 1976' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 3023/1245, pp. 86–87.



collaborative arrangement manifested as greater latitude for the states to jockey for political influence, employing the value system and rhetoric of the bloc, and the Soviet Union's dominant position within it, to pursue their own interests.

The SED's nation-building discourse, and the popular reception of it, were complicated by these dynamics. Efforts to integrate communist orthodoxy as a source of national pride were met with a lack of popular enthusiasm. Attempts to redefine German nationalism more fundamentally within the context of the 'family' of socialist states, meanwhile, were received even more coolly. Ultimately, in Wolff-Powęska's estimation, 'the attempt to create a socialist version of the German nation between the Elbe and the Oder failed. The imposed "internationalist" patriotism with the enemy on the Western side proved to be a phantom unworthy even of scientific or literary description'.<sup>168</sup>

Socialist patriotism became such a pervasive part of East Germans' discursive environment, however, that it inevitably shaped their own sense of identity to a degree. However, those aspects of the narrative that found the greatest acceptance were those that allowed for competition between peoples, and especially for the airing of (some) anti-Polish prejudices and grievances. The GDR identity that developed therefore included many elements of anti-Polonism in a reworked form. In effect, various anti-Polish ideas were progressively brought into the fold, and given the imprimatur of the SED leadership, as the socialist brotherhood solidified in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. The SED was not always in control of this process, and in its efforts to alter the national tapestry to suit its preferred narrative, it often found itself pulling on adjacent threads—relating to more virulent, or simply less useful, forms of anti-Polonism—and weaving those into the pattern of GDR nationhood as well.

As a consequence of this, the legacies of the war, along with earlier prejudices against Poles, were transmuted into political conflicts within the framework of the bloc. Resentment and distrust of the Poles were channelled into the GDR's competition with Poland for Moscow's favour, as well as for the title of the most orthodox communist state. Crucially, this competition was also incorporated into the SED's official nation-building project. The power structure of the Eastern bloc encouraged this rivalry between the two socialist brother states, albeit within fairly hard limits. This problem persisted through the years of détente, which

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<sup>168</sup> Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation*, p. 149.

themselves brought new sources of tension in the form of closer—and, from the SED's perspective, more worrying—relations between Poland and the Federal Republic. Indeed, the Federal Republic proved to be a complication across the board for the SED in this period, serving as an irresistible lure to both Poland and the East German populace, thereby threatening the party's legitimacy from both sides. The West German problem, and the party's alarmed reaction to it, illustrates the extent to which the nation-building and reconciliation projects were intertwined, and equally vulnerable.

By the 1980s, therefore, neither project had advanced a great deal. Far from having established amicable, brotherly relations with its eastern neighbour, the GDR had merely learnt to relate to it as a rival nation state, with all the narrow-minded chauvinism that implied. The SED's flawed and half-hearted attempts to achieve more fundamental reconciliation were undermined by the resentments and prejudices that its own nationalist discourse had fostered—while the latter had not even been sufficiently effective to shore up the party's own legitimacy. The following chapter charts the impact of this twofold deficiency up to the mid 1980s, examining the ways in which the SED began to abandon even the veneer of socialist orthodoxy represented by the socialist brotherhood narrative in the face of new legitimacy problems, with little regard for how this might lead to a regression in popular attitudes towards the Poles and stall reconciliation efforts still further.

## 4. Resurrecting national histories

As explored in the previous chapter, the SED's commitment to the narrative of the socialist brotherhood was faltering and conflicted, and the party's efforts to use it as a legitimizing strategy or an instrument of reconciliation met with only limited success. Certainly, the party failed to establish the idea of membership of the brotherhood as 'common sense' for the majority of East Germans; if anything, its actions and rhetoric demonstrated that a number of anti-Polish prejudices were justified, and that certain forms of anti-Polish expression were acceptable in a socialist context. Over the course of the 1970s, however, even the veneer of socialist fraternity began to be eroded, and by the middle of the decade the SED was beginning to pivot its nation-building propaganda towards a more traditional, ethnicized form of German nationalism. For various reasons, almost all related to political expediency, the party leadership found it increasingly desirable to draw on a wider range of figures, symbols and imagery from the German past, and welcome them into the canon of 'progressive' national traditions to which the GDR laid claim.

This 'broadening [of] the historical roots of the state narrative'<sup>1</sup> was primarily a domestic development, and was certainly not intended to affect the GDR's relationships with any of its socialist neighbours. Moreover, analogous reforms to official national narratives were carried out in most Soviet satellite states, including Poland, from the late 1970s onwards,<sup>2</sup> in a move that some historians believe hastened the destabilization of communist rule across the bloc.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, elements of this resurrected national history exacerbated tensions between East Germans and Poles. In addition, this process of national redefinition coincided with the 'wave of reform' taking place in Poland in the early 1980s, and, as Andreas Lawaty noted in the middle of the decade, 'in this constellation there was much cause for conflict'.<sup>4</sup> Relations were in any case starting to sour in this period, due largely to a

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Berndt Olsen, *Tailoring Truth: Politicizing the Past and Negotiating Memory in East Germany, 1945-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 137–82.

<sup>2</sup> Tomasz Leszkowicz, 'Ostatnia ofensywa na froncie historycznym? Polityka pamięci historycznej Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej w latach 1981–1986', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 46.2 (2014), 103–20.

<sup>3</sup> On this, see George Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe: 1945-1992* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht. Zur Kontinuität negativer Wirkungen der preußischen Geschichte auf die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), p. 256.

combination of mounting popular-level economic tensions and SED concerns about the potential impact of the Solidarity crisis on its own populace. The ethnicization and expansion of GDR nationhood did not cause these problems, but did make an already fraught situation worse. By shifting the tenor of official nationalism, bringing it closer to much popular nationalist sentiment, the change in rhetoric undercut the SED's professed orientation towards the socialist brotherhood in general, and German-Polish reconciliation in particular. If the 1960s and much of the 1970s had seen the brotherhood narrative established as an ostensible cornerstone of East German identity, while in reality providing little more than a new value system and vocabulary with which party and populace continued to express anti-Polish sentiment, by the early 1980s even this veneer was starting to be abandoned.

Aside from those elements of the resurrected national past that proved directly offensive to Poles, the shift was interpreted in Poland as an endorsement of a range of more critical, ethnonationalist, even anti-Slavic popular views, which it brought closer to mainstream political and social discourse. As a similar rediscovery of elements of the German past was also taking place in the Federal Republic, it was also viewed by the Poles as a dangerous sign of closer relations between East and West Germany, possibly even a precursor to reunification efforts. At the very least, the SED had demonstrated that the damage this could do to GDR-Polish relations mattered less to the party than the potential domestic and inter-German political gains that might be made as a result of this national redefinition. The move revealed the extent to which the SED valued its state's relationship with Poland, and the tentative progress that had been made since the mid 1960s.

## **The need for redefinition**

Joanna McKay acknowledges the uncertainty inherent in attempting to determine the motives of the SED leadership. In particular, she suggests that on the current evidence it is equally plausible that the leadership was concerned by the accusations (primarily coming from the FRG) that its more socialistic national concept lacked substance, or that it in fact felt that popular GDR national consciousness was now developed enough 'that a revival of interest in the state's German heritage would enhance it as opposed to undermining it'.<sup>5</sup> In either event, several other developments had also combined by the mid 1970s to convince the leadership

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<sup>5</sup> Joanna McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation in the Former GDR* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), p. 121.

that a broader, more traditional understanding of the nation needed to be promoted.

On the domestic front, the party was faced with a mounting legitimacy crisis, as large sections of the populace grew increasingly critical of the SED's handling of the economy, as well as its right to rule more generally. Brian Ladd, for instance, associates the SED's national redefinition with the increased emphasis on consumerism introduced under Honecker; both, he argues, were responses to the economic problems affecting the GDR and the party's growing legitimacy deficit.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, André Keil has argued that the ethnonationalist turn was rooted in the wider raft of reforms carried out during the 'final crisis' of the GDR.<sup>7</sup>

David Bathrick, meanwhile, notes that, in addition to political expediency, the resurrection of ever more elements from the German past can also be attributed to more fundamental changes in the basis of legitimization in the GDR. This period was marked by a 'gradual move away from Marxist-Leninism and even political ideology itself as binding forms of value formation and national identity, together with a search for more "pragmatic" ways of understanding one's relationship to the social order'.<sup>8</sup> This was the period in which the first post-war generation, that of the '1949ers', was entering the workforce, an experience that Dorothee Wierling has described as a 'more than usual reality shock'. This cohort had been instilled with 'high expectations' during their education and socialization at school and in youth organizations in the 1960s, particularly concerning the economic potential of the GDR. Once in the workforce, however, many of them found their avenues for advancement blocked by members of their parents' generation, who had benefited from the opportunities afforded them in the formative years of the GDR, and who now occupied leadership positions that they would prove reluctant to vacate until the very end of the communist era. The disparity between their 'high expectations' and these restrictions on their social mobility, as well as the GDR's worsening economic performance more generally, led to widespread disillusionment and a 'fading away of the early gratitude' that this generation had felt towards the state and their elders. The '1949ers' played a leading role in the population's reorientation

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Ladd, 'East Berlin Political Monuments in the Late German Democratic Republic: Finding a Place for Marx and Engels', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37.1 (2002), 91–104.

<sup>7</sup> André Keil, 'The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited: German–German Entanglements, the Media and the Politics of History in the Late German Democratic Republic', *German History*, 34.2 (2016), 258–78 (p. 276) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghw007>>.

<sup>8</sup> David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, NB and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 53.

towards private and family life in the mid 1970s as a result.<sup>9</sup>

The younger generations, meanwhile, were at risk of developing an even ‘more distanced attitude’ to the state than their elders, partly because they had comparatively few ‘clear reasons to feel indebted to the party’. They had not experienced the Second World War, or its immediate aftermath; nor had they participated in the construction of socialism in the 1950s, thereby acquiring a personal stake in its success.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they had no personal experience of the crimes committed during the Nazi period, and felt little commonality with those who had perpetrated or tacitly endorsed them. Bernhard Schlink vividly explains this detachment:

If a situation is so unique that it can’t be compared to anything, increasing historical distance will mean that it can no longer concern or engage us. It has lost its actuality. If the situation is discussed with moral pathos, that moral pathos amounts to almost nothing. Moral pathos not undergirded by moral engagement, and moral engagement not carried by contemporary concern, are not genuine. And the next generation keenly senses that hollowness.<sup>11</sup>

Official antifascism and its associated narratives had represented the SED’s attempt to foster a more personal connection with the GDR and its foundational myth, but these narratives ‘had apparently lost their appeal’ by the late 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Surveys conducted by the Leipzig Central Institute for Youth Research (*Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung*, ZIJ) recorded a slight increase in positive attitudes among young people towards the GDR in the early and mid 1970s, followed by a ‘very marked collapse’ in support among the next cohort along a decade later.<sup>13</sup> Raina Zimmering stresses that this national redefinition was not intended as a means of uncovering the reasons why the antifascist myth had lost its effectiveness. This would have entailed articulating the kind of ossified and hierarchical society the GDR had developed into over the previous decades, which would have weakened the SED’s legitimacy

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothee Wierling, ‘How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?’, in *Power and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 210–25 (pp. 214, 218–21).

<sup>10</sup> Anna Saunders, *Honecker’s Children: Youth and Patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979–2002* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Bernhard Schlink, *Guilt about the Past* (London: Beautiful Books, 2010), pp. 28–29.

<sup>12</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Mary Fulbrook, ‘Living Through the GDR: History, Life Stories and Generations in East Germany’, in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Caroline Pearce and Nick Hodgin (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 201–20 (p. 211).

still further.<sup>14</sup> The leadership therefore needed a more appealing and inclusive national narrative, in order to maintain popular consent for communist rule. The deepening of the GDR's historical roots was intended to strengthen the assertion that the state's foundation was a historical inevitability, rather than a mere accident of geopolitics. By providing a 'historical justification spanning centuries' for the establishment of the GDR, the leadership aimed to compensate for the waning effectiveness of the antifascist doctrine with a national narrative that was more immediately recognizable, and therefore more resonant, for both younger and older generations.<sup>15</sup>

The development of this new narrative was also prompted by the priorities of academic historians in the GDR, who, along with party ideologues, were the theorists primarily responsible for devising its details.<sup>16</sup> While the shift was an entirely top-down affair, and certainly 'had nothing to do with popular feeling in the GDR', historians and other intermediaries were able to exert some influence within the boundaries established by the party.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, they played one of the most influential roles in this reorientation, as they were responsible for determining which aspects of Prussian history received official approval and became accessible to the wider public.<sup>18</sup> These researchers were motivated in part by the heightened public interest in history in the Federal Republic in this period, which in turn stimulated popular 'historical consciousness' in the GDR.<sup>19</sup> GDR historians were therefore driven by a desire to 'compete with West German historiography on common terrain, but with different interpretations'.<sup>20</sup> They may also have been driven by their own desire to examine hitherto neglected areas of German history more comprehensively.<sup>21</sup> Generational changes were also gradually transforming the attitude of historians in the Federal Republic towards

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<sup>14</sup> Raina Zimmering, 'Der Preußenmythos in der DDR', in *Mythen in der Politik der DDR. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung politischer Mythen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2000), pp. 301–57 (pp. 303–04) <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-01492-8\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-01492-8_5)>.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Asmus, 'The GDR and the German Nation: Sole Heir or Socialist Sibling?', *International Affairs*, 60.3 (1984), 403–18 (pp. 414–15) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2617570>>.

<sup>16</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>17</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, p. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Burkhard Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive. Wahrnehmungen und Erinnerungsdiskurse am Beispiel Preußens in den 80er Jahren', *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, 51.1 (2019), 141–54 (p. 144) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/allemande.1570>>.

<sup>19</sup> Anna Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation: Germans and Their Nazi Past (1945–2010)*, trans. by Marta Skowronska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), p. 166.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp. 138–39.

<sup>21</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 121–22; Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, pp. 132–38.

the shared German past, and indirectly towards the GDR, by the early 1970s. A younger cohort of historians proved willing to examine Prussian history more critically, and to acknowledge the negative consequences of unification. Their works also ‘accepted the final demise of the Second Reich’ and, just as importantly, of ‘any claim to the return of the “lost territories”’. This development was ‘given a cautious, albeit critical, welcome’ by East German scholars.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to these internal circumstances, changes in the geopolitical landscape made a revision to the SED’s national narrative more desirable. Both the GDR’s relationship with the Federal Republic and the climate within the Eastern bloc had evolved such that a narrative emphasizing the GDR’s connections with the pre-socialist German past offered more political and diplomatic advantages. George Schöpflin defines the 1980s in particular as a period in which communist governments throughout the bloc increasingly appealed to popular nationalist sentiment and attempted to recast themselves more explicitly as representatives and defenders of the nation, in a bid to boost their popular legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> The SED leadership was bound to take its cue from this more permissive approach, especially given the other advantages of indulging popular nationalism.

There is evidence to suggest that the SED leadership paid particular attention to the implementation of this policy in Poland. A report by the Dresden *Bezirk* Secretary of the German Writers’ Union on a visit to Wrocław in 1970, for example, briefly comments on the evident importance to the Poles of national pride, and of their cultural heritage. When recounting their visit to a former Silesian museum that had recently been granted the status of a national museum, the report notes the GDR delegation’s interest in how carefully, and indeed tastefully, the Poles cared for artefacts from their national past. A conversation with the group’s escort revealed that this was part of a state-led strategy for inculcating a sense of national belonging among the populace. The artworks in the museum, they were informed, were intended to ‘contribute to the development of national consciousness, a task that acquires particular importance given the eventful history of Poland, in which the nation’s

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<sup>22</sup> I. R. Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia in the German Democratic Republic’, *German Life and Letters*, 37.1 (1983), 57–70 (pp. 61–62) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.1983.tb00594.x>>; Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, pp. 131–32.

<sup>23</sup> Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, p. 193. This wider context remains under-researched, however, and scholars such as André Keil have called for more transnational studies comparing the turns towards more ethnicized legitimizing national histories in Eastern bloc states. See Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, p. 278.



existence has been threatened time and again'.<sup>24</sup>

A similar discussion features in a report on a GDR educational delegation to Wrocław in 1984, which includes an account of a mild case of anti-Sovietism that illustrates the connection between this sentiment and Polish national pride. The report describes the delegation's visit to a panorama painting that was currently under reconstruction, and which depicted a Polish victory against tsarist Russia in the seventeenth century—presumably during the war of 1654–1657, as a result of which large portions of Polish territory, including Kiev, were ceded to Russia. The renovation had received 'many millions' in funding from both Polish and foreign (including American) investors. When the GDR delegation asked why so much time and money had been invested in a painting presenting Poland at war with Russia, their hosts responded that this was partly because the piece represented an important part of Polish history: it had previously been kept in Lwów, and returned to Poland after the Second World War. The Poles suggested that the Soviets had been keen to gloss over, and remove reminders of, the fact that 'Kiev was once Polish'. The report concludes that, despite the considerable common ground that existed between GDR and Polish functionaries, 'many unsolved problems also remain'.<sup>25</sup>

These are of course isolated and very specific instances, but they indicate that GDR functionaries were aware of, and interested in analysing, the PZPR's efforts to nurture popular nationalism to bolster their own rule. Various scholars have also suggested that the SED leadership was motivated in part by its observation of the Solidarity crisis in 1980 and 1981, which it ascribed to the close links in Poland between Church, populace and political opposition, and its desire to placate the first two groups in the GDR to avoid similar destabilization.<sup>26</sup>

More important than this, however, was the influence of West German *Ostpolitik* and improvements in inter-German relations taking place around this time, particularly the achievement of mutual recognition.<sup>27</sup> An upshot of this, however, was that both states were

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<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Scholz, 'Bericht über die Reise der Schriftstellerdelegation des DSV – Bezirk Dresden – nach Wrocław am 24.–26.11.1970, 3 December 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 11430 BT/RdB Dresden, Nr. 8548.

<sup>25</sup> Rudolf Vogt, 'Information über den Aufenthalt des Rektors der TU Dresden und des 1. Sekretärs der SED Kreisleitung an der Polytechnischen Hochschule Wrocław – VR Polen, 25 May 1984' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7844.

<sup>26</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> The impact of *Ostpolitik* on East German attitudes towards the Poles, and on the GDR-Polish relationship in general, is explored in Chapter 3 ('Asserting the socialist brotherhood').

required to relinquish their claims to be the sole representative of the German people; the GDR therefore needed to develop a more distinctive identity in order to justify itself as a separate nation state.<sup>28</sup> Dirk Verheyen summarizes this shift as a transition from a conception of the GDR as a “vanguard” state within a persisting German nation’ to the idea of a separate East German nation.<sup>29</sup> The party’s efforts to achieve this in previous decades through its *Abgrenzung* propaganda had largely failed,<sup>30</sup> and the success of *Ostpolitik* threatened to undermine the limited gains that had been made. The SED was concerned that ordinary East Germans might interpret the diplomatic advances made as a result of *Ostpolitik* negotiations as a sign that the two German states were growing closer together, rather than consolidating their separation, as the leadership saw it.<sup>31</sup> In short, ‘the SED was put on the defensive’, and now found it expedient to expand the previous attempts to present the GDR as the ‘better Germany’ and lay claim to broader sections of the shared German past.<sup>32</sup> In Asmus’ interpretation, the SED’s resurrection of a wider range of historical figures, symbols and trends was an attempt to convince the populace ‘that they [were] indeed more “German” than a rootless, Americanized West Germany and that they [were] heirs to the entire German past and not only selected traditions of the German labor movement’. In short, this shift represented an effort to ‘tear down the walls of a self-erected ideological cage of some 30 years’ standing’.<sup>33</sup> *Ostpolitik* therefore ‘triggered a re-evaluation of the concept of the German nation’, leading to a renewed emphasis on *Abgrenzung* and the promotion of the GDR as a separate socialist nation.<sup>34</sup>

## Expanding East German nationhood

The selective resurrection of the pre-communist past was the centrepiece of a broader redefinition of East German nationhood taking place in the 1970s. This consisted of an expansion of the national idea, as well as its ethnicization—or, more accurately, its re-ethnicization following a decade of communist vacillation on the issue.

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<sup>28</sup> Ladd, ‘East Berlin Political Monuments’.

<sup>29</sup> Dirk Verheyen, *The German Question: A Cultural, Historical, and Geopolitical Exploration*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 3 (‘Asserting the socialist brotherhood’).

<sup>31</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Nation’, pp. 404, 416.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald D. Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Past’, *German Studies Newsletter*, 1986, 19–24 (p. 23).

<sup>34</sup> Saunders, *Honecker’s Children*, p. 9.

Disagreement on the national question was one of the focal points of the power struggles that took place among the SED leadership in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ulbricht's continued adherence to the idea of a single German nation was the cause of clashes with several of his rivals in the Politburo, notably Honecker, and also, more importantly, was out of step with Soviet priorities in a post-*Ostpolitik* context. McKay has concluded that this, along with Ulbricht's increasingly self-aggrandizing behaviour, was the main instigation for his ousting and replacement by Honecker in 1971.<sup>35</sup>

Within months of his accession to the position of first secretary, Honecker declared that a purely 'socialist nation' was in the process of developing in the GDR. This assertion was followed by a crude, and inconsistent, effort to decouple German ethnicity from the idea of GDR nationhood, most obviously by the removal of the word 'German' from the names of various organizations and institutions. Similarly, the 1974 version of the constitution redefined the GDR as a 'socialist state of workers and farmers', rather than a 'socialist state of the German nation', and removed the references to the aim of overcoming the division of Germany. This campaign was a 'desperate attempt' to repudiate any remaining connection between the GDR and the FRG, and to convince both the East German populace and, to a lesser extent, the international community of the legitimacy of the GDR as a separate state. It proved an utter failure in this respect, however; it left the East German populace cold, leading many to feel as though their national identity was under attack, and was not even taken up with much enthusiasm by the academics and ideologues charged with providing theoretical justification for it.<sup>36</sup>

Unsurprisingly, therefore, within a few years the notion of a purely socialist state was supplanted by the more broadly palatable idea of the GDR as a socialist German nation. In rhetorical terms, this hinged on the awkward distinction drawn between 'nation', 'nationality' and 'citizenship', a distinction devised by theorists Alfred Kosing and Walter Schmidt and endorsed by Honecker at the 13th Plenum of the SED Central Committee in 1974. According to this schema, a 'nation' was an entity defined primarily by economic, ideological and class relations, while 'nationality' encompassed the ethnic, historical and cultural bonds between

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<sup>35</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 67–75.

<sup>36</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 76–99, 107. Changes to the constitution quoted in 'Aus den Veränderungen der Verfassung, 7. Oktober 1974', in *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945-1985*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1986), pp. 345–47.

people. 'Nationality', which therefore included all the characteristics shared by East and West Germans, was also deemed subordinate to the 'nation', comprising, in Kosing's and Schmidt's definition, 'only one of the components of the nation, and what is more, not the most decisive'. East Germans were therefore asked to consider themselves GDR citizens of German (or, in a minority of cases, Sorbian) nationality. This was a slight modification of the traditional Marxist-Leninist conception of a nation, justified as the result of the unexpected degree to which the two German states had diverged since the 1940s. The extent to which the populace found this revised national concept convincing is uncertain. At the very least, however, the majority were 'relieved to know that they were still allowed to be Germans', and found the idea of a socialist German nation sufficiently compatible with their own understanding of their national identity either to accept or to ignore it. This had little impact on popular attitudes towards the Federal Republic, with two-thirds of East Germans refusing to call it a foreign nation, according to West German sources. Pan-German sentiment remained high, and indeed intensified during the NATO missiles debate of the early 1980s and similar events. Nonetheless, the SED leadership apparently felt more secure with this compromise than with the previous theory, rarely referring to the national question from the late 1970s onwards and, conversely, proving increasingly willing throughout the 1980s to describe the GDR populace as Germans.<sup>37</sup>

This reorientation of official nationalism was bolstered by a revised programme of patriotic education that aimed at instilling younger generations with a distinct GDR identity. In addition to placing a greater emphasis on militarism and pride in the socialist state than in previous decades, this attempted gradually to incorporate the SED's more expansive approach to the German past into the school history curriculum.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Promoting 'Tradition und Erbe'***

The conceptual and rhetorical basis of much of the expanded national narrative, and the means by which the SED attempted to assert its compatibility with previous concepts of the nation, was the distinction between *Tradition* (tradition) and *Erbe* (heritage). As GDR historians Wolfgang Küttler and Hans Schleier explained, the difference between the two concepts hinged on their relevance to an 'attitude towards history [that is] active, critical and

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<sup>37</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 107–21.

<sup>38</sup> Saunders, *Honecker's Children*, pp. 31–43.

usable for societal development'. *Erbe* was used 'in the comprehensive dimension of objective history', while *Tradition* referred more specifically to 'that part of the overall *Erbe* [...] from which the socialist view of history and historical consciousness in the evaluation and judgement of history stems'.<sup>39</sup> Alternatively, in Stephen Hoffmann's more succinct formulation, 'all *Tradition* is part of the *Erbe*, but not all of *Erbe* belongs to tradition'.<sup>40</sup> This distinction was accompanied, however, by an acknowledgement that 'culture cannot arise solely out of political *Tradition*, however—it arises "organically" from *Erbe*. Thus it is better to lay claim to as much history, and therefore culture, as possible; political legitimacy best arises from historical precedence'.<sup>41</sup> The *Erbe/Tradition* duality was therefore marked by an intrinsic inclusivity, in spite of its insistence that only a subset of this history and culture would be usable. There were of course a variety of shades to the definitions of both terms, as well as disagreements between scholars over the ways in which each ought to be used.<sup>42</sup>

These debates did not extend beyond academia, however; indeed, the contorted distinction between *Erbe* and *Tradition* in its broadest sense was scarcely of interest to ordinary East Germans. It did, however, provide historians, as well as the SED leadership dependent on their work, with the theoretical justification for 'opening the whole of German history as a legitimate field of inquiry, while recognizing that only certain elements of the historical legacy were deemed to be positive'.<sup>43</sup> Despite this new expansive approach, historians were still obliged to make 'acrobatic efforts to select only the aspects of the [national] heritage that were in line with class ideology'.<sup>44</sup> Further ideological finessing was required to distinguish the GDR's new approach to the German past from that of the Federal Republic, particularly when the two states commemorated the same historical personalities. In such instances, leading SED figures such as Kurt Hager stressed, to both party functionaries and the wider populace, that the manner in which elements of the national past

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<sup>39</sup> Wolfgang Küttler and Hans Schleier, 'Die Erbe-Konzeption und der Platz der preußischen Geschichte in der DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft', *German Studies Review*, 6.3 (1983), 535–57 (pp. 537–38) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1429760>>.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen P. Hoffmann, 'The GDR, Luther, and the German Question', *The Review of Politics*, 48.2 (1986), 246–63 (p. 249) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500038535>>.

<sup>41</sup> Corinna Munn, 'The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR: From Rejection to Selective Commemoration' (unpublished undergraduate thesis, Columbia University, 2014), p. 53 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7916/D8QV3JNF>>.

<sup>42</sup> Küttler and Schleier, 'Die Erbe-Konzeption', pp. 537–40.

<sup>43</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, p. 131.

<sup>44</sup> Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation*, p. 166.

were presented in the GDR was as important as which elements were chosen. In contrast to earlier decades, it no longer mattered as much to the SED if both German states drew on the same national and cultural symbols, as long as the GDR offered a distinct interpretation of them.<sup>45</sup> As a result, ‘the commonly shared German history returned to East Germany by the back door’.<sup>46</sup> GDR historiography was increasingly marked by what Mary Fulbrook has termed the ‘sandwich principle’, whereby ‘a rich and nutritious empirical filling could be safely topped and tailed by a little dry bread of Marxist-Leninist theory in the introductory and concluding sections’. In this way, historians were able to pay lip service to ideological requirements while broadening the range of topics they researched considerably, beyond those relevant to contemporary political concerns. Indeed, much of the work produced in this period was barely distinguishable from that published in the far freer historiographical culture of the West, and made valuable contributions to research on Prussian history, the Reformation, and especially social and labour history.<sup>47</sup>

This was certainly not a wholesale revision, but the chance for researchers to ‘introduce new notes into the historiography of the GDR’.<sup>48</sup> Since the early 1950s, the SED had been fairly consistent in its insistence that the GDR was the inheritor of everything positive and progressive in the German past, having made a clean break with its reactionary elements. The change that began in the mid 1970s, however, lay in ‘the increasingly elastic definition of what [was] “progressive” as opposed to “reactionary”’.<sup>49</sup> This was heralded by Honecker’s call for GDR historians to ‘draw out the positive traditions of German history’. As Mitchell notes, such appeals had been made before, including by Ulbricht in the early 1950s, but in contrast to these earlier campaigns, drawing on ‘positive traditions’ no longer meant focusing solely on aspects of working-class history, but ‘being alive to the broader “national-territorial tradition” and its positive features’.<sup>50</sup> Horst Bartel, director of the GDR Academy of Sciences’ Central Institute of History, stated this directly in 1981: ‘Socialism is the legitimate heir to everything revolutionary, progressive, and humanistic in all of German history’.<sup>51</sup> In his assessment of this shift, Asmus identifies three directions in which the definition of East

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<sup>45</sup> Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, pp. 140–41.

<sup>46</sup> Wolff-Powęska, *Memory as Burden and Liberation*, p. 166.

<sup>47</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Nation’, p. 411. See also Ladd, ‘East Berlin Political Monuments’, p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia’, p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Nation’, pp. 413–14.

German nationhood was extended. First, it was extended chronologically: GDR national history was reconceptualised to encompass the entirety of the German past, including those ‘progressive’ developments and movements that did not involve, or even predated, the working classes. Topics now encouraged included the political and economic ambitions of the bourgeoisie and lower middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the Reformation; the peasants’ war of the sixteenth century; and a host of medieval uprisings, revolts and ‘antifeudal heretic movements’. Second, historiography was extended territorially. The GDR’s historical legacy was now deemed to include all German (and formerly German) territory, not only the areas that now comprised the GDR. This allowed for studies on the revolts of south-western Germany as well as Thuringia in the sixteenth century, the Mainz Republic of 1793, the fate of the south German Jacobins following the French Revolution, and the range of strikes and uprisings in Silesia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, among other topics. Last was a ‘sociostructural’ expansion, as part of which historical figures outside the working classes, even those typically viewed as reactionary, were brought into the fold. This paved the way for biographies of such former *personae non gratae* as Bismarck and Frederick the Great.<sup>52</sup>

In conversation with the publisher and media mogul Robert Maxwell in 1980, Honecker insisted that the new approach was consistent with the East German historiography of previous decades:

We are not only concerned with revolutionary socialist traditions [...] In appreciating the historical achievements of Martin Luther and Carl von Clausewitz, we stand in the tradition of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the German workers’ movement and our own history since 1945. We are in no way ignoring the limitations of these and other figures in German history, their negative characteristics, their contradictory behaviour [...] It is consistent with our worldview to comprehend history in its objective, factual progression, its comprehensive dialectic.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, GDR historian Adolf Laube justified the shift as the inevitable result of the maturation of the East German revolution. ‘The working class that exercises power’, he claimed, ‘has a broader view of the past than one that is in the middle of its struggle for

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<sup>52</sup> Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Nation’, pp. 413–14.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Maxwell, *Erich Honecker. Aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Dietz, 1980), p. 436. Quoted in Munn, ‘The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR’, p. 41 (translation mine).

power'.<sup>54</sup> These assertions do not really convince, however, and it is difficult to argue with Goeckel's interpretation that the 1970s turn saw the GDR place 'greater emphasis on adapting to, rather than on transforming, its political culture'.<sup>55</sup> It is unlikely that this is not also the way in which the SED leadership viewed the situation. In essence, the shift represented a tactical withdrawal by the party on the nationalism issue: a move towards a narrative more closely aligned to the pan-German nationalist loyalties felt by a majority of the populace, which the party had been unable to ignore or supplant.

The greatest beneficiary of this new approach was the Kingdom of Prussia (on which more below), but a host of other historical actors also received a boost to their reputations in the official nation-building narrative. Friedrich Nietzsche was rehabilitated in the 1980s,<sup>56</sup> as were a number of cultural figures, including Goethe (who was commemorated in 1982), Schiller (1984), Bach, Händel and Schutz (1985), and various others who could be construed to have been active in what became GDR territory.<sup>57</sup> One of the more prominent examples of this process, however, was the Reformation, and Martin Luther in particular. Luther had previously been denounced as the 'princes' lackey' and 'betrayers of the peasants'.<sup>58</sup> This condemnation softened over the following two decades, and the official interpretation of Luther became more nuanced, evolving 'from caricature to sophisticated portraiture'.<sup>59</sup>

Over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, Luther was welcomed more explicitly into the canon of progressive historical figures. The various doctrinal contortions required to make this transition consistent with socialist ideology rested on the SED's rather tortuous separation of *Erbe* and *Tradition*, with different aspects of Luther's legacy assigned to whichever was more ideologically expedient.<sup>60</sup>

The five hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth in 1983 (designated 'Luther year')

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in "'Mit Herrn Luther ist alles in Butter". Wie die SED den 500. Geburtstag des Reformators feiert', *Der Spiegel*, 7 March 1983, 106–13 (p. 106).

<sup>55</sup> Robert F. Goeckel, 'The Luther Anniversary in East Germany', *World Politics*, 37.1 (1984), 112–33 (p. 130) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2010308>>.

<sup>56</sup> Nick Martin, 'Nietzsche in the GDR: History of a Taboo', in *Nietzsche and the German Tradition*, ed. by Nick Martin (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 263–86; Ulrich B. Busch, 'On the Nietzsche-Reception in the GDR', in *Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900): Economy and Society*, ed. by Jürgen G. Backhaus and Wolfgang Drechsler (Boston, MA: Springer, 2006), pp. 173–89 <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-32980-2\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-32980-2_9)>.

<sup>57</sup> Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, pp. 138–39.

<sup>58</sup> Asmus, 'The GDR and the German Nation', p. 413.

<sup>59</sup> Goeckel, 'The Luther Anniversary in East Germany', pp. 114–15; Hoffmann, 'The GDR, Luther, and the German Question', pp. 252–56.

<sup>60</sup> Hoffmann, 'The GDR, Luther, and the German Question', p. 249.



afforded the SED the opportunity fully to ‘integrate Luther into the canon of relevant historical reference points’.<sup>61</sup> The year was marked with considerable fanfare, with enthusiastic state promotion of tourist sites related to Luther. Luther also received a ‘veritable avalanche of media attention’, including a number of television and radio plays and daily coverage of the preparations for the anniversary celebrations in the press. In a clear articulation of the new line, the West German newspaper *Neue Zeit* published a series on the East German heirs of Luther. This shift prompted the SED to cooperate, to a limited extent, with the Lutheran churches, which were offered state support for their own commemorations.<sup>62</sup> The symbolic high point of this cooperation was the church service in honour of Luther held at the Wartburg castle on 4 May 1983, which was attended by a contingent of GDR state officials.<sup>63</sup> Church and state had in any case been enjoying a more cordial relationship since the early 1970s, culminating in the church–state agreement of 1978. The relationship was not entirely harmonious, and the Luther anniversary itself became the subject of a minor power struggle during 1982 and 1983, but this did not overshadow the degree of consensus that had been achieved.<sup>64</sup> West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl criticized the GDR’s Luther commemoration as a ‘subtle attempt by the SED to use Luther to bind the concept of nation with that of socialism, as if there were a direct line of continuity from Frederick the Great to Erich Honecker’.<sup>65</sup> In general, however, the anniversary celebrations furthered the rapprochement between the two Germanies that had been set in motion by *Ostpolitik*, providing the occasion for intensified inter-German contacts and broadening the West German population’s awareness of events in the GDR.<sup>66</sup>

The built environment was also reshaped by the shift towards a *Tradition* and *Erbe* approach, which ushered in a wider range of styles and subjects for statues, monuments and buildings. In particular, this was one of several reasons for the reduced emphasis on prominent communist heroic figures from the late 1970s onwards. This was most clearly seen in the different fates of two statues planned for East Berlin at around this time: Ludwig

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<sup>61</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, pp. 268–69. See also Arvan Gordon, ‘The Luther Quincentenary in the GDR’, *Religion in Communist Lands*, 12.1 (1984), 77–85  
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/09637498408431113>>.

<sup>62</sup> Goeckel, ‘The Luther Anniversary in East Germany’, pp. 116–18.

<sup>63</sup> Hoffmann, ‘The GDR, Luther, and the German Question’, p. 246.

<sup>64</sup> Goeckel, ‘The Luther Anniversary in East Germany’, pp. 112–13, 121–24.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Goeckel, ‘The Luther Anniversary in East Germany’, p. 125.

<sup>66</sup> Goeckel, ‘The Luther Anniversary in East Germany’, pp. 124–27.

Engelhardt's 'Marx-Engels-Forum', and Lev Kerbel's statue of Ernst Thälmann. Both projects endured long and contentious development processes, and both were treated by the SED leadership as less important than the provision of housing, consumer goods, entertainment and other services. The Marx-Engels statue ultimately suffered the greater indignity, being placed across the river Spree from its original intended site (at which it would have had greater prominence and political significance), passed over in favour of a car park, while Kerbel's project became the site of various official ceremonies, but otherwise out of the way of most of the city's inhabitants.<sup>67</sup> This relative marginalization contrasted with the significance eventually accorded to the rehabilitated statue of Frederick the Great, prominently displayed in the very centre of Unter den Linden.

Accompanying this diminution of socialist symbols was a greater interest in the architectural heritage of the pre-war past, pursued through an extensive programme of monument preservation and restoration throughout the state. The GDR's thirty-fifth anniversary celebrations in 1984, for instance, were marked by the reopening, amid much fanfare, of the former Schauspielhaus theatre in East Berlin, which had been restored after being severely damaged by Allied bombing during the war, as a concert hall.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, much of the restoration work on historic sites was carried out by Polish craftsmen. Along with Czechoslovakia, Poland was one of the most active and enthusiastic preservers of cultural and architectural heritage among the bloc states, with Gerhard Strauss, an art historian based at the Humboldt University in East Berlin, noting in 1954 that 'the Poles are the best country in the [field of preservation]'.<sup>69</sup> While the GDR was engaged in its 'war on the past' in the 1950s and 1960s, the Poles had been able to embrace their heritage more wholeheartedly. As a result, the GDR lagged behind Poland—and, for that matter, behind virtually all the other bloc states—in terms of architectural preservation laws and activity. By the mid 1970s, Poland had some 5,500 workers in specialized preservation companies, compared to around 295 workers in the GDR. This was closely associated with the nationalist alliance that had been established between the PZPR and the Polish people in the very early

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<sup>67</sup> Ladd, 'East Berlin Political Monuments'.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Krisch, *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). Google ebook.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted and translated in Brian William Campbell, 'Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR, 1945-1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Rochester, 2005), p. 245.

years of communist rule, and which gave the Polish preservation efforts ‘strong nationalist overtones’ throughout. When the SED embarked on its more active preservation efforts in the mid 1970s, therefore, it was forced to turn to Polish restoration workers for the required expertise. This arrangement had in fact begun tentatively in the late 1960s, but as the SED became more interested in preservation in the following decade, collaboration intensified. Polish workers took the lead on the restoration of the Marstall building and the Neue Kammern at the State Palace and Gardens in Potsdam in 1973; a house in Stralsund, *Bezirk* Rostock, starting in 1975; and the Königlicher Weinberg at Sanssouci Palace through the 1970s and into the 1980s. They also assisted with the work of the VEB *Denkmalpflege* Quedlinburg, *Bezirk* Halle, throughout the 1970s. Reliance on the Poles lessened from the mid 1970s onwards, as the SED began bolstering the GDR’s own state conservation infrastructure.<sup>70</sup>

### **The *Preußenrenaissance* and its problems**

The centrepiece of the national turn was the reinterpretation, in a far more laudatory light, of the history, iconography and personalities of Prussia. As might be expected, given Prussia’s role at the vanguard of German imperialism in the nineteenth century, the Prussian revival ‘sparked off considerable interest [...] among some of the GDR’s Eastern neighbours familiar with certain of the less “progressive” aspects of Prussian rule’, not least Poland.<sup>71</sup>

Prior to the 1970s, the Prussian state and its political, social and moral legacy had been portrayed in wholeheartedly critical terms. Official antifascism was in essence a repudiation of almost everything that Prussia then represented, with the founding of the GDR conceived as a ‘complete break with the fateful Prussian past and the building of a socialist “New Germany”’, one that was ‘the antithesis to Prussia and all that it stood for’. Intellectuals such as Alexander Abusch drew a direct line of continuity from Prussian authoritarianism and militarism to Nazism, and thence to Germany’s defeat and the catastrophic situation of the immediate post-war period.<sup>72</sup> This line of reasoning was embedded in the official ideology and historiography of the GDR. In a review article on recent GDR works on enlightened absolutism published in 1968, for instance, historians Ingrid Mittenzwei and Hannelore

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<sup>70</sup> Campbell, ‘Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past’, pp. 249–53, 307–26.

<sup>71</sup> Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Nation’, p. 412.

<sup>72</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, pp. 259–62, 271.

Lehmann asserted that the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany had provided the opportunity to ‘eliminate fascism at its roots’, a process that also entailed ‘breaking with the reactionary Prussian tradition’.<sup>73</sup> This interpretation underpinned a range of SED policies in the reconstruction period and beyond. The land reform of the 1940s was trumpeted by slogans such as *Junkerland in Bauernhand*, which highlighted the Prussian origins of most of the landowners whose estates were being appropriated. Over subsequent decades, numerous buildings associated with the Prussian state in East Berlin were removed (such as the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great in 1950), demolished (including the Berlin Palace in 1950 and the remainder of the Garrison Church in Potsdam in 1968) or repurposed (such as the *Neue Wache* guardhouse, which was reopened in 1960 as a memorial to victims of fascism and militarism). Various media productions, such as the 1970 television serial *The Spirit of Potsdam*, denounced the Prussian state and lauded the GDR as ‘the socialist conqueror of Prussianism’. This vilification of Prussia was accompanied by a commensurate emphasis, in historiography, education and political discourse, on the continuity between the ‘progressive’ traditions in German history and the SED-state.<sup>74</sup>

The SED’s repudiation of Prussia in earlier decades was also motivated by Cold War realpolitik, and was closely tied to the GDR’s self-legitimization efforts. As I. R. Mitchell explains, the majority of West German historians in this period remained supportive of much of the legacy of the Prussian state, in spite of its political and intellectual contribution to the Second World War. In particular, they held that the unification of Germany under the Second Reich had been a progressive development, and that the borders of that state were still the legitimate boundaries of the German nation. Since this included the territory of the GDR—that is, the territory ‘under Soviet administration’—a defence of the Prussian Reich was by implication a denial of the GDR’s right to exist. In essence, West German historical understandings of Prussia bolstered the Federal Republic’s Hallstein doctrine, and countering them became an existential necessity for the GDR. In the eyes of the SED leadership, therefore, ‘a validation of this right to exist was seen as necessitating an attack on “Prussian militarism”, and demonstration that the development of Brandenburg-Prussia, including its role in the unification of Germany, had been a major source of the disasters which befell the

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia’, p. 59 (translation mine).

<sup>74</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, pp. 259–62, 271.

German nation in the present century'.<sup>75</sup> The SED's *Abgrenzung* propaganda was therefore replete with arguments that the 'democratic, humanistic, peaceful and socialist traditions of the German nation' were to be found in the GDR, while the FRG was the repository of all 'backward, barbaric and inhumane' elements of German history, especially 'reactionary Prussianism'.<sup>76</sup> By the same token, once *Ostpolitik* negotiations had led to a relaxation of the Hallstein doctrine and to recognition of the GDR by the Federal Republic, the path to East German acceptance of Prussia's legacy became considerably clearer.

By contrast, the *Preußenrenaissance* was part of a movement across both German states whereby Prussia assumed 'a new position of prominence in German cultural life'.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, competition with the West was one of the principal driving forces of the SED's rehabilitation of Prussia, particularly in its nascent years. The initial impetus came from an exhibition on Prussian history in the former Reichstag building organized by West Berlin mayor Dietrich Stobbe in 1981. The exhibition was staged amidst a flood of media activity relating to Prussia, and was a product of the nationalist soul-searching that had been taking place in the Federal Republic throughout the 1970s. Scholars such as Keil, however, have also suggested that it was in part intended to undercut the GDR's professions of legitimacy; since the majority of formerly Prussian territory was now part of the GDR, West German claims to the Prussian heritage and an emphasis on the 'unity of the German nation' would, it was hoped, undermine the SED's national narrative. The exhibition prompted a renewed interest in Prussian history in West Berlin, which manifested in a 'veritable flood of publications, TV broadcasts and events' and debates by historians and cultural journalists that made 1981 'an almost semi-official "Prussia Year"' in the Federal Republic. The GDR media was initially scornful of this attempted rehabilitation, interpreting it as a revival of militarist and imperialist attitudes in the West. It became more tolerant in its judgement as the SED began its own reinterpretation in earnest, but continued to attempt to undermine FRG representations of Prussia. Once the *Preußenrenaissance* had been established as a feature of both states' historical discourse, the FRG and the GDR began competing to present themselves as the 'legitimate representative of Prussian heritage'. This competition mostly

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<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, 'The Changing Image of Prussia', pp. 58–59.

<sup>76</sup> *Neues Deutschland*, 23 March 1962, quoted in Mitchell, 'The Changing Image of Prussia' p. 61.

<sup>77</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, 'A Mastered Past? Prussia in Postwar German Memory', *German History*, 22.4 (2004), 505–35 (p. 509) <<https://doi.org/10.1191/0266355404gh320oa>>.

took place as two separate conversations, however, with only isolated and very selective interaction between FRG and GDR academics. Nonetheless, there were occasional incidents of collaboration, one of the more prominent being the television serial *Saxony's Splendour and Prussia's Glory* (on which more below), the final two episodes of which were co-funded by the West German public broadcaster ARD. The rivalry between the two states was in any case eased by the fact that enthusiasm for Prussia 'petered out' in the Federal Republic from 1981 onwards, and never assumed the supreme importance of the Prussian turn in the GDR. Again, this was in all likelihood due to the GDR's inheritance of the bulk of Prussian territory (although in the West there was a great deal of commercially exploited nostalgia for the 'lost homelands' in Prussia, particularly among former refugees and expellees and right-wing revisionists, who posed something of a challenge to the ruling CDU in the 1980s).<sup>78</sup>

The Prussian revival also arose from a renewed emphasis on regional history and *Heimat* culture throughout the GDR. These had hardly been suppressed prior to this period, of course. As Jan Palmowski makes clear, the *Preußenrenaissance* was not created *ex nihilo*, and was 'neither a birth nor a renaissance'. The party and state infrastructure had since the 1950s been fostering local and regional cultures throughout the GDR, without which groundwork the greater emphasis on *Tradition* and *Erbe* in the 1970s and 1980s would have been 'inconceivable'.<sup>79</sup> The SED had certainly objected to the promotion of regional cultures on a number of ideological grounds, however, and had endeavoured to downplay their importance.<sup>80</sup> Among the communists' objections, albeit further down the list, was the impediment that the promotion of regional culture and dialects presented to the integration of expellees from the former German territories east of the Oder–Neisse border. As discussed earlier,<sup>81</sup> a large proportion of these resettlers remained in the GDR; indeed, the highest number ended up in *Land Mecklenburg* (and the *Bezirke* that replaced it from 1952 onwards). Their integration into the main national community, which was so crucial to the SED's

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<sup>78</sup> Keil, 'The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited', pp. 263–71, 274–77; Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, p. 90; Tim Blanning, *Frederick the Great: King of Prussia* (New York: Random House, 2016), pp. 611–12.

<sup>79</sup> Jan Palmowski, 'Regional Identities and the Limits of Democratic Centralism in the GDR', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41.3 (2006), 503–26 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009406064657>>.

<sup>80</sup> Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 92; Jan Palmowski, 'Building an East German Nation: The Construction of a Socialist Heimat, 1945–1961', *Central European History*, 37.3 (2004), 365–99 (pp. 371–72).

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 2 ('Processing the legacies of war').

narrative of a successful and painless resettlement process, was threatened by the continued ‘cultivation of regional peculiarities’. These were often pronounced enough to exacerbate tensions between locals and expellees. In Mecklenburg, for instance, the use of ‘incomprehensible’ Low German dialects in local culture was frequently cited as a barrier to integration, and became ‘extremely divisive’.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, popular attachment to *Heimat* culture proved intractable, and something the party had to adapt to. As Alon Confino has explained, ordinary East Germans ‘continued to imagine the nation as a local metaphor’ throughout the communist era. He suggests that the imagery retained its adhesive power because after so many decades ‘it was difficult, if not impossible, to talk, think, and draw Germanness without considering the Heimat traditions [...] If [the SED] wanted to abolish it, they had to reckon with its persistent hold on the German imagination’. Similarly, in order to appropriate it for legitimizing purposes, the SED needed to ‘take into account its tradition of symbols and meanings’, a ‘symbolic manual that imposed certain limits’.<sup>83</sup> In other words, it was obliged to take the existing pattern of the national tapestry into account.

Despite their objections to *Heimat* culture, therefore, German communists accepted the need to ‘integrate it into their new ideas about Germany’s destiny’.<sup>84</sup> As Laura Silverberg has pointed out, the SED never made any serious or long-term attempt to construct a ‘specifically East German culture’. Instead, the leadership favoured the development of a ‘socialist national culture’, in which compatible elements of the German cultural heritage were fused with communist ideology. Rather than pursuing anything overly revolutionary, the SED concerned itself with assimilating and adapting existing, and relatively conservative, cultural elements, and making them more accessible to the masses. In ‘aligning the GDR with the cultural past’ in this way, the leadership adopted the same approach it would later take with state-wide history.<sup>85</sup>

The SED’s preference was therefore to retain the look and feel of *Heimat* culture, the ‘localness and nationhood in its idiom’, but instrumentalize it in a form stripped of its bourgeois ideological and cultural content. The result was a sanitized, ‘generic Heimat

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<sup>82</sup> Palmowski, ‘Building an East German Nation’, p. 371.

<sup>83</sup> Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance*, pp. 93, 96, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance*, pp. 93, 96, 103.

<sup>85</sup> Laura Silverberg, ‘East German Music and the Problem of National Identity’, *Nationalities Papers*, 37.4 (2009), 501–22 (pp. 501–6) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990902985710>>.

iconography', which the party attempted to use as a representation of, and a rallying point for, the East German state and nation.<sup>86</sup> The SED attempted to redefine the *Heimat* as a more flexible, yet also more specific construct, a homeland distinguished by class and commitment to socialist ideology. This idea played a key role in the party's nation-building propaganda, and its efforts to distinguish the GDR from the FRG via a policy of *Abgrenzung*, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. The SED highlighted the diversity of *Heimat* culture, and emphasized its Germanness in contrast to the insidious Americanization of culture in the FRG, in a bid to enhance the prestige of the East German state at home and abroad.<sup>87</sup> On a more abstract level, the contrast drawn by the party between the German nation, which for the moment encompassed both Germanies, and the GDR state<sup>88</sup> rested on a similar distinction drawn in East German *Heimat* culture between the 'nation' and the 'fatherland', the latter being identified with the GDR. This was very similar to, and served as a precursor to, the dichotomy between 'nation' and 'nationality' established under Honecker. The implication of this was that the *Heimat* could be decoupled from one's place of birth. This argument also surfaced in propaganda relating to the expellees from the east. The resettlers, it was asserted, had been able to find their true *Heimat* in the GDR by becoming part of the socialist community. Meanwhile, their fellows who had settled in the Federal Republic, having gained a new state, but no new *Heimat*, were still adrift and pining for their former homes in Poland.<sup>89</sup> Of course, this particular rhetorical contortion proved even more unconvincing than most to the bulk of the GDR populace, who participated in *Heimat* culture for largely unrelated reasons.

Regionalism, and particularly the study of regional history, therefore fell into and out of official favour at various points from the 1950s to the 1970s. Its revival in the mid 1970s followed a period in which it had been denounced as a relic of reactionary historiography and banned from university curricula from 1968 onwards. Now, however, it was reinstated, and praised as a means of encouraging patriotism and 'solidarity with the state'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Palmowski, 'Building an East German Nation', pp. 388–89.

<sup>87</sup> Palmowski, 'Building an East German Nation', pp. 382–84. See also Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, pp. 149–50.

<sup>89</sup> Palmowski, 'Building an East German Nation', pp. 379–80.

<sup>90</sup> Madeleine Brook, 'Keeping the Myth Alive: The Myth of August the Strong in the GDR', *Austausch*, 1.1 (2011), 1–20 (p. 4).



It is worth pointing out that *Heimat* culture also had its equivalent in Poland. While its closest analogue in terms of reach and popular appeal was the officially propagated ethnonationalist propaganda (the same narrative that had been used to provide historical and moral justification for the German expulsions), the PZPR also pursued a policy of glorifying the national landscape and (selected) regional customs and cultures. As in the GDR, this was primarily an attempt to strengthen the Polish communists' claim to represent and defend the nation, by asserting ownership over elements of national culture that could not in any case be ignored. For the same reasons as their GDR counterparts, the PZPR also attempted to fuse this regionalism with socialist values and symbols, and met with similarly mixed success in this respect.<sup>91</sup>

There were two main elements to the *Preußenrenaissance* as it developed in the GDR. First, the Prussian state was progressively integrated into the 'spatially defined identity of the GDR'.<sup>92</sup> The GDR was situated mostly within Prussian territory. Brandenburg, the 'core of historical Prussia', was 'the largest, most populous and most important part' of the GDR. Similarly, most of the historical Prussian capital was now located in East Berlin. As a result, the SED's efforts to establish the GDR as a legitimate, territorially bound nation state, particularly post-*Ostpolitik*, could only benefit from renewed popular interest in Prussia. By claiming the greater part of Prussian history for themselves, the party could draw parallels between Prussia's status as a *Separatstaat*—which had succeeded in forming a German state, on its own terms, that excluded large parts of what had previously been considered the broader German nation—and the GDR's aspirations to separate nationhood. This idea was reinforced by the fact that a large proportion of the Brandenburg core of traditional Prussia was located in GDR territory, and by the 'sociocultural connections' identified by many observers between '*Altpreußen* (traditional Prussia) and *Rotpreußen* ("socialist GDR-Prussia")'.<sup>93</sup> Second, a selection of stereotypically Prussian traits were incorporated into the 'historical canon' and the ostensible national character of the GDR. SED propaganda in the

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<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Patrice M. Dabrowski, 'Encountering Poland's "Wild West": Tourism in the Bieszczady Mountains under Socialism', in *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 75–97; Bianca Hoenig, 'Nature into a Socialist Landscape? The Case of the Polish Tatra Mountains after 1945', *National Identities*, 16.3 (2014), 253–67 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2014.935313>>.

<sup>92</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations in this paragraph are from Keil, 'The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited', p. 262; Mitchell, 'The Changing Image of Prussia', p. 57.

<sup>93</sup> Verheyen, *The German Question*, p. 86.

1980s saw an increased emphasis on such laudable ‘Prussian virtues’ as discipline, loyalty, stability and, less glamorously, bureaucratic efficiency. This line would prove something of a double-edged sword, however, as it became one of the bases on which Polish observers attacked the GDR’s Prussian turn.

This reorientation began around 1978, initially in SED publications and academic journals, and in the mass media shortly after.<sup>94</sup> Isolated debates that had revised the uncompromisingly negative view of Prussia had taken place within academia in the 1950s and 1960s, but were now incorporated into the historiographical and political mainstream. The change in direction was heralded by historian Ingrid Mittenzwei in an article written in the FDJ journal *Forum* in 1978. Mittenzwei argued that now that Prussian imperialism had at last been overcome and socialism established on German soil, the progressive traits of Prussia should be acknowledged as ‘integral parts of the GDR’s historical heritage’.<sup>95</sup> Various figures and events associated with Prussia began to be portrayed more positively, even reverently. Most notably, Frederick the Great was presented as the ‘philosopher of Sanssouci’. The Prussian-Russian military alliance during the 1813 ‘Wars of Liberation’ was frequently shown in a positive light. The ‘patriotic movement’ that emerged during that same campaign were ‘widely and falsely associated with a rising of the “people” for a unified and liberal Germany’. The lower strata of Prussian society were not entirely forgotten, however: various popular protests and agrarian revolts were reinterpreted (or, in Stefan Berger’s view, ‘over-interpret[ed]’) as proto-revolutionary uprisings.<sup>96</sup> The Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz was even featured on a new 35 pfennig stamp issued in 1980,<sup>97</sup> in a range that otherwise consisted mostly of renowned scientists, including Frederic Joliot-Curie, Johann Friedrich Naumann and Alfred Wegener.

These developments were greeted with suspicion in Poland. The Poles’ attitude towards and relationship with Germany as a whole had since the beginning of the eighteenth century been shaped largely by their views—‘both scholarly and popular’—of Prussia. The Kingdom of Prussia had been the source of many of the biases and stereotypes that characterized

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<sup>94</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, pp. 265–75.

<sup>95</sup> Munn, ‘The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR’, pp. 39–40.

<sup>96</sup> Stefan Berger, ‘Prussia in History and Historiography from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Centuries’, in *Modern Prussian History, 1830–1947*, ed. by Philip G. Dwyer (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 21–40 (pp. 31–32).

<sup>97</sup> Elżbieta Opiłowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche deutsch-polnischer Erinnerungskulturen. Görlitz–Zgorzelec 1945–2006* (Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2009), pp. 86–87.

Poland as an anarchic and economically backward country, crippled by ‘Catholic superstition’. This image was promoted especially aggressively in the days of Frederick the Great, who made use of it to justify his efforts to annex parts of Polish Prussia, and became embedded in German—and indeed wider European—historiography in the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> As a consequence, Frederick and later Bismarck (for similar reasons) were viewed as ‘symbols of anti-Polish hostility’ in Poland.<sup>99</sup> Henryk Olszewski summarizes this connection, and the ‘community of fate’ that had developed in the Polish popular consciousness between Prussia and Germany, as follows:

If one remembers that German–Polish relations until the twentieth century have been largely dictated by the long-term effects of Prussian policies, it is hardly surprising that images of Prussia have always occupied a dominant place in the political-historical consciousness of the Poles.<sup>100</sup>

Over the decades, the PZPR and the Polish populace had developed a firm consensus on the national question (one that the SED, for the reasons discussed throughout this thesis, could not hope to replicate in the GDR). This understanding was founded in part on a shared experience of German war crimes and the struggle against the Nazi occupying forces during the war, as well as the conviction that National Socialism had been the direct descendent of Prussian culture and values. As a result, as Burkhard Olschowsky phrases it, ‘in the collective consciousness of many Poles, Prussia [had become] a black legend with enduring virulence’.<sup>101</sup>

As a corollary to the condemnation of Prussia in the early years of the GDR, Poland, along with other states such as Russia and even Austria, ‘generally received sympathy for being on the receiving end of “Prussian aggression”’.<sup>102</sup> That it should have found itself in the company of those particular countries is ironic, given that Russia and Austria had, together with Prussia, formed the triumvirate that had dismembered Poland during the partitions of the 1780s and 1790s. In the immediate post-war context, however, these states had all been able, albeit with varying levels of moral plausibility, to claim the status of victims of Nazi

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<sup>98</sup> Karin Friedrich, ‘“Pomorze” or “Preussen”? Polish Perspectives on Early Modern Prussian History’, *German History*, 22.3 (2004), 344–71 (p. 346) <<https://doi.org/10.1191/0266355403gh314oa>>.

<sup>99</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 88.

<sup>100</sup> Quoted and translated in Friedrich, ‘“Pomorze” or “Preussen”?’, p. 345.

<sup>101</sup> Olschowsky, ‘Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive’, p. 151.

<sup>102</sup> Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia’, p. 60.

expansionism, the supposed inheritor of the Prussian militaristic tradition. The East German denunciation of that tradition, and of Nazism as a whole, had contributed to the gradual thawing of relations between the GDR and Poland, at least on the official level. Even the SED's more 'demonizing' approach to Prussian history in previous decades had done little to dispel Polish distrust, however.<sup>103</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, East Germans were viewed as arch-Stalinists by many Poles, who saw unmistakable parallels between the 'military drill' and 'soulless discipline' of historical Prussia and the ostensibly zealous and obedient GDR population.<sup>104</sup> After returning from an official visit to the GDR in November 1984, for instance, a close colleague of PZPR first secretary Wojciech Jaruzelski remarked, 'The GDR keeps all the traditions of Prussian-German virtues, nurturing and developing them: discipline, order, the Hegelian "state-spirit" [...] with that said, however, we must consider the regression into Prussianism, the cult of Frederick the Great and a series of actions on the part of the GDR leadership that are surprising to us, but at the same time are largely unknown'.<sup>105</sup> The about-face that the 1970s *Preußenrenaissance* seemed to represent was therefore received with some concern east of the border, with fears that it marked a weakening of the SED's antifascist stance, or of its commitment to cordial relations with Poland. Indeed, the Prussian revival in the GDR provoked greater concern in Poland than the similar, but more multifarious and controversial, re-examination of Prussian history in West Germany.<sup>106</sup> The Poles were especially worried, however, that the two together might represent a prelude to renewed efforts at reunification.<sup>107</sup>

The Poles raised repeated objections to the Prussian revival in the GDR. At a meeting with vice president of the GDR Academy of Sciences Heinrich Scheel in May 1980, Polish historian Marian Biskop made a number of complaints about the recent glut of GDR publications relating to Prussian history. Biskop claimed that these publications,

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<sup>103</sup> Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht*, p. 256.

<sup>104</sup> Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive', p. 152.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted (in German translation) in Daniela Fuchs-Frotscher, 'Verachtet, vernichtet und verleumdet', *Neues Deutschland*, 7 July 2012 <<https://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/231881.verachtet-vernichtet-und-verleumdet.html>> [accessed 27 July 2020]. The meeting was in all likelihood that which took place at Honecker's official residence, Haus Hubertusstock: 'Bericht über das Treffen des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der SED und Vorsitzenden des Staatsrates der DDR, Genossen Erich Honecker, mit dem Ersten Sekretär des Zentralkomitees der PVAP und Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates der VRP, Genossen Wojciech Jaruzelski, am 16. 11. 1984 in Hubertusstock' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/2479, pp. 2–8.

<sup>106</sup> Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht*, p. 256.

<sup>107</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 86.

encompassing academic history, literature, film and television, had ‘disturbed’ the Polish populace, who were now ‘wondering where it might end. They don’t understand the political meaning of these activities’. He also made it clear that he sympathized with this disquiet, noting several figures and aspects of Prussian history recently revisited in GDR literature and media who were associated with aggression against the Poles. Most prominent of these was Frederick the Great, ‘one of the gravediggers of independent Poland’ due to his role in the partitions, but Biskop also mentioned the Prussian generals Gneisenau and Clausewitz, who had assisted Russia in putting down the Polish uprising of November 1831. Gneisenau also put the Poles in mind of a more recent injury, as it was a ship bearing his name whose sinking had ‘devastated Gdynia’ during the Second World War. Biskop even suggested that this deluge of Prussian media might ‘stimulate reactionary FRG historiographers’.<sup>108</sup>

Far harsher responses to aspects of the Prussian revival came from the Polish media. Polish commentators were initially required to maintain a clear distinction between the treatment of Prussia in each state, expressing their trust in the ability of East German historians to differentiate between the positive and negative aspects of Prussia's legacy. This was not, however, a stance that most Poles held with any conviction; as had been the case since the immediate post-war years, they were unwilling to acknowledge any meaningful difference between East and West German nationalism. With the (brief) relaxation of censorship during the Solidarity period, coverage of the GDR's *Preußenrenaissance* grew increasingly critical.<sup>109</sup>

In the pages of the PZPR organ *Trybuna Ludu* in 1981, Polish journalist Henryk Olszewski condemned Prussia as a ‘symbol of Germanness, [as] a synonym for might and the hope of unity, [as] an advance outpost of all Teutons towards the East, [as] the inheritor of the mission of the Teutonic Knights, [as] a bulwark against the dangers of liberalism, democracy and socialism’. In case there was any doubt about how pervasive he believed Prussia's baleful influence to have been in Germany, Olszewski brought his criticisms up to recent times, stressing that ‘Hitler’s Greater German Reich was the logical consequence of the triumph of

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<sup>108</sup> Heinrich Scheel, ‘Akttenotiz über eine von dem Vorsitzenden der polnischen Sektion der bilateralen Historikerkommission DDR – VR Polen gewünschte persönliche Unterredung am 29. 05. 80 anlässlich der 27. Tagung dieser Kommission in Leipzig, 17 June 1980’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 30/7353.

<sup>109</sup> Opiłowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 86.

Prussian generals'.<sup>110</sup> Along similar lines, journalist Marian Podkowiński noted warningly in the periodical *Perspektywy* in 1981, 'Those who thought that along with the Prussian state, [the Germans] had also buried its spirit are now convinced of their mistake. It [the spirit of Prussia] is starting to live a life of its own, and poses numerous problems for us that we believed would no longer be cause for concern'.<sup>111</sup>

Some of the more measured criticism of the Prussian revival came from academic historians in Poland. For much of the communist era, East German and Polish historians had found themselves on the same page when it came to the study of Prussia. To be sure, differences in interpretation were starker in the immediate post-war years, when Polish work on Prussia had distinct nationalist overtones and, influenced especially by the Western Institute in Poznań, focused on justifications for the westward border shift and similar topics. From the 1950s onwards, however, Polish scholars began to favour more nuanced portrayals of Prussia, relying on a similar distinction between 'reactionary' and 'progressive' traditions as that used in GDR historiography. Close collaboration between GDR and Polish historians often took place in this period.<sup>112</sup>

Polish historiography also saw a greater interest in Prussia that began at around the same time as its East German counterpart. This included a similar desire to approach Frederick the Great in a more multifaceted way. In 1981, at the height of the Solidarity crisis, Polish scholar Stanisław Salmonowicz published a biography of Frederick that moved beyond the usual 'one-sided condemnation' of the Prussian king, detailing his positive achievements alongside his aggression towards Poland. Such works were, however, generally aimed at a domestic readership, and did not have a significant impact on East (or West) German understandings of Prussia.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, Karin Friedrich suggests that in general, knowledge exchange between Polish and East German historians was hampered in the 1970s and 1980s by the fact that the two historiographies were at different, and to some extent incompatible, stages. Polish scholarship was showing a greater willingness to interrogate 'anachronistic continuities' that had built up in the popular imagination between the Teutonic Knights, Frederick the Great, Bismarck and the Nazi regime—'an important didactic move

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted (in German translation) in Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive', p. 145.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted (in German translation) in Opłowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 85.

<sup>112</sup> Berger, 'Prussia in History and Historiography', pp. 32–33.

<sup>113</sup> Friedrich, "'Pomorze" or "Preussen"?", p. 365.

for a Polish readership'.<sup>114</sup> Officially favoured history-writing in the GDR, meanwhile, was drawing on the interest in and trappings of traditional Prussia to produce increasingly reverent depictions of the old kingdom. Both were united by a broader approach to Prussian history overall, but in Poland this breadth was used to challenge the prevailing nationalist interpretations, while in the GDR it was used to reinforce older nationalist constructs.

It could be argued that this tendency in Poland was the result of political developments similar to those taking place in the GDR in this period, but which had the opposite effect. This was the case with the *Ostpolitik* negotiations and the establishment of more cordial relations between Poland and the Federal Republic, and particularly with the conclusion of the Treaty of Warsaw in 1970. In Anthony Kemp-Welch's view, this helped to 'put [...] to rest the spectre of "West German *revanchisme*"', going some way to assuaging fears that the (West) Germans would seek to reacquire the western territories in the future.<sup>115</sup> As Friedrich and Klaus Zernack point out, it also took many of the 'pressures of legitimation' off Polish historians, paving the way for a more varied, less politicized approach to the study of Prussia and other regional historical topics.<sup>116</sup> In other words, in both states *Ostpolitik* led to a more inclusive and less dogmatic presentation of Prussian history. In Poland, closer relations with West Germany relieved the PZPR of some of their security and legitimacy concerns, giving them the freedom to indulge in interpretations of Prussia less closely bound to the official national narrative. In the GDR, meanwhile, it exacerbated the legitimacy problems of the SED, and led it to encourage the recontextualization of Prussian history as a way of demarcating its state from the Federal Republic. The former represented a relaxation of official nation-building efforts, the latter an intensification of those efforts in a direction far less conducive to reconciliation. The two developments, born of the same diplomatic advance and of similar domestic processes, were nonetheless incompatible.

This tension was discernible in an article in the Polish foreign affairs organ *Polityka* in 1979 announcing a piece in *Einheit* entitled 'Prussia and German History'. The Polish article simply reported on the *Einheit* paper without any editorial comment, which, in Marian

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<sup>114</sup> Friedrich, "'Pomorze" or "Preussen"?", pp. 365–66.

<sup>115</sup> Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 179–80.

<sup>116</sup> Klaus Zernack and Karin Friedrich, 'Developments in Polish Scholarship on German History, 1945–2000: Introduction to the Special Issue', trans. by Deborah Cohen, *German History*, 22.3 (2004), 309–22 (p. 315) <<https://doi.org/10.1191/0266355403gh312oa>>.

Biskop's view, implied official disapproval; indeed, Biskop compared the announcement to an earlier piece on a collection of Romanian literature praising Ceaușescu's wife, which was certainly not a topic inspiring much Polish enthusiasm.<sup>117</sup>

The Polish disapproval of the wave of popular history books produced as part of the Prussian revival was less ambiguous. A host of new works communicated the revised interpretation of Prussian history to the GDR public, including Karl-Heinz Börner's *Krise der preußischen Monarchie 1858 bis 1862* (1976) and Heinz Kathe's biography of Frederick William I (*Der "Soldatenkönig"*, 1976).<sup>118</sup> 1979 saw the publication of Ingrid Mittenzwei's biography of Frederick the Great, which reinterpreted Frederick as an enlightened and progressive ruler. The SED also began to change its attitude towards Bismarck following the conclusion of the Basic Treaty with the Federal Republic in 1972. Ernst Engelberg's revisionist biography, published in 1985, presented the Iron Chancellor's achievements in a far more positive light than had previously been done in the GDR, interpreting his role in the formation of the German Empire as a contribution to the consolidation and modernization of the German nation state, and therefore a prerequisite for the foundation of a socialist Germany. Engelberg's overall argument was that Bismarck's forcible unification of Germany may have been morally reprehensible, but had also been historically necessary, leading as it did to the further development of Germany. This interpretation was as teleological as older GDR readings of Bismarck, although it drew far less on Marxist-Leninist ideology and was relatively free of the 'polemics' that had marked earlier studies of the Prussian chancellor.<sup>119</sup> As manifested in the work of historians such as Mittenzwei and Engelberg, the Prussian turn represented a more pragmatic and even-handed interpretation of Prussian history. Prussia was, these historians argued, an 'inescapable part of East Germany's [...] historical legacy, the positive *and* negative aspects of which must be interpreted honestly and objectively'. This, Verheyen claims, represented a dismantling of the 'one-dimensionality' of Marxist-Leninist historiography.<sup>120</sup>

Nonetheless, these works met with a negative reaction in Poland. Mittenzwei's

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<sup>117</sup> Scheel, 'Aktennotiz'.

<sup>118</sup> Munn, 'The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR', pp. 39–40.

<sup>119</sup> Keil, 'The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited', pp. 268–69; Robert Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 168; Wilma Iggers and Georg Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times: Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars and Citizens* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), p. 159.

<sup>120</sup> Verheyen, *The German Question*, p. 85 (emphasis in original).



biography of Frederick the Great was castigated by Polish reviewers, in particular for her perceived prevarication on the subject of the Prussian king's treatment of Poland. In a review of the book, journalist and historian Julian Bartosz suggested that Frederick himself would have described his role in the first partition of Poland more explicitly and honestly than Mittenzwei had managed. A number of alternative depictions of the Prussian king were produced to redress the balance, including articles by Władysław Konopczyński and Stanisław Salmonowicz.<sup>121</sup>

A range of television shows reinforced this rehabilitative message in the GDR, with the mini-series *Scharnhorst*, on the eponymous Prussian military reformer, launching an extensive line of period dramas and documentaries on aspects of Prussian history. These included the 1980 drama *Clausewitz*; the documentaries *Prussia's Best Men* and *The Horseman Unter den Linden*, both in 1986; and the sumptuous mini-series *Saxony's Splendour and Prussia's Glory*, which began in 1985. The *Scharnhorst* series in particular was viewed with suspicion by Polish commentators, with journalist Marian Podkowiński interpreting it as an ominous sign of East–West rapprochement, particularly as it had received favourable reviews in the Federal Republic.<sup>122</sup> This backlash occasionally interfered with the production of further shows in this vein. An East German film crew planning a production on Frederick the Great in around 1980, for instance, was denied support or permission to consult with Polish authorities.<sup>123</sup>

The Prussian revival also had a rapid impact on the built environment in East Berlin, most prominently with the restoration of the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great to the boulevard Unter den Linden in 1980, from the site in Charlottenhof Park to which it had previously been banished.<sup>124</sup> The symbolism of this was as plain as that of the original destruction of Prussian traces in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1980s also saw the restoration of the Lindenforum, a collection of Prussian buildings mostly located in what was now the Bebelplatz.<sup>125</sup> Shortly after the restoration of the Frederick the Great statue, Polish journalist Marek Regel commented caustically that there were some nations that were unfortunate

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<sup>121</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 87.

<sup>122</sup> Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive', p. 146.

<sup>123</sup> Scheel, 'Aktentotiz'.

<sup>124</sup> Ladd, 'East Berlin Political Monuments', p. 100; Munn, 'The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR', p. 42.

<sup>125</sup> Munn, 'The Changing Depiction of Prussia in the GDR', p. 2.

enough to lack both food for the people and historical roots.<sup>126</sup> The implication, presumably, was that Poland, unlike the GDR, could at least boast the latter. This idea was echoed by Adam Krzemiński in his discussion of the ways in which the *Preußenrenaissance* was unfolding in both German states. Krzemiński suggested that the GDR's lack of a true national history and continuity had long been an ideological problem, and was the main driver behind its Prussian revival.<sup>127</sup>

An exhibition on Prussian history held in 1981 at the Museum of German History in East Berlin also came in for criticism from Polish commentators. Podkowiński expressed his disappointment with the exhibition's omission of certain key aspects of Prussian history, such as the Prussian annexation of Polish lands in the partitions, Prussian attempts at Germanization in the occupied territories and, conversely, Polish contributions to Prussian culture. In a similar vein, journalist Adam Krzemiński judged it to be overly selective in order to justify the SED's current policies, with too little attention paid to the German-Polish relationship as a result.<sup>128</sup> He found the exhibition's representation of Bismarck equally lacking, noting the lack of any material on the chancellor's Germanization policies in Prussian-ruled Poland, and questioning the skewed impression this would give East German visitors of German-Polish relations in the previous century.<sup>129</sup> Krzemiński took his criticisms further, suggesting that the exhibition's deficiencies reflected the GDR's failure to confront and overcome the authoritarian, militaristic and xenophobic elements of its Prussian heritage—in which he included the Nazi state and the popular support it had received. The GDR's long-standing adherence to its antifascist narrative, he asserted, had allowed many East Germans to avoid accepting any moral responsibility for Nazi Germany's actions (including its treatment of Poland).<sup>130</sup>

Polish commentators were occasionally more forgiving of the Prussian revival, expressing their confidence in the ability of East Germans to embrace more of Prussian history without succumbing to its spirit. In a 1984 article in the periodical *Polityka*, for instance, Ryszard Wojna dismissed the widespread Polish fears of a joint East and West German reunification plan, stressing the GDR's commitment to the maintenance of peace and

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<sup>126</sup> Lawaty, *Das Ende Preußens in polnischer Sicht*, p. 256.

<sup>127</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 87.

<sup>128</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, p. 87.

<sup>129</sup> Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive', p. 145.

<sup>130</sup> Opilowska, *Kontinuitäten und Brüche*, pp. 87–88.

the solidarity of the socialist brotherhood. In a *Sprawy i Ludzie* article from the same year, Bartosz also professed his faith in the GDR's reliability, going as far as to argue that Polish fears of a Prussified GDR were evidence of a narrow bourgeois mindset that led Poles to seek ill-fitting historical analogies rather than recognize the radically new socialist Germany that the SED had created.<sup>131</sup> In the main, however, Polish observers were staunchly disapproving of this new, yet disquietingly familiar, direction taken by East German nation-building.

There is some indication that East Germans occasionally took notice of Polish misgivings about the implications of the Prussian revival. In response to Biskop's complaints, for example, Scheel attempted to reassure him of the GDR's commitment to the correct interpretation of Prussian history, and to working with Poland in that endeavour. He highlighted instances in which GDR historians, including himself, had forwarded theses and publications on Prussia to their Polish colleagues, asking them to appraise them to ensure that 'not a single line could be said to glorify Prussia or Prussianism'. He also proposed a meeting with a broader group of Polish historians at the Poznań Western Institute to allay their fears. While Biskop was initially keen on the idea, he quickly changed his mind, suggesting that 'perhaps it's not such a hot-button issue yet'. In his report on the meeting, Scheel expresses astonishment that Biskop, 'whom I know to be a solid historian', and who would never usually comment on anything that he had not personally read and did not know well, seemed to be basing so much of his concern on hearsay and theories 'that were quite obviously based on superficial appearances'. He concludes that Biskop may have been instructed to call the meeting, presumably, though he does not mention this, by his superiors at the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences.<sup>132</sup>

For the most part, however, East Germans paid 'astonishingly' little attention to the sensibilities or the response of their socialist brother state when revising their representation of Prussia.<sup>133</sup> Several cultural artefacts of the Prussian revival suggest that the SED was only tangentially interested, if at all, in the Polish reaction. This includes one of the more popular works of fiction to be produced in this period, the television mini-series *Saxony's Splendour and Prussia's Glory*. The series was an adaptation of a series of novels by nineteenth-century

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<sup>131</sup> Olschowsky, 'Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive', pp. 145–46.

<sup>132</sup> Scheel, 'Aktennotiz'.

<sup>133</sup> Karlheinz Lau, 'Friedrich II. – Friedrich der Große. Die DDR und der Preußenkönig', *Deutschland Archiv*, 2012 <<https://www.bpb.de/144983>> [accessed 26 July 2020].

Polish author Józef Kraszewski, depicting the Polish king and elector of Saxony August the Strong and his contemporaries. Kraszewski's writings had been promoted by the SED since the mid 1950s, not least because of his Saxon connections; aside from the focus on Saxon history in his novels, the writer spent thirty years of his life in Dresden. It was also hoped that his Polish roots would help forge cultural links and improve Poland's image with the East German populace. By the time of the television adaptation in the 1980s, however, the fostering of cultural collaboration was evidently less important, even to the panel of historians of Prussian history who advised the writers. The series removes the character of Polish elector Raimund Zaklika, and with him Kraszewski's efforts to cultivate Polish national consciousness. The plot of the adaptation is therefore 'entirely Germano-centric', suggesting, in Madeleine Brook's estimation, that the exploration of German nationalism had become more important than raising awareness of the GDR's eastern neighbour.<sup>134</sup> Mittenzwei's biography of Frederick the Great was another prime example of this neglect. Her work made little reference to the damage caused to German-Polish relations by the Prussian king's policies, nor to the 'negative Prussian and German Polish policy' that he inaugurated.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, throughout the *Preußenrenaissance*, Prussia's leading role in the partitions of Poland was downplayed.<sup>136</sup>

There was also some backlash against the rehabilitation of Prussia from East German historians, such as Heinz Kathe, and writers, including Claus Hammel. Given that these authors' criticism was published without any pressure or negative consequences, it seems probable that many SED functionaries at various levels also objected.<sup>137</sup> Some critical remarks were also made by the wider populace, as evidenced, for instance, by viewers' letters received by GDR television concerning the various historical dramas in the 1980s. These complaints suggest that many East Germans were aware of the discontinuities between *Tradition und Erbe* and the vilification of Prussia in previous decades, despite the SED's attempts to hide the joins, and some were willing to point out the discrepancy openly. In response, the SED marshalled a number of party ideologues and academic historians, who attempted to convince that the 1970s shift was an evolution, rather than a reversal. In her

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<sup>134</sup> Brook, 'Keeping the Myth Alive', pp. 12–17.

<sup>135</sup> Lau, 'Friedrich II.'

<sup>136</sup> Berger, 'Prussia in History and Historiography', p. 32.

<sup>137</sup> Keil, 'The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited', pp. 269–71, 275–78.

articulation of the new official line during a radio interview in the mid 1980s, Mittenzwei offered a qualified acknowledgement of the shift. In previous decades, she claimed, ‘the conflict with Prussia, above all with such a phenomenon as militarism of the Prussian type, was absolutely necessary following the catastrophe of the Second World War. Today, these matters can be viewed in more differentiated terms’.<sup>138</sup> Mitchell notes that Mittenzwei’s conclusions about Prussian history, particularly her argument that there was in fact no unbroken line of causation leading from Bismarck to Hitler, was presented as revolutionary ‘without mentioning that such a view [had] received widespread support in the GDR for decades’.<sup>139</sup> It is unclear whether Mitchell is referring to the views of the SED leadership or popular attitudes, but it is certainly true that the revised official interpretation brought SED rhetoric more in line with popular nationalist sentiment on the subject. Historians Wolfgang Küttler and Hans Schleier themselves made a similar point in the early 1980s:

Prussian history has not only been discovered by the Marxists in recent years. It has always been treated as an important, in some respects even progressive, element of national history. What is new is the more comprehensive categorization of the history of this state within the Marxist-Leninist view of history [and] in all components of the present *Erbe* concept [...] The changes are not arbitrary, but result from the advancement of this view of history and from new conditions for popular interest in history.<sup>140</sup>

The last sentence of this explanation is a surprisingly candid admission that changes in popular attitudes towards Prussia, and the SED’s desire to capitalize on them as a new source of legitimacy, played a role in the leadership’s decision-making at least as important as that of ideological analysis. In the majority of officially sanctioned commentaries on the change of emphasis, this was not emphasized. Despite the SED’s concerns, however, popular criticism of the 1970s shift was never significant. In most cases, the populace was happy to enjoy the programmes, films and other cultural products ‘without buying into the more or less subliminal ideological messages’.<sup>141</sup>

Popular responses to the *Preußenrenaissance* were of course far from uniform. There was a distinct generational bias to the way in which the new line was both implemented and

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Asmus, ‘The GDR and the German Past’, pp. 21–22.

<sup>139</sup> Mitchell, ‘The Changing Image of Prussia’, p. 65.

<sup>140</sup> Küttler and Schleier, ‘Die Erbe-Konzeption’, pp. 556–57.

<sup>141</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, p. 276.

received. As with most other aspects of the GDR's political and cultural infrastructure, the Prussian revival was primarily supported by the '1929ers'; the majority of the academics, journalists and artists who provided it with intellectual justification were members of that cohort. Keil suggests that this group was better able than others to reconcile the 'ideological contradictions' of the new approach to Prussia, particularly those between the ideals of socialism and Prussianism, as it had been characterized by the SED in earlier decades. The greater attention afforded to 'Prussian virtues' such as stability and obedience also offered them a framework for continuing to identify with and support the East German state in the face of its 'apparent final crisis' in the 1980s. The '1929ers' supported or contributed to the Prussian revival for a variety of reasons, many of which had little to do with the SED. In some cases, their views on Prussia had been shaped earlier, in the Third Reich, and this positive image had not been dislodged by SED propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s. The new climate 'allowed historians and cultural workers openly to articulate their own positive views on Prussian history'. This was certainly the case with the creator of the *Scharnhorst* television drama, Wolf-Dieter Panse, a '1929er' who later claimed that he had always held Prussia in higher esteem than the official national narrative, and had never identified with the latter. In a similar vein, Albrecht Börner and Hans-Joachim Kasprzik, creators of *Saxony's Splendour and Prussia's Glory*, explained that their initial inspiration for their adaptation of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's novel came from seeing expressions of regional Saxon identities in GDR football grounds, before the *Tradition und Erbe* turn. The upshot of this close association, however, was that this was virtually the only cohort among whom the *Preußenrenaissance* found widespread active support. Older generations seem to have been more aware of the contradictions between the two approaches. Younger generations from the '1949ers' onwards, meanwhile, simply considered Prussian history irrelevant, 'without a direct connection to their own lives'. A letter to GDR television from May 1980, for example, praised the new prominence given to Prussian history and figures such as Scharnhorst, who could serve as role models for younger generations, while lamenting that young people showed little interest in these lessons. In short, the Prussian revival was certainly popular among certain cohorts, but 'widely failed to create new patterns of identity and legitimacy for the SED', as had been intended. Instead, it drew on and entrenched existing generational

tendencies.<sup>142</sup>

## Conclusions

The expansion of East German nationhood that took place in the GDR from the mid 1970s onwards was not in itself a radical policy shift. Since the 1940s, the SED had relied on selective appropriation of the national past to legitimize its position, as well as to support its efforts at domestic integration and demarcation from the Federal Republic. The turn of the mid 1970s was distinguished, however, by an unprecedented expansion of the definition of ‘progressive’ to encompass an increasingly broad swathe of the pre-communist past. This entailed the progressive rehabilitation of heroes, monuments and buildings from the nineteenth century and earlier, many of which, as prominent components of ‘reactionary’ German nationalism, had been the subject of condemnation by the SED in previous decades. In promoting these rehabilitated elements of history, the SED sought to fashion an alternative source of legitimacy—a source in which it became increasingly invested as younger generations came to adulthood and earlier bases for legitimization, particularly antifascism, grew less effective. The most prominent of these, and the most difficult to reconcile with the party’s earlier stance, was the complex ideological and architectural legacy of Prussia, but other historical icons, such as Goethe, Schiller and Luther, received similar treatment. Given this, this turn has often been characterized by historians as a regression towards ‘more conservative notions of national history and identity’.<sup>143</sup>

This increasingly less subtle raiding of the pre-communist past could not but encourage the re-emergence, or increased salience, of older, often more exclusionary and chauvinistic, elements of popular nationalism. While the SED had been promoting regional cultures since the 1950s, this had been with the primary aim of cultivating identities tied to the new GDR *Bezirke* rather than maintaining those based on older German localities. The latter, however, were also reinforced as an inevitable by-product of the party’s regionalism and *Heimat* policies, and remained resonant among ordinary East Germans. As a result, ‘the more the districts promoted local and regional traditions during the 1970s and 1980s, the more contours they allowed for the development not just of district identities, but of historical and

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<sup>142</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, pp. 262, 272–78.

<sup>143</sup> Keil, ‘The *Preußenrenaissance* Revisited’, p. 260.

cultural identifications with historical regions and states'. Indeed, these policies had not managed to foster popular *Bezirk* loyalties by the time of the GDR's collapse.<sup>144</sup> In the same way, the Prussian revival was likely to increase the prominence of the values associated with the historical figures and events it glorified. Jan C. Behrends and Patrice G. Poutrus have pointed out that official nationalism in the GDR remained ethnicized throughout the communist era, past the point at which its counterpart in the Federal Republic began moving away from *völkisch* rhetoric.<sup>145</sup>

As George Schöpflin has emphasized, this was not a successful, or even stable, source of legitimacy. In order to remain compatible with communist ideology (and other strands of propaganda), the official national narratives continued to be conspicuously selective in their construction. While the SED incorporated ever greater swathes of Prussian history into its narrative, the anti-Russian and anti-Slavic elements inherent in this history were excised from the official version. Their absence was obvious, however, and keenly felt by the East German populace. Even in its expansive, more inclusive form, therefore, the SED's narrative was 'too restricted' to be taken seriously. By resorting to these raids on the German past, moreover, the party left itself open to the possibility that its opponents and rivals would be able to 'outflank' it in the nationalist stakes. Almost any non-communist had little difficulty presenting themselves as more nationalist than the SED, which remained hesitant and ambivalent even at the height of its willingness to rehabilitate the German past.<sup>146</sup> Certainly, historians such as McKay have argued that in claiming ownership of greater swathes of German history, the SED leadership ran the risk of reminding its citizenry of everything they shared with West Germans, thereby 'reinforcing the national bond, and arousing a latent desire for reunification'.<sup>147</sup> Some scholars have suggested that, ironically, the SED pursued its more inclusive nationalist strategy to forestall that very development; by 'co-opting' as many

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<sup>144</sup> Palmowski, 'Regional Identities', pp. 518–19, 521. Fulbrook has suggested that the SED had some success in creating a GDR-wide identity, at least, but notes that, aside from coming into its own only after reunification, this coexisted with older regional identities. See Mary Fulbrook, 'Democratic Centralism and Regionalism in the GDR', in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Maiken Umbach, New Perspectives in German Studies (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 146–71 <[https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230505797\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230505797_7)>.

<sup>145</sup> Jan C. Behrends and Patrice G. Poutrus, 'Xenophobia in the Former GDR – Explorations and Explanation from a Historical Perspective', in *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations*, ed. by Tomasz Kamusella, Wojciech Burszta, and Sebastian Wojciechowski, 2 vols (Poznań: Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa, 2005), I, 155–70 (p. 162).

<sup>146</sup> Schöpflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, pp. 193–95.

<sup>147</sup> McKay, *The Official Concept of the Nation*, p. 124.



historical symbols and figures as could be made compatible with socialist ideology, the leadership was attempting to ‘prevent them from being associated with philosophies that might challenge its own ruling myth’.<sup>148</sup>

In so doing, however, the SED attracted the anger and opprobrium of the PZPR and the Polish populace. The GDR’s resurrection and glorification of an increasingly broad range of elements of the German past, and of Prussian history in particular, gave the lie to the SED’s assertions of the socialist brotherhood, and of its desire for peaceful, fraternal relations with the Poles. More importantly, it also seemed to vindicate Polish fears that the Germans—even the East Germans—might continue to pose a threat in the future. The *Preußenrenaissance* raised the spectre of the Germany that had denigrated the Poles for centuries and brutalized them in a war only a generation earlier, and seemingly indicated how little the (East) Germans had changed in the intervening decades. Even as they engaged in their own reappraisal of Prussian history, therefore, the Poles vehemently condemned the GDR’s approach. Olschowsky concludes that ‘with this attitude, Poland denied the GDR [the right] to do what was normal for other socialist countries and [what] Poland had done since the mid 1970s – namely, to use the past as an integrative force [*integratives Potential*] for their own society’.<sup>149</sup> The SED and the East German people, however, had little regard for Polish sensibilities.

In the end, the SED may have ended up with the worst of both worlds. The party’s campaign of national redefinition was sufficiently nationalistic to alienate the Polish leadership and people, but not resonant enough with its own populace to serve as an alternative source of legitimacy. There is little evidence that the *Preußenrenaissance* influenced East German images of Poland to any great extent, but it illustrates that the SED was no longer concerned enough about this possibility—if it had ever been concerned—to sacrifice its nation-building project for the sake of reconciliation. As a result, even the hollow (but comparatively substantial) professions of commitment to the socialist brotherhood of the previous decade were now increasingly downplayed, having failed to foster any sense of East German nationhood or emotional attachment to the GDR. Evidently, once it had become clear that the brotherhood narrative had failed to achieve its domestic nation-building goal, the

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<sup>148</sup> Gerhard Brendler, *Martin Luther. Theologie und Revolution* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1983), pp. 261–62.

<sup>149</sup> Olschowsky, ‘Die DDR aus polnischer Perspektive’, p. 154.

SED was uninterested in engaging with it beyond the token rhetorical gestures required.

This relative disregard, combined with the fallout from the Solidarity crisis and the broader geopolitical shifts taking place in the early 1980s, paved the way for the downturn in East German-Polish relations that marked the remainder of the communist period. By 1985, official relations had become more ossified and formalized, and popular contacts had been pared down considerably, particularly in comparison with the efflorescence they had enjoyed during the open-border period. Popular impressions of the Poles were once again shaped by a far smaller range of influences. For the majority, therefore, the stereotypes given new life by the *Preußenrenaissance* assumed much greater importance, and the interplay between these, the unsavoury legacies of the war and the more recent grievances of the communist era ensured that popular conceptions of the Poles retained a negative undercurrent.

The preceding two chapters have concentrated on the ways in which popular attitudes towards Poland and the Poles were shaped by both ‘indirect impersonal’ and ‘indirect personal’ encounters, in Mühle’s formulation, over the twenty-year period. The following chapter shifts the focus to the area in which the bulk of ‘direct personal’ encounters between the two populations took place, exploring how grievances both old and new hamstrung everyday East German-Polish economic relations and interactions.

## 5. Redefining the economic relationship

As the previous chapters have shown, the SED's discourse of East German-Polish reconciliation proved ineffective in the face of pre- and post-war sources of antagonism, and much of the rhetoric associated with it, notably that of the socialist brotherhood, became an additional channel through which this antagonism could be expressed and sustained. This chapter explores these same processes at work in the economic sphere, examining the ways in which East Germans related directly to Poles as workers, tourists and consumers, and charting the banal nationalistic associations that developed through these interactions. Indeed, it was in this domain more than any other that the complexities of 'everyday nationalism' were in evidence.<sup>1</sup> The chapter examines the ways in which, from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s, the SED endeavoured to redefine the GDR-Polish economic association as a relationship of equals (with limited success, as will be seen), as well as the everyday economic interactions through which ordinary East Germans and Poles encountered each other and tested this redefinition. The 1960s saw an immense proliferation of economic links and points of contact between East Germans and Poles, but also, as a corollary to these, the development of new sources of friction. These combined in often complicated ways with the resentments engendered by the aftermath of the war, and especially with pre-war anti-Polish clichés, to distort popular impressions of Poland. The resulting conflicts frustrated the emergence of the more productive and conciliatory relationship to which the increased economic contact should have led.

### Official rhetoric and popular perceptions

The SED had made some effort to improve the popular impression of Poland and its economy since the late 1940s, attempting to dispel notions of Polish economic inadequacy by highlighting the industrial achievements the country had made under Stalinism.<sup>2</sup> As economic links between the two states began to deepen from the mid 1960s onwards, however, this line

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Jan C. Behrends, *Die erfundene Freundschaft. Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und in der DDR (1944-1957)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), p. 266; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, *Obraz Polski i Polaków w prasie i literaturze Niemieckiej Republiki Demokratycznej w okresie powstania Solidarności i stanu wojennego* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007), pp. 42–43.

was given more attention in the GDR media.<sup>3</sup> Poland was presented in this narrative as a progressive, economically powerful state. Media coverage made numerous references to Poland's 'dynamic development' and the 'great achievements' of its industry. A wide variety of articles, both short reports and more extended profiles of particular industries or factories, drew attention to the quantities of its industrial output, the growth rates of certain industries and prominent construction projects. Considerable emphasis was placed on the admirable improvement that Poland had made since the start of the post-war era, progressing from a 'backwards agrarian country' to a 'remarkable economic power' in only a few decades. Naturally, this transformation was attributed to the consolidation of socialism in Poland.<sup>4</sup> The strengths of the Polish economy were further emphasized by reports, especially plentiful during the early years of the open-border period, of industrial cooperation between Poland and the GDR. Receiving particular focus were joint ventures, such as the cotton mill established in Zawiercie in Silesia and named, naturally enough, 'Friendship'. Frequent mention of such projects served to portray Poland as a worthy and equal economic partner of the GDR. The intent behind this abundance of positive economic coverage was to displace unflattering historical stereotypes, such as the derogatory concept of the '*polnische Wirtschaft*', by the image of an invaluable economic ally, capable in its own right.

In the event, however, this characterization of Poland did not make enough of an impression to change the minds of most East Germans. Instead, anti-Polish resentments and prejudices soon re-emerged in new, politically acceptable forms, especially as greater economic entanglement brought with it more sources of disagreement and tension. Since a large proportion of pre-war anti-Polonism in particular stemmed from stereotypes about Poland's economic and cultural backwardness, however,<sup>5</sup> those indulging in this form of discrimination had more (and more resonant) material to work with. As a result, economic relations from the mid 1960s onwards were marked by a supercilious attitude on the part of

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<sup>3</sup> Parts of this paragraph are adapted from Simon Coll, 'The SED's Positive Polenbild as a Flawed Instrument of East German-Polish Reconciliation, 1972-1980' (unpublished master's thesis, University College London, 2014), pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, 'Polen heute', *Neues Deutschland*, 13 April 1972, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> On this, see Rudolf Jaworski, 'Deutsch-polnische Feindbilder 1919-1932', *Internationale Schulbuchforschung*, 6.2 (1984), 140-56 (p. 144); Tomasz Szarota, "'Pole", "Polen" und "polnisch" in den deutschen Mundartenlexika und Sprichwörterbüchern', trans. by Beatrysa Hirszenberg, in *Stereotype und Konflikte. Historische Studien zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2010), pp. 97-128 (esp. pp. 116-24); Szarota, 'Der Pole in der deutschen Kaikatur (1914-1944). Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung nationaler Stereotype', trans. by Theo Mechtenberg, in *Stereotype und Konflikte*, pp. 129-81 (pp. 161-65).

East Germans. This sentiment was at first confined mostly to popular discourses, acting as a form of resistance to the SED's official narrative. By the middle of the open-border period, however, the SED itself was also making increasing use of anti-Polish stereotypes and nationalistic rhetoric, albeit couched in communist language. The SED's depiction of a new, economically vibrant Poland, therefore, merely provided a new guise for old prejudices. Separately yet in parallel, both party and populace undermined the new narrative in their criticisms of Poland's economic priorities and performance, as well as the actions of Polish visitors to the GDR.

An examination of the SED's narrative and its effects first entails an overview of bloc-wide economic structures and relations in the twenty-year period, as these served as the framework within which the GDR and Polish economies were increasingly interconnected, and in which each state pursued its own economic interests. From the early 1960s onwards, the USSR attempted to impose, via Comecon, a policy of economic specialization on the bloc, whereby states would devote the bulk of their resources to specific economic sectors and (theoretically) coordinate their efforts in order to enrich the economy of the bloc as a whole. This was driven in part by the relaxation of intra-bloc political relations from the Khrushchev era onwards, and justified with the argument that 'it would be more in keeping with socialism's cooperative ethic for states to cooperate and coordinate their economic policies for the general good of the socialist community'. As R. J. Crampton notes, however, there were also key economic and geopolitical reasons for this shift: economic specialization would be 'cheaper' and would allow the USSR to channel more resources to shoring up the GDR—particularly after the construction of the Berlin Wall—as a 'worthy socialist competitor' of the Federal Republic.<sup>6</sup> In practice, as Jussi Hanhimäki points out, Comecon essentially evolved over the course of the 1950s and 1960s into an organization through which the USSR subsidized its satellite states. This wholly uneven relationship had the unfortunate and unproductive consequence of fostering a climate of 'competition among Comecon countries over the size of each nation's subsidy',<sup>7</sup> a situation similar—indeed, closely connected—to that of intra-bloc contests over the level of ideological conformity.

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<sup>6</sup> R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and After*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 307–8.

<sup>7</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'Détente in Europe, 1962–1975', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 198–218 (p. 206).

Many ordinary East Germans were critical of this arrangement in general, due largely to their (justified) high opinion of the economic power of their state. A 1970 opinion report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, for instance, briefly mentions one agricultural worker's resentment at Soviet dominance within the socialist bloc, and at the economic integration of the bloc more broadly: 'We're always told that we're a strong industrial state, but what are we really? We're nothing but a sidekick of our big brother (meaning the Soviet Union)'.<sup>8</sup> When discussing worker attitudes towards the closer economic integration of the bloc, and the export of GDR products to other socialist states in particular, a 1971 report from a factory in Radeberg, *Bezirk* Dresden, briefly mentions that 'the events in the CSSR and Poland were limiting factors. Various opinions were expressed suggesting that the GDR is being economically and technically exploited by several socialist states'.<sup>9</sup> A 1974 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda includes a brief mention of workers' attitudes towards the greater economic integration of the socialist bloc. A number of negative views are recorded, including complaints that 'integration is proceeding at the GDR's expense' and that as integration advanced, 'the GDR will only be a giver', and would get little in return. The policy of specialization also came in for criticism, with workers grumbling that 'the quality of products that used to be produced in the GDR, but which are now manufactured as part of the specialization of the other socialist states, has declined'.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in a discussion about the economic integration of the socialist bloc in 1974, a number of workers at the *Kreisbetrieb* Bischofswerda argued that the economies of the GDR's socialist neighbours were noticeably weaker, and that 'this may work to our disadvantage in certain areas for the time being', as the GDR would be diverting resources to improve the economies and living standards in other socialist states, and would no longer be able to make the 'great leaps forward' in living standards it had previously managed. A report by the SED party organization at the factory mentions that this position was justified by workers with reference to the poor quality of

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<sup>8</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Meinungsbildung der Genossenschaftsbauern der LPG "An der Röder" Lichtenberg Typ I, ausgehend von der Veröffentlichung der Grundsatzregelungen der Anwendung des ökonomischen Systems des Sozialismus in der Landwirtschaft und Nahrungsgüterwirtschaft im "ND" am 17. 6. 70, 26 June 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.93.

<sup>9</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, 'Bewußtseinsanalyse/ARBEITER, 15 March 1971' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.131.

<sup>10</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, 'Abrechnung der Verwirklichung des Beschlusses des Politbüros über Agitation und Propaganda vom 07. 11. 1974 unter Einbeziehung der Ergebnisse in der Vorbereitung des 25. Jahrestages der DDR, 15 August 1974' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.97.

many goods from other socialist states, notably ‘shoes made in Poland’, with some workers asking why the GDR imported these goods. The report also points out that the majority of workers were concerned only with GDR living standards, and that ‘it is difficult for political agitators to find any understanding here for the problems of the People’s Republic of Poland, for example, as too little is known about the historically rooted conditions of its people’.<sup>11</sup> Such criticism was occasionally accompanied by a lack of awareness of the extent to which the economies of the bloc states had become interconnected. In a 1977 report, for example, the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda argued that more effort needed to be made to impress upon the populace the degree to which the socialist camp was now interconnected: ‘There is an even greater need to make clear the process of union between the socialist states and nations in their different forms, and in particular to show the extent of cooperation between citizens, brigades, enterprises and institutions, and Soviet citizens and enterprises’.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the same applied to popular ignorance of the extent of the linkages between the GDR and Polish economies.

Particular criticism, by both party and populace, was reserved for the Poles’ interest almost exclusively in the economic dimension of their relations with the GDR. The proliferation of economic links between the GDR and Poland was one of the main reasons that the legacies of the war became less salient, and therefore a less prominent part of both official and unofficial national narratives, over the twenty-year period. From Poland’s perspective, once the Görlitz treaty had been agreed and nominal political reconciliation achieved in the 1950s, and once the communist bloc had become more consolidated in the 1960s, the existential threat posed by its German neighbour was reduced considerably. Economic cooperation therefore rapidly became the Poles’ main concern in their interactions with the GDR. In a conversation between Karl Mewis and Gomułka in 1966, Mewis asked about the current state of GDR-Polish relations. Gomułka’s only answer was that economic relations were showing some improvement, emphasizing the ‘need for cooperation’ before

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<sup>11</sup> SED Betriebsparteiorganisation HO Kreisbetrieb Bischofswerda, ‘Berichterstattung zur Verwirklichung des Beschlusses über Agitation und Propaganda, 15 November 1974’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.98.

<sup>12</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Agit./Prop., ‘Ergebnisse bei der Umsetzung des Politbüro-Beschlusses vom 18. Mai 1977, 19 September 1977’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/D/4.02.110.

launching into a lengthy discussion of Polish economic development.<sup>13</sup> This was not remarked upon by Mewis, but may indicate that both parties were aware of how strained relations were in other areas, and illustrates that the economic aspect of the relationship was almost the only one that interested the PZPR. Similarly, at a meeting between SED figures and PZPR Politburo member Strzeleki in 1967, the latter asserted that ‘the friendship between our two peoples has become a matter of course, and we do not especially need to talk about it’. This may be taken as an official declaration that GDR-Polish relations were now rock-solid; on the other hand, this remark was made as a prelude to demanding greater economic cooperation, and therefore may simply have been an attempt to cut to the chase. Strzeleki also ascribed the halting economic performance of the socialist bloc to the fact that ‘a narrow nationalism is moving through every country. The solution to this problem is the most important question for our system, for it will decide the competition between capitalism and socialism, all the more so as capitalism does not sleep’.<sup>14</sup> East German criticisms of this attitude were often tinged with ideological superciliousness, and the same sense of disapproval that marked reactions to the political situation in Poland. For example, a 1971 mood report on workers in *Bezirk* Erfurt includes a brief mention of a workers’ discussion of the westward economic orientation of other Eastern bloc states. ‘The GDR is disadvantaged by a number of these decisions’, workers were heard to complain. ‘The other socialist states, including Poland, the CSSR, Hungary and Romania, will not abide by the agreements and will orient themselves towards the Western states’.<sup>15</sup> In an evaluation of a Polish delegation’s visit to *Kreis* Görlitz in 1975, which included meetings with the SED *Kreisleitung*, the *Rat des Kreises* and the party organization at BKW Oberlausitz, a report by the *Kreisleitung* notes that ‘the questions asked by the Polish comrades are predominantly about economic problems, and far fewer concern political problems’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Mewis, ‘Information über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Gomulka [sic] am 16. Mai 1966, 17 May 1966’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1253, pp. 13–15.

<sup>14</sup> SAPMO-BArch NY 4182/1252, pp. 122–26.

<sup>15</sup> Rudi Focke, ‘Information über die Stimmung und Meinung der Werktätigen zu VIII. Parteitag der SED, 17 June 1971’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/7774.

<sup>16</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Einschätzung über den Besuch einer Parteidelegation des Kreiskomitees der PVAP in der Kreisparteiorganisation Görlitz am 11. und 12. März 1975, 17 March 1975’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.161.



## East German economic superciliousness

More prevalent than such expressions of ideological condescension, however, were assertions of the economic inferiority of Poland, and, by extension, the backwardness of its people. On the popular level, this was partly the product of the political isolation of the GDR, both within the socialist bloc (due to travel restrictions) and on the wider international stage. This point is made, for instance, by Andreas Staab, who suggests that the enforced insularity of East Germans within the bloc contributed to their rather snobbish ‘feeling of superiority’ in relation to other socialist states.<sup>17</sup> The workplace was often the site of at least tacit resistance to SED narratives of friendship with other members of the Eastern bloc, offering a limited public sphere in which workers were able (and eager) to criticize the government’s adoption of Soviet-style production methods, along with other aspects of the GDR-Soviet friendship.<sup>18</sup> This included the SED’s attempts to portray Poland as an economically robust state and valued partner of the GDR. A 1968 opinion report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Freital mentions several disparaging comments about the state of the Polish economy expressed by workers, including questions such as ‘why is there still a backlog in Polish agriculture?’ and ‘why are [the Poles] idle workers?’<sup>19</sup> Members of the SED party organization in Radebeul (*Bezirk* Dresden, *Keis* Dresden-Land) were heard at one meeting to comment angrily that ‘the Poles should come here and be amazed at how much better we live than they do; then they’ll see that we work better and so have a higher standard of living’.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a 1970 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land includes a minor example of economic superciliousness expressed by an employee at the VEB HAW Radebeul when discussing the unrest in Poland: ‘There have obviously been grave errors made in pricing policy in Poland. If the Polish comrades had set out their problems and difficulties before the workers as openly and clearly as we do, for example [...] a situation of this sort would probably not have occurred in our neighbouring socialist state’.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Andreas Staab, *National Identity in Eastern Germany: Inner Unification Or Continued Separation?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Jan C. Behrends, ‘Besuch aus der Zukunft. Sowjetische Stachanowarbeiter in der DDR’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 50.2 (2002), 195–204.

<sup>19</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Freital, ‘Informationsbericht für den Monat Juli 1968 der URANIA-Gesellschaft in Freital’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/B/4.05.74.

<sup>20</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Information an die Sekretäre des Hauses, 20 December 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/C/4.04.164.

<sup>21</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Informationsbericht über Meinungen und Stimmungen

Indeed, the various incidents of economic disruption that occurred in Poland from 1970 onwards provided fuel for the majority of these deprecating comments. In an overview of popular opinion on price increases in Poland, a 1970 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda includes several examples of ideological and economic superciliousness. While a number of the comments recorded expressed sympathy for the economic hardships facing ordinary Poles, equally prevalent were criticisms such as '[socialist] consciousness in Poland is not yet very well developed', references to 'shortcomings in ideological work' in Poland, and the pointed aphorism 'you live how you work [*so wie man arbeitet, so lebt man*]'. The report specifically identifies some of these as evidence of 'nationalistic tendencies', such as the statement that 'the Polish worker does not work with the same intensity as the German worker; therefore, the standard of living cannot rise as quickly', or the opinion expressed by a group of LPG farmers in Frankenthal that 'a large proportion of Poles are too lazy to work'.<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, a 1976 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on workers' responses to price increases in Poland mentions comments from workers at VEB Großbaustelle Kraftwerk Hagenwerder III expressing a lack of faith in the Polish economy. Workers asked, 'Why have the Poles not finished with their agricultural policy? Their state is three times the size of the GDR, and [they] only have twice as many people as we do to provide for', and derisively declared, 'Poland's a great country to go on holiday – you can't even get anything to eat!' Workers at the same factory also suggested that these problems were due partly to the influence of the Church in Poland: '[The Poles] listen to what the Church says more than what the party and the government say'.<sup>23</sup> By the time of the Solidarity crisis, East German workers had become still less sympathetic. When discussing worker reactions to events in Poland, a November 1981 report from the SED *Kreisleitung* Freital briefly mentions the scepticism of some workers about the sending of GDR relief supplies to Poland and the SED's official justification for this. Several workers argued 'that a country whose workers do not make use of their means of production does not deserve any support. These citizens state that the GDR's solidarity payments would have more value in

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zur 7. ZK-Tagung der PVAP vom 20. 12. 70 und zu den Ausschreitungen antisozialistischer Elemente in der VR Polen, 22 December 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/B/4.04.119.

<sup>22</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, 'Zuarbeit für die Sekretariatssitzung am Mittwoch, den 23.12.1970, 22 December 1970' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/B/4.02.94.

<sup>23</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, 'Kurzinformation zu typischen Diskussionen im Zusammenhang mit der angekündigten Preiserhöhung in der VR Polen, 26 June 1976' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

new nation states'.<sup>24</sup> Similar criticisms were recorded by the same *Kreisleitung* a month later. In response to the Christmas donation drive to support Polish children during the shortages and unrest, a number of workers made dissenting comments, including, 'If Polish parents had been working, they would have been able to give their children a proper Christmas'. The report on these conversations stresses that such comments were argued against by the majority of workers.<sup>25</sup>

For all the disapproval expressed by their functionaries in reports of such sentiments, however, and for all their efforts to promote the new, more positive economic narrative, the SED itself contributed to the problem when it suited the party. An account of a trip to the 'Friendship' cotton mill in Zawiercie contains a minor example of this superciliousness. The report devotes several lines to the poverty and primitiveness of the area, describing working conditions at the site as 'extraordinarily difficult': 'The area is undeveloped; some buildings are being established, but there are few streets and because it rains a great deal, the workers have to stomp through the mud in galoshes'. More importantly, it also presents the differences between East German and Polish attitudes to economic planning as stemming from insufficient ideological conviction on the Polish side: 'Our Polish friends are devoting all their effort to maintaining the plan, and our GDR functionaries know that the production plans cannot be fulfilled without ideological consolidation, without constant persuasive efforts'.<sup>26</sup> During the Solidarity crisis in particular, the party deliberately revived some of these stereotypes in an attempt to lower Poland's stock among the populace and thereby hinder the spread of revolutionary unrest to the GDR. The idea of the *polnische Wirtschaft* was 'reactivated', along with the stereotypes of the 'work-shy, lazy Pole' and 'Polish slovenliness and mismanagement'. All of these were given a new lease of life in SED propaganda, which used such disparaging characterizations of Poland as an 'explanation' for the unrest currently taking place there. The veiled anti-Polonistic references made by SED functionaries and intellectuals were then expanded on in 'numerous, often malicious jokes' in

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<sup>24</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Information über Stimmungen und Meinungen der Werktätigen zu aktuellen innen- und außenpolitischen Fragen sowie über Erfahrungen in der politischen Massennarbeit, 11 November 1981' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

<sup>25</sup> SED Kreisleitung Freital, 'Information über weitere Stimmen und Meinungen zur Unterstützung der Solidaritätsaktion für die polnischen Kinder, 18 December 1981' (Dresden), HStADD, 11860 SED-KL Freital, Nr. IV/D/4.05.68.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Bartel, 'Report' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch DY 13/2803.

popular discourses.<sup>27</sup>

Naturally, Poles reacted defensively to this form of superciliousness, and on many occasions both PZPR figures and ordinary Poles responded with their own unflattering assessments of the GDR economy and economic policy. This was evident, for example, in a clash that occurred in 1964 between the Polish owner of a ski rental shop and a GDR tourist group in Zakopane. The owner ‘told an LPG [agricultural cooperative] farmer in our tourist group that he didn’t need to pay any rental fees in addition to the deposit, as he had already had everything taken away from him. The communists, meaning we tour guides, were to pay the maximum possible price’.<sup>28</sup> A report by the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden on a visit by a Polish delegation to Dresden in May 1969 includes a brief mention of the reaction of the Poles when visiting a polyclinic. One member of the Polish delegation said that it was ‘unbelievable that a factory doctor should be working as a surgeon’ and claimed that, while he could not speak for Polish health care more widely, ‘factory health care in Poland has advanced’ beyond that obtaining in the GDR.<sup>29</sup> This defensiveness is also apparent in a 1970 report on a conversation with PZPR Politburo member Kliszko. The report includes a summary of the discussion of cooperation (primarily during 1969) between the SED and the PZPR. Kliszko pointed out that there was often a difference between word and deed where such cooperation was concerned, and, more specifically, mentioned that regional party organizations often responded ‘more flexibly and concretely’ than the central machinery. He offered the example of a recent potato shortage in a number of GDR *Bezirke*; the Polish voivodships partnered with these districts responded quickly, sending shipments of potatoes over.<sup>30</sup> A 1976 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on Polish attitudes to price increases in Poland includes various individual opinions, including one question from a young man in Zgorzelec drawing a direct comparison between the GDR and Poland: ‘How do you manage

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<sup>27</sup> Niels Gatzke, ‘Das Polenbild in Deutschland – Entstehung und Gegenwart’, in *Probleme mit Polen? Polenbezogene Ressentiments in Vorpommern*, ed. by Regionale Arbeitsstelle für Bildung, Integration und Demokratie (RAA) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e. V. (Waren (Müritz), 2012), pp. 12–19 (p. 15) <<https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-338529>>.

<sup>28</sup> Gerd Viertel and Gerhard Noack, ‘Information über einige Vorkommnisse bei einer Reise in die VR Polen – Zakopane’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1252, pp. 16–17.

<sup>29</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, ‘Bericht über den Aufenthalt der Mai-Delegation vom Bezirksvorstand Wroclaw beim FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, 12 May 1969’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>30</sup> Steltner, ‘Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Zenon Kliszko, Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär des ZK der PVAP, am 9.1.1970 in Warschau, 12 January 1970’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, NY 4182/1255, pp. 2–4.

in the GDR? You have no raw materials, but you have everything. You're like the Japanese'.<sup>31</sup> A similar 1976 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz includes further examples of the opinions of Polish workers in the GDR (a group of seventy female Polish workers at Werk I and III ESG) on the price hikes taking place in Poland. The report stresses that the response was almost universally positive, with comments such as, 'These measures are correct and we fully support them'. There were, however, several examples of resignation, or at least wearied acceptance of the price increases, including the observation that 'we knew this was coming. It will definitely happen in the GDR as well, and then things will be balanced'.<sup>32</sup>

The picture becomes more complicated when the wide variety of contacts that took place across these two decades between East Germans and Poles visiting the GDR are examined. Personal encounters with Poles, either as work colleagues or as tourists, had the potential to add much-needed nuance to popular understandings and dispel assumptions of Polish backwardness. In the event, however, the personal bonds formed were not sufficiently powerful or valued to outweigh the new sources of friction that attended the large influx of foreigners into the GDR.

## **Opening the borders: consumer tourism in the early 1970s**

Prior to the 1970s, very few Polish tourists came to the GDR, due primarily to the relative isolation of both states and the strictly controlled Oder–Neisse border. But the opening of the border in 1972 radically changed this situation, allowing large numbers of Polish tourists to visit the GDR for the first time. These visitors came, in large part, as a result of consumer desires and material interests, complicating already fragile GDR-Polish relations.

The border opening was greeted with optimism by many East Germans, particularly those interested in crossing over and seeing Poland for themselves. In its survey of the impact of the first six months of the open border, the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz states that over that time, 'visiting Poland has become a daily reality' for ordinary East Germans. Its report also mentions that 'the influx of Polish tourists to our town is constantly on the rise'.<sup>33</sup> A report

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<sup>31</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiinformation, 'Stimmungen und Meinungen in der VR Polen zu Strukturveränderungen der Preise, 15 July 1976' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

<sup>32</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, 'Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Änderung der Preisstruktur in der VR Polen, 16 July 1976' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

<sup>33</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, 'Informationsbericht zu Ergebnissen,

from the *Bezirksleitung* Rostock mentions that a number of workers had expressed considerable interest in the ‘living conditions in the neighbouring state’, adding that ‘they also recognize the need to understand the living habits of the Polish people’.<sup>34</sup> A January 1972 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz records various remarks and opinions expressed by workers in factories throughout the *Kreis* concerning their experiences of visiting Poland. The report notes that these views were generally very positive. A group of workers at a factory in Cottbus, for instance, were heard to say, ‘We visited Poland with our wives, and were both delighted and stunned by the friendly demeanour of the Polish citizens. [The border opening] will bring us closer together as friends’. Another worker had a similar story: ‘we spent a couple of pleasant hours with my wife’s [Polish] colleague and her husband. They’re coming to visit us soon. I think it’s a great thing!’ A group of employees at a different factory described themselves as ‘very enthusiastic about the introduction of visa-free travel between our two states. It will strengthen and develop the friendship between our two peoples. On our first visit to Poland, we got a wonderful welcome and had many warm encounters [with Poles]. We also have lots of new places to travel, and we’ll be able to get to know the traditions of our brother Poles better’. A railway worker at Görlitz station expressed their happiness at the ease of the border crossing, commenting that ‘I could hardly believe that it was so easy and straightforward to cross the border. It’s a fine thing, and will help improve relations between the German and Polish peoples’.<sup>35</sup> A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz briefly mentions the rate at which GDR citizens were taking up Polish language courses. Four hundred workers in state and private shops in the *Kreis* were currently studying on a language course, while forty-five workers at Centrum-Warenhaus had already completed a short-term course.<sup>36</sup> An additional report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz notes that some concerns were still expressed by workers, especially concerning a possible increase in criminality as a result of the open border. However, the report expresses the confidence that, after East Germans had personally visited Poland, met Polish citizens for the first time and

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Erfahrungen und Problemen aus dem visafreien Grenzverkehr zwischen der DDR, der VR Polen und der CSSR, 20 June 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

<sup>34</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fs vom 27.12.1971, 6 January 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

<sup>35</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fernschreiben vom 27.12.1971, 4 January 1972’.

<sup>36</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Ergebnisse, Erfahrungen und Probleme zum visafreien Grenzverkehr zwischen der DDR, der VR Polen und der CSSR, 11 April 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

seen what was on offer in shops, critical preconceptions such as ‘Görlitz will be bought out again’ and ‘free travel will only bring us problems’ would be largely dispelled.<sup>37</sup>

Some views expressed at the start of the open-border period were less complimentary, however, especially those relating to travel in the other direction. Motivated by their low opinion of the Polish economy, large numbers of East Germans voiced concern at the prospect of swarms of ‘shopping tourists [*Einkaufstouristen*]’ from Poland descending on border towns. A number of comments were recorded to the effect that ‘as far as we can see, it’s poorer over there. We should wait till our shops are open in a week’s time. Then the stream of visitors will flow in the other direction’. Other citizens expressed the same idea more positively and even-handedly, mentioning that ‘people are thinking about what goods can be bought more cheaply in Poland, and vice versa’.<sup>38</sup> The *Kreisleitung* Bautzen warned that the infrastructure of the *Kreis* was underprepared for the influx of tourists. Particular strain, it feared, would be placed on ‘certain sanitary facilities’, such as public toilets, accommodation, petrol stations and parking areas.<sup>39</sup>

East German concerns about Polish *Einkaufstouristen* had in fact been a source of some resentment as early as 1967. A report from that year on the opinions of female industrial workers in *Kreis* Görlitz (*Bezirk* Dresden) notes that workers had been asking ‘numerous questions about where the foreigners (Polish citizens) got so much money to go shopping in the GDR’.<sup>40</sup> Very soon after Polish tourists began crossing the border in large numbers, these concerns seemed to be vindicated. Several January 1972 reports by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz notes that the number of Polish visitors to the GDR was steadily increasing, and that the ‘eagerness of the Poles to spend their money’ was also on the rise.<sup>41</sup> As in the case of state-level relations, the SED expressed some frustration with the Poles’ fixation on the economic opportunities presented by the border opening. A November 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung*

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<sup>37</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fernschreiben vom 27.12.1971, 5 January 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

<sup>38</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fernschreiben vom 27.12.1971, 4 January 1972’.

<sup>39</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bautzen, ‘Einschätzung des erreichten Standes in der Entwicklung des visafreien Verkehrs der Volksrepublik Polen, der CSSR und der DDR (Beschluß des Sekretariats der BL vom 4.2. 1972), 29 November 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13001 SED-KL Bautzen, Nr. IV/C/4.01.222.

<sup>40</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Frauen – Industrie, 18 May 1967’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/A.4.06.59.

<sup>41</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fs vom 27.12.1971, 6 January 1972’; SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Euer Fs vom 27.12.1971, 7 January 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

Bautzen states that, so far, ‘we have not managed to interest our Polish friends sufficiently in the beauty of our town, with its historic sights and its new socialist development areas, via travel agencies in the GDR and Poland. This also means that the main objective of visa-free travel—getting acquainted with the country and its people, studying the construction of socialism and coming closer together as people—has not yet fully been reached’. The Poles, it argues, were more interested in shopping than in the nobler, reconciliatory dimension of the open border: ‘The majority of tourists see the main point of their visit as finding stores and other shopping opportunities, often beyond what they actually need’. As a result, ‘despite our political work, there is a great deal of discussion in the *Kreis* [...] of the “hamster shopping” of Polish citizens’. Nonetheless, it mentions that Polish visitors were interested in sightseeing to some extent, showing particular interest in the Pioneer Museum and the *Haus der Sorben* Sorbian museum. Visitors generally expressed an interest in learning more about East German nationality policies and ‘the position of the Sorbian minority in our socialist GDR’.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, the rapid increase in tourist numbers was generally received negatively by East German shop workers and customers. A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda stresses that the border opening had generally been ‘welcomed’ by the populace, who agreed that it offered ‘the possibility of expanding tourism on both sides, and of expanding our friendly relations’. The report also makes it clear that a majority of Polish visitors to the GDR had made a ‘very positive’ impression. It also notes, however, that the area was already experiencing problems relating to the Poles’ shopping habits: Polish tourists, it claims, were buying up ‘large quantities’ of certain products, despite being told by shop assistants that ‘we’re in the GDR; here, you can only buy one or two items’, and ‘probably reselling them at home at high prices’. The report asserts that some tourists attempted to bribe shop assistants with up to 100 Marks of ‘drinking money’ in order to secure specific items for themselves. Goods in which the Poles had already shown particular interest included underwear, shirts, leather shoes, women’s pumps and sports shoes, sandals, slippers, gloves, razors, cookware, knives, as well as certain foodstuffs, notably sausage and other meats. The report emphasizes that ‘a large number of citizens are angry that the Polish citizens are able to exchange Marks without any limit, and that a certain proportion of Poles are engaging in

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<sup>42</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bautzen, ‘Einschätzung’.



hamster shopping here'.<sup>43</sup> A 1973 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz includes a brief mention of criticisms expressed—'across all classes [*unter allen Klassen und Schichten*]'—of the continued activity of Polish *Einkaufstouristen* and the effectiveness of the new customs regulations. Citizens asked why the regulations were proving so ineffective, and expressed the fear that there would soon be shortages of certain goods in the GDR: 'Our Polish friends are buying meat in increasing quantities, next weekend the *Jugendweihe* is taking place, Easter is just around the corner. Will there be no supply problems?'<sup>44</sup> This sentiment was expressed most directly, however, in a December 1972 report from the *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, which notes that members of the SED party organization in Radebeul stated with indignation that 'the Poles aren't just buying all our goods, they're robbing us!'<sup>45</sup>

An April 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz mentions various 'typical' critical opinions expressed by workers in the *Kreis* on the open border with Poland, and especially on the behaviour and shopping habits of Polish tourists. 'A number of Polish citizens don't behave like real guests of our state', went one such comment, 'We see this in their increasingly obvious hamster shopping, and in their occasionally rude behaviour towards shop employees'. The workers also expressed their fear that Polish shopping habits were doing lasting damage to the GDR economy: 'although there were supply bottlenecks before visa-free travel, these were reduced markedly after the 8th Party Congress. Now, visa-free travel is having a damaging effect on the supply situation. What guarantees do we have that supplies for the GDR population in the border region will be maintained and improved?' Others pointed to the potential health risks of the shortages, asking 'will the economy be able to secure the drinks supply in the summer months? After all, it already has problems meeting demand completely'. Still others called for shop workers expressly to refuse to sell larger quantities of certain products to Polish customers, and shared their frustration that little was being done to combat bulk purchasing or black-market activity in the border region. Female workers also pointed out that the pressures caused by *Einkaufstouristen* were adding to their

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<sup>43</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, 'Meinungen und Probleme zum visafreien Reiseverkehr in die Volksrepublik Polen und in die CSSR, 4 May 1972' (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.086.

<sup>44</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, 'Berichterstattung zur politischen Massenarbeit – Stimmung und Meinungen zu aktuell-politischen Ereignissen der Innen- und Außenpolitik, 10 April 1973' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.106.

<sup>45</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, 'Information an die Sekretäre des Hauses, 20 December 1972'.

already greater burdens. One female member of the SED party organization in a factory in Crimmitschau (*Bezirk* Karl-Marx-Stadt, *Kreis* Werdau) complained ‘don’t talk to me about making things easier for working women. When you actually find the time to go shopping, you often don’t get what you need (children’s shoes, for instance). If that doesn’t change, we have to go shopping in the morning’.<sup>46</sup> A petition sent to the *Kreisleitung* by a workers’ collective echoed these complaints, pointing out the irony that these problems had begun so soon after working hours had become more flexible in the GDR: ‘on the one hand, our government has passed measures to give working women more time for looking after their children and for social activities; on the other, this time is lost again to futile shopping trips and long queuing times’.<sup>47</sup>

An October 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on a collection of petitions sent to the mayor of Görlitz by workers’ collectives from several factories in the city. One petition, signed by thirty-six signatories from two separate collectives, complains about the deterioration of the supply situation since the start of the open-border period. The document emphasizes that the workers had initially greeted the opening of the border, which they had anticipated would lead to ‘greater ease of travel and more options for holidays and leisure time. In no way, however, did we expect a worsening of the supply situation’. ‘With regret’, it continues, the workers had noticed that the shortages had grown steadily worse since January, and that ‘living standards in our city seem to have declined so much that the most basic of household and personal items are not available the normal way in shops any more’. The collectives ascribe these problems to the way in which Polish visitors ‘buy up and take (consumer goods) in large quantities’. A second petition contains similar complaints, focusing on the injustice of the situation for factory workers in particular: ‘it is unacceptable that after working for 8 3/4 hours, we have to queue for hours in shops overrun with Polish citizens, waiting, often in vain, for basic consumer goods’. The authors of this petition express their incredulity that the GDR authorities have not stepped in by this point, ‘and at least introduced a customs law’. The report notes that in response to these petitions, the *Kreisleitung* secretariat resolved to hold consultations between party, mass organization and management

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<sup>46</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Ergebnisse, Erfahrungen und Probleme zum visafreien Grenzverkehr zwischen der DDR, der VR Polen und der CSSR, 11 April 1972’.

<sup>47</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Fernschreiben, 4 October 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

representatives at the factories in question, with the aim of ‘suppressing all nationalistic tendencies’. The secretariat also mentions ‘supply changes [...] where necessary and possible’ as a secondary goal of the meetings, but the containment of dissent, and specifically of anti-Polonism, seems to have been their priority.<sup>48</sup>

A November 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land notes with concern that ‘discussions and disparaging remarks about Polish citizens’ were circulating among workers’ collectives at various factories in Radeberg. Among these remarks were calls for a levelling of prices across the bloc, ‘to prevent so-called hamster shopping’, and for a move to a more restricted form of open border similar to that established with Czechoslovakia. Other comments came from workers asking ‘why do our Polish friends indulge in hamster shopping? Won’t that make the black market popular in Poland?’ Along these lines, a group of workers was also heard describing Polish visitors as ‘black marketeers, not tourists’. A pair of senior workers at one of the factories opined that, while the arguments put forth by party agitators to counter anti-Polish sentiment were all correct, they did not offer ‘any solution to the problem. It would be possible to introduce measures very quickly that would put an end to this shopping mania [*Kaufgier*] without undermining the unifying idea of socialist internationalism’.<sup>49</sup> Other workers in the same region were reported expressing, ‘for the second time and in an aggressive manner’, criticisms of Polish shopping habits and the SED’s reaction to them. The workers demanded ‘when will strict and targeted measures be introduced to combat hamster shopping by unreasonable foreign citizens, such as border controls and tariff regulations?’<sup>50</sup>

Given such examples, it is easy to see why the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* suggested in a 1973 article on the open border that GDR citizens must have viewed Polish complaints of losing out on ‘the last batch of asparagus and the last jar of chanterelles’ in a GDR shop, or of East Germans buying Polish clothing and soft furnishings in excessive quantities, as ‘derisive mockery’ at best.<sup>51</sup> The situation was especially problematic, and did

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<sup>48</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Fernschreiben, 4 October 1972’.

<sup>49</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiinformation, ‘Information an den 2. Sekretär, 14 November 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/C/4.04.164.

<sup>50</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, Abt. Information, ‘Information über ausgewertete Wochenberichte der hauptamtlichen Parteisekretäre, der NF und des Rates des Kreises, 20 November 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/C/4.04.164.

<sup>51</sup> ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, *Die Zeit*, 18 August 1973. Reprinted (trans. David Gramling) in *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955–2005*, ed. by Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes

still greater damage to popular opinion of the Poles, on those occasions when Polish tourists became aggressive if their shopping behaviour was challenged. A particularly egregious example occurred in the Centrum department store in Alexanderplatz, East Berlin, in 1973, in which a number of Polish customers, finding they were unable to buy items they wanted, shouted ‘Nazi pigs’ at East German shop assistants.<sup>52</sup> A 1976 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, meanwhile, notes that for sales workers in particular, ‘the physical and mental burdens [...] are very high’, due to both shortages of certain goods and the daily confrontations with long queues and demanding, often irate customers. The report mentions that Polish customers could be especially demanding: shop assistants’ efforts to ensure the steady sale of goods and prevent hamster shopping sometimes led to ‘confrontations’ with Poles, ‘above all with those who do not wish to understand that they can only buy goods for their personal use’. Polish customers ‘often’ became insulting when they were told they could not buy certain goods, including pepper and sugar, calling shop assistants ‘stupid’ and—more harshly and somewhat ironically—‘German Jewish swine’. Many other insults were also frequently used, although as these were in Polish, they were not understood by staff. The report highlights one incident that occurred at a supermarket on Dresdener Straße in Görlitz in August 1976, in which a cashier and a Polish customer clashed over the latter’s attempt to buy five jars of pepper. When he was told he needed to put four jars back, the customer became violent, grabbing the cashier by the arms and shaking her. Other customers who witnessed this attempted to restrain the customer, but did not manage to do so. The report notes that such incidents were having an increasingly demoralizing effect on sales workers in the area. One shop assistant working in Görlitz, on Parstraße near the border crossing, stated that she refused ever to travel across to Poland, as she had been threatened with beatings by several Polish customers. Many others apparently made it clear that in the face of this abuse, they no longer intended to prevent Polish shoppers from buying large quantities of goods, or even to discuss the matter. The SED *Handelsorganisation* for the area reported growing numbers of workers calling in sick, and warned that many workers were insisting that they would apply for a change of job if the problem continued.<sup>53</sup>

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(Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 76–78 (p. 78).

<sup>52</sup> ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Information über die Stimmungen und Meinungen im Kreis Görlitz zum verstärkten Aufkauf von Waren durch Bürger der VR Polen, 13 August 1976’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861

Compounding the problem was the fact that some Poles did not confine their activities to buying up GDR goods, but also attempted to sell or resell them back in Poland. This form of ‘speculation’ was denounced by the SED on ideological grounds, but was also vehemently criticized by ordinary East Germans. According to a December 1972 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, for example, workers throughout the *Kreis* were aware of this problem, with one stating, ‘We have nothing against our Polish comrades and friends, we know that they suffered especially greatly under fascism, and we understand now that these negative discussions about the Polish people benefit the imperialists most of all, but we do have a problem with Polish speculators, profiteers and hamster shoppers who shop here in order to enrich themselves’.<sup>54</sup> In the same year, workers at various factories in *Kreis* Dresden-Land expressed their belief that ‘Polish tourists only buy the best products here, especially those we have to import ourselves, such as raisins and almonds’. The *Kreisleitung* report mentioning this comment also recounts an incident involving a group of Polish tourists caught selling coffee inside a shop ‘in order to obtain extra cash’. The sales assistant responded ‘quite objectively and correctly’, confronting the tourists and insisting ‘that she buys her coffee from us’.<sup>55</sup> This problem developed to almost comic proportions in an incident reported by the *Kreisleitung* in December 1972, in which a workers claimed that Polish tourists had begun trying to sell ‘6-piece gold-rimmed coffee serving sets’ that they had purchased in the GDR, asking for a price of between 320 and 350 Marks.<sup>56</sup> In addition to their habit of reselling GDR goods at home for an exorbitant mark-up, some Polish tourists were accused of doing the opposite in the GDR itself. A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, for example, states that a small number of Polish visitors had been caught hawking products, predominantly clothing and fabrics, at a discount in various locations throughout the *Kreis*. The report cites one example of Poles selling bolts of fabric ‘at discounts of between 500 and 190 Marks’, or hand cream at discounts of between 15 and 2

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SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

<sup>54</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Berichterstattung über Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Versorgungslage in Bezug des polnischen Touristenverkehrs, 5 December 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11859 SED-KL Dresden-Land, Nr. IV/C/4.04.164.

<sup>55</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Berichterstattung über Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Versorgungslage in Bezug des polnischen Touristenverkehrs, 5 December 1972’.

<sup>56</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Information an die Sekretäre des Hauses, 20 December 1972’.

Marks.<sup>57</sup>

A 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda provides a more positive assessment of Polish *Einkaufstouristen*. The document cites the comments of several German shop assistants, who maintained that ‘we enjoy serving our Polish customers, as, apart from a few exceptions, they are polite and behave considerately in our shops’. They also expressed understanding for those Poles who bought large quantities of goods, stating that ‘many goods are very expensive in Poland’, and that various products, such as babies’ and children’s clothing, dresses, underwear and tights, were in especially short supply there. Many were of the opinion that the shortages being experienced in the GDR were not the result of Polish over-buying, but of ‘inadequate supply as a result of consumer goods and wholesale production’.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, several workers at a factory in *Kreis* Dresden-Land expressed the view that *Einkaufstouristen* were not responsible for the shortages of consumer goods, maintaining that ‘tourism hasn’t caused any difficulties. We ourselves are responsible for the provision of goods. We must stabilize the situation in our factories’.<sup>59</sup> ‘If GDR journalists ever admit to tensions between Poles and Germans’, *Die Zeit* claimed in a 1973 article, ‘they blame them on the Germans; they, and only they, have made a vow to socialist brotherhood’.<sup>60</sup> For the SED, however, this was rather dangerous territory for German-Polish solidarity to venture into and, while only a minor example, is an indication of why the leadership was ambivalent in its encouragement of reconciliation, particularly where the open border was concerned.

As the open-border period progressed and the problems associated with *Einkaufstouristen* continued, even some Poles became critical of their compatriots’ behaviour. Several 1976 opinion reports by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz include views stated by Polish workers in the *Kreis* concerning the shopping habits of their fellow Poles. One group of female workers claimed to be ‘angry that Polish tourists are engaging in hamster shopping, which tarnishes the reputation of all Polish citizens. They believe that the GDR government

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<sup>57</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Meinungen und Probleme zum visafreien Reiseverkehr in die Volksrepublik Polen und in die CSSR, 4 May 1972’.

<sup>58</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, ‘Informationsbericht über die eingeleiteten Maßnahmen der Regierung der VR Polen zum Touristenverkehr und zur Versorgungslage im Kreis, 5 December 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.086.

<sup>59</sup> SED Kreisleitung Dresden-Land, Abt. Parteiorgane, ‘Berichterstattung über Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Versorgungslage in Bezug des polnischen Touristenverkehrs, 5 December 1972’.

<sup>60</sup> ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, pp. 77–78.

must introduce export limits for certain products, and enforce them'. Another Pole working at a brown coal power plant in the region expressed hope that 'the Polish government will soon introduce measures so that GDR citizens are no longer at the mercy of an immense wave of Polish citizens buying up everything'.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, another Polish worker was caught by her colleagues after concealing 'fifteen pairs of shoes in her locker and a further ten pairs behind a curtain'. The report on the incident notes that the other Poles working at the same factory 'distanced themselves from such purchases'.<sup>62</sup>

Both the SED and the PZPR were from an early stage aware of the hostility this behaviour was likely to arouse among the East German populace, and took limited measures to curb Polish spending. A December 1972 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz discusses workers' reactions to the announcement of foreign currency restrictions in Poland, which were instigated in part to relieve the pressure of Polish economic tourism on the GDR. Comments from the workforce were generally very positive, with many expressing relief that 'something is finally being done to shorten the long queuing times inside and outside shops for working women doing their daily shop', and their hope that the measure would 'put a stop to the smugglers and speculators'. Interestingly, Polish workers in the GDR also expressed satisfaction, and in some cases relief, at the change in policy. One stated, 'We are very pleased with the measures introduced by our government. Now we can buy what we want again with the money we've earned. It's been unpleasant for us to be looked on as a sort of tourist (and hamster shopper) all the time when we shop in Görlitz. There are now downsides for us'. Many comments, however, emphasized the damage that Polish shopping tourism and the goods shortages had already done to GDR-Polish relations by this point, and the extent to which they had undone some of the positive developments resulting from the border opening. One worker opined that 'it would be a shame if citizens from another country couldn't buy what they wanted to in our shops. It would be a humiliation to our citizens if they had to buy goods under the counter to meet their families' basic needs. This kind of selling activity is harming our friendly relations with Polish citizens'. In the same vein, several workers asked with frustration why both governments had taken so long to acknowledge the problem and

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<sup>61</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, 'Stimmungen und Meinungen zu Preis- und Lohnregulierungen in der VR Polen, 15 July 1976' (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.108.

<sup>62</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, 'Stimmungen und Meinungen zur Änderung der Preisstruktur in der VR Polen, 16 July 1976'.

take steps to resolve it. ‘Why’, they asked, ‘did they not make use of [these measures] when visa-free travel was first introduced? That would certainly have avoided the anger that’s been developing on both sides’.<sup>63</sup>

Unsurprisingly, given the amount of cross-border travel taking place in this period, there were a number of more overt clashes between East Germans and Poles. As the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* noted in a 1973 article, ‘In private, GDR citizens often complain about their Polish friends. The mean-spirited call them “Polacks”: “they’re always showing up in big groups, taking away our girls, and then beating us up!” After dance parties, street fights often break out between Germans and Poles. “And then our police prefer to help the Poles, not us”, reports one young East German man bitterly’.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, a report by the *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda briefly mentions an attack on a Polish citizen by a group of eight Germans in Steinigtwolmsdorf in January 1973.<sup>65</sup> As one young man from East Berlin stated pointedly, ‘It is fine that people always remind us that we and the Poles are socialist brothers. That’s just fine, but if everyone is going to continue talking about brotherhood, then we would ask them to kindly deal with us like brothers someday as well’.<sup>66</sup>

In the face of the considerable tensions between East Germans and Poles during the open-border period, and the mounting impatience of GDR citizens, integration of the two populations did not progress as was initially hoped. As an example of this, the 1973 *Die Zeit* article referred to the coverage in the GDR student magazine *Forum* of a range of collective sports and cultural events at the VEB Schwarze Pumpe, at which around five hundred Polish workers were engaged. While he naturally highlighted the many instances of solidarity between the two peoples, the GDR journalist also noted with disapproval that some obvious divisions remained: ‘Although the friends spend most of their free time together, none of the Poles were allowed to ride the motorcycles that belong to the Society for Sport and Technology. They might drink their beer together, but at home there is still a German and a Polish entrance’.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, Abt. Parteiorgane, Sektor Information, ‘Stimmungen und Meinungen zu aktuell-politischen Ereignissen, 4 December 1972’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/C.4.06.105.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, p. 77.

<sup>65</sup> SED Kreisleitung Bischofswerda, Abt. Parteiinformation, ‘Informationsbericht: Meinungen der Bevölkerung zu Problemen der Innen- und Außenpolitik, 16 January 1973’ (Dresden), HStADD, 13002 SED-KL Bischofswerda, Nr. IV/C/4.02.086.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, p. 78.

<sup>67</sup> ‘In der DDR heißen sie Freunde’, pp. 77–78.



Tensions between Poles and East Germans over economic matters persisted, and indeed worsened, over the course of the decade. Indeed, following further price increases in Poland in the mid 1970s, many Germans feared that Poles would find shopping in the GDR an even more attractive prospect. A 1976 report by the *Kreisleitung* Görlitz includes a variety of comments by workers at a power station in Hagenwerder, a town to the south of Görlitz close to the Polish border. As a result of the price hikes, many workers believed, ‘now they’ll buy up everything again!’ Others suggested that Poles might develop renewed interest in working in the GDR, realizing that ‘life is just better here’. Many also claimed that they had already noticed the rate of Polish shoppers in the area starting to rise again, and expressed the hope that the GDR authorities would not allow ‘profiteering and black marketeering to flourish again’.<sup>68</sup>

The framing of many of the complaints, moreover, became increasingly ethnicized. In his memoir, composed in 1977, Rudolph Bühring expresses concern about the resurgence of anti-Polish sentiment among the GDR populace at the time. He focuses in particular on many East Germans’ habit of referring to their eastern neighbours using the pejorative ‘Pollaken’, a venerable word that had seen particularly frequent use during the Nazi period: “‘Pollaken’—those were people who in the Nazi view were not people at all. A “P” was fair game, and every Nazi court endorsed it as such. It offends and it hurts to know that even in schools the word “Pollaken” is simply accepted. Today it’s the “Pollaken” who buy out everything in Pasewalk; back then it was the “Pollaken” who belonged to the dregs of society’. Bühring recounts a recent visit from a group of school pupils at which, during his talk on German-Polish antifascist wartime cooperation, anti-Polish sentiment was expressed: ‘Even there the word “Pollaken” surfaced, and I was told that at home they only speak in terms of the “Pollaken” and the “Polish economy” [*polnische Wirtschaft*]’.<sup>69</sup> Polish *Einkaufstouristen* were also referred to by incensed locals during this period, with increasing frequency, as ‘dogs’, ‘swine’ and ‘scum’ who were ‘fouling up the place’.<sup>70</sup>

A 1980 report from the FDGB Union for Trade, Food and Beverages [*Gewerkschaft Handel, Nahrung und Genuss*] states that a number of areas in *Bezirk* Dresden, particularly

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<sup>68</sup> SED Kreisleitung Görlitz, ‘Kurzinformation zu typischen Diskussionen im Zusammenhang mit der angekündigten Preiserhöhung in der VR Polen, 26 June 1976’.

<sup>69</sup> Rudolph Bühring, ‘Erinnerung’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch SgY 30/1845/1.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan R. Zatlin, ‘Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989’, *Central European History*, 40 (2007), 683–720 (p. 686).

the *Kreise* of Görlitz, Zittau, Löbau and Bautzen, were experiencing severe shortages of goods that had been bought up by Polish tourists. The products most seriously affected included confectionery, meat products, spices, cheap spirits, children's clothing and shoes. Of the last of these, the report mentions that most shoes in the lower and middle price ranges had sold out, leaving only the more expensive items, and that there were no shoe vendors left that did not have queues outside in which customers had to wait at least half an hour. The document also outlines the problems experienced by the confectionery department of the Centrum-Warenhaus department store in Dresden, which was suffering such disruptive shortages that cashiers were obliged to remove from shoppers' baskets certain products, including pralines, if the customer was attempting to purchase more than two of them at any one time—a policy that provoked 'very unpleasant remarks from citizens of Poland and the CSSR'. The objections raised by GDR citizens to this shopping behaviour were very similar to those at the beginning of the open-border period, with frequently recurring comments such as 'why aren't the customs laws having any effect?', 'where do the Polish citizens get all the money from?' and 'this has nothing to do with tourism any more'. As at the beginning of the decade, workers also drew comparisons between their own industriousness and the rampant consumerism of the Poles, complaining that 'we're working out daily production plans to improve our supply situation, while on the other hand, widespread shopping by Polish citizens is doing our population no good whatsoever'.<sup>71</sup>

The SED's closure of the border on 30 October 1980, as one of several responses to the Solidarity crisis, can be understood primarily as the culmination of the erosion of popular and political will to maintain the open-border policy. Particularly telling in this respect is the fact that the travel restrictions were reinstated unilaterally by the GDR.<sup>72</sup> The one-sided nature of the border closure also reflects the SED's anxieties concerning the threat to the stability of the GDR, and to its own legitimacy, presented by the actions of the Solidarity movement.<sup>73</sup> In addition to closing the border, the SED attempted to contain the potentially

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<sup>71</sup> Bezirksvorstand Dresden, 'Information, 21 October 1980' (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 42/2539.

<sup>72</sup> Czesław Osękowski, 'Der Pass- und Visafreie Personenverkehr zwischen der DDR und Polen in den siebziger Jahren. Politische, wirtschaftliche und gesellschaftliche Auswirkungen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ulrich Heiße (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 123–33 (p. 133).

<sup>73</sup> Erhard Crome and Jochen Franzke, 'Die DDR und Polen. Betrachtungen über das Verhältnis der Ostdeutschen zu den Polen', in *Die verschwundene Diplomatie. Beiträge zur Außenpolitik der DDR: Festschrift für Claus Montag*, ed. by Erhard Crome, Jochen Franzke, and Raimund Krämer (Berlin: Berliner

disruptive ‘Polish bacillus’ by means of a virulent anti-Polish propaganda campaign at home, more aggressive even than that waged in response to the 1956 uprising. At the same time, the party pressed for military intervention from the Warsaw Pact in the same manner as in Czechoslovakia in 1968, relenting on both counts only after the establishment of martial law in December 1981.<sup>74</sup> However, while the Solidarity uprising was the proximate and most influential factor in its decision, the previous years of disillusionment with the open border, and awareness of its growing unpopularity, undoubtedly also carried some weight.

By the time the border had been reopened, following the Solidarity crisis in Poland, relations between East Germans and Polish tourists appear to have been little better. Isolated incidents reveal the amalgam of a range of pre-existing and long-standing prejudices. In one case, six young members of a Polish tourist group visiting the GDR in 1984 committed various acts of ‘political provocation’ when drunk: they called a female FDJ official a ‘fascist’; they ostentatiously tore up a GDR flag; and generally behaved like ‘thugs’. The report on the incident notes that the remainder of the tourist group took pains to distance themselves from the youths’ behaviour. The six were subsequently sent back to Poland.<sup>75</sup>

## Polish workers in the GDR

For the bulk of the twenty-year period, especially either side of the open-border years, most

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Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003), pp. 110–23 (pp. 117–19).

<sup>74</sup> On this twofold response, see Martin McCauley, ‘The East German Response to Events in Poland’, *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 2.3 (1982), 5–12; Douglas A. Macgregor, *The Soviet-East German Military Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 92–101; Reinhardt Gutsche, ‘Nur ein Erfüllungsgehilfe? Die SED-Führung und die militärische Option zur Niederschlagung der Opposition in Polen in den Jahren 1980/81’, in *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates: Beiträge und Analysen*, ed. by Klaus Schroeder (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), pp. 166–79; Michael Kubina and Manfred Wilke, ‘Das “Mosaiksteinchen” Polen 1980/81. Verantwortungsgemeinschaften in Deutschland’, in *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates: Beiträge und Analysen*, ed. by Klaus Schroeder (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), pp. 149–65; ‘Hart und kompromißlos durchgreifen’: *Die SED contra Polen 1980/81: Geheimakten der SED-Führung über die Unterdrückung der polnischen Demokratiebewegung*, ed. by Michael Kubina and Manfred Wilke (Berlin: Akademie, 1995); Manfred Wilke, ‘Interventionspolitik: Die SED und der Prager Frühling 1968 und die polnische Demokratiebewegung 1980/81’, in *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert – der Fall DDR*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996), pp. 623–44; Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998), pp. 91–93; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, ‘Der öffentliche Polen-Diskurs in der Solidarność-Ära’, in *Narrative des Nationalen. Deutsche und polnische Nationsdiskurse im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Izabela Surynt and Marek Zybura (Osnabrück: fibre, 2010), pp. 339–59; Dariusz Wojtaszyn, ‘Die Darstellung der Solidarność in der Regionalpresse der DDR am Beispiel des “Sächsischen Tageblatts”’, in *Die DDR und die Solidarność: ausgewählte Aspekte einer Beziehung*, ed. by Konstantin Hermann (Dresden: Thelem, 2013), pp. 171–82.

<sup>75</sup> Jürgen Heinrich, ‘Information über besondere Vorkommnisse im III. Quartal 1984, 11 October 1984’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/16874.

of the Poles encountered by ordinary East Germans were those working in the GDR. These Poles were one of several groups of foreign nationals engaged on fixed, short-term labour contracts throughout the industrial sector from the early 1960s onwards. The national mix of foreign workers shifted over the twenty-year period, with the largest contingents in the 1960s and early 1970s coming from Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, and later groups consisting predominantly of Vietnamese, Cuban and Mozambican workers.<sup>76</sup> However, the very first contract workers, who arrived in 1963, were from Poland,<sup>77</sup> and Poles remained a significant presence in GDR workplaces throughout.

A 1966 report from the *Rat des Bezirkes* in Dresden breaks down the numbers of Polish workers currently employed in *Bezirk* Dresden (all female). These included 120 workers at the VEB *Elektroschaltgerätewerk* Görlitz, 200 at the VEB *Elektroschaltgerätewerk* Oppach, 100 at the VEB *Kondensatorenwerk* Görlitz, 88 at the VEB *Feinoptisches Werk* Görlitz, 35 at the VEB *Duroplast-Presswerk* Neusalza-Spremberg and 40 at the VEB *Schamotten-Silikonwerk* Rietschen.<sup>78</sup> A report from the same year by the FDGB *Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung* at VEB *Elektroschaltgeräte* Oppach states that 194 female Polish workers were employed at the factory. The report stresses that German and Polish workers generally got on well, especially as a majority of the Poles spoke or understood at least some German, and some German workers also spoke Polish.<sup>79</sup> A report by the FDGB *Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung* at VEB *Kondensatorenwerk* Görlitz, also from 1966, mentions that around one hundred female Polish workers were employed at the factory. Again, the report mentions that relations between German and Polish workers were generally good; there were occasional misunderstandings due to the language difference, but these were usually able to be cleared up after ‘amicable discussion’.<sup>80</sup> Another 1966 report by the FDGB *Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung* at the VEB *Duroplast-Presswerk* Neusalza-Spremberg factory

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<sup>76</sup> Mike Dennis, ‘Asian and African Workers in the Niches of Society’, in *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, ed. by Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 87–123 (p. 87).

<sup>77</sup> Göktürk, Gramling, and Kaes, *Germany in Transit*, p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, ‘Bericht über die Beschäftigung polnischer Arbeitskräfte in Betrieben der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 26 July 1966’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>79</sup> FDGB Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung VEB Elektroschaltgeräte Oppach, ‘Einschätzung über die Zusammenarbeit mit den in unserem Werk beschäftigten poln. Kolleginnen, 13 October 1966’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>80</sup> FDGB Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung VEB Kondensatorenwerk Görlitz, ‘Report, 14 October 1966’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

mentions that thirty-five female Polish workers were employed at the plant. According to the report, ‘cooperation between the Polish and German colleagues can be described as good [...] there have been no difficulties to date’.<sup>81</sup> By the middle of the open-border period, Polish workers had in many cases become more firmly established in GDR workplaces. A report by the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden from 1976 asserts that Polish workers had become ‘firmly integrated into the workers’ collective’, taking full part in ‘social competitions’ and in many cases being awarded prizes or ‘activist’ badges. Integration had apparently advanced to the extent that there was discussion of the possibility that Polish workers would be offered FDGB membership.<sup>82</sup>

In an article published in its organ *Junge Welt* in September 1972, the Free German Youth set out the official stance on the role and value of Polish workers in the GDR. In answer to a question posed (ostensibly) by a reader from Eisenhüttenstadt, the author comments,

When I think about the role of our Polish and Hungarian friends, I am reminded of a conversation I had with a Polish brigade leader in a Frankfurt (Oder) semiconductor factory. She characterized the work of her collective as ‘socialist teamwork for a common goal’. Indeed, our friends help us carry out our economic tasks, while simultaneously increasing the overall strength of socialism. Many of them enjoy careers as highly qualified skilled laborers in our factories. In every respect, they are true partners from a socialist neighboring country—for example, Poland, where the population has grown more quickly than industry in the last few decades.

Our Polish and Hungarian friends are respected citizens within our socialist society. More than a few of them proudly display the activist badge. Brigades of our Polish friends are distinguished with the honorary title ‘Collective for Socialist Labor’.<sup>83</sup>

Aside from the brief sideswipe at Poland’s economic performance in the middle—another example of the East German sense of economic superiority—this is a good encapsulation of

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<sup>81</sup> FDGB Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung VEB Duroplast-Presswerk Neusalza-Spremberg, ‘Einschätzung über die Zusammenarbeit mit polnischen Arbeitskräften, 14 November 1966’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

<sup>82</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, Abt. Organisation-Kader, ‘Information über die Beratung am 14.4.1976 mit polnischen Genossen in Görlitz, 19 April 1976’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1481.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Welchen Stand haben ausländische Arbeiter bei uns?’, *Junge Welt*, 28 September 1972. Reprinted (trans. Tes Howell) in Göktürk, Gramling, and Kaes, *Germany in Transit*, pp. 74–75.

the narrative the SED tried to promote about those Poles working in the GDR, presenting them as stalwart, hard-working and valued representatives of a fellow (and equal) socialist state, true ‘partners’ in the collective construction of socialism. As with other aspects of the friendship and reconciliation narrative, however, this line was undermined from the beginning: by residual distrust, by prejudices both old and new, by living and working circumstances that were uncondusive to improved relations, and by the SED’s own failure to commit to it.

Contrary to the SED’s rhetorical appeals to the ideology of *Völkerfreundschaft* (friendship between peoples), foreigners living and working in the GDR, Poles included, were subject to strict regulation and suspicion by both the state and the populace. While the majority had little contact with ordinary Germans, those interactions they did have, particularly in the workplace, were often marred by latent, and occasionally overt, German xenophobia.<sup>84</sup> Behrends and Poutrus identify a variety of factors that caused or exacerbated this attitude. These included, most obviously, the pre-existing prejudices of German nationalism, especially those given a new lease of life in the Nazi era and those bolstered by the SED’s subsequent nation-building efforts. Compounding this was the SED’s frequent use of rhetoric warning against outside infiltration and sabotage, with party propaganda constantly emphasizing the need for ‘vigilance’ against the insurgency of ‘strangers’ and ‘saboteurs’. While this was intended to refer to Westerners visiting the GDR, foreigners from other socialist states were also caught up in the suspicion and scapegoating. This certainly included the Poles, as was the case with the SED’s liberal use of anti-Polonist rhetoric during the official backlash against Solidarity in the early 1980s.<sup>85</sup> In addition, relations were strained by the homogenizing pressures of communist society, with its insistence on conformity and ‘normal’ behaviour. As Behrends and Poutrus point out, this was hardly

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<sup>84</sup> Jan C. Behrends and Patrice G. Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR – Explorations and Explanation from a Historical Perspective’, in *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations*, ed. by Tomasz Kamusella, Wojciech Burszta, and Sebastian Wojciechowski, 2 vols (Poznań: Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa, 2005), I, 155–70 (p. 155). This dynamic persisted throughout the communist period, and formed a significant part of the broader current of xenophobia that remained a distinguishing feature of the socio-political landscape of the former East in post-*Wende* Germany. For more on the disproportionate level of xenophobia recorded in eastern Germany since reunification, see Patrice G. Poutrus, Jan C. Behrends, and Dennis Kuck, ‘Historische Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in den neuen Bundesländern’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 39 (2000), 15–21; David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 199.

<sup>85</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, p. 163.

conducive to developing a culture of tolerance towards any kind of ‘other’.<sup>86</sup> The deficiencies of the GDR economy and consumer culture also played their part, leading to competition for scarce resources between East Germans and foreigners (especially Poles, as will be explored below).

The relative isolation of foreign workers also contributed to their unfavourable reputation among the East German populace. This isolation was almost entirely enforced by the SED-state, which housed foreign workers separately and subjected them to near-constant oversight. Among other measures, and in addition to the supervision and surveillance they were forced to contend with from their home states, GDR officials inspected their dormitories, monitored their post, informed customs of their consumer habits, and even limited their visits to each other.<sup>87</sup> This segregation was advantageous, particularly in an economic sense, to both the SED and the home states of most of these foreign workers. Both sides were eager for them to return home at the end of their stay, an outcome that would furnish their home states with a more productive workforce that had been educated abroad, and relieve the GDR of the burden of paying for their welfare in the long term. Both had a particular interest in discouraging relationships or marriages between Germans and foreign workers.<sup>88</sup> As a result of this, contact with foreigners was confined predominantly to the political elite, with ordinary East Germans only occasionally interacting with members of official delegations to the GDR. ‘The unsupervised communication with foreigners [...] did not become a part of everyday life for ordinary citizens’.<sup>89</sup> These measures applied primarily to workers from farther afield—particularly those from Vietnam and Mozambique—and the Poles were not isolated to anything like this degree. Nonetheless, these policies contributed to the general distrust of foreigners among the East German populace, which exacerbated the poor reception many Poles received as well. The SED’s isolation measures had the additional effect of politicizing the presence of all foreigners for most ordinary East Germans, who associated them closely and specifically with the communist authorities.<sup>90</sup> Because of their isolation from the wider populace, rumours abounded about the privileges enjoyed by foreigners working in the GDR. One such rumour stated that foreign workers were paid in

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<sup>86</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Zatlin, ‘Scarcity and Resentment’, pp. 712–14.

<sup>88</sup> Zatlin, ‘Scarcity and Resentment’, p. 715.

<sup>89</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, ‘Xenophobia in the Former GDR’, pp. 164–65.

<sup>90</sup> On this, see Chapter 3 (‘Asserting the socialist brotherhood’).

hard currency.<sup>91</sup>

These interrelated pressures and prejudices compounded each other, making the GDR a place where Polish workers were often treated with suspicion, disdain or at best aloofness. A 1974 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda mentions that some workers had reservations about workers from other socialist states, and that this had become the main focus of discussions at the VEB Fortschritt plant. The report claims that these reservations had largely been overcome, ascribing this to the successful handling of the issue (and proletarian internationalism in general) in the party's political and work and ideological training efforts.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, a 1976 report by the SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz on workers' responses to price increases in Poland records concerns expressed by workers at VEB Großbaustelle Kraftwerk Hagenwerder III about possibility that the price increases could lead to strikes and riots, and about how those Poles working in the GDR would react if this happened.<sup>93</sup>

Other complaints were more specific, such as those related to the productivity of the Polish workforce. A 1966 report by the *Rat des Bezirkes* in Dresden outlines a number of productivity problems caused by Polish workers at the VEB Elektroschaltgerätewerk Oppach. The report claims that 'a number of Polish women have committed the grossest violation of work discipline by missing shifts'. This was exacerbated by the fact that many of these incidents were recorded as authorized holidays by factory functionaries, thus hindering *Bezirk*-level awareness of the problem and efforts to combat it. Not unrelated to this was the report's comment that the Polish workforce had also failed to fulfil their work norms, in some cases reaching only 40 to 50 percent of their targets. The rate of 'low norm fulfilment', it asserts, was twice as high among Polish as among East German workers. Discussions with especially unproductive workers revealed that they were content with this level of productivity, and the lower amount of money they were earning as a result. The report does, however, stress that in most other respects the discipline of Polish workers was 'very good'.<sup>94</sup>

There were also occasional situations in which confusion, rather than outright

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<sup>91</sup> Behrends and Poutrus, 'Xenophobia in the Former GDR', p. 165.

<sup>92</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Bischofswerda, 'Abrechnung der Verwirklichung des Beschlusses des Politbüros über Agitation und Propaganda vom 07. 11. 1974 unter Einbeziehung der Ergebnisse in der Vorbereitung des 25. Jahrestages der DDR, 15 August 1974'.

<sup>93</sup> SED *Kreisleitung* Görlitz, 'Kurzinformation zu typischen Diskussionen im Zusammenhang mit der angekündigten Preiserhöhung in der VR Polen, 26 June 1976'.

<sup>94</sup> *Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes* Dresden, 'Bericht'.



hostility, marred workplace relations between East Germans and Poles. A 1968 report by the Stasi *Kreisdienststelle* Görlitz, for instance, makes reference to an (amicable) misunderstanding between German and Polish workers employed at VEB FOW Görlitz in August of that year. A German factory worker began talking to her workmates early in the morning about a rumour that a general strike would be taking place that day in Czechoslovakia. One workmate passed this rumour on to a Polish worker at the factory, but the latter—‘obviously due to a translation problem’—misunderstood this to mean that German workers at their factory were planning to strike at noon that day. The Polish worker then spread the word to the remaining Polish workers at the factory, and the Polish contingent resolved to go home at noon, ‘because they were afraid that they wouldn’t be able to get over the border otherwise’. The original Polish worker was especially concerned about this, as she had three younger siblings to look after back across the border, ‘and she became very worried about that’. In the subsequent attempt to disentangle this misunderstanding, the original German worker was questioned about where she had originally heard about the Czechoslovakian strike, but claimed that she could not remember, stating that ‘she had heard about it from colleagues and passed it on’. The report notes that both this worker and the German colleague who had passed the rumour on to the Polish worker were young and ‘mentally challenged’.<sup>95</sup>

A significant number of incidents of conflict were sparked by GDR workers’ concerns about their own working and living conditions in comparison to those of their Polish colleagues. A report by the FDGB *Bezirksvorstand* Dresden from 1965 stresses that both the discipline of Polish workers and their relations with the GDR workforce were very good. It mentions that some sceptical opinions had initially been expressed by GDR workers, to the effect that ‘our colleagues would lose their positions to Polish workers – or: no more German women will be hired now’. These concerns had quickly been addressed, however, and no further problems had yet emerged.<sup>96</sup> A more serious incident is detailed in a 1972 report on a fight between a Polish and a German worker at VEB *Werk für Signal- und Sicherungstechnik* in *Stadtbezirk* Berlin-Treptow. The fight was sparked by provocative comments made by the

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<sup>95</sup> MfS Kreisdienststelle Görlitz, ‘Report, 23 August 1968’ (Dresden), HStADD, 11861 SED-KL Görlitz, Nr. IV/B.4.06.132.

<sup>96</sup> FDGB Bezirksvorstand Dresden, ‘Information über die in unserem Bezirk beschäftigten polnischen Bürger in den VEB’s Elektroschaltgerätekwerk Oppach und Görlitz, 30 November 1965’ (Dresden), HStADD, 12465 FDGB-BV Dresden, Nr. 1015.

Polish worker, dissatisfied with the fact that his wages were lower than those of his German colleagues. After arguing that he had the same qualifications as the German workers, and should therefore receive the same wages, the Pole asserted that ‘this was like it was in the Third Reich, and [the Polish workers] were being treated like second-class citizens’. A nearby German co-worker was sufficiently provoked by this to hit him. The report notes that disciplinary measures were taken against the German worker, but also acknowledges that ‘the true cause’ of the conflict was indeed the unfair wage disparity, which had not been eliminated despite considerable effort, and which was damaging German-Polish relations at the plant.<sup>97</sup> Along similar lines, there are a number of examples of clashes relating to the housing of Polish workers. A 1971 report on the general mood of the populace in the Hans-Loch-Viertel district of Berlin-Lichtenberg concerned the construction of new apartment blocks for Polish workers. The opinion was frequently expressed that it was unfair to provide the Poles with new accommodation, given the housing problems that persisted in the GDR, and that the Poles should be housed in barracks instead. The report recommends that such sentiments be tackled swiftly at a residents’ meeting (*Einwohnerversammlung*), in order to avoid fallout in the upcoming elections.<sup>98</sup> A report on comments made by FDJ members in Schwarze Pumpe concerning housing shortages in 1975, meanwhile, includes the complaint that ‘we construction workers build homes, but don’t receive one ourselves. Workers from other countries (Poland, Hungary, Algeria) are given homes, while we in Schwarze Pumpe only receive temporary accommodation’.<sup>99</sup>

By the time of German reunification in 1989, some 52,000 Poles remained in the GDR—a figure lower than that for Vietnamese workers (60,000) but higher than those for all other groups of foreign workers in the state. Deniz Göktürk and others assert that in the post-*Wende* period, these foreigners faced ‘deportation, premature discontinuation of their residence permits, bureaucratic chaos, and more openly sanctioned and violent xenophobia than they had seen in the GDR’.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Rudi Focke, ‘Information über besondere Vorkommnisse, 7 November 1972’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/8931.

<sup>98</sup> FDGB Bundesvorstand, Abteilung Organisation, ‘Sonderinformation über besondere Vorkommnisse in den Bezirken Berlin und Dresden, 22 September 1971’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 34/23023, p. 484–85.

<sup>99</sup> Wolfgang Rudolph, ‘Zusammenstellung von aktuellen Fragen und Argumenten unter der Jugend nach der 13. Tagung des ZK der SED, 9 January 1975’ (Berlin), SAPMO-BArch, DY 24/23781.

<sup>100</sup> Göktürk, Gramling, and Kaes, *Germany in Transit*, p. 69.

## Conclusions

These two decades saw a great deal of change in the economic sphere. The early 1970s saw both the opening of the borders to consumer tourism, and an increased emphasis, under Honecker's new 'economic and social policy', on satisfaction of consumer demands in the here and now, in contrast to Ulbricht's previous emphasis on working for a better life in the future. East German expectations were raised at precisely the time that somewhat unwelcome visitors from Poland could more easily come over the border and benefit from the higher productivity of which GDR citizens were so proud; at the same time, workplace frictions exacerbated old prejudices. Meanwhile, the declining economic situation and rising Cold War tensions of the later 1970s and early 1980s provided the impetus for growing popular discontent across Eastern Europe. The political forms this took in Poland greatly concerned the SED; in the process, official rhetoric and popular views increasingly coalesced.

Evidently, and despite the greater promise it initially offered, the economic arena was no more successful than the political as a site for the implementation of the SED's attempt to disseminate and inculcate a narrative of friendship and reconciliation. Instead, it proved another domain in which anti-Polish sentiment was not overcome, and was even strengthened by developments over the twenty-year period. This manifested, among other tensions, in expressions of economic superciliousness in both official and unofficial discourses. The popular—and, by the mid 1970s, even parts of the official—response to the economic pressures caused by Polish visitors was allowed to become quite aggressively ethnonationalist. This tainted the open-border period, which at the beginning of the 1970s had the potential to be the start of a more thoroughgoing reconciliation process, but which was almost immediately derailed by the East German populace's outspoken discontent at the behaviour, and indeed the presence, of Polish *Einkaufstouristen*. This was not a one-sided conversation, of course; the Poles objected vociferously to the East Germans' slander, and responded in kind within the framework of the socialist brotherhood. Their responses, however, had no real effect on either Moscow or popular opinion in the GDR. Any remaining potential for improved relations or the dispelling of prejudice was squandered by the SED's decision to close the border. In the economic field, therefore, both sides sacrificed the prospect of reconciliation for their own interests. In the GDR's case, these interests once again brought elements of anti-Polonism to the fore and granted them unintended legitimacy.

Again, therefore, the new economic structures established in the Eastern bloc served mainly to provoke new sources of friction and rivalry between East Germans and Poles. The principal effect of the SED's normalizing rhetoric, meanwhile, was to provide an alternative, socialist vocabulary and value system with which pre-existing prejudices could be revived and 'flagged' as acceptable to the populace.

By the mid 1980s, these prejudices loomed even larger in the minds of many East Germans. Aside from those who happened to work with Poles or who took part in (or read about) visits by official delegations, the populace was exposed to the idea of Poland and its people primarily through continued interactions with or media coverage of Polish *Einkaufstouristen* (although far less so than during the 1970s). Along with the anti-Polish values fostered by the *Preußenrenaissance*, this emphasis on the economic predations of the Poles grew increasingly significant, overshadowing the more nuanced impressions that had begun tentatively to form due to the increased personal contact of the open-border years, and souring relations until the end of the decade.

## 6. Conclusions

The story of the GDR-Polish relationship, and more specifically of the evolution of East German conceptions of Poland and its people, is one of unresolved bitterness, unapologetic chauvinism and the indulgence of prejudice—punctuated by brief phases of rapprochement that neither side pursued with any vigour or consistency. From the GDR perspective, it is imbricated with broader issues, including the political and social normalization of the East German state and the limits of the SED's control, or rather the limits of its ability to gain popular acceptance of its preferred narratives. It touches on questions relating to the legitimacy of SED rule and of the GDR as a separate (nation) state, and to the contestation between memory communities over the interpretation of their own past and that of their nation.

The roots of the East German-Polish antagonism lie in the pre-communist past. 'The legacy of history', as Rachwald asserts, 'plays a very special role in Polish-German relations'.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the post-war era, the SED was forced to contend with the historical burden that overshadowed both official and popular relations. For contemporary Poles and East Germans, this burden stemmed partly from the long-standing antagonism that had begun with the Polish partitions in the late eighteenth century, and which by the time of the German and Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 had provided both sides with a sizeable collection of stereotypes and grievances.<sup>2</sup> It was primarily these acculturated prejudices on which the populace in both states fell back at times of heightened tension, and to which the SED turned

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur R. Rachwald, 'Poland and Germany: From Foes to Friends?', in *The Germans and Their Neighbors*, ed. by Dirk Verheyen and Christian Sjøe (Boulder, CO and others: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 231–49 (p. 232). Wanda Jarzabek's notion of the 'shadows of memory' is a particularly vivid formulation of the same idea: Wanda Jarzabek, 'Shadows of Memory in Polish-German Relations (1989-2005)', in *Germany, Poland and Postmemorial Relations: In Search of a Livable Past*, ed. by Kristin Kopp and Joanna Niżyńska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 25–42.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular the majority of essays in Tomasz Szarota, *Stereotype und Konflikte. Historische Studien zu den deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2010). Also see Karen Schönwälder, 'Invited but Unwanted? Migrants from the East in Germany, 1890-1990', in *The German Lands and Eastern Europe: Essays on the History of Their Social, Cultural and Political Relations*, ed. by Roger Bartlett and Karen Schönwälder (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 198–216; Michael G. Müller, 'Poland and Germany from Interwar Period through to Time of Détente', in *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Eduard Mühle (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), pp. 91–106 (pp. 94–98); Niels Gatzke, 'Das Polenbild in Deutschland – Entstehung und Gegenwart', in *Probleme mit Polen? Polenbezogene Ressentiments in Vorpommern*, ed. by Regionale Arbeitsstelle für Bildung, Integration und Demokratie (RAA) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e. V. (Waren (Müritz), 2012), pp. 12–19 (pp. 13–15) <<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-338529>>.

when seeking to cultivate or exploit this animosity for its own ends. There is therefore some truth to Jonathan Zatlin's statement that those East Germans engaging in anti-Polish demagoguery were 'partaking of a discriminatory vernacular that had been in currency for some 200 years'.<sup>3</sup>

Far more onerous, however, were the more immediate traumas relating to each populace's experiences in the Second World War. Indeed, the war and its immediate aftermath are the starting point of East German-Polish relations, providing the material and geopolitical circumstances that shaped and constrained the relationship and many (though not all) of the tensions that characterized it throughout the communist era. For the Poles, these memories were dominated by the brutal and viciously xenophobic German occupation, which had led to the murder of some three million gentile Poles as well as three million Polish Jews, the enslavement of hundreds of thousands more in Germany, and the devastation of many cities and much of the state's agricultural and industrial capacity.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, the bulk of the surviving population was 'infected with hate' by 1945, filled with a universal resentment and distrust of the German populace that began to dissipate only two decades later.<sup>5</sup> Only Polish communists were willing to attempt to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' Germans in accordance with the orthodox Soviet interpretation, though even they were ultimately unable to overcome their belief that 'there are no good Germans'.<sup>6</sup> Aphorisms such as that cited by Sheldon Anderson became widespread in post-war Poland as a result: '*Jak świat światem, nie*

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan R. Zatlin, 'Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989', *Central European History*, 40 (2007), 683–720 (pp. 687–89).

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War: How the Nazis Led Germany from Conquest to Disaster* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 10–47, 75–80, 621–23; Gerhard Wolf, *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität: Nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012); Winston Chu, Jesse Kauffman, and Michael Meng, 'A Sonderweg through Eastern Europe? The Varieties of German Rule in Poland during the Two World Wars', *German History*, 31.3 (2013), 318–44 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ght032>>; Martin Winstone, *The Dark Heart of Hitler's Europe: Nazi Rule in Poland under the General Government* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014). See also a number of the contributions in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. by Ulrich Herbert (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004). On Polish slave labour in the Third Reich, see Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, pp. 21–22, 348–62.

<sup>5</sup> Mieczysław Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen', in *Zwangsverordnete Freundschaft? Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und Polen 1949-1990*, ed. by Basil Kerski, Andrzej Kotula, and Kazimierz Wóycicki, trans. by Ewa Krauß (Osnabrück: fibre, 2003), pp. 59–79 (p. 59); Stanisław Lisiecki, 'Die offene Grenze – Wandlungen im Bewußtsein der Grenzbewohner', in *Die offene Grenze. Forschungsbericht polnisch-deutsche Grenzregion (1991-1993)*, ed. by Stanisław Lisiecki, trans. by Ulrich Heiße (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1996), pp. 97–115 (p. 98).

<sup>6</sup> Tomala, 'Eine Bilanz der offiziellen Beziehungen', p. 59; Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations 1945-1962* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), p. 10.

*będzie Niemiec Polakowi bratem* ('As long as the world is whole, no German will be a brother to a Pole').<sup>7</sup>

The East German traumas, on the other hand, related predominantly to the loss of eastern Prussian territories to Poland, as well as the experiences and disruptive arrival into Germany of expellees from those territories.<sup>8</sup> The number of new arrivals, and the fact of their expulsion, were a significant shock to a populace already enduring the indignities of defeat and the hardships of post-war reconstruction. Of more relevance are the traumatic experiences and accounts of harsh, even violent treatment at the hands of Polish civil and military authorities that these expellees brought with them. The cumulative effect of such horror stories was the escalation of anti-Polish sentiment throughout what became the GDR.

The legacies of the war were never overcome entirely. Those injuries experienced as personal traumas remained painfully relevant for the individual East Germans concerned, and in some cases were shared or passed down within family circles. Those received as national outrages, meanwhile, became embedded in both the national identity (whether that nation was understood as 'German' or 'East German') and the collective narratives of other communities within the GDR. Both of these did become less acute, and less influential on East German attitudes towards Poland and the Poles, over the twenty-year period. This was due in part to generational transition and partly to the increased salience of other factors, especially economic interests, and the opportunities for rapprochement as well as the new sources of friction that these represented. Chief among these was the establishment of closer economic links, which became the main priority for the Poles. Indeed, from the mid 1960s onwards, this was practically the only basis on which the Poles had any interest in dealing with the GDR, and was certainly more important to them than the cultural or political cooperation achieved in this period. This was accompanied by the SED's promotion of a narrative that presented Poland as a viable economic partner of the GDR and aimed to dispel long-standing German assumptions of Polish economic backwardness. It was primarily in the interests of deepening economic links that the GDR-Polish border was opened in 1972, and largely because of the disruption caused by resurgent popular tensions that the open-border period

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<sup>7</sup> Translation by Anderson in Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Parts of this section are adapted from Simon Coll, 'The SED's Positive Polenbild as a Flawed Instrument of East German-Polish Reconciliation, 1972-1980' (unpublished master's thesis, University College London, 2014), pp. 26–30.

was so brief. Both states' forcible membership of the brotherhood of socialist states also proved a source of additional discord, providing an arena in which each sniped at and attempted to undermine the other while competing for Moscow's approval. On the domestic front, the SED's socialist brotherhood narrative was intended as a complement to the SED's economic narrative—and both failed to find favour among the GDR populace for a similar constellation of reasons. The post-war resentments never faded far from view, however, and—along with the older prejudices embedded in the German national consciousness—tainted ordinary East Germans' opinions of and interactions with Poles throughout this period.

These changes took place within the context of the political and social (and, to a lesser extent, economic) evolution of the GDR from the mid 1960s onwards. In particular, throughout (and indeed beyond) the twenty-year period, the SED attempted to impose two discourses on the East German populace: a nation-building discourse, closely linked to the legitimization of communist rule; and a discourse of German-Polish reconciliation. These two discursive projects were pursued in the context of the normalization of SED rule, with their ideas and rhetoric becoming, to a certain extent, routinized and internalized over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Both projects waxed and waned over the decades, particularly in terms of the degree to which the party was invested in them, and they interacted and often interfered with each other. The party, moreover, was not in full control of either of these propaganda projects. The party was in control of the channels through which they were disseminated, but its power to determine how they were received and acted on by ordinary East Germans was limited. As part of the discursive landscape in which East Germans lived, and in which subsequent generations such as the '1949ers' came of age, both projects certainly became norms that needed to be engaged with and negotiated. The SED had little influence over the forms this response took, however, or over the ways in which its propaganda interacted with the alternative narratives of the various memory communities that existed in the GDR. Popular East German images of and attitudes towards the Poles were largely a product of this ceaseless discursive contestation, or at least heavily influenced by it, and were marked by simmering resentment and unresolved traumas as a result.

The main change to the East German-Polish relationship that did occur in this period was the transmutation of these resentments and prejudices into peculiarly communist conflicts. While it never succeeded in generating emotional attachment among the East



German people, socialist patriotism was so pervasive a part of their discursive environment that it inevitably shaped their own sense of national identity to a certain extent. This included anti-Polonism in its reworked form; indeed, its greater popular accessibility gave it a disproportionate presence in the new national identities that emerged in this period. The Soviet empire, with its economic and military institutions and its network of political and cultural practices, very quickly became a setting in which East German-Polish antagonism could be expressed in an acceptable way. GDR officials were at liberty to criticize the policies (and competence) of the Poles. GDR factory workers were able to ascribe problems with their Polish colleagues to shortcomings in their national character, insofar as this national character was presented as bound up with their commitment to and competence in implementing socialism. Ordinary East Germans more broadly were able to rail against the depredations of Polish tourists, decrying the invasion of their home towns without a trace of irony. Provided these criticisms were couched in the correct ideologically infused language, they were tolerated by the Soviet centre. They were not considered a threat to the reconciliation that had been nominally achieved in the 1950s, as a result of which both communists and populace alike were above open reproach.

This was an indicator of the reduced salience yet continued presence of deep-seated German-Polish antagonism. The fact that this rhetoric proved so much more resonant and successful than the propaganda associated with the reconciliation project suggests that it was more in tune with popular discourses of German nationalism. The SED leadership, moreover, was well aware of this fact. The party was not starting from scratch in constructing the new socialist nation and personality, but nor was it taking pre-existing national identities wholesale. Instead, once it had assumed ownership of the 'official' national tapestry, it began adding to it, attempting to divert the threads into a pattern more in keeping with its ideology and conducive to the maintenance of its power. Its efforts, however, were inevitably constrained by the pattern that had already been begun, and the party was unable to deviate too far, too fast. Moreover, SED members were themselves part of that tapestry as well, and their views, prejudices and priorities were products of that same pattern. The degree to which they were able or willing to deviate, therefore, was more limited than they professed it to be.

As a result, no serious attempt was made by the SED to defuse East German-Polish tensions in the communist era in general, and in the 1970s and 1980s in particular. Indeed, the SED did not shy away from stoking anti-Polish sentiment among the populace. This was

partly for cynical political reasons, chiefly the legitimization of communist rule. Anti-Polish rhetoric was used because it could be relied upon to resonate with the populace. It was also, however, because many SED figures, in both the leadership and the rank and file, themselves shared these prejudices and resentments. This use of anti-Polish rhetoric thus indicates the limits of the SED's commitment to the reconciliation discourse, and contributed to undermining it.

However, it also contributed to the party's loss of control over the nation-building project, by introducing (and endorsing) elements of national chauvinism that paved the way for other manifestations of nationalism that the party was less keen on—that is, those that touched on non-negotiable, foundational elements of GDR statehood and communist rule. The SED was quite happy to draw on disparaging characterizations of the Polish state, economy and national character to discredit the country at times when it was experiencing unrest, in a bid to prevent the disaffection from spreading to the GDR. Similarly, from the mid 1970s onwards, political and social changes in the GDR (especially generational transition) encouraged the SED to resort to the incorporation of more elements of traditional German nationalism into its nation-building discourse as a means of mobilizing the populace and boosting its legitimacy. These same pressures also led the party to return to the well of popular anti-Polonism with greater frequency. The populace readily took the cue on such occasions, but they also seized the opportunity to express related nationalistic sentiments, demanding revision of the Oder–Neisse border, and even repudiating the GDR's alliance with the Soviet Union and membership of the socialist brotherhood. By periodically 'flagging' certain anti-Polonistic ideas, and hinting at their acceptability within the communist framework and value system, the SED allowed other, less desirable ideas to remain closer to the surface. These ideas could then also find expression in implicit—and occasionally even explicit—criticisms of SED rule. In other words, in its efforts to embroider and rework the national tapestry, the party leadership ended up pulling at certain adjacent threads that it had not intended to touch. In the process—and not to strain this metaphor too much—it risked, if not the complete unravelling of the tapestry, then at least the distortion of its pattern to the point that it was far less useful as a mobilizing or legitimizing force.

The upshot of this was what might be described as the incubation of anti-Polish attitudes over the twenty-year period. The later years, especially the mid 1970s onwards, saw an increasingly blatant return to a more ethnicized form of anti-Polonism. The same pressures

that lay behind the party's increasing reliance on German ethnonationalism as a mobilizing and legitimizing force also encouraged it to exploit popular anti-Polonism with increasing frequency. The SED thereby marked anti-Polonism with the imprimatur of orthodox communist respectability, integrating it into official nationalist discourse.

By 1985, therefore, neither the nation-building nor the reconciliation project had achieved its objective. The nation-building project failed in its principal aim, in that it never managed to generate much in the way of popular emotional attachment to the GDR, or a sense of belonging to the wider community of socialist states. The SED's efforts, including the ideological contortions it performed to incorporate more aspects of pre-communist nationalism from the mid 1970s onwards, resulted in the 'near-complete absence of a GDR-specific patriotism' by the mid 1980s.<sup>9</sup> As Mary Fulbrook has remarked, the most that the party managed was to create 'a new "ex-GDR" wide regional identity' that acquired definition and significance for (former) East Germans only after reunification.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, this failure was not in itself an existential threat to the GDR or its ruling party. The GDR's longevity as a state was largely unrelated to the SED's instrumentalization of popular nationalism; far more influential was Soviet political and military support throughout the forty years of the state's existence. Conversely, while pan-German nationalism and a sustained desire for reunification may have had some impact on the course ultimately taken by the revolution of 1989—the 'Wende within the Wende'—there is little evidence to suggest that it precipitated the popular protests that led to the destabilization of the GDR.<sup>11</sup> In terms of the stability of the East German state, the nation-building project was never the most important term in the equation. Its failure did, however, complicate the implementation of the reconciliation project.

The reconciliation project, meanwhile, was largely unsuccessful at encouraging East Germans to overcome their post-war grievances, or at correcting older prejudices and derogatory characterizations of Poland and its people. Neither the socialist brotherhood

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Palmowski, 'Regional Identities and the Limits of Democratic Centralism in the GDR', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41.3 (2006), 503–26 (p. 526) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009406064657>>.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Fulbrook, 'Democratic Centralism and Regionalism in the GDR', in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Maiken Umbach, *New Perspectives in German Studies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 146–71 (p. 148) <[https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230505797\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230505797_7)>.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Corey Ross, 'The End of the GDR: Revolution from Below, Implosion from Within, Collapse from Outside?', in *The East German Dictatorship* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2002), pp. 126–48; Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp. 220–23.

narrative nor the attempts to raise Poland's economic profile proved sufficiently inspiring for their core messages to be accepted by the populace. Many East Germans continued to hold negative conceptions of the Poles; in fact, as outlined above, these were gaining new prominence in public and private discourses by 1985. On those occasions when they had personal contact with Poles, the interactions were marred by mistrust, hostility and mutual recrimination. Official relations were little better. Many SED members, from the rank and file to the leadership, were themselves driven by anti-Polish prejudice, nationalist loyalties, post-war grievances and a desire to further the cause of their own state. Despite their protestations to the contrary (when they made any), they often related to the Poles as representatives of a foreign nation state with a burdened relationship to their own, rather than as socialist brothers.

Both the nation-building and the reconciliation efforts were hampered by a variety of factors. One of the more significant was popular 'resistance'—that is, popular refusal to internalize the official narratives or endorse them with any enthusiasm, and popular maintenance of alternative narratives in memory communities of various sizes. The two were also undermined by the limits of the SED's discursive dominance, and therefore of its ability to embed its narratives as 'common sense' among the populace. The presence of the Federal Republic, as both an alternative locus of national identity for the East German populace and an alternative Germany with which Poland could do business, was a further aggravating factor. As indicated above, however, a major obstacle was the SED's own ambivalence regarding both discursive projects on occasion, but especially its reconciliation project. For the most part, the party was not inclined to prioritize the reconciliation project if interests it considered more 'core' were endangered. This is in itself an understandable and unsurprising position. The problem, however, was that a great many developments became threats to the party's legitimacy and the GDR's state interests, and therefore interfered with the reconciliation project by weakening the party's will to pursue it. The interplay between the two strands of propaganda, and the relative failure of both, placed the party in something of a double-bind. Its inconsistent and lacklustre moves towards reconciliation, or towards the improvement of East German-Polish relations, were stymied in part by the anti-Polish sentiment and associations that had been nurtured by its own nation-building efforts. Its nation-building work, meanwhile, did not even provide the compensatory benefit of boosting the legitimacy of communist rule. In this sense, the SED's discursive projects were not only

at odds with each other, but also ironically resonated with and fed into alternative discourses among the populace that eroded the very state concept the party was trying to construct. The party sacrificed much of the potential for reconciliation for little return.

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